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## THE LANGUAGE OF AGGRESSION

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**Introduction.** In the light of ongoing Russia-Ukraine war, it is necessary to address the problem of verbal aggression of Russian politicians towards Ukraine and her allies. Therefore, there is a need for comprehensive analysis of Russian political discourse.

**Methods.** To examine the problem, we analyzed the speeches by Russian President Putin, the tweets posted by ex-president Medvedev, and the press releases announced by Foreign Minister Lavrov published on the official websites of Russian state bodies and in the media shortly before and in the time of full-scale Russia-Ukraine war. In the process of investigation we used the following research methods: linguistic observation, discourse analysis, and conversation analysis.

**Findings.** In the statements by Russian politicians we revealed the following types of confrontational strategies: invective and discrediting strategies aimed at threatening the positive face, and the strategy of verbal abuse that is targeted at the opponent's negative face. To criticize the opponents, they use negative evaluative adjectives. The linguistic technique

“name calling” serves to create negative associations with Ukrainians and their allies. To justify their aggression, Russian politicians draw parallels between their opponents and Hitler. They resort to threats violating the maxim of quantity to generate fear. The following features of terrorism discourse were revealed in Russian political discourse: the practice of othering, the technique of dehumanization, and the use of theological language. The smallest verbal unit of Russian aggression is the letter “Z” that is used to *express support for war against Ukraine*.

The findings could be useful for policy makers, linguists and journalists. Further studies are needed to reveal the most effective ways to handle aggression in international relations.

**Key words:** Russia-Ukraine war; verbal aggression; confrontational strategies; political discourse; terrorism discourse.

**Вступ.** В час російсько-української війни необхідно розглянути проблему вербальної агресії російських політиків, що спрямована на Україну та її союзників. Для цього слід провести комплексний аналіз російського політичного дискурсу.

**Методи.** Ми проаналізували доповіді російського президента Путіна, твіти експрезидента Медведєва та пресрелізи міністра закордонних справ Лаврова, що були опубліковані на офіційних вебсайтах російських державних органів та в медіа незадовго до та під час повномасштабного вторгнення Росії в Україну. У процесі дослідження ми використовували наступні методи: лінгвістичне спостереження, дискурс-аналіз та конверсаційний аналіз.

**Результати.** У заявах російських політиків виявлено такі типи конфронтаційних стратегій: стратегії інвективів і дискредитації, що загрожують позитивному обличчю адресата, та стратегія «вербального насильства», яка спрямована на його негативне обличчя. Для критики опонентів вони використовують прикметники на позначення негативної оцінки. Лінгвістична техніка «навішування ярликів» слугує для створення негативних асоціацій з українцями та їх союзниками. Щоб виправдати агресію, російські політики проводять паралелі між їх опонентами та Гітлером. Також вони вдаються до погроз, порушуючи максимум кількості, щоб викликати страх. У російському політичному дискурсі виявлено такі ознаки терористичного дискурсу: практика іншування, техніка дегуманізації та використання теологічної лексики. Найменшою вербальною одиницею російської агресії є літера Z, яку використовують для вираження підтримки війни проти України.

Результати наукової розвідки можуть бути цікавими для політиків, лінгвістів та журналістів. Перспективу подальшого дослідження вбачаємо у виявленні ефективних стратегій і тактик ведення діалогу з агресивним співрозмовником в контексті міжнародних відносин.

**Ключові слова:** російсько-українська війна, вербальна агресія, конфронтаційні стратегії, політичний дискурс, терористичний дискурс.

**Introduction.** In the light of ongoing full-scale Russia-Ukraine war, it is vitally important to reveal and record manifestations of aggression. Physical aggression of invaders in the 21st century is being broadcast live on TV channels all over the world. Alongside with this, linguists investigate means of expressing verbal aggression.

A number of researchers have examined terrorism discourse [1; 2; 3]. Several attempts have been made to explore the role of language in conflict [4; 5]. This paper focuses on the language of Russian aggression. Therefore, the **aim** of this study is to investigate verbal aggression of Russian politicians.

**Methods.** To examine the problem, we analyzed the speeches by Russian President Putin, the tweets posted by ex-president Medvedev, and the press releases announced by Foreign Minister Lavrov published on the official websites of Russian state bodies and in the media shortly before and in the time of full-scale Russia-Ukraine war. In the process of investigation we used the following research methods: linguistic observation, critical discourse analysis, and conversation analysis.

**Results and Discussion.** In her analysis of conflict in communication strategies, Alyeksyeyeva concluded that they can be classified into two sets: cooperative and confrontational. The author claims that the latter are employed when participants give different meaning and evaluation to the same

situation, feel mutual dislike and are overcome with negative emotions [4, p. 29]. Therefore, Alyeksyeyeva identifies two strategies, aimed at threatening the positive face [4, p. 30]: a. Invective strategy. To accomplish this strategy, the speaker undertakes the tactics of insults and mockery. For example, in order to humiliate the leaders of France, Germany, and Italy, Russia’s former president posted to Twitter the following tweet: *European fans of frogs, liverwurst and spaghetti love visiting Kiev. With zero use* [6]. b. Discrediting strategy. To accomplish this strategy, the speaker undertakes the tactics of negative evaluation of the opponent’s personality, actions, or opinions: *Do not forget to look at what was said by my colleague, Foreign Minister of France Jean-Yves le Drian. He loves to show off, you know. The rooster is a national symbol of France. They often get cocky* [7]. When it comes to criticism of opponents’ actions, negative evaluative adjectives are used: *<...> the sources of these crises that began not today, or in February, or even last year. They are the result of the reckless, ill-considered and failing policy of the West <...>* [8].

Alongside with this, it is not necessary to evaluate negatively to humiliate [4, p. 36]. A face-threatening act was used by Putin to demonstrate neglect of the opponent and assert his dominance over the addressee – President of France – in the following conversation:

**Macron:** *Very well, you have confirmed that you generally agree. I suggest that our staff try to prepare a joint statement, such as a press release following this conversation.*

**Putin:** *Honestly, I was going to play hockey. I'm talking to you from the gym before training. But first I will call my advisers [9].*

The strategy of verbal abuse is targeted at the opponent's negative face. It is used to make addressees do something against their will. To support the strategy, the following tactics are used: orders, bans, and threat [4, p. 30]. For example, overt or hidden threats concerning a nuclear war in the statements of Russian politicians: *As for military affairs, even after the dissolution of the USSR and losing a considerable part of its capabilities, today's Russia remains one of the most powerful nuclear states [10].* Indirect threats hint at possible consequences of the opponents' actions by means of violation of the maxim of quantity: *In the case of attack against our cities, Russia would strike the centres where these criminal decisions are made. Some of them aren't in Kiev. What comes next is obvious [6].*

In a recent article, Yenikejev [5] argues that verbal aggression in international political discourse is considered a gross violation of norms. It is worth mentioning that speech aggression is defined as the use of words determined by the pragmatic function of producing pejorative expressive effect [11]. For this purpose, the linguistic technique "name calling" is often used by Russian politicians to create negative associations with opponents. In their statements Ukrainians are often called Nazis or neo-Nazis: *And then Nazi ideology was used [12]; There was every indication that a clash with neo-Nazis and Banderites backed by the United States and their minions was unavoidable [13].* The texts of their speeches contain derivatives of these words: *To this end, we will seek to demilitarise and denazify Ukraine <...> [10]* and parallels with Hitler: *They will undoubtedly try to bring war to Crimea just as they have done in Donbass, to kill innocent people just as members of the punitive units of Ukrainian nationalists and Hitler's accomplices did during the Great Patriotic War [10].* In his statement on the reasons for war, Lavrov compares Zelensky to Hitler in order to justify Russian aggression: *If I remember it right, I may be wrong, but Hitler also had Jewish origins, so it doesn't mean absolutely anything. For some time we have heard from the wise Jewish people that the biggest anti-Semites were Jews [14].* On March 3, 2022, the Russian foreign minister compared Napoleon's and Hitler's policies to the ones pursued by the United States: *In their time, Napoleon and Hitler set*

*out to subjugate Europe. Now, the United States has taken it over [7].*

Metaphorical expression "empire of lies" loaded with negative evaluation is used by Putin to refer to the United States and the West: *Incidentally, US politicians, political scientists and journalists write and say that a veritable "empire of lies" has been created inside the United States in recent years [10]; Mikhail Vladimirovich (Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin) and I discussed this topic, naturally bearing in mind the sanctions that the so-called Western community, as I called it in my speech the "empire of lies", is now trying to implement against our country [15].*

*Symbolism plays an important role in terrorism. To represent their ideology and express publicly their support for war against Ukraine, Russians use the Latin-script letter Z. It can be seen on tanks and cars, in social media, on billboards and clothing, etc.* Russians incorporate this Latin-script letter into the slogans written with the Cyrillic alphabet: *Za мир без нацизма (For the World without Nazism), Za Россию (For Russia), Za победу (For victory).* Nowadays, we can witness banning the Z symbol as it happened to swastika, the official symbol of Nazi Germany, after World War 2. Thus, even one letter can symbolize aggression. Therefore, it is now cancelled by some companies or even countries to avoid associations with murdered Ukrainians.

Exploring verbal aggression in service of radicalization, Etaywe [1] found that the practice of othering in terrorist communication is considered an intrinsically face-threatening act which operates contrary to Leech's maxims of politeness in relation to viewing outgroups. The author concludes that othering is an ideological, social and discursive practice in which a language user strategically deploys particular grammatical choices whose patterns manifest and function as a powerful tool for coercing into and legitimating aggressive attitudes, behaviours and negative consequences in terms of hostility and stereotyping. The practice of othering can be illustrated with the use of the pronoun "we" as an opposition to "they". Othering can be combined with the technique of dehumanization of opponents: *Properly speaking, the attempts to use us in their own interests never ceased until quite recently: they sought to destroy our traditional values and force on us their false values that would erode us, our people from within, the attitudes they have been aggressively imposing on their countries, attitudes that are directly leading to degradation and degeneration, because they are contrary to human nature [10].* It is worth mentioning, that dehumanization, according to Loughnan et al. [16] is the cause, catalyst, and consequence of violence.

Moreover, in genocide studies, dehumanization is commonly understood as a preparatory step on the path to mass killing [17].

Interestingly, in dominant terrorism discourse theological language is employed to de-contextualize terrorist's motives from historical-material settings and construct terrorism as a metaphysical phenomenon [3]. On March 6, 2022, Forgiveness Sunday for the Orthodox, Patriarch Kirill justified the Russia-Ukraine war with the following words: *All of the above indicates that we have entered into a struggle that has not a physical, but a metaphysical significance* [18]. In his sermon, the leader of Russian Orthodox Church claimed that the reason for war is the necessity to protect traditional family values: *And in the Donbass there is rejection, a fundamental rejection of the so-called values that are offered today by those who claim world power. <...> Do you know what this test is? The test is very simple and at the same time terrible – it is the Gay Pride parade* [18]. At the same time, Putin cites the Bible (John 15:13) to encourage Russians to support the war in Ukraine: *Words from the Holy Bible come to my head: “There is no greater love than to lay down one’s life for one’s friends”* [19]. Back in 2018, being asked about the possibility of a nuclear war, Putin answered using religious language: *As martyrs, we will go to heaven and they*

*will just croak, because they won’t even have time to repent* [20]. Therefore, religion is obviously weaponized and used to manipulate.

**Conclusions.** To sum up, in the statements by Russian politicians we revealed the following confrontational strategies used to attack Ukraine and her allies: invective and discrediting strategies aimed at threatening the positive face, and the strategy of verbal abuse targeted at the opponent’s negative face.

The evidence from this study suggests that the smallest verbal unit of Russian aggression is the letter “Z”. To criticize their opponents, Russian politicians use negative evaluative adjectives. The linguistic technique “name calling” is used to create negative associations with Ukrainians. To justify their aggression, Russians often draw parallels with Hitler. To generate fear, Russian politicians resort to threats. Talking about the nuclear war, they hint at possible consequences of the opponents’ actions by means of violation of the maxim of quantity.

In the speeches by Russian politicians, we revealed the following features of terrorism discourse: the practice of othering, the technique of dehumanization and the use of theological language.

We think that our findings could be useful for policy makers, linguists and journalists. Further studies are needed to reveal the most effective ways to handle aggression in international relations.

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