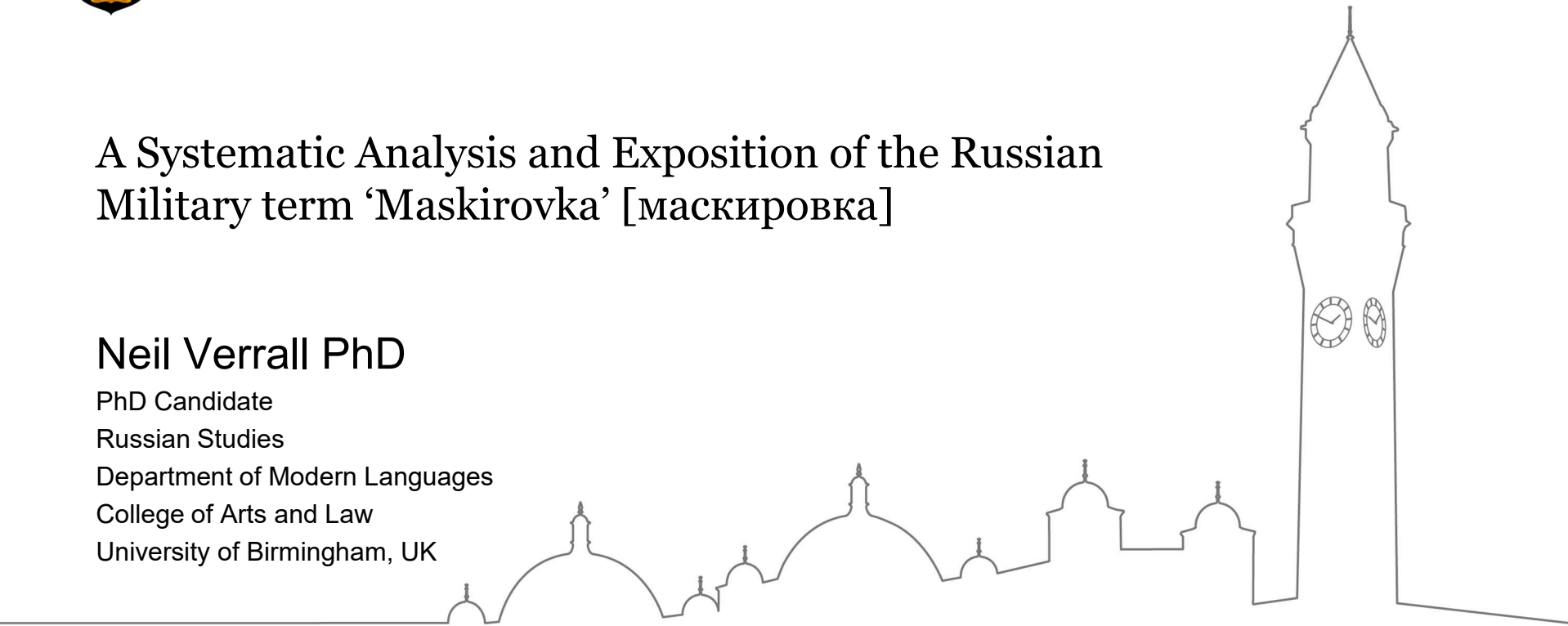
UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

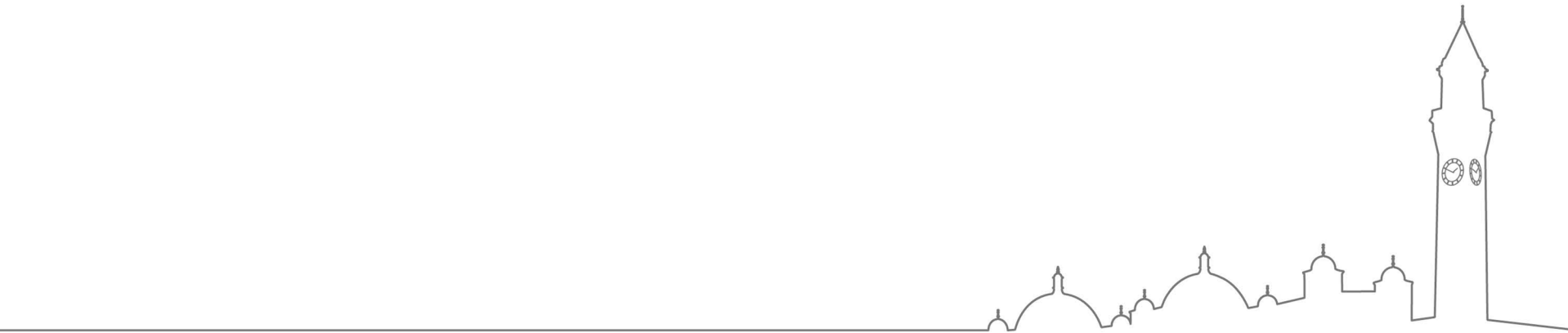
A Systematic Analysis and Exposition of the Russian Military term ‘Maskirovka’ [маскировка]

Neil Verrall PhD

PhD Candidate
Russian Studies
Department of Modern Languages
College of Arts and Law
University of Birmingham, UK



Background and rationale



Maskirovka: Deception Russian-Style

Background and rationale

- 6-year part-time PhD in Modern Language (Russian) 2021-27.
- I'm not a linguist, but I am a seasoned academic and applied defence researcher.
- Resurgent use of the term 'maskirovka' in the West.
- But, *what* does it *really* mean and relate to?
- Aim: Conduct *the* most thorough analysis and exposition of the term (certainly in Western research and literature).

Putin's Maskirovka and his Preference for U.S. President

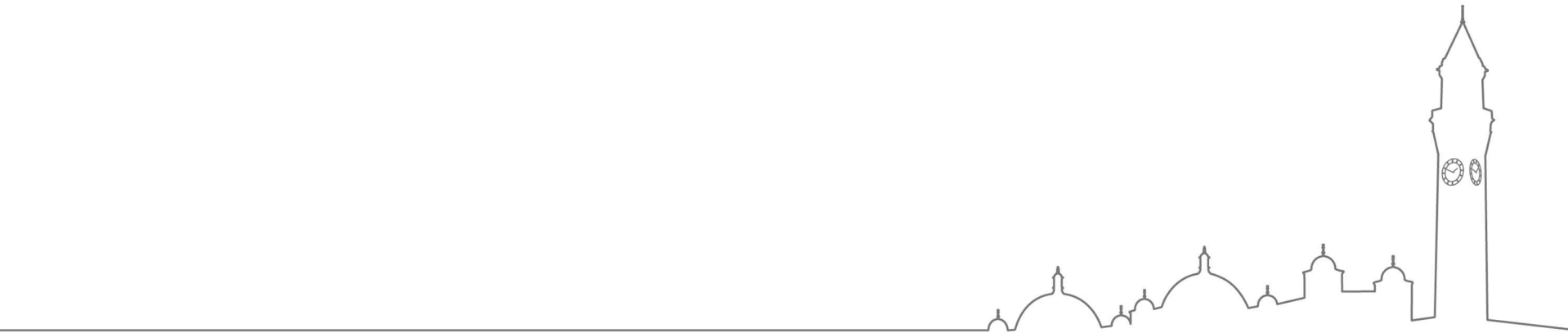
Considering Maskirovka

Maskirovka: From Russia, With Deception

UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

'Maskirovka' — Russian disinformation tactic used in Ukraine

Source material

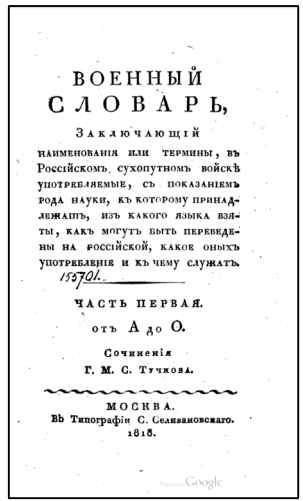


Source material

- (currently) N=161 Russian military texts (articles, books, reports) with ‘маскировка’ in the title (1914 - 2024).
  - Why in title? So you know they are focusing on the topic.
  - NB. ~n=100 additional citations (but no access).

- (currently) N=39 Russian military dictionaries, lexicons and encyclopaedia (1795 - today’s RF MOD online).

САМООКАПЫВАНІЕ ВЪ СВЯЗИ СЪ МАСКИРОВКОЙ.


ВОЕННЫЙ СЛОВАРЬ,

Заключающій

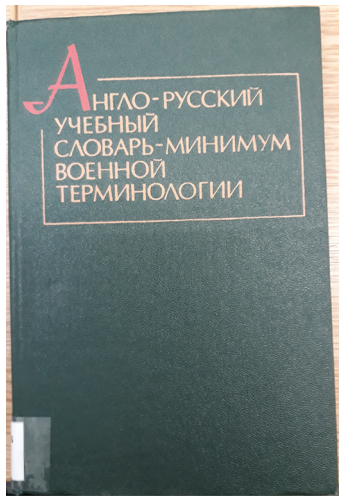
наименованія или термины, въ Россійскомъ, сухопутномъ войскѣ употребляемые, съ показаніемъ рода науки, къ которому принадлежатъ, изъ какого языка взяты, какъ могутъ быть переведены на россійской, какое оныхъ употребленіе и къ чему служатъ.

ЧАСТЬ ПЕРВАЯ.

отъ А до О.

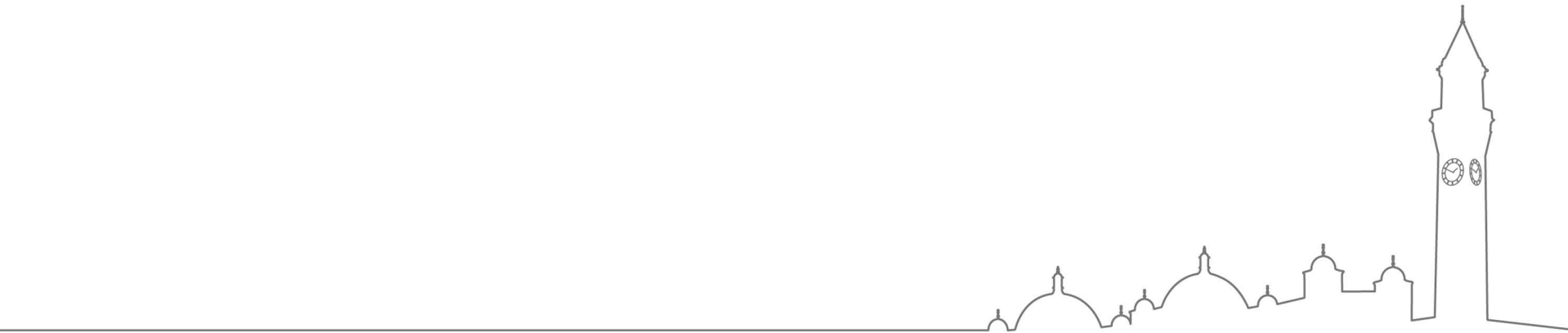
Сочиненія Г. М. С. Тучкова.

МОСКВА. Въ Типографіи С. Селивановскаго. 1818.



UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

Methodology



Methodology (research questions)

1. When did the term маскировка enter the formal Russian military lexicon?

2. What does the term маскировка mean?

3. What has been the contextual framing of the term маскировка?

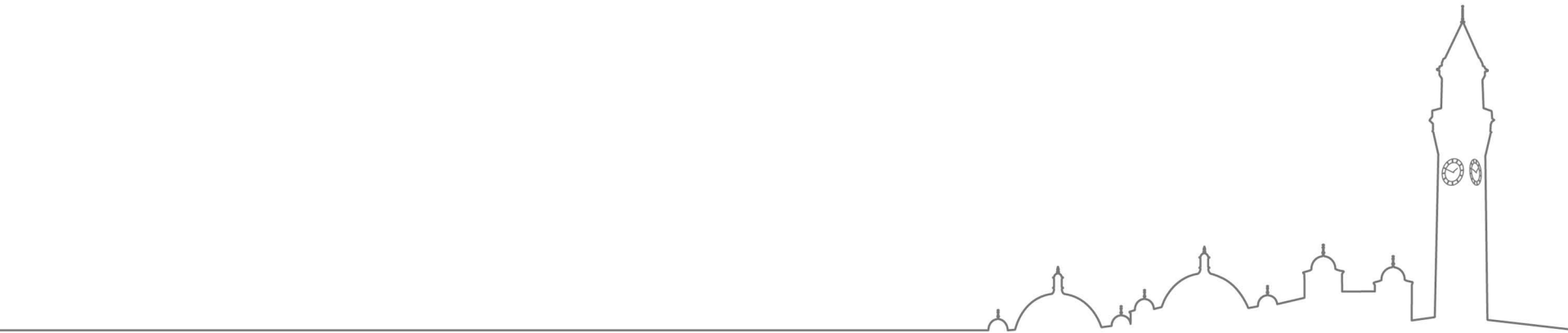
4. How do images support the understanding of the context?

Methodology (language-based research techniques)

- Interdisciplinary, blended, mixed methods approach of a *specialised genre*: Applied linguistics, translation studies, lexicography.

1. When did the term ‘маскировка’ enter the formal Russian military lexicon? (military dictionaries).
   - Qualitative content (text) analysis, intertextual.
2. What does the term ‘маскировка’ mean? (definitions).
   - Qualitative content (text) analysis (discourse), intertextual.
3. What has been the contextual framing of the term ‘маскировка’? (database of texts: context).
   - Qualitative content (text) analysis (paratext).
4. How do images support the understanding of the context? (supporting images in texts).
   - Multimodal analysis; intertextual.

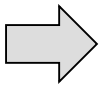
Initial insights



Initial insights

- The largest sample of original Russian/Soviet material assembled with ‘маскировка’ in the title.
- Dictionaries:
  - 1795 - 1914 only intermittent inclusion (50% of the time). Starts to challenge the assumptions and myth.
  - 1914 - today: consistent and ever present.
  - Used interchangeably alongside: mask, disguise, camouflage (Камуфляж).

- Definitions:
  - Starts off short and applied to ‘army’ and ‘tactical’ activity. Over time, gets longer and more detailed.
  - ‘Operational’ after the GPW (1940s), ‘Strategic’ (early 70s…Cold War geopolitics).
  - Core sub-concepts of: concealment, imitation, demonstration, disinformation.
  - Exposes the wider lexicon of Russian military deception-related terminology.



Wider deception-related terminology

English	Cyrillic	Transliteration
Military concepts (higher level)		
Stratagem	Стратагема	*Stratagem*
Deception, deceit	Обман	*Obman*
Cunning	Хитрость	*Khitrost'*
Surprise	Внезапность	*Vnezapnost'*
Misleading	Введению в заблуждение	*Vvedeniyu v zabluzhdeniye*
Ruse, Trick	Уловка	*Ulovka*
Craftiness	Лука́вство	*Lukávstvo*
Savvy	Смекалка	*Smekalka*
Deception-related terms		
Mask, disguise, camouflage (general)	Маскировка	*Maskirovka*
Imitation	Имитация	*Imitatsiya*
Demonstration	Демонстрация	*Demonstratsiya*
Disinformation	Дезинформация	*Dezinformatsiya*
Camouflage (specific)	Камуфляж	*Kamuflyazh*
Deformation	Деформация	*Deformatsiya*
Distort	Искажат	Iskazhat
Hiding, concealing	Скрытие	*Skrytiye*
Unmasking	Демаскировка	*Demaskirovka*
Trap	Западня Ловушка	*Zapadnya* *Lovushka*
Artifice	Выдумка	*Vydumka*
Lure	Приманка	*Primanka*
Mimic	Мимикри́я	*Mymykriya*
Decoy	Ложная цель	*Lozhnaya tsel'*
Disorientate	Дезориентировать	*Dezoriyentirovat'*

UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

Initial insights

- Contextual:
  - Key database categories of: year, title, military branch, level of activity, current or historical, specific purpose, image present.
  - Mostly applied to the army and the tactical level of military activity.
  - Occasional emergence of SME across time.
  - Different theoretical models for different contexts.
  - Images as a prevalent supporting tool.

- Multimodal:
  - *Initial* categories (TBC) include: photographs, drawings, illustrative, topographical, equipment, technical info and formulas, people, methods, outcomes, theories.
  - To be focus of last bit of analysis (2025-26).

UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

Summary

- The largest collection of original Russian/Soviet texts and citations assembled with ‘маскировка’ in the title.
- Missing material (articles, books): pre-1914…where is it?
- Change and adaptation of the concept (system) across historical epochs.
- A complicated term, with consistencies and inconsistencies.
- More diversity of domestic theoretical thought than maybe assumed by the West.
- More to discover and understand! (2025-27).

UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

Image source

Slide 3
Top: Ash, L. (2015). ‘Maskirovka: Deception Russian-Style’, BBC, 1 February 2015,.<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b050674y>, accessed 27 October 2024.
Next: Dannenberg, R. (2024). ‘Putin’s Maskirovka and his Preference for U.S. President’, The Cipher Brief, 22 July 2024, <https://www.thecipherbrief.com/column_article/putins-maskirova-and-his-preference-for-u-s-president> accessed 27 October 2024.
Next: Friedman, G. (2023). ‘Considering Maskirovka’, Geopolitical Futures, 30 May 2023, <https://geopoliticalfutures.com/considering-maskirovka/>, accessed 27 October 2024.
Next: Vowell, J. (2016). ‘Maskirovka: From Russia, With Deception’, Real Clear Defense, 30 October 2016, <https://www.realcleardefense.com/articles/2016/10/31/maskirovka_from_russia_with_deception_110282.html>, accessed 27 October 2024.
Bottom: Ukraine MFA. (2022). ‘‘Maskirovka' — Russian disinformation tactic used in Ukraine’, Facebook, 3 April 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/UkraineUA.MFA/videos/maskirovka-russian-disinformation-tactic-used-in-ukraine/657892978617152/>, accessed 27 October 2024.

Slide 5
Top left: Viemko, V. (1914). Self-entrenching due to maskirovka. *Military Collection*, No.1, pp. 47-59.
Top right: Podgornykh, Yu., Dybov, V. & Kul'kova, N. (2022). Maskirovka of forces and means.. *Arsenal of the Fatherland*, 61(5), pp. 24-29.
Bottom left: Tuchkova, G. (1818). Military dictionary of ground forces (Moscow: The Printing House of S. Selivanovsky).
Bottom right: Pasechnik, G. (1986). English-Russian textbook minimum military terminology dictionary (Moscow: Military Publishing House).

Slide 11: Verrall, N. (2027, in progress). *A Systematic Analysis and Exposition of the Russian Military term ‘Maskirovka’ [маскировка]*. PhD in Modern Languages (Russian), University of Birmingham, UK.

Slide 12
Top: Viemko, V. (1914). Self-entrenching due to maskirovka. *Military Collection*, No.1, pp. 47-59.
Middle: Matveevsky, M. (2017). Military cunning in combat examples. *Army Collection*, No.5, pp. 25-31.
Bottom: Golovin, A. & Likhachev, D. (2021). Imitation aids in the maskirovka system. *Material and technical support of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation*, No.6, pp. 8-13.