



The Coverage and Reception of  
the Russian-Ukrainian Conflict



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# Unwanted Encounters:


## Antiukrainian rhetoric in social media reception of Russian-Ukrainian conflict

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# Objectives



- To show **the anti-Ukrainian discourse and how known topoi are employed** in the anti-Ukrainian discourse;
  - To show **how this discourse is created** in contrast to the mainstream media outlets.
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# Topoi



“topoi or loci can be described as parts of argumentation which belong to the obligatory, either **explicit or inferable premises**. They are **the content-related warrants or ‘conclusion rules’ which connect the argument or arguments with the conclusion, the claim**. As such, they justify the transition from the argument or arguments to the conclusion”  
(Kienpointner, 1992, p. 194).

# Context



- **Poland used to be markedly homogenous**; over the course of the past decade (Russian invasions on Ukraine in 2014 and 2022, Syrian refugee crisis in 2015 etc.), the country has undergone many changes in this regard **becoming heterogenous and multicultural**. As a result, the notions of foreignness gained traction in public discourse.
- The discourse on Ukrainians consists of:
  - The mainstream media outlets (relatively unified);
  - **A series of counterdiscourses, that have their niches in internet** - sometimes interacting with the mainstream in comments sections, countering the dominating narratives.
- The data are fragmented and require contextual knowledge and/or a point of reference.

# **Anti-Ukrainian niches**




- **The popular social media platforms** (Facebook, Instagram, X, YouTube):
  - **Radical bloggers and organizations** profiles, closed groups, anonymous videos in YouTube:
    - **e.g. Konfederacja (and its politicians)** - the issues tackled and fostered in the mainstream discourse by Konfederacja, a fairly popular political far right-wing party (1.5 million votes in the 2023 parliamentary election, or 7.1% total votes);
    - **e.g. Krzysztof Tołwiński** - the pro-Russian/pro-Belarusian blogger and the leader of the political party Normalny Kraj (4,000 votes);
- **The alternative social media platforms** (e.g. DLive, NPTV):
  - **e.g. Rodacy Kamraci** - the radical nationalist (fascist) movement, that gets meaningful viewership (11,000 subscribers, videos peaking at almost 400,000 views).

# **Methods**



- **Corpus linguistics** - in limited use due to relatively small corpus and high level of creativity, invention and typos in the material; manual annotation was employed as the corpus was very small;
- **Rhetoric** – topoi analysis.

\* All the quotations are translated from Polish into English, retaining their original meaning and form and reflecting the original punctuation and spelling where possible.



# Corpus overview



- **5800 tokens** collected via snowballing (anti-Ukrainian attitudes are comparatively very rare);
- Data gathered from posts and comments on selected Facebook and Instagram posts;
- Manually annotated by our heroic linguists;
- Pre-analysed with quantitative methods and then examined thoroughly through qualitative frameworks;
- **A 130,000 token** Polish social media CORECON subcorpus was used as reference corpus in quantitative analyses;
- Sampling based on **available data from 2022-2024.**

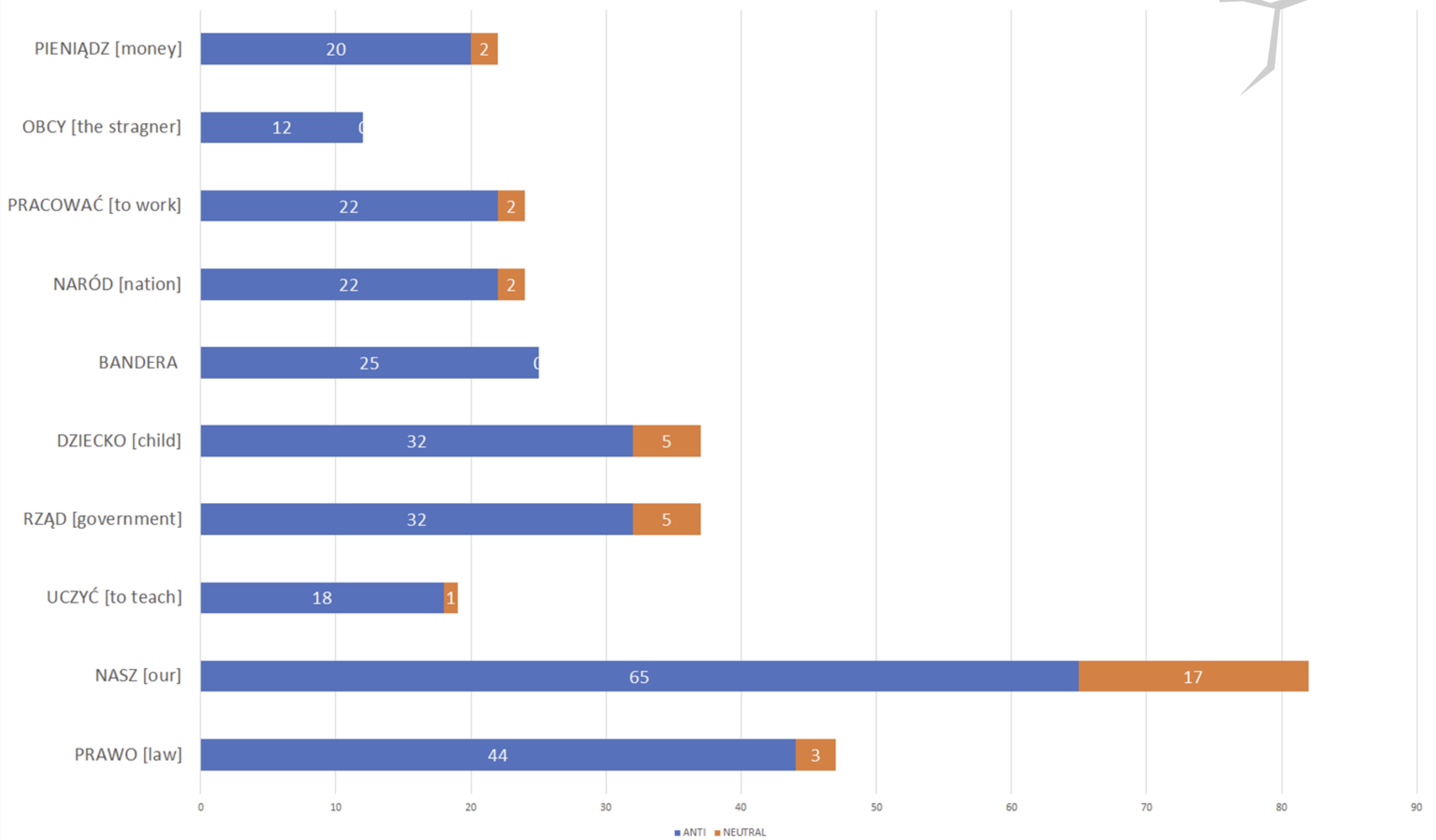
# Corpus pre-analysis



- Verb analysis done in CLARIN-PL's LEM indicated that **Past tense was meaningfully more likely to be used in the anti-Ukrainian corpus** (27% past tense verbs vs 14% in the neutral corpus (due to the historical context related to Bandera and more recent events that are framed as “government handouts”));
- Keyness (LL)test was conducted in LANCSEBOX based on a pre-lemmatised corpus (via CLARIN-PL). Results are provided in **relative frequencies per 10k words**. The data in the graph are sorted based on how key they were.



# Keyness: ANTI [blue] & NEUTRAL [ORANGE]



# ~~Selected topoi used by Martin Reisigl and Ruth Wodak in RASIM representation research~~

**(2001)**

- Topos of threat;
- Topos of justice;
- Topos of economic burden;
- Topos of abuse;
- Topos of culture;
- Topos of history.

# **Topos of threat**



- **“if a political action or decision bears specific dangerous, threatening consequences, one should not perform or do it. Or formulated differently: if there are specific dangers and threats, one should do something against them”** (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001, p. 70);
- The other proposed understanding of topos of threat can be that “Threats should be addressed”; in our corpus, this is represented by incitement to violence;
- It is present and marked throughout the examples, accompanying other topoi.

# **Topos of justice**



- Lack of equality where it should be present (Ukrainians get more than, or as much as Poles);
- Equality is not always just; “Poland first” calls to focus on Polish needs rather than those of “the others”.

# ~~Topos of justice - examples~~

(a) For Ukrainians there is money, for Poles there is not! So why, why divide the money from the EU. **For Poles, nothing, because of your politician's poor resolutions.** Whom do you serve Polish politicians? You surely do not serve or help Poles! Something is wrong with you. Lawlessness rules when there is nobody honest out there to govern" [topos of threat]

(a) Regarding that incident, Ukrainians act just like these two primitives. Yet, **nobody steps up to defend the Poles because it is unbecoming and** does not align with neomarxist thinking. I do not mind when foreigners find honest jobs in Poland."

(a) And I FUCKING had to leave this country to make ends meet because "my country" could not offer anything but illegal work that is paid 10 zlotys [2.5 USD] per hour.

# **Topos of economic burden**



- Partly connected to topos of abuse & topos of justice as Ukrainians are said to take what should be given to Poles - instances of economic burden heavily imply abuse;
- The economy suffers, which leads to people's suffering;
- Ukrainians receive social benefits and military support at our expense;
- The Ukrainian workers “damage the job market” [topos of threat].

# **Topos of economic burden - examples**



(a) Sikorski [Minister of Foreign Affairs] **has just given more money** to save Ukrainian television. Kosiniak [Deputy Prime Minister] is **spending money** to save Ukrainian clerks. Then **they [Ukrainians] get social benefits, healthcare pension and disability benefits, more benefits what's next** [topos of threat]

(a) Yes this is Poland not ukropl [blend of Ukraine and Poland] **!** [6x] Enough of paying for foreigners with our tax money make them go back to their country where 90 % of Ukraine functions normally.

# **Topos of abuse**



**“if a right or an offer for help is abused, the right should be changed or the help should be withdrawn or measures against the abuse should be taken.”**

(Reisigl & Wodak, 2001, p. 70);



# **Topos of abuse - examples**



(a) Revoke help for foreigners who declare no income - **even a deserter who works and makes huge money can easily get from 700 to 1400 PLN per month for 12 months, all they need to do is sign up for a course in Polish language.** And for a Pole to get electricity subsidised, they can't be making even a few cents above the pathetically low criterion. [also topos of justice]

# **Topos of culture**



A group “being the way it is” endangers another group’s identity

This topos is employed in the narratives of:

- Ukrainians affecting education and history/histories being taught;
- “Stopping ukrainisation”/”deukrainisation”; the idea is circulated that “Ukrainisation of Poland needs to be stopped”, which presupposes that Poland is undergoing it already.
- Over-foreignerisation (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001, p. 71), linked to the topos of threat of racism, employed in arguments that pertain to being overwhelmed by the “others”.

# ~~Education~~

Ukrainian children participate in education in Poland. To this end, curriculum reform is needed, which is heavily protested by certain groups (who employ hyperboles quite often).

(a)Of course, if the history [curriculum] **is to be designed by Ukrainians**, we will soon discover that Bandera was a wholesome person and it was in fact Poles who assaulted him at the border. Thank you, our messed up Polish compatriots, for your choices. You had it coming. Amen.

(a)Yep,so in all Polish schools, events will be held on all Ukrainians national celebrations,.Rooms will be occupied for additional classes , **so our kids will have classes until ...9 PM**.Schools are already running on two shifts. I can imagine all those **Ukrainian teachers and our headmasters licking their boots**.And we will get occasional school newspapers which sing the praises of...,guess whom? [Bandera].And all this for your money,Polish parents.”

# **Deukrainisation & over-foreignerisation**

This is POLAND, not UKROPOL !

The FIVE [fundamentals] of Konfederacja

1 **Revoke the permanent stay permits** and stop granting Polish citizenship to Ukrainians.

2 **No “Ukrainian component” at Polish schools. Complete Polonisation of Ukrainian children.**

**Revoking the rights of Ukrainian minority** in Poland to the rights of Polish minority in [Original uses NPC “na” instead of PC “w”] Ukraine.

3 **Signing the anti-Bandera loyalty oath by all Ukrainians.**

4 **Social benefits exclusively for Poles and their children.** Zero material and financial support abroad. (...)

#StopUkrainizacjiPolski [StopUkrainisationOfPoland]

#StopBanderyzacjiPolski [StopBanderisationOfPoland]

# **Topos of history:**



- “because history teaches that specific actions have specific consequences, one should perform or omit a specific action in a specific situation (allegedly) comparable with the historical example referred to” (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001, p. 70);
- “Learning from past mistakes”: through the use of hyperbole, all Ukrainians are implied to support Bandera (a Ukrainian leader of UPA, a nationalist organisation that committed genocide on Polish civilians during WW2).


# **Topos of history examples**



- (a) I'd send all pro-ukrainian politicians there [to war], starting with our little president Duda and his medals. **He can give them away in Ukraine to all those Banderites.**
- (a) **Ukraine's history is mostly based on genocide.** Class dismissed. Thank you
- (a) When will we get rid of the symbols [Ukrainian flag] of **tormentors who committed mass murder on Poles**, show me where they flew Polish flags in Ukraine, ask that banderite, Sadovyi, why Lwów is not decorated with Polish flags?..


# ~~Conclusions I~~



- The well known topoi are used but with contextualised specifics;
  - The anti-Ukrainian rhetoric is based on **nationalism**;
  - Simple solutions based on “**racial purity**” are proposed;
  - The **hyperboles and stereotypes** are used for radicalisation of rhetoric and oversimplification of the issues leading to the moral panic.
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# **Conclusions II: further research**



- To enhance analysis and annotation, **topos as an analytical category** needs to be clarified and made less fuzzy;
  - Perhaps **a return to classical notions of topoi** might be a solution to attain clarity when categorising these data (Žagar, 2010).
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