Political actors in the media coverage of the war in Ukraine: critical discourse analysis

Abstract. With the beginning of the war in Ukraine started by Russia in 2022, political discourse on the war in Ukraine has dominated the world media. This research explores the properties of British and American media coverage of war-related news. The media rhetoric highlights the new world threat (Putin’s Russia) and appeals to the international community.

The study is based on the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) which explore the relations of the language and power as well as relations between language and image. The article analyses the political and ideological contexts of the war in Ukraine and investigates language means used to verbalise discursive strategies. Political actors are researched by a three-level analytical framework for textual analysis which divides the text analysis into three domains: actors, social actions and argumentation. In the study we focus on historical, cultural and psychological contexts and political implicatures. The content analysis of the articles from British and American newspapers and magazines revealed the extensive employment of crime- and punishment-related vocabulary, the
results of the quantitative analysis presenting the frequency of crime and punishment lexemes’ occurrence.

The language means nominating Putin as a political actor include both explicit and implicit means focusing on the negative attitude of the international community rendered by euphemisms, metonymy. To make the audience emotionally involved in condemning the crimes carried by Russian troops, the authors use explicit linguistic means: nouns, adjectives, participles II. Comparing Russian president with Stalin and Hitler, and Russia with Nazis Germany they emphasize his barbaric politics which is at the linguistic level verbalised by metaphors and similes. The similitude with the Nazis’ defeat in WWII, punishment render the predictions of Russia’s failure in the war, with modal verbs expressing the certainty degree.

Keywords: media discourse, political actors, Critical Discourse Analysis, Multimodal Discourse Analysis, three-level analytical framework of text analysis, language means.

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ПОЛІТИЧНІ АКТОРИ У ПОВІДОМЛЕННЯХ ЗМІ ПРО ВІЙНУ В УКРАЇНІ: КРИТИЧНИЙ ДИСКУРС-АНАЛІЗ

Анотація. З початком війни в Україні, розпочатої Росією у 2022 році, політичний дискурс про війну в Україні домінує у світових ЗМІ. У цьому дослідженні розглядаються особливості висвітлення британськими та американськими ЗМІ новин про війну в Україні. Риторика ЗМІ висвітлює нову світову загрозу (путінська Росія) та апелює до міжнародної спільноти.

Стаття базується на критичному дискурс-аналізі аналізі (КДА) і мультимодальному дискурс-аналізі (МДА), які досліджують відносини мови та влади, а також відносини між мовою та образом. У роботі
аналізується політичний та ідеологічний контексти війни в Україні та досліджуються мовні засоби вербалізації дискурсивних стратегій. Образ політичних акторів вивчається за допомогою трірівневої аналітичної основи текстового аналізу, яка поділяє аналіз тексту на три домени: актори, соціальні дії та аргументація. У статті ми зосереджуюмося на історичних, культурних і психологічних контекстах і політичних імплікаціях. Контент-аналіз газетних та журналних статей виявив широке використання лексики кримінально-правового характеру, результати кількісного аналізу показують частотність зустрічальності лексем злочинності та покарання.

Мовні засоби номінації Путіна як політичного актора містять як експліцитні, так і імпліцитні мовні засоби, що акцентують увагу на негативному ставленні міжнародної спільноти, переданому евфемізмами, метонімією. Щоб емоційно залучити аудиторію до засудження злочинів російських військ автори використовують експліцитні мовні засоби: іменники, прикметники, дієприкметники. Порівнюючи російського президента зі Сталяном і Гітлером, а Росію з нацистською Німеччиною, вони підкреслюють його варварську політику, що на лінгвістичному рівні вербалізують метафори та порівняння. Подібність до поразки нацистів у Другій світовій війні, покарання передають передбачення провалу Росії, а модальні дієслова виражають ступінь впевненості.

Ключові слова: медіа-дискурс, політичні актори, критичний дискурс-аналіз, мультимодальний дискурс-аналіз, трірівнева аналітична структура аналізу тексту, мовні засоби.

Statement of the problem. After the beginning of Russian invasion in Ukraine on February 24, Russia began a large-scale military actions. A number of Ukrainian cities were hit by missiles, the whole world was shocked by the atrocities of the Russian military towards the Ukrainian soldiers and civilians. Ukraine started the investigation into war crimes seeing hundreds of civilian bodies in towns from which Russian troops withdrew. Since the beginning of the military actions, political discourse on the war in Ukraine has dominated the world news.

Research analysis. To throw light on the discourse analysis of political actors, studies explore many aspects starting from detailed textual analysis to discourse topics and show the relation of analytical categories to macro-structure on different contextual levels [1, 15, 19]. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) may include the analysis of many analytical categories including referential, predicational, and argumentative strategies (topoi) (Wodak; Reisigl & Wodak [10, 18]), discourse topics, positive
Self-presentation and negative-Other presentation (van Dijk [12, 13]; Wodak & van Dijk [17]), categories of the socio-semantic approach by van Leeuwen concerning social actors (van Leeuwen [16]).

Majid KhosraviNik [6] suggested a three-level analytical framework for textual analysis of the political actors which divides the text analysis into three domains: social actors, social actions and argumentation highlighting what the analysis should look at in the text and investigate how these domains are linguistically realized through a set of linguistic processes and mechanisms. The first level accentuates the presence and qualities of the actors. The second one analyses the qualities of actions emphasizing the linguistic processes verbalising the perspectivization that social or political actors add to the manipulation in ideology of the text. And namely, mitigation and hyperbole to play down or exaggerate certain actions; hedging and modality to induce certain ideology, foregrounding or backgrounding of actors or actions, as “… ideologies allow people, as group members, to organize the multitude of social beliefs about what is the case, good or bad, right or wrong, for them, and to act accordingly.” [14] The third level covers argumentative strategies and their qualities critically analysing the arguments for or against certain actors and highlighting the linguistic methods of accentuating the arguments (mitigation and hyperbole, implicitness vs explicitness; induced vs blatant argumentation; inductive vs deductive arguments, metaphors, allusions, fallacies and paradoxes (Reisigl & Wodak [10]).

The purpose of the article. The aim of the research is to study the linguistic image of the Russian-Ukrainian war and the coverage of the main political actors in British, American press. The analysis intends to shed light on the political and ideological contexts of the war in Ukraine and give insight into the sociopolitical and cognitive aspects of news coverage applying an interdisciplinary approach considering the language as a social practice. In our study we intend to apply the integrated Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) approach to the study of the news reports with the purpose of exploring the media discourse and the language (Hidalgo Tenorio [11]) with CDA focusing on social practice, social power and ideology (Fairclough [3]). As a theoretical basis of the study, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) will focus on the problem of applying the language in social contexts and referring it to power (cognitive analysis of discourse by N. Fairclough N. [3-4], German school of CDA (sociolinguistic research by R. Wodak [17-19]). Political Discourse Analysis (PDA) is used to investigate the relation of language and ideology making the comparison of the images of war represented in different news reports.
We will focus the analysis on the language means in news articles which are used to verbalise discursive strategies. And more specifically, in the language analysis we will be interested in studying how certain statements (“war as a crime”, “criminal actions of Russia”, Putin as a criminal” etc.) function at the linguistic level.

And namely, we concentrate on the analysis of:
- Law vocabulary and legal concepts applied in the media discourse.
- Grammar structures (main and auxiliary verbs (tense forms), active and passive voice to see whether the actors are excluded from the arguments;
- Primary rhetoric and literary figures (allegories, metaphors, similes, idioms, proverbs) and additional rhetoric figures (parallelism, hyperboles, synecdoches, rhetorical questions, anaphora) to see how they form the meaning of the specific statements;
- Modal verbs and modal expressions to explore the implied hypothetical meanings.

In the research we intend to turn to historical, cultural and psychological contexts and political implicatures. To form a body of illustrative material we applied methods of information search and continuous sample. The language material was generated from the open access newspapers and magazines issued in the US and Great Britain (The NY Post, The New York Times, The Independent, The New Yorker, The Times, The Guardian, The Telegraph, The Sun and others).

**Presentation of the main research material.** Content analysis of news reports from media covering the war in Ukraine reveals law, crime and punishment vocabulary (killer, punishment, accused) describing the policy of Russia, its president and actions of its troops in depicting the latest news (examples 1-3). The implicature in (1) is the Russia’s president policy and responsibility for the military actions. Comparing the euphemism (“Russian counterpart”) and the Joe Biden’s name “American leader” highlights the backgrounding of Putin as a president expressing the disparaging attitude, while appreciating the positions and views of Joe Biden. The author applying metonymy in example (3) (Putin’s troops) emphasises the responsibility of the Russian president for the atrocities committed in the temporally occupied cities (Bucha), metaphorically used verb “to butcher” contributing to the cruelty of the crimes carried out by Russians, the crisis situation and danger.

1. President Vladimir V. Putin dryly wished President Biden “good health” on Thursday after the American leader assented to a description of his Russian counterpart as a “killer,” and long-running tensions morphed into a furious exchange of trans-Atlantic taunts. [32]
2. Joe Biden and European allies intend to keep turning the financial screws on Russia as punishment for its invasion of Ukraine, the White House announced after the US president spoke with various heads of state. [34]

3. Mirzayan claimed scenes in Bucha, where Putin’s troops have been accused of butchering civilians and burying them in mass graves, were faked and "done by professionals, probably British". [40]

The inevitability of the imposed punishment for the committed crimes after the trial investigation is what is underlined by the authors enumerating the crimes and their victims in the following paragraph that analyses the qualities of actions:

4. UN chief on sexual violence warns dozens of cases under investigation are ‘tip of the iceberg’ Men and boys are among the alleged victims of rape by Russian soldiers in Ukraine, where dozens of cases of sexual violence by the invading forces are already under investigation, UN and Ukrainian ... [22]

To claim the guilt for the crimes of all Russian troops, US News declares “responsibility” emphasised by the adverb “obviously” which as an intensifier casting aside all the doubts:

5. Russian forces are obviously responsible for the atrocities in the Ukrainian town on Bucha, the Pentagon said on Monday, even as it acknowledged it was not yet sure precisely which units were operating in the area. [41]

The Guardian blaming Putin in the war crimes (accused) in (6), appeals to the general public and predicts his being responsible for the crimes committed (7):

6. Vladimir Putin accused of war crimes. [38]

7. Putin will be held responsible for war crimes. [37]

The cruelty of the multiple crimes carried out on Ukrainian civilians terrified the world, authors of news reports applied the lexical unit “atrocities” to the mass killings and tortures of the peaceful population, including children and elderly people as the next examples demonstrate:

8. Putin's propaganda machine has repeatedly attempted to cover up Russia's involvement in alleged atrocities, including using cluster bombs to blast Ukrainians. [39]

9. And a Russian attack on a maternity hospital, which killed three people including a child, has been condemned as ‘an atrocity’ by Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelensky and US vice president Kamala Harris. [29]

Comparing with the most cruel dictators in the history of mankind like Hitler and Stalin and allegedly even “more dangerous”, and the war
unleashed by Russia with the the “Germany's 1941 invasion of the USSR” (examples 10-13), the authors characterise the Russian leader nowadays as a person applying the old days’ views and methods that were notorious in previous century, but not compatible with the modern civilized world, the mentioned examples creating the basic semantic context of the news reports cover the argumentative strategies of the actions:

10. Yet Putin is committing some of the same blunders that doomed Germany's 1941 invasion of the USSR while using "Hitler-like tricks and tactics" to justify his brutality, military historians and scholars say. [21]

11. Polish President Andrzej Duda slammed the leaders of France and Germany over their phone calls with Russian President Vladimir Putin, saying it was like having talks with Adolf Hitler during World War Two, according to the German mass-selling daily Bild. [33]

12. Putin’s Russia rose like Hitler’s Germany — and could end the same. [26]

13. Vladimir Putin ‘more dangerous than Hitler or Stalin’, says Poland’s prime minister. [30]

Trying to predict the outcomes of the war in (12), the author compares the Russia ruled by Putin with the Hitler’s Germany applying simile “like Hitler’s Germany”, with modal verb “could” implying hypothetical meaning.

The following examples demonstrate the similar features of Russia and nazis’ politics, while modal verb “must” verbalises the certainty in predicting the similar outcome:

14. UK defense secretary: Putin, generals are ‘mirroring’ Nazis and must meet same fate. [24]

Explicitly nominating Russian “war crimes” in (15) and (16) BBC and New Yorker recollect the Nuremberg trials against Germain Nazis Germany for the carried out invasions and other crimes in World War II:

15. ... there is a reasonable basis to believe war crimes have been carried out in Ukraine.

...It originated at Nuremberg, after the judge sent by Moscow convinced the Allies that Nazi leaders should face justice for "crimes against peace". [28]

16. The Prosecution of Russian War Crimes in Ukraine. [31]

Putin is explicitly nominated “a criminal”, his politics being ruining for Russia and making him “enemy of his own people” (17):

17. Putin, a criminal and incompetent president, is an enemy of his own people. [35]
The results of the quantitative analysis are shown in Table 1 below:

**TABLE 1. Number of occurrences of crime and punishment vocabulary**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verbalisation of crime and punishment lexemes</th>
<th>Frequency of occurrence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>criminal</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>war crimes</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>atrocities</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>victims</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>punishment</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>investigation</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>responsible</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>like Hitler</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>killer</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>accused</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>95</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Realising the multimodal approach (Kress, Leeuwen [6]) allows to conceptualize the relations between language and image (O’Halloran, Pal, Jin [9]) and investigate texts and depictions. Brutality and cruelty of Russian troops defined the characteristics of their leader in comparison him with Hitler and Stalin in pictures and slogans with implications of the outrageous and illegal political steps and crimes:
Conclusions. The war in Ukraine is represented on a large scale in British and American media news reports, with the attitude of media towards the war and Russian political actors being definitely negative. The content analysis of the media articles revealed the extensive employment of crime- and punishment-related vocabulary, the most frequent being criminal, war crimes, atrocities, victims.

The conducted textual analysis of the political actors based on the three-level analytical framework allows to conclude on the investigation in all three domains (actors, actions and argumentation) and on the linguistic implementation of the discourse strategies. The language means chosen by the authors at the first level to nominating Putin as a political actor and to influence audiences most effectively include both explicit and implicit means focusing on the disparaging attitude of the international community rendered by euphemisms (Russian counterpart), metonymy (Putin’s troops).

The authors are trying to make the audience emotionally involved in condemning the atrocious crimes carried by Russian troops by using explicit linguistic means: nouns, adjectives, participles II (killer, criminal, accused, responsible, etc.) and comparing Russian president with the most cruel world leaders (Stalin and Hitler) and Russia with Nazis Germany emphasizing Putin’s obsolete and barbaric views and politics which is at the linguistic level verbalised by metaphors and similes. The applied predictions on the negative for Russia outcome of the war are based on the comparison with the Nazis’ defeat in WWII, punishment (Nuremberg) with lower or higher
certainty degree (modal verbs could, must). As MDA demonstrates, the media rhetoric aims at highlighting the new world threat (Putin’s Russia) and is an appeal to emotions of the general public.

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Література:


%20was%20not%20yet%20sure%20%20precisely%2020which%20units%20were%20operating%20in%20the%20area.