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## Topoi Analysis of Vladimir Putin's Speeches in Media Discourse

### ABSTRACT

Media discourse is a type of discourse that is seen as a broadcast platform in which the discourse is directed to a non-present reader, listener, or viewer (O'Keeffe, 2011, p. 441). The study of media discourse is important to understand and interpret the ideologies hidden within the adopted discourse. Topoi analysis is seen as argumentation-schemes within the field of critical discourse analysis that help connect the linguistic means to the macro-sociological and ideological levels implied within the selected discourse. The present study aims to investigate the use of topoi in Putin's speeches during the Russian-Ukrainian war of 2022. The study shows how Putin utilizes topoi in his speeches and their ideological impact. The adopted methodology is qualitative in nature depending on the model of Wodak et. al. (2009) argumentation-schemes (i.e., topoi) are seen as a bridge between different linguistic means and macro strategies as ideological in the presentation of identified social actors.

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## تحليل المخطط الجدلي لخطابات فلاديمير بوتين في الخطاب الاعلامي

م. اوس نصري حمد الشجلاوي/ كلية الامام الاعظم الجامعة

### الخلاصة:

الخطاب الاعلامي هو نوع من الخطاب الذي يُنظر إليه على أنه منصة بث يتم فيها توجيه الخطاب إلى قارئ أو مستمع أو مشاهد غير موجود (او كفييل، ٢٠١١، ص ١٤٤). تعتبر دراسة الخطاب الاعلامي مهمة لفهم وتفسير الأيديولوجيات المخفية في الخطاب المعتمد. يُنظر إلى تحليل المخطط الجدلي على أنه مخططات حجة في مجال تحليل الخطاب النقدي الذي يساعد على ربط الوسائل اللغوية بالمستويات الاجتماعية والأيديولوجية الضمنية في الخطاب المختار. الهدف من هذه الدراسة هو التحقيق في استخدام المخطط الجدلي في خطابات بوتين خلال الحرب الروسية الأوكرانية عام ٢٠٢٢. توضح الدراسة كيف

يستخدم بوتين في خطابه وتأثيرها الأيديولوجي. المنهجية المعتمدة نوعية بطبيعتها اعتمادًا على نموذج وداك وآخرون (٢٠٠٩) ، يُنظر إلى مخططات الجدل على أنها جسر بين الوسائل اللغوية المختلفة والاستراتيجيات الكلية باعتبارها أيديولوجية في عرض الجهات الفاعلة الاجتماعية المحددة. الكلمات الافتتاحية: المخطط الجدلي، الهوية، الأيديولوجية، الخطاب الاعلامي، الموقف السياسي

## 1. Introduction

The language of media concerning political issues is important. It presents different ideological implications hidden within the selected discourse. The study of media discourse and politics sheds light on the ‘positioning’ of the politicians and their implicit and explicit stance in accordance with others. Thus, the study aims to deconstruct the language of media discourse to show the positioning of president Putin concerning the war against Ukraine 2022. Furthermore, the study represents the political identity of president Putin in the selected discourses. The chosen speeches of Putin are regarded as fundamental in the presentation of the act of war. These speeches depend on different presentations of the self and the national identity of Russia and Ukraine. These speeches are of vital importance not only to the action of war itself but also to the representation of the others (i.e., the United States and Europe) and their role in the act of war.

To achieve the above aims, the adopted analysis is concerned with the Wodak et. al.’s (2009) argumentation schemes of identity construction known as topoi. These topoi help in the presentation of the self. The notion of the topoi can be clarified through the analysis of certain linguistic means, such as *metaphor*, *personal reference*, *lexemes*, *temporal reference*, and *quotations* and their connection to sociological, ideological, and historical strategies implied within speeches. According to Wodak (2015, p. 5-7) topoi can be regarded as "search for formulas which tell you how and where to look for arguments. At the same time, topoi are warrants which guarantee the transition from argument to conclusion". According to Krzyzanowski (2010, p. 85), topoi are seen as:

“certain headings of arguments which, in a way, summaries the argument while also providing it with necessary ‘skeleton’ which is fleshed over by respective discourse contents. Therefore, the analysis aims to discover the links which are established in the course of

analysis between the levels of mapping of those contents (i.e. topics) and establish the argument schemes (i.e. topoi) deployed, and related to linguistic aspects”.

Consequently, most of the studies agree that topoi are argumentation schemes that present strategies of argument utilized to justify the best conclusions or promises they offer.

## **2. Identity and Ideology**

According to the study of critical discourse analysis, specifically speaking about the argumentation schemes, namely, Topoi. The researcher needs to explain the concept of identity and its connection to ideology and positioning. According to De Fina (2019, p.1), identity is defined as “Identity can be regarded as collective or individual, social or personal, mental constructs, or product of actions”. Many scholars within the field of critical discourse analysis classify identity construction into different types, such as cultural identity, political identity, and religious/ethnic identity. To study the ideology within a certain identity presented in a certain discourse (i.e., political discourse, media discourse, or literary discourse), it expresses certain beliefs, attitudes, and history in the actual world and through the language used in certain practices (Fairclough, 2003).

The current media discourse will be limited to the type of ideology connected to the political identity. The study tries to show the hidden ideology within the speeches in media discourse, and how these speeches express the positive/negative presentation of the self. The analysis of the self-presentation indicates the positioning and the political ideologies and sociological strategies implied within discourse.

## **3. Methodology**

The section on methodology is concerned with the presentation of data selection and the adopted model of analysis. Concerning the data selection, it gives a thorough description of the data and the reason behind choosing these data not others. The second part is to explain the model of analysis under study.

### **3.1 Data Selection**

This section is concerned with the presentation of data selection and adopted methods for the analysis. Concerning the selected data, a random sampling technique is chosen. Putin’s presidential speeches concerning the

crisis with Ukraine are taken. Three presidential speeches are selected within the period from the beginning of the war in February 2022 till March 2022.

### 3.2 Model of Analysis

According to the adopted model of analysis, Wodak et. al. (2009) is adopted. Wodak et. al. (2009) model is concerned with the presentation of identity construction within various discourses. There are different levels of analysis within the current model, such as textual, argumentation, and sociological levels of analysis. The present study will be limited to the analysis of argumentation schemes known as topoi. Thus, topoi are seen as important argumentation schemes in the presentation of identity construction. Topoi can be defined as “topoi or loci is described as parts of argumentation which belong to obligatory, either explicit or inferable premises” (Wodak & Meyer, 2006, p. 74). Wodak et al. (2009) presents four main Macro-sociological strategies that depend on various lists of topoi concerning identity construction. The analysis will be limited to two main Macro-strategies and their list of topoi (i.e., Constructive and Perpetuation strategies). Thus, the list and (table 1) below will indicate the adopted topoi of analysis:

- Topos of Ignorance
- Topos of Illustrative Example
- Topos of Comparison
- Topos of History
- Topos/fallacy of External Threat
- Topos of Appeal to Authority
- Topos of Definition/ Name Interpretation
- Topos of Lovely Idyllic Place
- Explicit and Implicit Topos of Comparison
- Topos of Terrible Place

**Table 1:** *List of Topoi, Macro-Strategies, and Linguistic Means adopted by Wodak et. al. (2009)*

| <b>Strategies</b>                               | <b>Topoi</b>                              | <b>Linguistic Means</b>                                                                                                                  |
|-------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Shift of Blame and Responsibility               | Topos of Ignorance                        | Lexical units with semantic components creating difference                                                                               |
| Strategy of Casting Doubt                       | Topos of Illustrative Example             | Allusions, insinuations, vagueness and evocations                                                                                        |
| Balancing one thing against another             | Topos of Comparison                       | 'yes-but' figure, suggestive icons. Personal reference, toponymy.                                                                        |
| Emphasizing the difference between now and then | Topos of History                          | Lexical units indicating difference                                                                                                      |
| Strategy of 'squaring'                          | Topos fallacy of external threat          | Fictitious (threatening) scenarios                                                                                                       |
| Legitimization/ de-legitimization               | Topos of appeal to authority              | Quotations                                                                                                                               |
| Emphasis on positive political continuity       | Topoi of definition/ name interpretation  | Temporal reference including continuity: temporal presuppositions including adverbs of time and adverbial constructions such as (always) |
| Emphasis on national uniqueness                 | Topos of lovely idyllic place             | Lexemes with semantic components expressing singularity                                                                                  |
| Emphasis on subnational uniqueness              | Explicit and implicit topos of comparison | Positively connotated attributions                                                                                                       |
| Emphasis on the difference between now and then | Topos of terrible place                   | Implicit and explicit comparisons                                                                                                        |

#### 4. Data Analysis

As mentioned previously, the method applied in the present study is qualitative in nature. Following Wodak et. al. (2009) topoi list of analyses of the presidential speeches of Putin. The data is chosen from YouTube channels and is converted to written format to be analysed. The selected speeches are chosen within the period of 24th of Feb. 2022 till the 18th of March 2022.

##### Presidential speech 1: 24/2/2022

###### Extract 1:

“I will begin with what I said in my address on February 21, 2022. I spoke about our biggest concerns and worries and about the fundamental threats which irresponsible Western politicians created for Russia consistently,”

The above extract presents the use of temporal reference and certain lexemes that emphasize the threatening scenarios. The use of topos of external threat, as an argumentation scheme, denotes the strategy of justification within the identity of Russia.

###### Extract 2:

“In the late 1980s, the Soviet Union grew weaker and subsequently broke apart. That experience should serve as a good lesson for us, because it has shown us that the paralysis of power and will is the first step towards complete degradation and oblivion. We lost confidence for only one moment, but it was enough to disrupt the balance of forces in the world.”

The above example presents an explicit comparison between the past and now. The use of toponymy and lexemes emphasize the difference between the two periods. Topos of history is taken as an argumentation scheme that expresses the historical development between the past and the present time. The example demonstrates the gradual changes in the acts of power between then (i.e., past) and now.

###### Extract 3:

“Then came the turn of Iraq, Libya and Syria. The illegal use of military power against Libya and the distortion of all the UN Security Council decisions on Libya ruined the state, created a huge seat of international terrorism, and pushed the country towards a humanitarian catastrophe, into the vortex of a civil war, which has continued there for years.”

The above extract uses vocations and insinuations as linguistic means to express the topos of illustrative example. The reason behind using this type of topos is to highlight the idea of doubt, emphasizing the political ideology of Russia against the one presented by the US government.

**Extract 4:**

“A similar fate was also prepared for Syria. The combat operations conducted by the Western coalition in that country without the Syrian government’s approval or UN Security Council’s sanction can only be defined as aggression and intervention.”

Another example of topos of illustrative examples presented above. The repetition of such topos throughout Putin’s speech serves as indicative mark to the terrible disaster committed by the US government against different areas around the world. Putin highlights these examples using various vocatives and insinuations to demonstrate how his political ideology is different.

**Extract 5:**

“They used the pretext of allegedly reliable information available in the United States about the presence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq.”

The use of personal pronoun ‘they’ is a negative self-presentation of the United States. This personal reference is used to express the argumentation scheme represented in the topos of comparison concerning their disastrous actions towards different countries. This type is used to show the sociological strategy used in Putin’s speech which is the balancing between different political poles, concentrating on the different reasons behind his act of war against theirs (i.e., the United States).

**Extract 6:**

“Overall, it appears that nearly everywhere, in many regions of the world where the United States brought its law and order, this created bloody, non-healing wounds and the curse of international terrorism and extremism.”

The above example presented different lexical components that express the topos of ignorance. This topos is used to indicate the shift of blame and

responsibility. It represents the political actions of the United States by using semantic components of levelling them down in relation to their actions around the world.

#### **Extract 7:**

“Therefore, one can say with good reason and confidence that the whole so-called Western bloc formed by the United States in its own image and likeness is, in its entirety, the very same “empire of lies.””

The above example presents the use of topos of appeal to authority. Putin’s speech concerning the war against Ukraine is to express legitimization.

#### **Extract 8**

“The United States is pursuing its own objectives, while neglecting our interests.”

The above example concentrates on the topos of comparison. It expresses the positive-self presentation through the use of the reference ‘our’, whereas it gives a negative-self presentation of the United States through the reference to their objectives and deeds.

#### **Extract 9:**

“If history is any guide, we know that in 1940 and early 1941 the Soviet Union went to great lengths to prevent war or at least delay its outbreak.”

The above example uses different references and lexical expressions, such as the pronoun ‘we’, and ‘Soviet Union’ to emphasize the historical background of Russia concerning the acts of war in comparison to the United States. This example is presented by Putin to declare the difference between the adopted ideologies of Russia and the United States.

#### **Extract 10:**

“In the first months after the hostilities broke out, we lost vast territories of strategic importance, as well as millions of lives. We will not make this mistake the second time. We have no right to do so.”

The use of pronoun ‘we’ as a reference to positive-self presentation, and the use of implicit comparisons to express the argumentation scheme of topos of terrible place to indicate the importance of change of action between the past and now.

### **Presidential speech 2: 16/3/2022**

#### **Extract 1:**

“But we see time and again that the Kyiv regime, which was assigned by Western masters to create anti-Russian offensive is indifferent to the fate of Ukrainian people.”

The above extract depends on the use of personal reference and referential expressions to express the topos of comparison. According to this topos, the argumentation scheme is to use these linguistic tools to acknowledge and emphasize the difference between the positive-self positioning of the Russian in comparison to the western masters and the Kyiv regime (i.e., negative self-presentation).

#### **Extract 2:**

“Let me stress the obsession with sanctions by the united states and its supporters is not shared by the countries where more than half of the world’s population lives.”

The use of implicit comparison is between the United States’ ideology and other countries in relation to the Russian ideology. The topos of terrible place is an argumentation scheme to show the comparison between political ideologies to emphasize the political views, i.e., the United States as a negative political ideology in comparison to Russia as a positive political ideology.

#### **Extract 3:**

“Global social networks and all the western media are taking part. Their objectivity and independence turned out to be just a myth.”

The use of topos of ignorance in the above example is to present the blame and responsibility of the media in the representation of the political ideology. The above example indicates the use of the ideas presented by western media as a fabricated image (i.e., negative positioning).

### **Presidential speech 3: 18/3/2022**

**Extract 1:**

“We the multinational people of Russian Federation, united by the common destiny of on our own land.”

According to the example presented above, the use of ‘we’ ‘our’ references is seen within the topoi of comparison to emphasize the positive self-presentation.

**Extract 2:**

“They went to take part in the referendum in Crimea Sevastopol on March 18, 2014; they lived and live now on their own land.”

The above example shows the use of certain toponymy, temporal references, and adverbs of time as linguistic means connected to the topoi of definition. The benefit of this topos is to emphasis continuity. The president Putin emphasizes in his speech on certain incidents from the past to shed light on the power of the Russian army.

**Extract 3:**

“I recollect the words from the Holy Scripture: Greater love has no one than this that he lay down his life for his friends.”

The use of this quotation from the Holy Scripture is seen as part of topos of appeal to authority. This topos helps put legitimization to the act of military operation committed by the Russian.

**Extract 4:**

“It’s mere coincidence that the military operation started on the same day which marks the birthday of one of our outstanding military commanders, who has been canonized, (18<sup>th</sup> century Russian navy admiral) Fyodor Ushakoy, he has never lost a single battle during his brilliant military career”

The above extract emphasizes on the name of one of the famous military commanders “Fyodor Ushakoy”. This extract is seen as part of the topos of explicit and implicit comparison. This comparison is used to show the implicit connection between the births of Fyodor Ushakoy in the same date of the war against Ukraine which is seen as a sign of power and strength of Russian acts.

#### **Extract 5:**

“Those storms will contribute to Russia’ glory, to Russia’s glory! So it was then, as is now and will be forever!”

The above example uses the lexical expressions that emphasize singularity. This example is seen as part of topos of idyllic place. The emphasis on these lexemes is to add strength and share the national uniqueness of Russia. The repetition of these lexemes is to show the ideological impact of Russia to power, glory, and strength.

#### **5. Conclusion**

The present study depends on the use of Wodak et. al. (2009) concerning the discursive construction of identity. This study depends on the analysis of topoi as argumentation schemes and their ideological presentation. The above analysis shows Putin’s tendency to use the topos of comparison to indicate the differences between his adopted ideology and the United States' ideology. Putin’s speeches express his political identity as a president of a powerful nation through various uses of topos of definition and topos of history and comparison to indicate his positive-self presentation of his nation implicitly compared to the United States and their supporting countries. Another technique adopted by Putin’s speeches is the shedding of light on different actions of the United States government against many middle-eastern countries to express their negative-presentation and severe and decisive political ideology.

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