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## COUNTERING RUSSIAN FAKE NARRATIVES IN BRITISH AND AMERICAN MEDIA: CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS (CDA)

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Based on critical discourse analysis conducted on the media reports which cover the articles from British and US press, the research gives insights into the common Russian propaganda narratives which have been spread over the last decade on Ukrainian sovereignty and the war unleashed by Russia on the territory of Ukraine. The linguistic analysis of the conflict rhetoric covers pragmatic and semantic elements with the implied negative assessment of Russian policy. With Critical Discourse Theory and Analysis, Critical Metaphor Analysis and Positioning Theory applied, the research classifies the positioning of the main actors as aggressors or victims and describes the discursive strategies used for countering and dispelling the fake Russian narratives. The study reveals the causes and implications of the analysed practices, identifies the linguistic means used for the realisation of the discursive strategies and shows how emotional triggers engage readers through lexical-semantic means and stylistic figures.

*Key words:* critical discourse analysis, discursive strategies, linguistics means, stylistic figures, Russian fake narratives, war in Ukraine.

**Introduction.** At times when the enemy threatens Ukraine, Russia is spreading disinformation and propaganda to gain its purposes and to justify its illegal invasion into the independent state employing confusing, distorting disinformation, and spreading lies. This article discusses how Russia uses disinformation as a weapon in wartime and analyses the Western media which are countering and denying the most common Russian propaganda myths and narratives.

Propaganda can manipulate emotions, shape our attitudes toward certain issues or persons, restrict access to alternative information leading to a biased world-view, cause psychological pressure on a person, try to convince them of certain beliefs or force them to make certain decisions.

In the recent time, researchers have widely investigated positioning and binary conceptions of the “Self” and the “Other” in media political discourse (Fina & Schiffrin [7]; MišićIlić & Radulović [10]; Filardo-Llamas & Boyd [6] and others). Based on the latest studies, the article reveals the discursive strategies aimed at countering Russia’s fake official media narrative positioning the Self (Russia) and Ukraine to reach their political goals.

*Previous Research in the Area.* The war in Ukraine has triggered a wide media coverage of battlefield operations alongside with the Russian powerful aggressive rhetoric campaign spreading propaganda myths against Ukraine (Nordenstreng et al. [10]; Breeze & Novoa-Jaso [2]; Zhabotyńska & Brynko [22]; Shevchenko [13]).

*Drawing* on the insights from pragmatics, with language and context being core for language understanding (Levinson [8], Mey [9], Fairclough [4], Dijk [15–19]) and Positioning Theory (Davies, Rom [3]), the study investigates the common Russian propaganda narratives being countered and dispelled in the UK and the US media based on the ideas of structural forms of discourse related to social practices [4]. According to Fairclough [5], discourses must be analysed at three levels at the same time: at the text level, as a discursive practice in the production and interpretation of texts, and social practice (the situational context). The article examines the process of the meaning creation at the explicit and the implicit levels (Thompson [14]), classifies the discursive strategies and identifies linguistic tools of de-legitimation in Western media that analyse fake Russian official press narratives.

**Methodology.** The study researches ideologically polarized positioning as a method of constructing social actors and groups by their relations and reveals implications of the represented practices according to the “ideological square” (van Dijk [16]) of foregrounding positive practices of One-self and de-emphasizing positive aspects of the Other: “...The strategy of polarization – positive In-group description, and negative Out-group description – thus has the following abstract evaluative structure, which we may call the ‘ideological square’: 1. Emphasize our good properties/actions. 2. Emphasize their bad properties/actions. 3. Mitigate our bad properties/actions. 4. Mitigate their good properties/actions.” (van Dijk [18]). The study distinguishes the discursive strategies of “actor description”, “evidentiality”, “generalization”, “hyperbole”, “metaphor”, “self-glorification”, “number game”, “victimization,” etc.

We also rely on T. van Leeuwen’s typology of (de)legitimation tactics: 1) authorization; 2) moral evaluation; 3) rationalization; and 4) mythopoesis or legitimation conveyed through the narratives whose outcomes reward legitimate actions and punish non-legitimate actions [20, 21].

We investigate the discursive strategies at the linguistic level in political media discourse covering war, with a special focus on stylistic figures and metaphor (Charteris-Black [1]; Semino [12]; Zinken & Musolf [23]) as a key device (Critical Metaphor Analysis) constructing the main actors and events.

By applying the CDA to the chosen research material, we identify social practices and ideologies in the media political discourse and classify the discursive strategies of positioning with a focus on stylistic figures deployed to realize the discursive strategies.

The corpus for the research has been compiled by the manual search of newspaper articles from open-access newspapers and magazines published in the United States, Canada and Great

Britain, including The Financial Times, Reuters, Business Insider, The New York Times, The Guardian, The Atlantic Council, The Economist, public service broadcasters CCN and BBC and others. The selection period was from 2021 to the first half of 2024.

*Results and Discussion.* In the most common Putin propaganda narratives [24], Russia uses disinformation as a weapon in the war unleashed on the territory of Ukraine, as the metaphor describes: *This is how Russia weaponizes disinformation* [26].

One of the statements by Russia claims that Western sanctions are fostering the Russian economy [24]. The applied discursive strategy of the **number game**, as “figures speak louder than words”, with the metonymy (Vladimir Putin’s invasion) presents the proof of the false facts spread by Russian media and reveals their deceptive methods:

1. *Russia’s current-account surplus cratered almost 80% during the first nine months of 2023 from a year earlier to \$41 billion. The country’s revenues from energy, a key economic driver for the oil-rich nation, dropped 41% year-on-year to just \$25 billion in the seven months through July:*

2. *Meanwhile, the rouble is another sign of economic weakness. It has dropped 10% against the US dollar since Vladimir Putin’s invasion – and that’s despite the Bank of Russia repeatedly raising interest rates in a bid to prop up the currency [28].*

The hyperbola “record” demonstrates the obviously false information presented by Russians, explaining the true reasons: *Lastly, war itself is having an impact. Russia is now facing record worker shortages because so much of its population have either been called up to fight or chosen to emigrate, according to data published in April* [28].

Stating that it does not intend to impose anything by force [24], the Kremlin contradicts all the facts and evidence presented by the Western media. The following example demonstrates how the applied strategy of the positive Self and negative Other presentation enables them to counter Russian myths presenting the **evidentiality** strategy regarding the world-famous media organization and the strategy of **victimization** giving the proof from witnesses:

1. *Ukrainians are being denied healthcare and free movement unless they take up Russian citizenship, evidence suggests. The European Broadcasting Union (EBU), an alliance of public service media including the BBC, interviewed refugees for the investigation. They spoke of relentless pro-Russian propaganda in the occupied lands:*

2. *One refugee from the occupied territories, Larysa, told the EBU’s Investigative Journalism Network that one of her friends was not provided with insulin for her diabetes – a key part of treatment – until she applied for a Russian passport [32].*

Another Russian propaganda narrative claims that the Kremlin wants to protect children in regions it illegally occupies [24]. The article from Reuters shows how the discursive strategies of **personalisation and victimisation** are verbalised in the following example:

*KHERSON, Ukraine, March 3 (Reuters) – The moment her grand-daughter was born, Olha Lukina, 65, rushed to a registry office. It was one of the last still providing Ukrainian citizenship for newborns in the southern city of Kherson which was then under Russian occupation. Baby Kateryna became Ukraine’s newest citizen that day in May, born into one of the country’s darkest times. Later in the occupation, Russia required all newborns to receive Russian citizenship, said Leonid Remyga, chief doctor at Kherson City Clinical Hospital, the city’s only working hospital [30].*

The strategies of **ridicule** (“saving”), **labelling** (“war crime”, “stolen children”, “criminal”, “kidnapping children”), **evidentiality** (“the subject of international outrage”, “Biden said during his address”) are dispelling the Russian myths about the Russian policy of illegally transporting children from Ukrainian territories:

1. *While Kremlin officials argue that they are “saving” the children by removing them from their homes, international watchdogs have called the forcible removal of Ukrainian kids – including infants as young as four months old – a war crime.*

2. *Insider previously reported some children who were taken against their will by Russian forces ended up being placed for adoption in Russia, where the process has been expedited to rush the stolen children through the system:*

3. *The disappearances have become the subject of international outrage, with President Joe Biden on Thursday declaring alongside Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy that “what they’ve done to your children is just – it’s criminal.”*

4. *“Russia alone stands in the way of peace. It could end this today,” Biden said during his address. “Instead, as the threat of famine still stalks families around the globe, Russia is bombing grain silos in Ukraine and separating families, kidnapping – this is what I can’t get over – kidnapping thousands of Ukrainian children.” [33].*

The **ridicule strategy** about the mentioned Russian “humanitarian actions” on deportation of children is reinforced by the descriptive adjective with a negative connotation (“an audacious bid to dismantle its future”):

*Ferit Hoxa, Albania’s representative to the UN, called the deportations “an audacious bid to dismantle its future” of Ukraine, adding that Moscow “has failed to convince the world that its re-education camps and forced adoptions are, as portrayed, humanitarian actions” in an August statement [33].*

The strategies of **evidentiality** (1, 3) and **number game** (3) present the evidence given by the government and international officials, as well as the data from official reports and estimates:

1. *“In the situations examined, Russian authorities transferred the children to areas occupied by the Russian Federation in Ukraine, including Donetsk and Luhansk regions, Crimea, or deported them to regions in the Russian Federation, such as Moscow or Krasnodar,” a spokesperson for the UN Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine told Insider: “There, Russian authorities temporarily accommodated the children in hospitals, social institutions, or camps.”*

2. *Russia operates at least 43 known facilities dedicated to providing “re-education”, military training, and pro-Russia academic instruction to Ukrainian children forcibly removed from their homes, the Yale report indicated.*

3. *An official estimate from the Ukrainian government puts the total number of forcibly displaced kids at just under 20,000. Though some 18,000 have been found, per Ukraine’s count, more than 500 are counted among the dead, and 1,241 “disappeared” [33].*

4. *The spread by the Kremlin myth states that they do not intend to impose anything by force [24].*

Example (1) below presents, by applying the strategy of **evidentiality**, the data from the famous Research Lab as the proof of the reliability, and “an arrest warrant against Russian President Vladimir Putin”, while **labelling** (3–4) and **ridicule** (5–6) strategies assess the

policy of Russia as “classical war crimes” and present their declarations as absurd and not worthy of serious consideration:

1. *Russia is forcing Ukrainians in Russian-occupied territories to accept Russian citizenship by engaging in a systematic push “to make it impossible for residents to survive in their homes” unless they do so, according to a newly released report from the Yale Humanitarian Research Lab.*

2. *The violations detailed in the report “are classic war crimes in the sense that they are restricting or limiting through this process people’s ability to access critical services and resources that Russia is required to allow all people to access, such as healthcare, and humanitarian systems,” Yale Humanitarian Research Lab’s Nathaniel Raymond told CNN Wednesday.*

3. *Yale’s Humanitarian Research Lab has done extensive work looking into Russia’s alleged war crimes, including its program of forced deportation of Ukrainian children – a crime for which the International Criminal Court issued an arrest warrant against Russian President Vladimir Putin.*

4. *According to one of the researchers who compiled the report, when residents in these areas are pressured into accepting Russian citizenship, they are also “strongly encouraged” to renounce their Ukrainian citizenship, and those with municipal or public jobs are required to do so.*

5. *Many of the policies described in the report can be traced to the Russian federal government, researchers said, with one noting that Putin “is clearly deeply involved in this.”*

6. *“Russia’s occupation administrations have also made access to a variety of critical municipal services,” including drivers licenses, vehicle registration and even access to the electrical grid, “impossible without Russian citizenship.”*

The phraseological unit “to erase Ukrainian national identity and Ukrainian sovereign state existence” suggests the resemblance and similarity for the war and visualises the image to enhance the information and invoke emotions and feelings of readers making implicit comparison:

7. *“The second part here is that this is a unique and specific dynamic of the broader campaign by Russia to erase Ukrainian national identity and Ukrainian sovereign state existence,” he said [29].*

Addressing the statement made by Putin to the BRICS Summit in South Africa: “Our actions in Ukraine are dictated by only one thing – to end the war that was unleashed by the West and its satellites against the people who live in the Donbas” [24], The New York Times labels his declaration with an idiom “up-is-down narrative”:

1. *This is the culmination of Mr. Putin’s up-is-down narrative portraying Ukraine, the country that his forces have repeatedly carved up through occupations and annexations, as a terrifying threat to Russia.*

Russia leader’s words about “demilitarization” and “denazification” are **ridiculed**, **labelled** “false claim”, “superficial claim of humanitarian intervention” and criticized revealing Moscow’s true plans:

2. *This may be the most important line of Mr. Putin’s speech, as a seeming statement of war aims far beyond his superficial claim of humanitarian intervention. His reference to*

*“demilitarize” is being widely read as a threat to subjugate the Ukrainian state as a whole, neutering its ability to defend itself and therefore its sovereign autonomy. Russian forces have already struck at Ukrainian military installations across the country.*

3. And Mr. Putin’s use of *“denazify,”* in context with his *false claim* that Ukraine’s democratic government is a neo-Nazi dictatorship, is seen as a threat to topple that government outright. Western intelligence agencies have warned for weeks that Moscow may be plotting to install a pliant dictatorship in Kyiv [27].

During a May 23 televised discussion, President Vladimir Putin claimed that Ukraine’s alleged absence from a 17<sup>th</sup> century map of Europe is evidence that Ukraine has no historical legitimacy as a country [24]. The following examples **ridicule** the insincere claims by the Russia leader, **labelling** his work “a controversial new essay” (1) with “imperial echoes and thinly veiled threats” (2), “the Russian president’s masterpiece”, “the latest example of gaslighting” (3, 4) calling him “a revanchist ruler, prepared to construct false historical narratives to justify his imperial dreams”, **labelling** with **irony** an “amateur historian” giving “a masterclass in disinformation” (2) and asking Zelenskyy to “give Putin a history lesson” (3). These characteristics are so extreme and exaggerated that seem even comical (“grotesquely disingenuous”) (4). The applied discursive strategy of **evidentiality** presents opinions by the officials to instil in the readers their mental models:

1. *Russian President Vladimir Putin has outlined the historical basis for his claims against Ukraine in a controversial new essay that has been likened in some quarters to a declaration of war. The 5,000-word article, entitled “On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians,” was published on 12 July and features many talking points favoured by Putin throughout the past seven years of undeclared war between Russia and Ukraine.*

2. *Others identified numerous imperial echoes and thinly veiled threats in Putin’s attempt to play amateur historian. Stockholm Free World Forum senior fellow Anders Eslund branded the article “a masterclass in disinformation” and “one step short of a declaration of war.”*

3. *Melinda Haring, Deputy Director, Eurasia Center, Atlantic Council: Putin’s delusional and dangerous article reveals what we already knew: Moscow cannot countenance letting Ukraine go. The Russian president’s masterpiece alone should inspire the West to redouble its efforts to bolster’s Kyiv ability to choose its own future, and Zelenskyy should respond immediately and give Putin a history lesson.*

4. *Brian Whitmore, Non-resident Senior Fellow, Atlantic Council: Vladimir Putin’s inaccurate and distorted claims are neither new nor surprising. They are just the latest example of gaslighting by the Kremlin leader. ... Putin’s claim that the “true sovereignty of Ukraine is possible only in partnership with Russia” is grotesquely disingenuous. For Ukraine, partnership with Russia has mainly meant subjugation by Russia. Putin’s claim that Russia and Ukraine share “spiritual, human, and civilizational ties formed for centuries” disregards and downplays Ukraine’s historical connection to Europe, independent of Russia, as part of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. The Russian leader’s essay reveals more about him than it does about Ukraine. It shows him to be a revanchist ruler who is prepared to construct false historical narratives to justify his imperial dreams [25].*

Russia claims that it has achieved its lowest ever unemployment rate, saying that this is the result of a strong economy [24]. In the following examples, the proof of the false myths is presented by figures from government officials (**a number game** and **evidentiality** discursive strategies) emphasised by the metaphor “dwarf the Ukrainian figures”, phraseological unit “it is moving into the past” and the amplifier “as many as 120,000 deaths and 170,000 to 180,000 injured”:

1. *Over the past decade, GDP in advanced economies has grown by 22%; across the world as a whole it has risen by 41% (both adjusting for price changes). Should projections of a 15% contraction be right, by the end of the year Russia’s economy will be 7% smaller than in 2012. Russia has not just lost a decade of growth – be it in economics, health or happiness. It is moving into the past.*

2. *Russia’s military casualties, the officials said, are approaching 300,000. The number includes as many as 120,000 deaths and 170,000 to 180,000 injured troops. The Russian numbers dwarf the Ukrainian figures, which the officials put at close 70,000 killed and 100,000 to 120,000 wounded. Russians are fewer, poorer and more miserable than a decade ago [31].*

**Conclusions.** The research reveals the negative attitude and countering by the British and American media of the most common Russian fake narratives which are spread both locally and worldwide. The study shows an opposite depiction of both countries, which is a typical strategy of a positive Self and a negative Other presentation to demonstrate the polarity between Russia and Ukraine. The practice of positive Self and negative Other presentation depicted negative facts about Russia, which are contrasted by positive features of the Self, Ukraine, where Ukraine is presented as a victim.

The analysis demonstrates negative framing of fake Russian propaganda claims that have been dispelled by Western media applying such discursive strategies as evidentiality, victimization, number game, personalisation, ridicule, irony and labelling that are realized by different linguistic means, including metaphor, metonymy, irony, idioms, phraseological units, etc.

The results of the analysis of the body texts reveal that Russia and its leader are prescribed destructive semantic roles that contribute to the negative semantic field associated with Russia’s responsibility. Russia and its president are presented by the choice of lexis, as the actor of a verb with negative connotation and noun phrase constructions, such as “weaponizes disinformation”, “criminal”, “a revanchist ruler” and their activities are “inaccurate and distorted claims”, “to construct false historical narratives to justify his imperial dreams”, “a masterclass in disinformation”, “kidnapping”, “gaslighting”, “classic war crimes”, “imperial echoes and thinly veiled threats” aimed “to erase Ukrainian national identity and Ukrainian sovereign state existence”.

The overlexicalization in the articles involves semantically related terms that are repeated within the articles on the topic (“crime”, “criminal”, “kidnapping”), the semantic field for Russia being “law infringement”.

Numerous negative connotation descriptive adjectives, nouns and idioms (“country’s darkest times”, “relentless pro-Russian propaganda”, “an audacious bid to dismantle its future”, “a unique and specific dynamic of the broader campaign by Russia”, “superficial claim of humanitarian intervention”, “imperial echoes and thinly veiled threats”), ironical quotations

(“a controversial new essay”, “up-is-down narrative”, “facilities dedicated to providing “re-education”, “attempt to play amateur historian”, “a masterclass in disinformation”), other categorical assertions, lack of mitigators and hedges appeal to emotions are based on the facts provided by authoritative experts and present the assessments as indisputable facts although still allowing the readers’ interpretations of Russia and Putin’s policy.

The research, being conducted on printed US and British media editions, reveals limited results based on qualitative analysis. The prospective future study could be the investigation of social media based on qualitative and quantitative analyses.

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## ПРОТИДІЯ РОСІЙСЬКИМ ФЕЙКОВИМ НАРАТИВАМ У БРИТАНСЬКИХ ТА АМЕРИКАНСЬКИХ МЕДІА: КРИТИЧНИЙ ДИСКУРС-АНАЛІЗ (КДА)

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На основі застосування критичного дискурс-аналізу, проведеного на матеріалах друкованої британської та американської преси, дослідження розкриває поширені впродовж останнього десятиліття наративи російської пропаганди щодо суверенітету держави та війни, розв'язаної росією на території України. Корпус матеріалу для дослідження сформовано шляхом ручного пошуку з газет і журналів у відкритому доступі, опублікованих у США, Канаді та Великій Британії, зокрема The Financial Times, Reuters, Business Insider, The New York Times, The Guardian, The Atlantic Council, The Economist, а також суспільних мовників CCN і BBC та інших. Аналізу підлягали публікації за період з 2021 року до першої половини 2024 року.

Лінгвістичний аналіз риторики конфлікту охоплює прагматичні та семантичні елементи з імпліцитною негативною оцінкою російської політики. За допомогою критичної теорії та аналізу дискурсу, критичного аналізу метафор і теорії позиціонування, дослідження класифікує головних акторів як агресорів або жертв та описує дискурсивні стратегії, що використовуються для протидії та викриття фейкових російських наративів. У статті розкрито причини та наслідки проаналізованих практик, визначено мовні засоби, що використовуються для реалізації дискурсивних стратегій, і розглянуто, як емоційні тригери викликають інтерес читачів за допомогою лексико-семантичних засобів і стилістичних фігур. Результати аналізу текстів свідчать про те, що росії та її лідеру прописані деструктивні семантичні ролі, які сприяють формуванню негативного семантичного поля, пов'язаного з відповідальністю росії за протиправні воєнні дії в Україні. Аналіз демонструє негативне обрамлення фейкових тверджень російської пропаганди, яке було розвінчане західними ЗМІ за допомогою таких дискурсивних стратегій, як доказовість, віктимізація, гра в числа, персоналізація, висміювання, іронія та навішування ярликів. Зазначені стратегії реалізуються різними мовними засобами, зокрема метафорою, метонімією, іронією, ідіомами, фразеологізмами та ін.

Проведене авторами статті дослідження, що ґрунтується на якісному аналізі друкованих видань США та Великобританії, дає обмежені результати. Перспективним напрямком для подальших наукових пошуків може стати опрацювання матеріалів соціальних мереж на основі застосування якісного та кількісного аналізу.

*Ключові слова:* критичний дискурс-аналіз, дискурсивні стратегії, лінгвістичні засоби, стилістичні фігури, російські фейкові наративи, війна в Україні.