(De)legitimization in online discourse: A case study in the coverage of the Russian-Ukrainian war

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Interdisciplinary Perspectives on the Mediation of Russian-Ukrainian War: Language, Representation, Society, Culture

Sibiu, July 9-11

Acknowledgements

The study is part of the **CORECON** project (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).

Outline

- Legitimation and delegitimization in discourse

- Data

- A hybrid style of a Fb post

- Analysis

- Conclusions

(De)legitimation in discourse

van Leeuwen (2007)
(1) authorization, (2) moral evaluation, (2) rationalization, (4) mythopoesis

Reyes (2011)
(1) legitimization through emotions, (2) legitimization through a hypothetical future, (3) legitimization through rationality, (4) voices of expertise, and (5) altruism.

authorization, rationalization, moral evaluation, emotional appeal, hypothetical futures

Data

Corpus compilation procedure:

➢FB search: key word: Ukraina (PL)
➢Media coverage of conflict (FB specific only)
➢Snowballing technique
➢Marcin Ogdowski's account

Data: **over 90k word** corpus of FB posts
from Feb 24, 2022 through June 30, 2024
1 post ≈ 570 words (with some longer posts of approx. 3,000 words)

A hybrid style of a Fb post

Ogdowski's posts are characterized by a dual nature:

➢highly opinionated and emotionally charged,

➢rich in factual, research-based information, including statistics and analytical commentary.

intersection of objective and interpretative journalism with elements of advocacy

Fb post affordances

➢high informality of language (a truly conversational style that mirrors to some extent everyday conversation):

- **first-person perspective and audience-inclusive language**
(e.g., *Let's now turn to*…, *We can clearly see*…, *I am convinced that*… etc.)

- **colloquial language**, including swear words and slurs
(e.g., *Wkurza mnie*… [It pisses me off that…], *Nosz kurwa!* [For fuck's sake!],

- **breach of orthography**
(e.g., *rosja* [EN: russia], *rosjanie* [EN: russians], the metonymic *moskwa* [EN: moscow], etc.)

Authorization

used to delegitimize Russian war-related actions but not to legitimize Ukrainian involvement in the war

Indirect speech

Ogdowski references:

➤ military experts, human rights advocates or defense analysts

➤ various institutional bodies via their representatives, such as NATO (e.g., NATO secretary-general Jens Stoltenberg), United Nations (e.g., Head of the UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine Matilda Bogner)

➤ international organizations metonymically (e.g., *ONZ acknowledged…, NATO uses…*)

Rationalization

the major strategy to provide factual data and hence amplify the objectivity of the coverage

➢**statistics** and **data analyses** either of his own or provided by official institutional bodies (e.g., *official UN data claim…, a Human Rights Watch report, UN World Population Prospects report*) or more generally attributed to Ukrainian sources (e.g., *Kiev's report, Ukrainians report that…*)

➢ legitimizing Ukrainian defense-oriented actions undertaken as a response to Russian aggression (providing **rational grounds** for the military and economic support of Ukraine by emphasizing the necessity of constant military equipment delivery and continuous strengthening of western sanctions aimed at Russia), e.g.:

Fierce resistance of AFU [Armed Forces of Ukraine] (but also russian bestiality, for example) have redefined the meaning of "victory" in NATO's terms. It has now become – to quote Jens Stoltenberg, NATO secretary-general – a "complete victory", that is, going back to Ukrainian borders from before 2014, **which h-a-s to be accompanied by the longest-possible-lasting reduction of russia's military capacity***.*

Moral evaluation

➤ pinpointing **moral implications** of aggression, portraying Russia's actions as **unjust** and barbaric and frames the conflict as a struggle between good (Ukraine) and evil (Russia), reinforcing the idea that aggressive actions will ultimately lead to moral and ethical condemnation

*There are **no grounds** for advocating russian bestiality; it is not possible to justify the orcs' racism and nationalism. There is **no morally sound reason** to support their plans of exterminating the Ukrainian nation... From this perspective it is a **moral imperative** to hunt, persecute and make the propagandists' lives harder by any means available; a part of raison de'etat*

Emotional appeal (1/2)

clearly evaluation- and emotion-driven language is a highly conspicuous aspect of Ogdowski's coverage of the conflict

➢ a breach of orthographic rules of Polish concerning the capitalization of proper names

➢naming strategies applied to refer to Russia and its army:

▪ attribution: pre- and/or post-modifying a noun with a value- and emotion-laden vocabulary additionally enclosed in inverted commas (e.g., *"niezyciężona armia"* [EN: "the invincible army"] or *"druga armia świata"* [EN: "the second army in the world"])

▪ metaphor: *orcs, the orcs' leader*

▪ conceptual blends: (a) *raszyści*, (b) *Putlerowcy* or (c) *ruSS-armia*

Emotional appeal (2/2)

➤ emotional and evaluative language:

*Yes, dear readers, they [Russian generals] rushed navy sailors of different specialties together and sent them as regular infantry into battle; **indeed, a truly effective tactics** … to get rid of specialists. **Way to go, comrades**.*

*Nearly three months after the beginning of the "special operations" in Ukraine, the russian president can celebrate… the conquest of Mariupol, a mid-size town on the Sea of Azov. **F…ing congratulations.***

Hypothetical future

delegitimize Russian actions but also to legitimize the support of Ukraine in fighting for its sovereignty and territorial integrity

➢projecting a scenario in which the war spreads westward to NATO countries (legitimizing Ukraine's resistance against the aggressor)
➢ the use of analogy (a temporal analogy axis linking a past reference point with the present event or occurrence)

*There still are people in Poland who have personally experienced Soviet bestiality characteristic of the Red Army's advancement to the west. Their memories are passed down to next generations – rooted at the deepest psychological level, that was the reason of our fear of the USSR and later russia. Today, these anxieties are fed by the images of the liberated Ukrainian territories. They will stay in our minds for years, serving as an incentive to mobilization, if necessary. After all, **we don't want to have another Bucha or Nemmersdorf at our place***

*Especially that russia has been a hostile country – for centuries – and for months now fueled by vengeance for supporting Ukraine. If it was not for the NATO protection and fierce Ukrainian defense, **we would be fighting the russians at our place***

Thank you.

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