

Mediated Rhetoric of Recent Conflicts

12 (2) 2025

ISSUE EDITORS: KATARZYNA MOLEK-KOZAKOWSKA, ECATERINA ILIS

KATARZYNA MOLEK-KOZAKOWSKALUCIAN BLAGA UNIVERSITY OF SIBIU, ROMANIA;
UNIVERSITY OF OPOLE, POLAND<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9455-7384>

molekk@uni.opole.pl

JAN PASZCZYŃSKI

UNIVERSITY OF OPOLE, POLAND

<https://orcid.org/0009-0008-7485-4830>

130883@student.uni.opole.pl

Rhetorical and linguistic devices in the argumentation against supporting Ukraine in the radicalized Polish media sphere

Retoryczno-lingwistyczne środki w argumentacji przeciwko wsparciu Ukrainy w zradyzalizowanej polskiej mediosferze

Abstract

This article reports on an analysis of salient argumentative schemes, rhetorical devices and linguistic choices that are characteristic of, but also problematic for, the public deliberation in Poland on the acceptable degrees and forms of assistance provided to Ukraine and Ukrainians. By identifying the historical origins of anti-Ukrainian sentiment and the current media stereotypes used as premises in deliberation on the Ukraine war, the study traces how arguments are enhanced, sometimes through *topoi* and fallacies, by communicators that are against supporting Ukraine. The study draws on a multimodal dataset of textual and audio-video materials from 2022-2024. The larger aim is to enhance critical rhetorical literacy through an overview of the rhetorical strategies that render even unsound arguments acceptable and appealing.

W artykule przedstawiono analizę schematów argumentacyjnych, środków retorycznych i wyborów językowych charakterystycznych, a jednocześnie problematycznych, dla debaty publicznej trwającej w Polsce na temat akceptowalnego stopnia i form pomocy udzielanej Ukrainie i Ukraińcom. Studium omawia historyczne źródła nastrojów antyukraińskich oraz obecne stereotypy medialne wykorzystywane jako przesłanki w debatach na temat wojny w Ukrainie. Analiza ilustruje, w jaki sposób wzmacnia się argumentację sprzeciwiającą się wspieraniu Ukrainy, czasami za pomocą toposów i poprzez błędy wnioskowania. W badaniu wykorzystano multimodalny zbiór danych obejmujący materiały tekstowe i audio-wideo z lat 2022–2024. Celem studium jest zwiększenie umiejętności krytycznej analizy retorycznej poprzez przegląd strategii retorycznych, które sprawiają, że nawet wadliwe argumenty są akceptowalne i atrakcyjne.

Key words

Polish-Ukrainian relations, public deliberation, argumentation schemes, alternative media
stosunki polsko-ukraińskie, debata publiczna, schemat argumentacji, media alternatywne

License

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 international (CC BY 4.0).
The content of the license is available at <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

Received: 6 November 2024 | Accepted: 6 March 2025

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.29107/rr2025.2.3>

KATARZYNA MOLEK-KOZAKOWSKA

LUCIAN BLAGA UNIVERSITY OF SIBIU, ROMANIA;

UNIVERSITY OF OPOLE, POLAND

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9455-7384>

molekk@uni.opole.pl

JAN PASZCZYŃSKI

UNIVERSITY OF OPOLE, POLAND

<https://orcid.org/0009-0008-7485-4830>

130883@student.uni.opole.pl

Rhetorical and linguistic devices in the argumentation against supporting Ukraine in the radicalized Polish media sphere

1. Introduction

Public discourses about the degree and forms of assistance provided to Ukraine in its fight against the Russian invasion are being shaped not only in the mainstream media, but also through non-licensed online channels and in posts on social media platforms. They consist of various remediations of and polemics with official governmental declarations or reports by think tanks responsible for defense and security. In addition, there are various expert bloggers, oppositional movements, NGOs or private citizens taking part in that debate, often representing agonistic, highly emotional or even irrational positions and promoting them through posts, comments, videos, memes or gifs, among other forms of expression (Dryzek 2002). While not all (re)mediated argumentative texts are inherently manipulative or fallacious, this study looks specifically at such ways of representing a controversial social issue that can be seen as unsound.

In controversies that evoke diverse emotions and may be underpinned by deliberate Russian propaganda campaigns, such as the current debate about helping Ukraine, public deliberation is prone to manipulations and strategic maneuvering (van Eemeren 2010), or to logical fallacies or rhetorical tricks (Oswald 2014). The use of these devices tends to be employed to quickly garner political support, for example by fear appeals or via fueling nationalistic resentments. Indeed, this may be the case with the Polish right-wing party *Konfederacja*, which comprises various political stances, including far-right and conservative nationalists, and which often harks back to the difficult memories of past Polish-Ukrainian conflicts, stirs up anxiety related to Russian nuclear threat, or the economic burden caused

by large migration from Ukraine. Incidentally, similar arguments can be found on the websites and social media accounts of Russian embassies and ministries. On other occasions, such devices are a direct result of the affordances of social media platforms (Myers 2010), sensational journalism (Molek-Kozakowska 2013), or artificially engineered polarization of public debates (Molek-Kozakowska and Wanke 2019).

In this study, we use a special-purpose multimodal dataset of materials released between 2022 and 2024 and originating with the relatively radical sources that oppose Poland's current elevated levels of sustained support for and means of assistance to Ukraine. The manner of collecting and selecting the dataset is explained in section 4, and the sources that ended up in the dataset are listed in the appendices. It must be underlined here that not all public or political deliberations on how Poland should position itself in supporting Ukraine are laden with manipulation, yet this particular study focuses on the radicalized discourses that draw on fallacious rather than sound argumentation and that are rhetorically and linguistically enhanced. The aim is to trace the repertoire of resources applied in the realization of this type of claim-making by identifying the underlying premises of CIRCUMSTANCES, VALUES, GOALS and MEANS (Fairclough and Fairclough 2012). Through this study, we also aim to catalogue the repertoire of rhetorical devices and linguistic resources (grammatical structures, lexical choices or stylistic devices) that are recruited to increase the attractiveness of specific premises and to garner the public support for the claim, even at the cost of inducing fallacious thinking (Lewiński 2014). The material used in the study is in Polish but was transcribed and translated into English using literal translation techniques by the authors in order to make the rhetorical and linguistic analysis available and comparable with similar research in other parts of Europe or the world.

The dataset was collected through a web search guided by a snowballing protocol with selected keywords and profiles that represent anti-Ukrainian sentiment, some of which may have been influenced by Russian propaganda, understood here as deliberate efforts to impose a negative or confusing view of Polish-Ukrainian relations that benefits Russia with the aid of textual patterns that aim to activate some psychological mechanisms of compliance (Dobek-Ostrowska et al. 1999). By reconstructing (hidden) premises and analyzing the wording and style of rhetorical expressions, including *topoi* and fallacious arguments, we aim to assess the manipulative potential of some salient patterns of argumentation and explain their working mechanisms (Walton 1990). This is not to claim that all arguments against helping Ukraine are inherently manipulative; after all, manipulation is a feature of reception, not production in discourse (van Dijk 2006). The study is

of a qualitative and typological nature and does not constitute a systematic analysis of all possible counterarguments used in the public debate on aid to Ukraine. We understand the challenges of scalability and replicability of such analyses, and aim to undertake or inspire further research at the intersection of rhetoric and linguistics by making our data and analytic protocols transparent.

This article is structured in the following way. First, we explain the broader context of Polish-Ukrainian relations, given the historical alliances and tensions as well as the progress made in normalizing and europeanizing the bilateral cooperation in the fields of politics, economy and culture. Through a literature review of current studies by Polish, Ukrainian and international scholars, we identify the historical origins of possible anti-Ukrainian sentiment and the current stereotypes and patterns of representation that constitute a pool of resources for premises and *topoi* in the argumentation against supporting Ukraine. Secondly, we explain the protocol for the collection of our material and our resulting dataset. Thirdly, we define and operationalize analytic categories that we find useful for approaching the examples we identified and annotated in our dataset. Then we report on our analysis of salient argumentative schemes, rhetorical devices and linguistic choices that we find to be characteristic of as well as problematic for the public deliberation in Poland on the acceptable degree and forms of assistance provided to Ukraine and Ukrainians.

2. Polish-Ukrainian relations in the historical and current context

Polish-Ukrainian relations have been based on the post-WWII recognition of independence and structured centrally by the two governments and international organizations such as the UN and Council of Europe. Regional initiatives, such as the Visegrad Fund and Eastern Partnership (a symbolic continuation of a promethean program established in the 1930s by Józef Piłsudski) are instrumental in ensuring good economic and political relations, as well as joint cultural and social enterprises (Kravchenko 2024). The multi-layered bilateral cooperation is also enacted by numerous private organizations and NGOs, such as Polish-Ukrainian Chamber of Commerce (Polsko-Ukraińska Izba Gospodarcza 2024). Such strategic cooperation is determined by a complex geopolitical and economic situation and by the role played by Poland in bringing Ukraine closer to European institutions (Zajączkowski 2005), especially after the beginnings of the Russian challenges to Ukraine's territorial integrity and independence in 2014 (Melnychenko et al. 2022). One striking example of solidarity is the exceptional engagement of Polish citizens and the state in mitigating the Ukrainian refugee crisis in 2022 sparked by the full-scale Russian invasion (Staniszewski 2022; Grabowska and Pięta-Szawara 2023).

Due to both geopolitical and cultural proximity, the cooperation in the field of cultural exchange has also been intense (Mironowicz 2012; Stokłosa 2012), and the status of relations between the two nations is considered as “very good,” yet not free from tensions. The divisions regarding the historical memory of mid-twentieth century is the most controversial issue at the moment, with every anniversary of the massacres of Poles in Volhynia and Eastern Galicia (1943) remaining a challenge for both Ukrainian and Polish authorities. The commemoration of certain national heroes, such as Stepan Bandera, who is known for anti-Polish actions, is also a sensitive point for shaping mutually acceptable perspectives on the common past and history education (Copsey 2008; Szeptycki 2018).

2.1. Historical alignments and tensions

Historically, the Polish and Ukrainians depended on each other repeatedly since the times of Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (1569-1795) (Bakuła 2006), even though the cooperation was set to be in favor of Poles, which was reflected in the dominance of Polish culture and mores among the relatively diverse and multicultural society (Andrusiw 2011). This may have stemmed from an established perception of “the West” as traditionally “strong,” “legitimate,” “serious,” “accurate” or “dominating” and “the East” as “weak,” “chaotic,” “immature,” or “subordinated.” This dichotomy has underpinned the attitudes of some Poles towards Ukrainians, erstwhile Cossacks or closer allies of Moscow, and has been shaping relations based on the assumption of an inferior status (and fear) of anything coming from the East (Copsey 2008). Because of the long-term disadvantaging of Ukrainians in these relations, as well as instances of polonization efforts, some Ukrainian scholars view Poland as a “colonial power,” according to the standards set in postcolonial theorizing (Andrusiw 2011; Zhurzhenko 2013).

The twentieth century processes of nation-building in Ukraine were marked by another power shift between western and eastern empires, where the Polish-Bolshevik war of 1919-1921 placed Ukraine in a buffer zone (Łastawski 2015). Ukraine’s national interests were dismissed during the following decades, with the Polish authorities discriminating against the Ukrainian minority, a process that further brutalized and radicalized Ukrainians. This explains the rise of nationalism in the western parts of Ukraine with the leading role of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UIA) that operated mainly in 1942-1949 and resisted not only the Nazi and Soviet regimes, but also the Polish (later communist) governments (Zhurzhenko 2013). For example, the first leader of the UIA, Stepan Bandera, is likely the most controversial figure in the Polish-Ukrainian relations, alongside the Volhynian-Galician massacres that have yet to be studied. Incidentally, Bandera remains an important but not a key national hero of free Ukraine, due to his resistance of Soviets (Sawicz 2023).

2.2. Identity, perception and stereotyping

As of 2017, public surveys showed that the evaluation of mutual Polish-Ukrainian relation was worse among Poles (for 29% it was good) than among Ukrainians (for 42% it was good). Stepan Bandera may not, therefore, be the only issue distorting Polish-Ukrainian relations. Undoubtedly, the unresolved historical disputes around past atrocities committed by radical UIA nationalists carry the potential for breeding resentments in public discourses and in international relations (Stryjek et al. 2017). For example, a 2018 study of a representative group of Ukrainians indicated the slight rise in popularity of Stepan Bandera (from 26% to 36%), but this approval rating is still low and uneven: higher in the West, negligible in the East (Sawicz 2023). Therefore, the so-called “cult of Stepan Bandera” seems to be regionally bound and traditionally connected with his anti-Russian resistance activities during and after WWII that were rekindled after the Russian invasion. Meanwhile, the negative Polish perception of Ukrainian heroes results in the media and public debates challenging the merits of UIA from Poland’s historical perspective (Szeptycki 2018).

Another cause for resentment may be connected to “Eastern Borderlands,” which, in the Polish historiography, could be compared to the concept of “paradise lost” (Bakula 2006; Tomaszewska and Wolski 2016). The longing for the control over former territory, now within Ukraine, is a proof of nostalgia among older generations, which creates a threat to political and public reconciliation by paving a way to revisionism or, in extreme situations, even to revanchism (Bakula 2006; Zhurzhenko 2013). For example, both Ukrainians and Poles use Lviv as integral to their nationhood, enabling that nostalgia. In the Polish memoir literature, Lviv is sometimes described as multicultural and tolerant, and “always faithful” or loyal to the Polish state (Kotyńska 2008).

Stereotypes of Ukrainians are relatively widespread in Poland and correspond well with the aforementioned dichotomy between “East” and “West.” Many negative stereotypes stem from categorization and overgeneralization often fueled by discourses overemphasizing historical conflicts, economic competition, cultural differences or sociopolitical incongruities (Jurek 2018). The formation and propagation of simplistic categories and binary oppositions is a trait of social cognition embedded in historical memory, which may be reproduced through polarized public debates, and recently also through short and superficial commentary on social media. The origins of current pejorative connotations with Ukrainians reveal historical marginalization of the Ukrainian nation (Thompson 2000). In early modern literature Ukraine was portrayed as a food-producing nation, associated with the images of uneducated peasantry, simpletons or backward folks, and village fools, who were not as familiar with standards of health and hygiene

as the Poles were at that time (Andrusiw 2011). The analysis of selected works of literature and social research provides information to determine the fictional roots of certain harmful stereotypes and explains the volatile attitudes in the context of war and Polish promethean aspirations (Kravchenko 2024).

The “West-East” dichotomy underpins a few stereotypes of Ukraine and Ukrainians, particularly that they are poor, not technologically advanced and where substandard lifestyle without modern appliances is common (Jurek 2018). This is often overlaid with the association of all Eastern nations with “Russkies,” which is strengthened with a historical fact that Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic (1919-1991) was part of Russia-controlled Soviet Union, which championed the so called “Russki mir” [Russian world], a doctrine of centralized uniformity and party dominance at the expense of democracy and social integration. The citizens of such a regime are often resented or ridiculed by Poles as being authority-oriented, indoctrinated and corrupt, as well as beholden to oppressive communist ideology, which is still a fresh and traumatic memory for some in Poland. The oppressive system also breeds low trust in institutions and unreliable work ethics. In addition, there is an older stereotype of Ukrainians as Cossacks, a fiery people who are impetuous, aggressive and a little bit sloppy, lazy and uncouth. However, it is wrong to equate Ukrainians with Cossacks, as Ukraine has been a multicultural collection of Slavic peoples, Tatars and Jews as well (Jurek 2018; Nedobiichuk 2018). Since Cossacks were rebellious and murderous, the stereotype of a Ukrainian as a violent, unscrupulous criminal is latched onto it, especially when tainted by popular culture featuring Russian mobsters and nuclear-device trafficking gangs. Given the tendency to lump all Eastern nations together and to treat them as inferior, many Poles see themselves as superior and self-describe as Europeans who can “civilize” Ukrainians (Bokszański 1997).

3. Polish mediosphere and the representations of Ukraine at war

The evolution of Polish-Ukrainian relations has been influenced by such events as Orange Revolution (2004-2005), “Maidan Uprising” (2013), or the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine, which may stand as milestones in history. The Russian invasion in Ukraine is widely regarded as a turning point in Polish-Ukrainian relations (Olech and Dobrowolska 2022). Importantly, the vision of war “at the gates of Poland” and the confirmation of Kremlin’s military interventionism prompted Polish authorities to declare firm and swift assistance to Ukraine’s war efforts, together with initial preparations for the upcoming refugee crisis. Currently, the Polish-Ukrainian perceptions are being shaped not only by governmental agencies supporting Ukraine in its fight against invasion under the

leadership of PMs Mateusz Morawiecki (conservative, until December 2023) and Donald Tusk (centrist), but also think tanks, such as the *Polish Centre for Eastern Studies* or *Institute of Central Europe*, which adhere to the values of academic integrity, openness and pluralism. They monitor the geopolitical developments, social attitudes and academic debates and publish reports that support the claim that solidarity with Ukraine is in Poland's long-term interest.

Polish public deliberation is largely mediated via mainstream media, particularly weekly opinion magazines and dailies, television stations and online portals that add both journalistic and partisan perspectives on cultural, social and economic dimensions of Polish-Ukrainian relations (Stokłosa 2012; Łastawski 2015; Tkachenko 2016). The anti-Russian editorial line transpires across the whole ideological spectrum: while *Wyborcza*, *Newsweek Polska* and *TVN24* are known for a variety of liberal views, *Rzeczpospolita*, *Wirtualna Polska* and *Onet* are viewed as moderate, and *DoRzeczy* is oriented towards conservatives and tends to be relatively critical of the current centrist government. The rise of tabloids, such as *SuperExpress* and left-wing *oko.press*, offers more varied readings of the implications of the Ukraine war. Meanwhile, the Polish blogosphere and social media serve as platforms for alternative, ultra-right, nationalist or propaganda agents to express non-mainstream, often anti-Ukrainian, sentiments.

According to Statista (2024), access to social media in Poland reached 91% in 2020 and increased to 94% in 2024. While Facebook remains the dominant social media network, Poles spend more time on YouTube and TikTok, the average daily amount of time spent on YouTube increased from 40 minutes to 1 hour and 15 minutes for the 8-9 million light TV viewers – those who prefer online viewing to traditional TV. YouTube is particularly popular because it offers more interesting content, more opportunities for personalization and less bias. 53% of viewers also choose it for education. As regards X (formerly Twitter) 1.25 million males and over 1 million females are using the platform as of 2024, as do many public figures, media personalities and institutional actors.

Last but not least, as the Polish public's interest in the developments in Ukraine has grown, the number of information outlets focusing on the topic increased, and the threat of disinformation material aimed at manipulating the public emerged (Olech and Dobrowolska 2022). Disinformation during a crisis is often disseminated using several strategies. For example, the cognitive overload caused by excessive informational input and competing narratives makes disinformation harder to identify, as it is impossible to correct and debunk all false reports immediately. It is therefore important to establish resilience mechanisms in the public that are aimed at counteracting disinformation by building the awareness of tactics used by harmful propaganda. This study aims to contribute to this by exploring the

textual and rhetorical strategies in the online materials that represent the view that Poland should not support Ukraine.

4. Materials and coding protocols

The dataset used for this study was compiled through a web search guided by a snowballing protocol with selected keywords and profiles that represent anti-Ukrainian sentiment, followed by abductive annotation conducted by two coders that led to selection and downsizing of the data to a set of 37 items. These items were selected to study rhetorical and linguistic features of argumentation in the Polish mediasphere.

Since the Polish mainstream media are relatively pro-Ukrainian (cf. Molek-Kozakowska and Dragomir, 2025), the material from the domains of top Polish news portals was used as complementary source, since the rhetoric and language used were likely “tainted by” framings that represent various antagonistic voices, some compatible (or not) with editorial lines. However, the records within some of the most politicized outlets, such as *DoRzeczy* and *Rzeczpospolita*, yielded a diverse range of reported examples of claims against helping Ukraine. For this reason, it was deemed important to match journalistic texts with “raw” data within alternative, social and user-generated domains.

The initial search in Google incognito mode with “Ukraine, why not help” [„Ukraina, dlaczego nie pomagać”] was too ambiguous and yielded records that represented pro-Ukrainian views. Consequently, a more pejorative and direct prompt was used to execute the search, namely “Ukraine, hoax/fraud” [„Ukraina, ściema”], as was compatible with the tone of online materials that drew attention to discourses with a higher likelihood of fallacious arguments against supporting Ukraine. The search was conducted in late June 2024 and repeated in late September 2024. The sampling yielded materials posted mainly between January 2023 and September 2024, given that the Google algorithm is skewed towards recent materials.

The most relevant search results via Google pointed to YouTube videos and channels of representatives of *Konfederacja*, as well as their supporters and promoters. In the video records of the Polish tabloid *SuperExpress*, or *Wirtualna Polska* online portal, the representatives of right-wing political parties were found vociferously opposing aid to Ukraine. Such channels as *WinTV*, or the official channel of *Konfederacja* or *Ruch Narodowy* (nationalists within *Konfederacja*) became the sources of further snowballing searches within YouTube itself. Another prolific source of similar arguments, according to our Google search, was the domain of x.com (Twitter) with multiple specimens of highly rhetorically charged posts and quotes, as well as retweets that enabled the second level of snowballing

to sites, profiles and materials that promoted anti-Ukrainian sentiments. The search also identified popular news media texts, namely from *TVN24*, *Wyborcza* and *DoRzeczy*.

The snowballing technique was pursued until we collected over one hundred of individual textual or multimodal samples. In the downsizing procedure we evaluated each item through close reading and abductive annotation by both authors. Fairclough and Fairclough's (2012) scheme was used to identify texts that included argumentative statements, that is claims warranted by premises of CIRCUMSTANCES, VALUES, GOALS and MEANS (see 5.1 for details). For rhetorical annotation, we used both induction from the data with such codes as "unproven source," "loaded words," "fear mongering," and the codes for concepts established in rhetoric (e.g., the *topos* of "precedent," *ad personam* attack) or linguistic studies (e.g., "syntactic parallelism," "direct address," "inclusive we"). There were initially over 50 different codes – a number which was reduced in the process of analysis to the most salient categories, which are thus presented in the following section. It is important to note that the downsized sample reflects careful identification of only the materials that include explicit claims and arguments that Poland should not support Ukraine, even though there is plenty of generalized anti-Ukrainian sentiment that relates to economic competition, cultural discrepancies or social tensions between Poles/Poland and Ukrainians/Ukraine. Ultimately, the process achieved a sufficient level of saturation with the collected 37 materials (Appendix 1 and 2) as no new codes for annotations could be found. The transcribed Polish-language material amounts to approximately 4,700 words.

In the next stage of the Google search, English-language phrases such as "threats/risks resulting from supporting Ukraine" yielded English records remediating the views of various politicians and experts in Europe and beyond. These included the highly positioned accounts linked to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, notably its director of the information and press department, Maria Zakharova's. While English-language Russian sources were not included in the sample, the information and rhetoric they contained was used to establish the baseline for Russian propaganda argumentation. This served as a reference for assessing how some Polish-language sources seemed to replicate or align with some of the propagandistic arguments (Dobek-Ostrowska et al. 1999). Ultimately, 13 items were collected in this way and treated them as a reference sample.

5. Analytic categories and methods of interpretation

Participation in deliberation on controversial issues is mainly oriented towards successfully distinguishing one's stance from the opponent's and articulating

one's claims in a way that is attractive and acceptable to the audience. In this case, it means making the arguments against supporting Ukraine stronger and more accessible, often by taking strategic advantage of various mechanisms of cognitive processing, including selectivity, memory and emotional stimulation (Oswald 2014, 103–107). Arguably, this can also involve manipulating social cognition through discursive moves that draw on widely recognized stereotypes of Ukrainians and ideologically charged slogans (e.g., “Stop the ukrainization of Poland”). Hence, the study maps the argumentative patterns, the rhetorical resources and the linguistic devices recruited by communicators whose aim is not only to contest the official governmental position that Poland should help Ukraine, but also to instill a sense that it is against the best interests of Poles to provide the current degree of assistance. After all, according to van Dijk (2006), obscuring the sense of what is in the interest of the target audience is one of the constitutive elements of manipulation. The following two subsections outline the categories used for the annotation of the dataset (as explained in the coding protocol in section 4).

5.1. Argumentative schemes and rhetoric

An appropriate framework for analyzing such claim-making can be based on works of argumentation scholars and rhetoricians focusing on audience-oriented persuasion (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969) and practical reasoning (Walton 1990; Walton et al. 2008), and supplanted with the work of discourse analysts on persuasion. In the context of specific affordances of the blogosphere and social media (Myers 2010), claim-making can be grasped through mapping first the macro-processes of argumentation and then the micro-processes of multimodal and linguistic expression (Molek-Kozakowska 2015). For this purpose, we use the structured method for argumentation analysis by Fairclough and Fairclough (2012). This approach allows us to trace claim-making against the official position, as it also offers space for a more language-oriented study of means of counter-arguing, refuting, or mitigating.

Fairclough and Fairclough define counterarguments as based on “different but often reasonable values and value hierarchies (normative priorities), which often turn out to be hard or impossible to reconcile” (2012, 21). According to this framework, communicators make certain claims about what the “Agent” (the Polish government) ought to do regarding allowing/restricting support for Ukraine. To make the claim acceptable, each communicator may frame the premises in line with their interests. For example, the premise based on CIRCUMSTANCES will invoke aspects of economic reality in such a way that make it seem impossible for Poland to help Ukraine. The premise of VALUE may represent helping Ukraine

through military assistance as immoral due to the prospective high loss of life. The GOAL premise may stress peace talks and alternative preferred actions and the MEANS premise may focus on the specific legislation or action that the government or the citizens themselves should take to ensure that the situation is under control. Such claim-making may also involve premises with counterarguments that take the validity and persuasiveness away from the government's stance that Poland should help Ukraine.

The close reading undertaken in the downsizing stage of the dataset compilation and annotation revealed that some of the argumentative schemes that were present in the collected materials were not sound, and the concept of "strategic maneuvering" (van Eemeren 2010), understood as an additional rhetorical flair added to pragma-dialectic argumentation may not fully account for the observed variance. In fact, logical fallacies and manipulative uses of *topoi* (Gula 2002; Lewiński 2014; Schopenhauer 1997) could also be identified at the level of presentation of the argument against aiding Ukraine, especially in audio and video material featuring politicians' press conferences, expert interviews or influencer podcasts.

A *topos* is a well-established argumentative scheme with a strong persuasive potential that can be applied in various contexts to support different premises, as it derives from simplified accounts of experience or established cultural narratives (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969). Some of the well-documented common *topoi* that are drawn from in public debates include "appearance vs. reality" (things are not always what they seem, hidden dimension, a version of possible/impossible), or "theory vs. practice" (while in theory certain actions might work, in practice there are many obstacles, a version of genus/species), "consequence by analogy" (if things/people share common characteristics, they are likely to act in similar ways, a version of similarity/difference), "motive is cause" (if someone has reasons to do something, they have likely done it, a version of cause/effect), "precedent mistakes" (if someone was mistaken previously, he is likely to be mistaken again, a version of past/future fact), "part for the whole" (if something is the case about a part, it is likely to be the case about the whole) (cf. Gula 2002).

Finally, during the annotation we incorporated some well-known fallacies and rhetorical devices that help one win an argument even without sound arguments (cf. Schopenhauer 1997), such as appeals that seem to privilege or protect the interests of the common people, including the interests of the audience members, often signaled by the pronoun "we" (*ad populum*), criticisms of the discrepancy between a person's previous actions or declarations and current statements (*ad hominem*) or attacks on character (*ad personam*) (Pruś 2023), threats of violence in case of dissent or disagreement to instigate fear (*ad baculum*), or appeals to one's interest and financial advantage (*ab utili, ad pecuniam*), or to one's inability

to find a proof to the contrary (*ad ignorantiam*). Another tactic is to misrepresent the original argument in order to refute it more easily (*ad absurdum*, strawman/ironman).

5.2. Linguistic devices

However, scholars representing discourse studies, particularly its critical branch, recognize the fundamental role of strategic mustering of emotional and evaluative language to make an articulated claim, even if fallacious and unsound, acceptable or attractive (van Dijk 2006). For example, discourse analysts point to many ways in which online media leverage negative evaluation, grand quantifiers, unmitigated stance-taking (to indicate strong modality and claim to truth/obligation) and stimulation of emotionality (with nouns and modifiers that explicitly name the desired state, invoke stereotypes or incite strong and/or confusing feelings). Some of the effective appeals that work in the context of war are those related to expressions that instigate fear or sense of threat (“Third World War”), national pride (the Polish promethean tradition, patriotism) and resentment (in relation to Eastern Borderlands, Lviv or Volhynia), which were presented in section 2. These strategically deployed compositional and linguistic devices (van Eemeren 2010) are common in headlines, press-conference announcements, or in video tabs, as they are first about strong emotions making people pay attention to certain claims amongst the variety of more neutral and toned voices, and second about emotional overstimulation that makes reasoned judgment difficult (Myers 2010).

Another well-established approach to public deliberation draws attention to devices for strategic positive self- and negative other-presentation, which functions as a rhetorical strategy to give salience to favorable information about “us” and to discrediting information about “them” (van Dijk 2006, 373). This approach is often realized through false analogy, false dichotomy and reinforcement of stereotyping (as was mentioned in subsection 2.2). Cognitive simplification through reliance on stereotypes and the polarization of stances into only two mutually exclusive positions both inhere fundamental distortions of social reality (Gajewska et al. 2023). They can be used to lead people to conclusions that involve sweeping overgeneralizations and unwarranted extrapolations. In anti-Ukrainian discourse, detailed and rhetorically enhanced examples of negative other-presentation will be foregrounded. Discursive devices with a similar function include imposed terms for rude or ridiculing other-reference and name-calling (“Ukropol,” “Donaldinio”), and the use of pejorative modifiers, attributions, or predicates, as well as collocations that may invoke negative “semantic prosody” (loaded words) (cf. Molek-Kozakowska 2013). If pervasive, these linguistic choices are instrumental to increasing the acceptability of anti-Ukrainian arguments.

6. Results

6.1 Mapping of claim-making against support to Ukraine

According to the rules of practical reasoning (cf. Walton 1990), and as explained with the model by Fairclough and Fairclough (2012) in section 5, the claims become stronger or sounder, and thus acceptable to the public, if the premises that these claims are supported with can be easily identified and understood by target audiences. They also need to resonate with common knowledge, subjective experience, values and reasoning formulas (*topoi*) that do not raise objections and lead to counterarguments. In the material from 37 Polish-language texts and transcripts coded in this study, the mapping of claim-making against the extent of provided help to Ukraine and Ukrainians at the moment of arguing can be presented in the following way:

CIRCUMSTANCES (economic, military, political): Poland is relatively deficient in resources. The Polish people have already sacrificed too much to transfer resources, money and aid to Ukrainians. The Polish army requires equipment to defend the country in case of future attacks. The Polish governments have made promises about aid packages that were not consulted with the society, and that do not reflect the will of the voters.

VALUES (peace, security, prosperity, fairness, choice): achieving peace without further loss of life; making Poland secure from Russia but also from Ukraine; keeping up Poland's economic prosperity and stability; keeping a fair balance between defensive and aggressive measures taken by Ukraine in the war; ensuring that the Polish citizens have a choice to what extent they want to subsidize Ukraine (this should not be imposed by the government)

GOALS: to stop the loss of life and property by making diplomatic arrangements with Russia; to stop enabling corruption in Ukraine; to stop conceding to Ukraine's demands for assistance; to make arrangements that do not disadvantage the Polish economy, business, farming, and transportation; to make arrangements that are reciprocal materially and symbolically (e.g., Ukraine should acknowledge 1943 Volhynia genocide and start reconciliation); to ensure that Ukrainian migrants in Poland do not abuse the social system and integrate to the degree necessary to adhere to Polish laws, norms and traditions.

MEANS TO THE GOAL: to lease, not donate the military equipment; to implement better controls on how the funds given to Ukraine are being spent; to make sure that Ukraine is not given exceptional treatment or free pass due to war regarding European standards (product quality assurance, governance transparency), to pressure Ukrainian authorities to allow study and exhumations related to the Volhynia genocide in exchange for aid; to make assistance to Ukrainian

migrants in Poland conditional on their acceptance of Polish regulations, including sending children to Polish schools; to reduce the amount of symbolic gestures, flags and public expressions of solidarity with Ukraine in the Polish public spaces.

The process of claim-making in discourse is a result of representational strategies that construct a particular version of social reality and, on its basis, offer solutions to current problems. The process of claim-making presented above is channeled to the ideology that Poland's prosperity and Polish citizens interests are superior to those of Ukrainians, and an implication that Ukrainians should polonize in order to be acceptable as citizens. This reasoning also draws on historical tensions and current competition for resources between Poles and Ukrainians that justifies the reasoning that by giving something to Ukrainians, decision-makers are necessarily depleting and weakening Poland, not making Polish society safer or more prosperous. The divisive and at times nationalistic thinking persists in implying that Ukrainians in Poland cannot be "true" Polish citizens and that they, even if they pay taxes, are not deserving of social benefits until they share exactly the same values, traditions and historical memory as Poles. The claims are resonant on account of both the invocation of cherished values of self-governance and peaceful cooperation characteristic of European community and the down-to-earth practical reasoning related to taking precautions against those who might detract from these values.

6.2. Rhetorical analysis of anti-Ukraine posts on X

This section is devoted to the analysis of 14 multimodal materials from X platform (cf. Appendix 1). The posts, some with videos or images, predominantly originate from oppositional party profiles (5 posts from the official profile of *Konfederacja*, 1 post by *WolnośćTV* related to that party, 1 post by *Ruch Narodowy*, and from 7 profiles with right wing, nationalistic political sentiment). Unsurprisingly, the material on X can be characterized by direct and aggressive tone, with a strong polarization between "us" (reasonable Polish citizens, as represented by *Konfederacja*) and "them" (everybody who supposedly supports the unidirectional, unconditional and continuous assistance to Ukraine).

The arguments are infused with various accusations directed at the government and the elites or organizations that support pro-Ukrainian assistance. They concern anything from treason, through fiscal irresponsibility to naivety, as well as being dishonest with voters about the "real" scale and consequences of supports pledged to Ukraine (cf. the *topos* of "appearance vs. reality") (1):

- (1) Grzegorz Płaczek (*Konfederacja*): Chcecie lekką ręką dać Ukraińcom 6 mld złotych! Wam nie przeszkadza, że kiedy bezrefleksyjnie przekazujemy wsparcie finansowe Ukraińcom, ta sama Ukraina składa skargę na Polskę do Światowej Organizacji Handlu [You have no qualms about

wanting to give away 6 billion PLN to Ukrainians whatsoever! You do not mind that when you unreflexively send aid to Ukraine, the same Ukraine makes a complaint against Poland to WTO].

The accusatory tone also foregrounds the *topos* of “reality hidden behind appearances” and instantiates *ad populum* appeals that posit that the Polish citizens are manipulated into giving away valuable resources that they deserve to keep. This draws on *ab utili* fallacy that inheres that if something puts Poland at an economic disadvantage now then it cannot be right, which is an obvious simplification that disregards the notion of investing in long-term security.

In X posts, such traits as greed, corruption and ungratefulness are routinely attributed to Ukraine and Ukrainians (as a whole, not specific parts), particularly when implying that the donated assistance is forfeited, or that it unjustly privileges Ukrainians at the cost of Poles’ standard of living. This may be expressed with additional irony, exclamation, strategic uses of “we,” or in the form of contrastive, slogan-like syntactic parallelisms for a stronger effect of creating the sense of outrage (2):

- (2) Ruch Narodowy: Hańba! [...] Zamiast przeprosin za rzeź wołyńską, będziemy mocniej sponsorować Ukrainę [Disgrace! [...] Instead of getting an apology for the Volhynia massacre, we will be sponsoring Ukraine even more].

At times, the oppositional politicians that call for curbing support to Ukrainians in their tweets engage in positive self-presentation. Through personal narratives of organized rallies or petitions, they posture as sole protectors of the interests of the Polish state, using videos or longer posts to document how close they are to the Polish people (cf. *Konfederacja*’s Krzysztof Mulawa’s and Konrad Niżnik’s tweets).

They may also spice this with invoked imagery of “defenseless” Poland that has given away all its military equipment and has overspent on the social benefits for Ukrainian migrants. This type of posting borders on fearmongering and is rife with false analogy, especially when political decisions are represented as if they were exactly like personal decisions (3):

- (3) Ewa Zajączkowska-Hernik (*Konfederacja*): Rząd bezprawnie deklaruje wysyłanie polskich żołnierzy. Niech politycy idą sami na front, to może wtedy przestaną szafować decyzjami [The government illegally pledges to send Polish troops [to Ukraine]. If politicians went to the front themselves, maybe they would not be so careless with their decisions].

In a few videos and comments, additional *ad personam* attacks are thrown at leaders from the ruling coalition with stereotypical representations of political elite’s corrupt tendencies, as well as attributions of deliberate ill motivations that harm the Polish state and society (particularly by Krzysztof Bosak). Additional warrants to such paradoxical claims are collected in posts that use authority figures

(economists, constitutional lawyers) to seemingly confirm the charges of illegality and economic wastefulness regarding the declarations the Polish government is making to support Ukraine, as in (4) where an academic is quoted (as a credible source) to attack the government:

- (4) Konfederacja: „To jest bełkot, który nie spełnia żadnej normy pisania dokumentów międzynarodowych” - dr Szewko o umowie Polska-Ukraina [“This is gibberish that does not meet any standards of writing of international documents” – dr. Szewko about the Poland-Ukraine agreement].

In addition, assertions with large quantifiers (e.g. “we will never allow it”), extrapolations based on scarce data (e.g. “Donald Tusk to face a tribunal”), and frequent repetition of slogans, such as “Poland first” and “Stop the ukrainization of Poland,” also as hashtags, are characteristic linguistic and compositional maneuvers deployed on X.

6.3. Rhetorical analysis of news and influencer multimodal materials

This section is based on the study of 23 articles and transcripts (cf. Appendix 2), of which 10 are in the textual form and were found on the websites of *DoRzeczy* (4), *Wyborcza* (1), *Rzeczpospolita* (3), *Belsat* (1), *Onet – Business Insider* (1). These outlets apply diverse editorial lines to present a variety of opinions regarding the Ukraine war, including also sources with anti-Ukrainian positions, especially regarding continuous supporting of Ukrainians militarily and financially. Additionally, 13 materials are videos/audios (11 of them on YouTube) were traced to *TVN24* (2), *SuperExpress* (2), *Radio Trójka* (1), *Wirtualna Polska* (3), as representatives of media outlets that also feature interviews or press conferences of oppositional politicians or experts, as well as to *Telewizja wPolsce* (1), *Radio WNET* (1), and *Porucznik Piotr Powalka* (3) as examples of non-licensed opinionated channels. This section avoids repeating the same examples of rhetorical and linguistic devices that were already evidenced in internal political deliberation on X. Some examples of arguments against helping Ukraine draw on external geopolitical situation (e.g., Poland helps in contrast to Germany, Italy or Hungary that do not, and offer various reasons why not to).

Some outlets highlight the fact that since December 2023, the new centrist government has been taking the scale of Polish commitment to Ukrainian defense even further. *TVN24* reports on the NATO summit where the Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs Radosław Sikorski has boasted that Poland is a champion in enabling Ukraine’s offensive (5):

- (5) Sikorski: Polska przygotowuje 45. pakiet pomocy dla Ukrainy, a każdy z poprzednich pakietów miał wartość około 100 milionów euro. Gdyby inni wzięli z nas przykład, Ukraina mogłaby przejść do ofensywy [Sikorski: Poland is preparing the 45th aid package to Ukraine, with

each package worth of approximately 100 million EUR. If other states followed our example, Ukraine could move on to an offensive]. (TVN24)

Such statements have stirred controversy over the militaristic stance and unconditional support for Ukraine by Polish elites with a range of publications about the possible reasons for restraint in helping Ukraine in the case of American administration (*Wyborcza*), Italian government (*Rzeczpospolita*) and German federal government (*Telewizja w Polsce*). Bringing the Polish policy of supporting Ukraine into sharper contrast with more calculating states was aimed to expose the foolishness and naivety of the Polish government intent on sponsoring the “overkill” and the corruption in Ukraine (*DoRzeczy*). The conservative *DoRzeczy* editorial calls this stance bluntly as a renaissance of moronic and primitive pro-Ukrainian narrative [renesans tępej i prymitywnej proukraińskiej narracji] attributing it to PM Donald Tusk in repeated *ad personam* attacks. Notably, the PM is at times ridiculed by being addressed with some diminutive versions of his first name, e.g., “Donaldinio” by *Porucznik Piotr Powalka*. By invoking a false dichotomy between either “reasonable” or “irrational” geopolitical decisions (rather than them being a complex result of risk calculation), and by using strong moral evaluation, the communicators apply a rhetorical strategy to build up acceptance for anti-Ukrainian policies based on negative sentiment.

Sentiment is also foregrounded in a 56-minute interview with the economist dr. Artur Bartoszewicz, titled “Czujemy dziś ból i wstyd” [We feel pain and shame today] (*SuperExpress*), where the main argument is that Poland has been giving away too much military equipment and other aid instead of leasing or selling some of it. Such a one-sided, unreciprocated economic relationship breeds undue resentments among Poles. The interview features many vivid embodied metaphors and analogies that associate giving resources away with pain and hardship, e.g., Poland will not be able to shoulder this burden [Polska tego nie uniesie]. The rhetorical figures invoke the feelings of embarrassment for the lack of control over one’s finances, as if it were a body thrown out of balance. Also, Ukraine is repeatedly called “a fallen state” [upadłe państwo] and the contrast between impoverished Ukrainian refugees subsidized by Polish citizens and Ukrainian oligarchs exploiting European trade agreements is emphasized. The *topos* of “appearance vs. reality” is deployed to demystify the “real” relationship between Poland and Ukraine – that of neighboring countries: sometimes collaborating but sometimes also competing due to separate national interests – rather than close friends or members of a family whose destinies are inseparably tied together for better or worse.

Through such a redefinition of Polish-Ukrainian relationships, the idea of unconditional pro-Ukrainian support is exposed as a “mere fantasy” [czysta

fantazja] by Bartoszewicz (*SuperExpress*). Other common re-framings of Polish-Ukrainian relations, more in line with conspiracy discourse, are based on the rhetorical effects of the “appearance vs. reality” *topos*. Examples include postulating that Ukraine is “not a victim here” at least when one takes into account Ukrainians’ constant benefiting from free modernization of their army (Krzysztof Bosak for *Wirtualna Polska*), or that “it is only common sense to dispose of the friendship analogy and stop treating being neutral as being anti-Ukrainian” (Artur Bartoszewicz for *SuperExpress*). In turn, for Grzegorz Braun, Ukrainian refugees are not given temporary shelter in Poland, but it is a “mass relocation scheme” aimed to destroy Polish tradition (*SuperExpress*). Such accusations are peppered with *ad personam* attacks waged at those public figures that express solidarity with such terms as “liars” and “Russkie’s socks” (Wojciech Cejrowski for *DoRzeczy*). Other identified devices include rhetorical questions, such as “Why do producers and consumers have to pay the costs of pro-Ukrainian policy? Who says we have to pay?” (Witold Modzelewski in *Radio WNET*), or *ad absurdum* statements: “Soon we will be giving our pensions away to Ukrainian pensioners” (*Porucznik Piotr Powalka*).

The emphasis on the national dividing line between Poles and Ukrainians is an important *topos* and dichotomy between “us” and “them”: since there are two different nations, there must be different interests and priorities. For example, Krzysztof Bosak (*Wirtualna Polska*) repeatedly negates the legality of relocating Polish weaponry to Ukraine and the formation and training of a Ukrainian legion in Poland, which he claims will expose Poland to Russian attacks (6):

- (6) Nie dla mobilizacji wojskowych dla Ukrainy w Polsce. Zorganizowanie formacji legionu jest bezprawne. [...] To jest ograbienie polskiego wojska ze sprzętu, nie mamy już czego dawać [We are saying “no” to the mobilization of Ukrainian military troops in Poland. The formation of the legion is illegal. This is an act of robbery of the Polish army of its equipment. There is nothing left to give away].

The rhetoric emanating from conservatives and nationalists is assertive and unmitigated: the imagery of the Polish army being “robbed” and “left with nothing” is striking and emotional. So is the slogan-like language of some headlines: “Taxed for Ukraine” [Ukraiński podatek], “Treason charge for Donald Tusk” [Trybunał Stanu dla Donalda Tuska], “How Poles are being screwed” [Dymania Polaków ciąg dalszy].

Some commenters also call for the reestablishing of territorial and symbolic borders and installing controls, which is a rhetorical strategy that draws on representing self/other as separate “containers” (van Dijk 2006), as well as on the associations between nation-state in terms of purity vs. pollution. The Polish-Ukrainian border needs to be guarded better against alleged infiltration by spies and

pro-Russian Ukrainians, but also against a mass transport from Ukraine of cheap substandard produce dumped onto the Polish market (Krzysztof Bosak). Poland should also stop allowing further “ukrainization,” namely the open acceptance of foreign cultural traditions, the tolerance of “Russki mir,” or values that Poles worked hard to shed in their journey towards Europe (Artur Bartoszewicz for *SuperExpress*). This argumentation is reminiscent of the embedded stereotypes of Ukrainians as uncivilized Easterners and may be extrapolated to foreground the Other’s criminality; for instance, Grzegorz Braun’s call to “immediately deport all Ukrainian criminals” (*DoRzeczy*).

Another anti-Ukrainian stereotype of a devious nation is deployed in the news on how the Polish ministers are being deliberately misled by their Ukrainian counterparts [Sikorski został wprowadzony w błąd przez Ukraińców] (*DoRzeczy*). We see a repeated claim that Ukrainian military command is covering up its incompetence or its reckless use of troops as “cannon fodder” [mięso armatnie, siła żywa] (*Porucznik Piotr Powalka*). Apparently, the Ukrainians in Poland cannot be trusted either, given the historical facts that show them as violent towards Poles in Volhynia (the *topos* of “previous mistakes”). The way to curb their disloyalty and scheming could be, according to Grzegorz Braun, making them sign an affidavit denouncing Stepan Bandera [lojalki antybanderowskie] (*DoRzeczy*).

In a parallel vein, President Zelensky is negatively represented through a double bind. Sometimes he is a skillful manipulator and PR-specialist on account of his acting career, which helps him to play the victim and blackmail other countries into sending more support (Artur Bartoszewicz for *SuperExpress*). On other occasions, he is presented as an incompetent and easily manipulated puppet, who is being used by both rich oligarchs and military and political masterminds who profit from the war in Ukraine (7):

- (7) Żeleński, komik i aktor, nie wojskowy, podpisał ustawę o mobilizacji, która usuwa limit 36 miesięcy kontraktu na polu walki. Żeleński mówi do żołnierzy – nie gagatku – będziecie walczyć do końca wojny lub do śmierci. [...] Żołnierz po 2,5 roku uciekający z wojska jest nazywany bandytą, a dzieci urzędników nie walczą, tylko zwykli ludzie i pracownicy. Łapówkarstwo pozwoliło bogatym uchylać się od służby w armii. [Zelensky, comedian and actor, not a military man, signed an act on mobilization, which removes the limit of 36 months of combat contract. Zelensky says to the soldiers – no, no, you monkey – you will fight until the end of the war or until you die [...] A soldier deserting after 2.5 years of service is branded as a criminal while kids of officials don’t have to fight – this happens only to common people and workers. Bribery saved many rich people’s kids from the service in the army] (*Porucznik Piotr Powalka*)

In the materials that feature arguments against aiding Ukraine, there are a few cases where the Hungarian perspective is reported, perhaps unsurprisingly, given Hungary’s strong opposition to the European policy of supporting Ukrainians in

the war. According to some Polish editors aligning with this stance, both European and Ukrainian authorities should stop the fight and negotiate a truce based on the current geopolitical situation. For them, to reference Orban, “Ukraine is no longer a sovereign state, but a mere protectorate dependent on the Western money and weaponry” [Ukraina jest obecnie jedynie protektorem zależnym od zachodnich pieniędzy oraz broni i nie jest już suwerennym państwem - powiedział Viktor Orban] (TVN24). Even the Hungarian opposition politicians have resorted to various analogies to condemn the idea of unconditionally trusting Kyiv with military and financial support. Péter Magyar (8), for example, is interviewed as strongly asserting that:

- (8) Węgrzy uratowali monarchię habsburską, chrześcijańską Europę wiele razy, przez setki lat. Ukraińskie miasta są niszczone, a mimo to Kijów ma czas, aby ograniczać prawa węgierskiej mniejszości! Jak to możliwe? [Hungarians saved the Habsburg monarchy and the Christian Europe many times over hundreds of years. Now Ukrainian cities are being destroyed and yet Kyiv has the time to oppress the Hungarian minority! How is that even possible?] (*Rzeczpospolita*).

It can be understood that such expressions of ironic disbelief, rhetorical questioning and the vivid comparisons that unequivocally present Hungarians in positive way while Ukraine as a country that has its priorities all wrong have been remediated in the Polish mediasphere that is hostile to the idea of supporting Ukraine.

7. Conclusion

The mapping of claim-making undertaken in this study revealed some problematic assumptions and embedded stereotypes, such as those of Polish superiority, of Polish interests naturally clashing with Ukrainian interests, and of nationalistic dividing lines between “us” and “them” or between Western or European values and those of the Ukrainians’ who allegedly still need to master them and adapt to them. Incidentally, a recent study by Openfield (2024) indicates that Ukrainians (both pre-war migrants and war refugees) have been able to adapt and accommodate to the Polish reality relatively well: Only 3% of refugees were unable to communicate in Polish in 2024 (as opposed to 20% in 2022), while 28% have mastered Polish at a level of functional literacy and working without translation (B1). 67% of Ukrainians rent a place instead of living off community housing or charity (as opposed to 27.6% in 2022), and 64% of refugees have found employment (as opposed to 30% in 2022). At the same time, unfortunately, only 1.5% migrants and 5.2% of refugees continue to believe that Poles have a “very friendly” attitude towards Ukrainians, which is a major drop in comparison to 2022.

The analysis has also revealed characteristic formulations of argumentation against helping Ukraine and Ukrainians based on premises that dwell on anti-Ukrainian resentment (historical conflicts in Volhynia), and stereotypes of incompetence and corruption in Ukraine (“Russki mir”). They all fuel rhetorical pathos built on security concerns and a sense of injustice requiring decisive action (as with “Poland first!” or “Stop the ukrainization of Poland!”). Many of these formulations inhere some aspect of fallacious thinking, which is usually inconspicuous, as it is covered up by witty maneuvering, aggressive tone, or reference to common experience for provocative insinuation (van Eemeren 2010; Domínguez-Armas et al. 2023). Incidentally, similar arguments and maneuvers could be found on the websites and social media accounts of Russian embassies and propagandists in our reference corpus of English-language materials. The rhetorical and linguistic devices identified in the 2022-2024 sample seem to cater to public desire for directly expressed, yet polarized and polemical, stances. These divisions are magnified by the affordances of social media platforms, taken up by sensational journalism or artificially engineered by disinformation agents (Molek-Kozakowska 2013).

Given the substantial polarization of the Polish media and social media spaces with prolific expressions of support for solidarity with Ukrainians on the one hand and the variety of anti-Ukrainian stances, it is also possible to bring the results into a comparison with the recent research into polarized argumentation (cf. Gajewska et al. 2023). One general argumentative strategy observed in our study might be categorized broadly as “robin-hooding”: this is when the arguer positions themselves as rebelling against a tyrannical regime in order to protect the underdog. Here the alleged victim of the oppressive actions is the Polish taxpayer forced to give up an inordinate amount of resources to support Ukraine, without any compensation or guarantees of reciprocity. The examples above testify to some maneuvering in line with “robin-hooding,” especially where the government is blamed for irrational decisions that put ordinary Poles at a disadvantage (Gajewska et al. 2023). Another broad strategy deployed here is related to “brave-hearting” and involves the uses of strong and emotional language fueled by a sense of injustice and deep division between “us” – the rational and knowing Poles, and “them” – the oppressive elites that entered into some shady political arrangements (either with the West or Ukraine) for profit, and started to “wage a war” on tax-paying and law-abiding Polish citizens. The differences between “us” and “them” are presented as irreconcilable and the issue at stake is seen as lacking any room for negotiations or appeasement (cf. Molek-Kozakowska and Wanke 2019, on the similar maneuvering in the online abortion debates in Poland).

This study has been designed to be of a qualitative and typological nature and, as such, it does not aspire to a systematic analysis of all possible counterarguments used in the public debate on the adequate degrees and forms aid to Ukraine. Rather, it is meant to foster reflectivity, language awareness and critical rhetorical competences (Molek-Kozakowska 2015), without which the processes of deliberation in the democratic sphere are likely to deteriorate into a cacophony of stances with an ever-growing share of disinformation (Dryzek 2002). Rhetorical critical literacy has a long tradition of being developed in the context of political negotiations, argumentative stunts and public debating, not propagandas or polarized echo chambers. For its sake, it is important to apply argumentation, rhetorical and linguistic analysis to routine and mundane media uses, including the scrolling of tweets or the viewing of YouTube videos, which carry ideological messages infused with stereotypes and fallacies, but which do not lend themselves easily to exercising critical thinking while consumed recreationally.

Acknowledgement

This work was funded by the EU's NextGenerationEU instrument through the National Recovery and Resilience Plan of Romania – Pillar III-C9-I8, second round, managed by the Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitalization, within the project entitled *The coverage and reception of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict in Polish, Romanian and English-language media: A comparative critical discourse study with recommendations for journalism training (CORECON)*, contract no. 760244/28.12.2023, code CF 25/27.07.2023

References

- Andrusiw, Stefania.** 2011. "Relacje polsko-ukraińskie z perspektywy Postcolonial Studies." *Roczniki Humanistyczne* 59: 61–69.
- Aristotle.** 2008. *The Art of Rhetoric*, trans. W. Rhys Roberts. Megaphone eBooks. www.wendelberger.com/downloads/Aristotle_Rhetoric.pdf. Accessed: February 12, 2025.
- Bakuła, Bogusław.** 2006. "Kolonialne i postkolonialne aspekty polskiego dyskursu kresoznawczego (zarys problematyki)." *Teksty drugie* 6: 11–33.
- Bokszański, Zbigniew.** 1997. *Stereotypy a kultura*. Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Leopoldinum.
- Copsey, Nathaniel.** 2008. "Remembrance of Things Past: The Lingering Impact of History on Contemporary Polish–Ukrainian Relations." *Europe-Asia Studies* 60(4): 531–560.
- Dobek-Ostrowska, Bogusława, Janina Fras, and Beata Ociepka.** 1999. *Teoria i praktyka propagandy*. Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego.
- Domínguez-Armas, Álvaro, Andrés Soria-Ruiz, and Marcin Lewiński.** 2023. "Provocative Insinuations as Hate Speech: Argumentative Functions of Mentioning Ethnicity in Headlines." *Topoi* 42 (2): 419–431. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11245-023-09894-6>

- Dryzek, John.** 2002. *Deliberative Democracy and Beyond: Liberals, Critics, Contestations*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Fairclough, Isabela, and Norman Fairclough.** 2012. *Political Discourse Analysis*. London: Routledge.
- Gajewska, Ewa, Katarzyna Budzyska, Barbara Konat, and Marcin Koszowy, eds.** 2023. *The New Ethos: Linguistically Analysing Polarisation on Social Media*. Warsaw: Warsaw University of Technology.
- Grabowska, Sabina, and Anna Pięta-Szawara.** 2023. "Wsparcie Polski na rzecz uchodźców z Ukrainy w obliczu wojny w 2022 r. Wybrane aspekty." *Journal of Modern Science* 50(1): 381–396. <https://doi.org/10.13166/jms/161538>
- Gula, Robert J.** 2002. *Nonsense: A Handbook of Logical Fallacies*. Mount Jackson, VA: Axios Press.
- Habermas, Jürgen.** 1989. *The Structural Transformations of the Public Sphere*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Jurek, Krzysztof.** 2018. "Stereotypy na temat Ukraińców funkcjonujące w Polsce. Imigranci z Ukrainy w Polsce." In: *Potrzeby i oczekiwania, reakcje społeczne, wyzwania dla bezpieczeństwa*, ed. Michał Lubicz Miszewski, 33–46. Wrocław: Akademia Wojsk Lądowych.
- Kotyńska, Katarzyna.** 2008. "Odzyskiwanie miasta utraconego? Polski Lwów z perspektywy ukraińskiej." *Prace Filologiczne* 55: 157–164.
- Kravchenko, Svitlana.** 2024. "Polityka wschodnia Polski: Tradycje prometejskie i wyzwania współczesności w ramach Grupy Wyszehradzkiej." *Acta Universitatis Lodzensis. Folia Historica* 115: 181–197. <https://doi.org/10.18778/0208-6050.115.10>
- Lewiński, Piotr.** 2014. "Od Arystotelesa do van Eemeren i Tindale'a. W poszukiwaniu źródeł współczesnej retoryki i dialektyki." In: *Pragmatyka, retoryka, argumentacja. Obrazy języka i dyskursu w naukach humanistycznych*, ed. Piotr Stalmaszczyk, 43–61. Kraków: Universitas.
- Łastawski, Kazimierz.** 2015. "Problemy geopolityczne w stosunkach polsko-ukraińskich." *Krakowskie Studia Międzynarodowe* 12(2): 95–108.
- Melnichenko, Oleksandr, Tatiana Osadcha, Anatoliy Kovalyov, and Valerii Matskul.** 2022. "Consequences of Russia's Military Invasion of Ukraine for Polish-Ukrainian Trade Relations." *Journal of International Studies* 15: 131–149. https://doi.org/10.14254/2071_8330.2022/15-4/8
- Mironowicz, Eugeniusz.** 2012. *Polityka zagraniczna Ukrainy 1990-2010*. Białystok: Wydawnictwo Uniwersyteckie Trans Humana.
- Molek-Kozakowska, Katarzyna.** 2013. "Towards a Pragma-linguistic Framework for the Study of Sensationalism in News Headlines." *Discourse & Communication* 7(2): 173–197. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1750481312471668>
- Molek-Kozakowska, Katarzyna.** 2015. "Rhetorical Criticism as an Advanced Literacy Practice: A Report on a Pilot Training." In: *The Ecosystem of the Foreign Language Learner: Selected Issues*, ed. Ewa Piechurska-Kuciel, and Magdalena Szyszka, 169–184. Berlin/Heidelberg: Springer.
- Molek-Kozakowska, Katarzyna, and Isabela-Anda Dragomir.** 2025. "Demystifying, Delegitimizing, Debunking: Discursive Editorial Strategies of Neutralizing the Rationales for Russia's Intervention in Ukraine." *Media, War & Conflict* 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.1177/17506352251314876>
- Molek-Kozakowska, Katarzyna, and Michał Wanke.** 2019. "Reproductive Rights or Duties? The Rhetoric of Division in Social Media Debates on Abortion Law in Poland." *Social Movement Studies* 18(5): 566–585. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14742837.2019.1629279>
- Myers, Greg.** 2010. "Stance-taking and Public Discussion in Blogs." *Critical Discourse Studies* 7(4): 263–275. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17405904.2010.511832>
- Nedobiichuk, Nataliia.** 2019. "Polacy i Ukraińcy we wzajemnych profilach stereotypowej percepcji." In: *Imigranci z Ukrainy w Polsce. Potrzeby i oczekiwania, reakcje społeczne, wyzwania dla bezpieczeństwa*, ed. Michał Lubicz Miszewski, 17–30. Wrocław: Akademia Wojsk Lądowych.

- Olech, Aleksander Ksawery, and Julia Dobrowolska.** 2022. "Polsko-ukraińskie relacje a rosyjskie działania dezinformacyjne." *Studia Bezpieczeństwa Narodowego* 4: 63–72. <https://doi.org/10.37055/sbn/156978>
- Openfield.** 2024. "Tacy sami czy jednak inni? Ukraińscy imigranci przedwojenni a uchodźcy - porównanie 2022/2023/2024." https://openfield.pl/pdf/raport_ua_2023.pdf. Accessed October 20, 2024.
- Oswald, Steve.** 2014. "It is Easy to Miss Something You Are Not Looking for: A Pragmatic Account of Covert Communicative Influence for (Critical) Discourse Analysis." In: *Contemporary Critical Discourse Studies*, eds. Christopher Hart and Piotr Cap, 99–121. London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Perelman, Chaim, and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca.** 1969. *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press.
- Polsko-Ukraińska Izba Gospodarcza.* <https://pol-ukr.com/> Accessed: April 14, 2024.
- Pruś, Jakub.** 2023. "Argument ad hominem, argument ad personam i atak osobisty – Analiza porównawcza." *Res Rhetorica* 10(2): 47–73. <https://doi.org/10.29107/rr2023.2.3>
- Sawicz, Agnieszka.** 2023. "The Myth of Stepan Bandera." *Przegląd Zachodni*, Special Issue 2023: 251–281.
- Schopenhauer, Arthur.** 1997[1831]. *Erystyka, czyli sztuka prowadzenia sporów* [The art of being right]. Warszawa: Alma Press.
- Staniszewski, Robert.** 2022. *Společna percepcja uchodźców z Ukrainy, migrantów oraz działań podejmowanych przez polskie państwo. Raport porównawczy z badań opinii publicznej*. Warszawa: Uniwersytet Warszawski.
- Statista.* 2024. "Social media usage in Poland." <https://www.statista.com/topics/5296/social-media-usage-in-poland/#topicOverview>. Accessed: October 20, 2024.
- Stokłosa, Katarzyna.** 2012. "Neighborhood Relations on the Polish Borders: The Example of the Polish–German, Polish–Ukrainian and Polish–Russian Border Regions." *Journal of Borderlands Studies* 27(3): 245–255. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08865655.2012.750948>
- Stryjek, Tomasz, Joanna Konieczna-Salamatin, and Kamila Zacharuk.** 2017. *Ukraińcy o historii, kulturze i stosunkach polsko-ukraińskich. Raport z badania ilościowego i jakościowego*. Warszawa: Narodowe Centrum Kultury.
- Szeptycki, Andrzej.** 2018. "Rola pamięci historycznej we współczesnych stosunkach polsko-ukraińskich." In: *Refleksje o przeszłości, spojrzenie na współczesność*, ed. Olga Wasiuta, 210–234. Kraków: Uniwersytet Pedagogiczny im KEN.
- Thompson, Ewa.** 2000. *Trubadurzy imperium. Literatura rosyjska i kolonializm*. Kraków: Universitas.
- Tkachenko, Olha.** 2016. "The Perception of Ukrainian Identity during Euromaidan in Polish Opinion-making Press." *Studia Medioznawcze* 64(1): 75–85.
- Tomaszewska, Natalia, and Łukasz Wolski.** 2016. "Rola Kresów w drodze Polski do wolności. Rys historyczny i współczesne rozumienie tożsamości kresowej." In: *W walce o wolność i niepodległość Polski*, ed. Dorota Litwin-Lewandowska and Krzysztof Bałkowski, 86–110, Lublin: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Tygiel.
- Van Eemeren, Frans H.** 2010. *Strategic Maneuvering in Argumentative Discourse*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Van Dijk, Teun.** 2006. "Discourse and Manipulation." *Discourse & Society* 17(2): 359–383. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926506060250>
- Walton, Douglas.** 1990. *Practical Reasoning: Goal-driven, Knowledge-based, Action-guiding Argumentation*. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Walton, Douglas, Chris Reed, and Fabrizio Macagno, eds.** 2008. *Argumentation Schemes*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Zajączkowski, Wojciech. 2005. "Polish-Ukrainian relations." *Yearbook of Polish Foreign Policy* 1: 124–132.

Zhurzhenko, Tatiana. 2013. "Memory Wars and Reconciliation in the Ukrainian–Polish Borderlands: Geopolitics of Memory from a Local Perspective." In: *History, Memory and Politics in Central and Eastern Europe: Memory Games*, eds. Georges Mink, and Laure Neumayer, 173–192. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Appendix 1: X (Twitter) sources

	Date	Address	Source
1	7.02.2024	https://x.com/WolnoscTV/status/1755238064685769190	WolnoscTV (Grzegorz Płaczek)
2	20.02.2024	https://x.com/krzysztofmulawa/status/1759896912738627799	Krzysztof Mulawa
3	22.02.2024	https://x.com/KONFEDERACJA_/status/1760673523104936181	Konfederacja
4	22.02.2024	https://x.com/HanterPoen/status/1760753909620977911	Hanter Poen
5	23.02.2024	https://x.com/KONFEDERACJA_/status/1760991156970603000	Konfederacja
6	27.02.2024	https://x.com/MastinPL/status/1762409415653695851	Rafał Sondaże
7	16.03.2024	https://x.com/KONFEDERACJA_/status/1768916594229432426	Konfederacja (Ewa Zajączkowska-Hernik)
8	18.04.2024	https://x.com/Claudia00275488/status/1781065528901058699	Claudia
9	19.04.2024	https://x.com/KonradNiznik_/status/1781188720479134175	Konrad Niżnik
10	03.06.2024	https://x.com/KONFEDERACJA_/status/1797590314527412533	Konfederacja (Rafał Mekler, Krzysztof Bosak)
11	09.07.2024	https://x.com/RuchNarodowySL/status/1810735669939163237	Ruch Narodowy
12	10.07.2024	https://x.com/KONFEDERACJA_/status/1811011011832348697	Konfederacja (Krzysztof Bosak)
13	10.07.2024	https://x.com/RDJ00000/status/1811031236640452708	RDJ (dr Szewko)
14	12.07. 2024	https://x.com/bpawel89/status/1811539246173552674	Paweł Bala (Konrad Berkowicz)

Appendix 2: Internet sources

	Date	Headline	Address	Source
1	8.08.2022	Grzegorz Braun OSTRO o uchodźcach z Ukrainy. POLSKA TEGO NIE UNIESIE!	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vOCzBvTt7SQ&ab_channel=SuperExpress	SuperExpress

2	20.01.2023	Dlaczego Niemcy nie chcą pomagać Ukrainie	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MPNTHdi4HDY&ab_channel=TelewizjaWPolsce	Telewizja w Polsce (Marek Król, Paweł Badzio)
3	11.08. 2023	NIGDY nie było PRZYJAŹNI z UKRAINA?! Dr Artur Bartoszewicz: Czujemy dziś BÓL i WSTYD	https://youtu.be/FGwNg5fjxRk?si=ATLos9-18TilkLyR	SuperExpress
4	25.09. 2023	Premier Viktor Orban oświadczył w poniedziałek, że jego kraj nie będzie wspierać Ukrainy w żadnej sprawie na arenie międzynarodowej, dopóki rząd w Kijowie nie przywróci praw mniejszości węgierskiej na Zakarpaciu.	https://tvn24.pl/swiat/viktor-orban-nie-bedziemy-wspierac-ukrainy-dopoki-kijow-nie-przywroci-praw-wegrow-na-zakarpaciu-st7360766	TVN24
5	13.12.2023	Dlaczego tak naprawdę Republikanie blokują pomoc dla Ukrainy?	https://wyborcza.pl/7,75399,30503778,dlaczego-tak-naprawde-republikanie-blokuja-pomoc-dla-ukrainy.html	Wyborcza (Maciej Czarnecki)
6	27.01.2024	Krzysztof Bosak: NIE Ukraina i Ukraińcy, a POLSKA i POLACY Oddaliśmy im wszystko ZA DARMO!	https://youtu.be/wxfNuEebNaY?si=8p4GPwp1OoIqu7If	Radio Trójka
7	29.01.2024	Donald Trump torpeduje porozumienie, bez którego nie będzie pomocy dla Ukrainy	https://www.rp.pl/polityka/art39754131-donald-trump-torpeduje-porozumienie-bez-kturego-nie-bedzie-pomocy-dla-ukrainy	Rzeczpospolita (Aleksandra Ślabisz)
8	11.02.2024	Ukraina nie wygra	https://dorzeczy.pl/kraj/548220/ukraina-nie-wygra-polska-musi-bazowac-na-wariacie-w-ktorym-ukraina-traci-czesc-terytorium.html	DoRzeczy
9	15.03.2024	Minister spraw zagranicznych Włoch Antonio Tajani powiedział, że wysłanie wojsk NATO na Ukrainę oznaczałoby ryzyko wybuchu trzeciej wojny światowej.	https://www.rp.pl/konflikty-zbrojne/art40004841-wojska-nato-na-ukrainie-szef-msz-wloch-ostrzega-przed-iii-wojna-swiatowa	Rzeczpospolita
10	02.04.2024	Trzy scenariusze eskalacji	https://belsat.eu/pl/news/02-04-2024-trzy-scenariusze-eskalacji-czy-perspektywa-iii-wojny-swiatowej-jest-realna	Bielsat
11	12.04.2024	Prof. Witold Modzelewski: Nadchodzi kolejna fala drożyzny w Polsce. Będzie gorzej niż się zapowiada	https://youtu.be/ejH7f_LSeG8?si=_6KowXuDJ8RhHA6K	Radio WNET
12	13.04.2024	Donald Trump zaproponował, że pomoc dla Ukrainy powinna być udzielana w formie pożyczek, a nie darowizn	https://businessinsider.com.pl/wiadomosci/to-moze-byc-przelom-donald-trump-rozwazamy-pomoc-ukrainie-ale/9zt7vgm	Onet Business Insider
13	05.05.2024	W czasie I i II wojny światowej stanęliśmy po stronie Niemców i wszystko przepadło. Teraz więc staramy się choć trochę być niezależni – mówi w rozmowie z „Rzeczpospolitą” lider węgierskiej opozycji Péter Magyar	https://www.rp.pl/polityka/art40297311-peter-magyar-wegrom-nikt-nie-pomagal-dlaczego-teraz-my-mamy-pomagac-ukrainie	Rzeczpospolita

14	15.05.2024	Cejrowski: Byliśmy onucami. Lisicki: Opowieść o zwycięskiej Ukrainie była humbugiem	https://dorzeczy.pl/plus/antysystem/586656/wojna-na-ukrainie-cejrowski-niedawno-byalismy-onucami.html	DoRzeczy
15	31.05.2024	Stoltenberg: Ukraina ma prawo do samoobrony, my mamy prawo pomagać Ukrainie	https://tvn24.pl/swiat/nato-szczyt-jens-stoltenberg-ukraina-ma-prawo-do-samoobrony-my-mamy-prawo-pomagac-ukrainie-st7941521	TVN24
16	13.06.2024	Trump chce oddać Krym i Donbas? Szokująca propozycja Donalda Trumpa	https://youtube.com/shorts/kXbS36QwWXg?si=_gY5krpS-rsOQaAT	Porucznik Piotr Powalka
17	10.07.2024	Absolutna patologia! Bosak: Tusk przed Trybunał Stanu. Złamał konstytucję	https://youtu.be/rt4I3ZouWXg?si=NGcrrhS-fDuE1Mak	Wirtualna Polska
18	10.07.2024	Bosak żąda trybunału stanu dla Donalda Tuska za tajne umowy z Ukrainą!	https://youtu.be/c4bwQiPalSo?si=Vg1mtG8fzhVYrXpg	WiN TV
19	11.07.2024	Bosak: Polska nie jest stroną w tej wojnie. Ostrzega przed formowaniem legionów ukraińskich w Polsce	https://youtube.com/shorts/72KKwahBmZ4?si=9D-DJVo1E1Ex0ub6	WiN TV
20	17.07.2024	Ukraina Ma PROBLEM!!! Żołnierze Uciekają z Armii!!!	https://youtu.be/w7Zz-jwbfj0?si=BQwarBDdRGTORW0Y	Porucznik Piotr Powalka
21	18.07.2024	Będziemy PŁACIĆ "Ukraiński Podatek". Nowa Rezolucja Parlamentu Europejskiego	https://youtu.be/lTRgBYAn5-A?si=Rw-SRSe7jSZgjAUa	Porucznik Piotr Powalka
22	09.09.2024	Ukraińcy wprowadzili Sikorskiego w błąd? Legion Ukraiński w Polsce.	https://dorzeczy.pl/kraj/631502/legion-ukrainski-sikorski-wprowadzony-w-blad.html	DoRzeczy
23	10.09.2024	„Lojalki Antybanderowskie”. Korona przedstawiła swoją „piątkę”	https://dorzeczy.pl/kraj/631846/lojalka-antybanderowska-korona-brauna-predstawila-piatke.html	DoRzeczy