CORECON

The Coverage and Reception of
the Russian-Ukrainian Conflict

Alternate construals of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict:

A pilot study of framing in the discourse of conflict

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Outline

- Socio-political background of the study

- Proximization theory in a nutshell

- Media discourse: basic remarks

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Background

On February 24, 2022, Russian President Vladimir Putin launched a full-scale military invasion of Ukraine, framing it as a "special military operation." Putin cited several justifications, including Ukraine's NATO aspirations, alleged threats to Russian-speaking populations in Ukraine, and the need to "demilitarize and de-Nazify" the country. The invasion was widely condemned as a violation of international law, and many saw it as a broader Russian effort to reassert control over Ukraine and prevent it from aligning with Western institutions.

The conflict stems from deep-seated political, territorial, and historical tensions between Russia and Ukraine, dating back to the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. The invasion followed years of regional instability, particularly after Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and its backing of separatist movements in eastern Ukraine's Donbas region.

The war has had global repercussions. Millions of Ukrainians have been displaced, leading to one of Europe's largest refugee crises since World War II. Economic sanctions against Russia have severely impacted its economy while causing global disruptions, particularly in energy and food markets, as Ukraine is a major grain exporter. The conflict has also deepened divisions between Russia and the West, with NATO expanding and increasing military aid to Ukraine.

Proximization theory

 Proximization theory is a cognitive-pragmatic framework for understanding how language, as manifest in particularly political discourse (e.g., Cap, 2008; 2013), can manipulate perceptions of **threat** and **urgency**. The theory is especially relevant in analyzing security-related rhetoric, such as political speeches (e.g., Cap, 2022) and media coverage (e.g. Hart, 2010; Kopytowska 2009, 2010) about terrorism, immigration, or other issues where an "external" threat is presented as dangerous to an "internal" or domestic space.

The overall goal of proximization is to **legitimize** actions such as military interventions, stricter immigration controls, or curtailment of civil liberties which can be taken as preventive response to the imminent threat.

A key element in proximization is the use of **deictic centers**, that is, reference points that center the discourse around a speaker, an audience, or a nation. We distinguish **central entities** are called **IDCs** (inside-the-deictic-center) and **peripheral entities** referred to as **ODCs** (outside-the-deictic-center). The idea echoes van Dijk's (1988) ideological-square-based opposition between discursive *US* and *THEM* in his approach to ideology operation in discourse.

Proximization theory

Proximization operates on three primary dimensions:

➢**Spatial proximization** is a construal of external threats (be it physical, mental or axiological) encroaching upon the IDC entities' territory.

➢**Temporal proximization** construes the immediacy of a threat, suggesting that if no action is taken now (the speaker's present), future consequences will/can ensue.

➢**Axiological proximization** is a construal of an ideological clash between the values cherished by the IDC entities and the antagonistic values of the ODC entities.

Media discourse

➢**framing**: construing (not reflecting) reality (allocating emphasis, specific lg, themes and narratives),

➢**neutrality/objectivity:** ideologies of media organizations, editorial line, individual journalist),

➢**gatekeeping**: controlling information flow/access (newsworthiness, influencing public agenda)

➢**power and control**: who gets to speak, what voices are amplified

Data

Corpus compilation procedure:

➢Google search engine in the incognito mode

➢key word: Ukraina (PL), Ukraine (EN)

➢search tools: news, one-month time frame

➢2 PL corpora (Polsat, TVN)

➢2 EN corpora (BBC, CNN)

6 news items per month (Feb through June 2022)

5 news items per month (July through Dec 2022)

60 news items per corpus in total

	PL corpus 1 (Polsat)	PL corpus 2 (TVN)	EN corpus 1 (BBC)	EN corpus 2 (CNN)
No. of tokens	22 805	27 137	49 603	74 194
No. of lemmas	6 784	7 926	6 019	7 558

PL corpora analysis (Polsat)

Proximization strategies regarding the **RU-UA conflict in general** are present exclusively in external voices (either quotes or paraphrases):

o Polish President Andrzej Duda

o Polish PM Mateusz Morawiecki

o Polish government's spokesperson Piotr Müller

o President of PO (Civic Platform) Donald Tusk

o Head of BBN (National Security Bureau) Paweł Soloch

o Deputy PM of Ukraine Iryna Vereshchuk

There is a special sub-thematic category of a potential **nuclear conflict** (discussed separately).

IDC entities (Poland, EU, democratic world) vs. **ODC** entities (Russia)

PL corpora analysis (Polsat)

Spatial proximization

bezpieczeństwo (EN: *safety)* presupposes the existence of a (real) threat

Jako prezydent RP i zwierzchnik sił zbrojnych, zapewniam o pełnej gotowości do zapewnienia **bezpieczeństwa** naszym granicom **(IDC)**

[As president of Poland and Head of Armed Forces I assure we are ready to provide **safety** to our borders **(IDC)**]

Jesteśmy zjednoczenie, żeby zapewnić **bezpieczeństwo** wszystkim krajom Sojuszu **(IDC)** (Duda)

[We are united to be able to provide **safety** to all countries of the Alliance **(IDC)**]

… to gwarancja **bezpieczeństwa** nie tylko dla Ukrainy, ale także Polski i całego Zachodu **(IDC)** (Tusk)

[.. is a guarantee of **safety** not only for UA but also for Poland and the whole West **(IDC)**]

PL corpora analysis (Polsat)

Spatial proximization

… Ukraińcy podziękowali Polakom i Czechom za przekazanie czołgów, dzięki którym mogą "walczyć o Ukrainę, Czechy, Polskę. O każdy metr naszej słowiańskiej ziemi **(IDC)** (UA)

[Ukrainians have express gratitude to Poles and Checks for providing tanks thanks to which they can "fight for Ukraine, the Check Republic and Poland. For each inch of our Slavic land **(IDC)**]

 aby w najbliższym czasie UE przygotowała się do potencjalnego ataku Rosji również na państwa bałtyckie czy Polskę" **(IDC)** (Müller)

[in order for the EU to get ready for a potential Russian attack on the Baltic states or Poland **(IDC)**]

PL corpora analysis (Polsat)

Temporal proximization

To od tego, w jaki sposób wspólnie zareagujemy na zło **(ODC)**, zależy przyszłość wolnego świata **(IDC)** (Duda)

[The future of the free world **(IDC)** depends on how we will jointly react to the evil **(ODC)**]

Nie będziemy w stanie długo wytrwać. Jeżeli nie dostaniemy pomocy natychmiast, będziecie mieli wojnę na całym świecie **(IDC)** - mówiła w programie "Dzień na Świecie" wicepremier Ukrainy Iryna Wereszczuk.

[We will not be able to stand long. If we don't get help right now, you are going to have a global **(IDC)** war, said Deputy PM of Ukraine Iryna Vereshchuk]

HISTORICAL ANALOGY (Fauconnier & Turner's *time compression*):

Sytuacja jest dramatyczna, każdy scenariusz jest możliwy. Historia wróciła do nas **(IDC)** w sposób dramatyczny i niespodziewany. To nie zwalnia nas jednak z odpowiedzialności i racjonalnego myślenia (Tusk)

[The situation is dramatic; each scenario is a possibility. The history has come back to us **(IDC)** dramatically and unexpectedly.]

PL corpora analysis (Polsat)

Axiological proximization

Rosja **(ODC)** chce zniszczyć nasz świat taki, jaki znamy **(IDC)** (Morawiecki)

[Russia **(ODC)** wants to destroy our world as we know it **(IDC)**]

Ale Rosja **(ODC)** chce naruszyć cały porządek pokoju, który został ustalony po II wojnie światowej (Morawiecki)

[But Russia **(ODC)** wants to violate the entire architecture of peace which has been worked out after WW2]

To jest sygnał, że czytamy działania Rosji **(ODC)** jako działania w pierwszym rzędzie na rzecz podboju Ukrainy ale też wywrócenia porządku światowego **(IDC)**, już nie lokalnego, czy regionalnego, tylko światowego (Soloch)

[It is a signal the we interpret Russian **(ODC)** actions as attempts to first and foremost invade Ukraine but also to turn the global order **(IDC)** upside down: no longer just local or regional order but global.]

PL corpora analysis (Polsat)

NUCELAR CONFLICT

Jak wyjaśnił Enerhoatom [Ukraine's State Enterprise National Nuclear Energy Generating Company], gen. Dombrowski "ponosi bezpośrednią odpowiedzialność za akty jądrowego terroryzmu, które naraziły na niebezpieczeństwo pół świata". **(SPAT)**

[As explained by Enerhoatom, gen. Dombrowski is directly responsible for the acts of nuclear terror that endanger half of the world. **(SPAT)**

Jak powiadomił prezydent Ukrainy, jednym z tematów była także sytuacja związana z Zaporoską Elektrownią Jądrową. "Ten jawny terror ze strony agresora może mieć globalne, katastroficzne skutki. **(SPAT)**

[President of Ukraine informed that the talks also concerned the situation in the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant. "The aggressor's outright terror may have catastrophic global consequences.] **(SPAT)**

PL corpora analysis (Polsat)

NUCELAR CONFLICT

Historical analogy creates a common conceptual space for both the proximized historical event and the current situation.

Jednym z tematów rozmów była sytuacja w Elektrowni Jądrowej w Zaporożu. - Nie chcemy przeżyć jeszcze jednego Czarnobylu **(TEMP)** - mówił prezydent Turcji.

[The talks also concerned the situation in the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant. We don't want to have one more Chernobyl **(TEMP)**, said president of Turkey.]

Dmitrij Miedwiediew oskarża stronę ukraińską o "zaaranżowanie nowego Czarnobyla„ **(TEMP)**. "Rakiety i pociski spadają coraz bliżej reaktora elektrowni jądrowej w Zaporożu" - napisał w Telegramie były prezydent Rosji. Miedwiediew dodał, grożąc Europie, że "W UE **(SPAT)** też są elektrownie. Tam również mogą się zdarzyć takie przypadki".

[Dmitrij Miedwiediew accuses the Ukrainian side of "arranging a new Chernobyl" **(TEMP)**. "Missiles are closer and closer to the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant," wrote the former Russian president in the Telegram. Miedwiediew threatened Europe saying that "there are also power plants in the EU **(SPAT)** and situations may happen there as

PL corpora analysis (TVN)

Legion działa w ramach sił obrony terytorialnej. Zełenski powiedział, że są do niego zaproszeni ci, którzy chcą "przyłączyć się do oporu wobec rosyjskiego okupanta **(ODC)** i obrony bezpieczeństwa światowego **(IDC)**" **(SPAT)**

[The legion operates within the structure of territorial defense system. Zelensky said that anyone who would like to fight against the Russian occupant **(ODC)** and protect the world **(IDC)** safety is invited to join in.] **(SPAT)**

PL corpora analysis (TVN)

NUCLEAR CONFLICT

Prezydent Zełenski poinformował także, że w czasie rozmów z szefem ONZ Antonio Guterresem zwracano uwagę na "szantaż nuklearny Rosji" w Zaporoskiej Elektrowni Jądrowej. "Ten celowy terror ze strony agresora może mieć katastrofalne konsekwencje dla całego świata" **(SPAT)** - napisał ukraiński przywódca na Telegramie.
[President Zelensky has informed that during the talks with secretary-general of UN Antonio Guterres the case of "nuclear blackmail" in the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant has been raised. "The aggressor's outright terror may have catastrophic consequences for the whole world".] **(SPAT)**

Bezpieczeństwo atomowe to bezwzględny priorytet dla wszystkich na świecie **(SPAT)** - podkreślił Zełenski.
[Nuclear safety is a top priority for everybody in the world **(SPAT), said** Zelensky.]

EN corpora analysis (BBC)

Spatial proximization

"Russia's **(ODC)** widespread aggression is a threat to the entire world and to all Nato countries **(IDC)**," she [Prime Minister of Estonia Kaja Kallas] said.

France's President Emmanuel Macron said the attack would have "deep, lasting consequences for our [Ukraine's Western allies] **(IDC)** lives".

Eastern European **(IDC)** countries, who fear they may be next in Putin's **(ODC)** sights, are watching nervously for any Russian maneuvers close to their borders.

EN corpora analysis (BBC)

Temporal proximization

That scenario, of a Russian **(ODC)** military incursion into a Nato country **(IDC) (SPAT)**, almost unthinkable until recently **(TEMP),** is when Nato and Russia could indeed be at war with each other. But it hasn't happened - yet **(TEMP)** - and Western leaders are hoping that by joint, concerted action now, coupled with stringent economic sanctions, the message of deterrence will register crystal clear in Moscow.

Nato defence chiefs have re-examined his lengthy speech of July 2021 and concluded they urgently **(TEMP)** need to reinforce Nato's **(IDC) (SPAT)** eastern borders lest Putin **(ODC)** is tempted to make a move on countries like Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia **(SPAT)**.

EN corpora analysis (BBC)

Axiological proximization

No cases found

EN corpora analysis (BBC)

NUCLEAR CONFLICT

Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky accused Russia **(ODC)** of resorting to "nuclear terror", while British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said such "reckless actions" could "threaten the safety of all Europe **(IDC)** ".

Following its conclusion, they urged military restraint around the Russian-controlled Zaporizhzhia nuclear power station in southern Ukraine, where renewed fighting has led to fears of disaster worse than that in **Chernobyl in 1986**.

EN corpora analysis (CNN)

TEMPORAL PROXIMIZATION

If Russia **(ODC)** is allowed to win, Putin's war would **(TEMP)** mark the beginning of a new era of global **(IDC)** instability, with less freedom, less peace and less prosperity **(AXIOL)** for the world **(SPAT)**.

In an an emotional speech Thursday afternoon, Zelensky called on world leaders for support, warning that if Ukraine doesn't get help now, "war will come knocking at your door **(IDC)** tomorrow **(TEMP)**."

EN corpora analysis (CNN)

AXIOLOGICAL PROXIMIZATION

US President Joe Biden said Thursday that Russian President Vladimir Putin **(ODC)** had "committed an assault on the very principles that uphold the global **(IDC)** peace."

NATO's Secretary General, Jens Stoltenberg condemned the Russian **(ODC)** attack as a "grave breach of international law, and a serious threat to Euro-Atlantic security **(IDC)**."

"This is not just Russia's **(ODC)** invasion of Ukraine," Zelensky said on Sunday. "This is the beginning of a war against Europe **(SPAT) (IDC)**, against European structures, against democracy, against basic human rights, against a global order of law, rules, and peaceful coexistence".

On the forthcoming NATO summit in Madrid, Stoltenberg said that a new strategy concept will be adopted "will declare that Russia **(ODC)** is no longer a partner, but a threat to our **(IDC)** security, peace and stability."

Some (tentative) conclusions

The identified proximization strategies have a number of lexico-grammatical instantiations and it is not possible to reduce them to a finite set of categories. They range from NPs (most frequent) to whole clauses or even strings of discourse.

Spatial proximization is also realized by the context sensitive possessive adjective *our* (PL: *nasz*) and the object pronoun *us* (PL: *nas*), which allow for a more flexible context-sensitive interpretation.

The danger can be expressed overtly as NPs (e.g., *threat*, *aggression*) or can be presupposed (e.g., *to guarantee safety*).

The prospect of nuclear conflict, though highly unlikely, seems to be the most anxiety-inducing case scenario for the international community and hence its wide coverage with the use of proximization strategies in all the corpora.

Some conclusions

In the CNN corpus the most frequent type of proximization is axiological. This can be explained with reference to Americans' allegiance to values and principles such as freedom, democracy or independence.

Some cases of proximization seems to be at least partially culture-sensitive (the case of Chernobyl historical analogy).

Zelenski's words/quotes which instantiate proximization serve rather a different function, that is, rooting for support and asking for solidarity with UA. Such cases of proximization may be referred to as *positive proximization*, whose aim is to construct a symbolic community of common values and experiences within solidarity discourse (see Wilk & Molek-Kozakowska, in press).

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