



Online *Pravda*'s Communicative Intentions Regarding the War in Ukraine: A CDA-Based Study of the Website's Opinion Articles

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Abstract: This research paper, based on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), aimed to uncover how the opinion articles published on *Pravda.ru* discursively depicted the war in Ukraine and the parties involved. To achieve this, two elements of CDA analysis, namely presupposition and structural opposition, were examined. The first element was scrutinized to determine how *Pravda.ru* depicted the war in Ukraine (RQ1), while the second element was analyzed to understand how *Pravda.ru* portrayed the parties involved, whether directly or indirectly, in the war (RQ2). For this study, 83 articles were subject to critical discourse analysis, covering the period from February 25, 2022, to February 24, 2023, the first year of the war. The results obtained from this study indicated that *Pravda.ru* employed various techniques to construct presuppositions and structural oppositions. *Pravda.ru* portrayed the war as a 'special military operation' and a 'proxy war.' The former, characterized as a euphemism, aimed to mitigate the impact of the word, presupposing that the events did not constitute aggression against Ukraine. The latter presupposed that Russia was a victim of a conspiracy. Furthermore, the results revealed that *Pravda.ru* used stigmatization and religious affiliations, and terms to construct structural oppositions.

Keywords: Presupposition, Structural Opposition, Creating Meaning, Communicative Strategies, Stigmatization, Euphemism

1. Introduction

The representation and depiction of people, relationships, events, objects, and actions in the media have always been a significant concern for critical discourse analysts. This significance arises from the assertion that the media utilize communicative strategies that can be ideological (Machin & Mayr, 2012).

This paper focuses on the referential and representational strategies employed by *Pravda.ru* concerning the war in Ukraine. Young (2011) categorizes media content into standard narratives, such as features, news articles, and opinion articles, and non-standard narratives, like letters to the editor. This paper specifically examines opinion articles. An opinion article, also known as an op-ed, offers a judgment or evaluation of a subject or issue and explicitly aims to influence readers' perspectives as determined by the writer or publication (Saleh 2013).

A brief review of the literature reveals that it has predominantly explored the potential of print mass media texts, such as news articles (Sheyholislami 2007; Teo 2000), columns (McElmurry 2009), and editorials (Sabah et al., 2023; Matu & Lubbe 2007), with limited attention given to opinion articles. Opinion articles published on *Pravda.ru* concerning the war in Ukraine remain unexamined. This study seeks to address this gap in the literature by investigating how these opinion articles discursively represent the war in Ukraine and the parties involved, whether directly or indirectly. To achieve this, the study formulates the following two research questions:

- How do opinion articles published on *Pravda.ru* discursively depict the war in Ukraine?
- How do opinion articles published on *Pravda.ru* portray the parties involved in the war in Ukraine?

Building upon Machin and Mayr (2012), this paper asserts that manipulation, bias, racial prejudice, and ideologies are discursively constructed, defended, mirrored, and challenged through linguistic resources. The authors contend that language is not merely a system of grammar rules but a semiotic resource set with specific potentials or affordances. Miller (2002) posits that individuals' understanding of their societies and the world depends on how things are discursively presented to them, shaping their choices regarding what to reject, accept, and do.

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This paper argues that Pravda.ru employs various discursive strategies, such as euphemism, victim-playing, and historical references, to construct presuppositions. Additionally, it uses stigmatization and religious affiliations to establish structural oppositions. Moreover, the analyzed texts exhibit manipulation and embedded ideologies.

Subsequently, the paper will provide a conceptual background, review pertinent literature, expound on the theoretical concepts guiding the analysis, and elucidate the chosen methodology. In subsequent sections, the study will present, analyze, and discuss the results, draw conclusions, and delineate the implications of the research.

2. Conceptual Background and Literature Review

2.1. Conceptual Background

Conceptualization is the process by which researchers define the terms they use to prevent misconceptions (Zikmund 2000). The following paragraphs aim to provide definitions for several terms relevant to this study.

2.1.1. Discourse

Lemke (1995) characterizes discourse as the social activity in which meanings are constructed using symbolic systems within a specific context. Wodak (2001a) views it as a social action that entails a "dialectical relationship between a given discursive event and the specific field of practice" (p. 66) within which it is situated, such as social structures, institutions, and situations. Sharp and Richardson (2001) succinctly describe it as "the sum of communicative interactions" (p. 195).

2.1.2. Text

Wodak (2009) distinguishes between discourse and text by highlighting that a text represents a unique and specific manifestation of discourse, typically belonging to a particular genre. Conversely, discourse implies commonalities and patterns of knowledge and structures, often seen in patterned texts.

2.1.3. Meaning Creation

The term "creating meaning" is borrowed from Machin and Mayr (2012). In this context, "meaning" does not refer to the literal definition of a word, but rather to the perception it generates. Meanings are universal; they exist across languages and cultures. However, text producers assign meanings to things, activities, actions, etc., to create different perceptions. For instance, the concept of war remains consistent across languages and cultures (universal meaning), but writers and authors attribute different connotations to it (assigning different actions) to shape distinct perceptions. This is often done to persuade readers to adopt a specific viewpoint or thought process—essentially, to influence how readers think. For instance, *Pravda.ru* describes the events in Ukraine as a "special military operation," while the Moscow Times characterizes it as a "war." Both descriptions pertain to the same events but create different perceptions.

2.1.4. Language

Language is not solely viewed as a product of society but is also considered a significant force in shaping and reshaping social practices, both positively and negatively (Fairclough 1995; Fairclough 2003; Fairclough 2010; Fairclough & Wodak 1997; Wodak & Meyer 2009; van Dijk 2001). The first aspect refers to language as a system of communication encompassing grammar and vocabulary. The second aspect regards language as an action. Holtgraves (2002) explains that when language is employed, it becomes a social action embedded within a complex web of interpersonal determinants and consequences. However, as a communication system, language is influenced by society (a neutral social action). Yet, when utilized, it can also become an institutional or individual-biased action. In other words, individuals and institutions leverage language to shape perceptions in alignment with their interests and policies. This is illustrated in the example provided earlier concerning how *Pravda.ru* and Moscow Times (institutions) used language to create differing perceptions.

2.2. Literature Review

As previously mentioned, this study serves a dual purpose: (a) to scrutinize the assumptions that articles about the war in Ukraine make implicitly, presenting them as unquestionable, and the potential meanings that these assumptions may convey (presuppositions), and (b) to investigate how these articles create opposing concepts to portray the parties involved in the war (structural oppositions).

Hate speech, discrimination, classification, stigmatization, and dehumanization are all outcomes of communicative interactions that, according to Stanton (2013), can escalate into genocidal acts. These acts represent social issues ingrained in societies to varying degrees, contingent on their level of modernization. Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999) argue that Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) begins with an awareness of such social problems.

Manipulation stands out as a critical social problem that warrants special attention from critical discourse analysts (van Dijk 2006). For van Dijk, manipulation encompasses discriminatory treatment and misrepresentation of minorities and political adversaries by dominant groups. Atkin and Richardson (2007) conducted an analysis of 86 letters to the editor published in *The Guardian* regarding Muslims, concluding that unfounded arguments perpetuate racism and inequality. Similarly, Saeed (2007) conducted a meta-analysis of how ethnic minorities were discursively represented in the British media, revealing that these minorities were often portrayed as the 'alien other' in a racist manner.

In a similar vein, Pattersson (2019) investigated Facebook entries by three Finnish politicians and their interviews in the news media. The study found that these politicians depicted themselves as defenders of liberal values, Finland, and its people against 'barbaric' and 'evil' others, specifically Muslims. The authors suggest that these politicians framed their hate speech against Muslims in Finland as virtuous actions, serving their personal social and political interests.

Utilizing CDA to analyze the works of a prominent Canadian writer, Lillian (2006) found that all forms of racist texts identified in other societies were also present in Canadian society. In a related study, McElmurry (2009) examined a single column published in the Chicago Sun-Times newspaper on the Arellano controversy and the reactions of other columnists in the Hoy Spanish newspaper. The study revealed that the construction of 'us versus them' was prevalent in the content analyzed.

Social problems tend to escalate during significant events (Khosravinik 2009). In a decade-long study spanning from 1996 to 2006, Khosravinik (2009) investigated how asylum seekers, immigrants, and refugees were discursively represented in several British newspapers, including The Guardian, The Times, The Observer, The Sunday Times, The Mail on Sunday, and Daily Mail. The study concluded that instances of racism increased following major events, such as the Madrid bombings in 2004 and the 9/11 attacks in 2001.

3. Framework for Analysis

As the title implies, this study employs a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework. Historically, CDA was developed in the early 1990s by Ruth Wodak, Norman Fairclough, and Teun van Dijk. Today, CDA is a well-established paradigm within the field of linguistics (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). What sets CDA apart from other linguistic approaches is its emphasis on the "interaction between language and social structures" (Wodak & Meyer 2009: 21). CDA frequently seeks to examine the many indirect or implicit meanings within a text, such as presuppositions, implications, allusions, and vagueness (van Dijk 2001).

Conceptually, Wodak and Meyer (2009) view CDA as a problem-oriented, constitutive interdisciplinary approach that delves into the study of complex social phenomena rather than focusing solely on "linguistic units in isolation" (p. 2). Lin (2014) describes CDA not as a unified discipline but as a cluster of interdisciplinary approaches.

CDA encompasses three primary approaches: (1) Wodak's discourse-historical approach (DHA), (2) van Dijk's socio-cognitive theory of critical discourse studies (CDS), and (3) Fairclough's dialectical-relational approach (DRA) (Lin 2014). This study adopts Wodak's DHA because it places a significant emphasis on addressing social phenomena rather than examining linguistic units in isolation (Wodak & Meyer 2009: 2). It primarily focuses on politics, establishing a framework for political discourse analysis, and aims to develop conceptual tools suited to specific social issues while avoiding theoretical intricacies. DHA encompasses three core dimensions: (a) analyzing discourses with elements of anti-Semitism, racism, ethnocentrism, or nationalism, including topics related to collective identity, welfare state issues, employment matters, law and order, liberal values, immigrant status, racism/anti-racism, and anti/pro-establishment; (b) examining the discursive strategies employed, including van Dijk's concepts of 'positive self' and 'negative other'; and (c) deconstructing the "linguistic realizations of discursive practices," such as depersonalizing synecdoche and metaphors (Wodak & Meyer 2009: 29).

Wodak (2001b) outlined the key principles of DHA as follows: (a) it maintains a problem-oriented approach, not fixating on specific linguistic elements; (b) it adopts an interdisciplinary approach that transcends various levels, encompassing the work itself, teams, theory, and practice; (c) it combines theories and methods; (d) it involves ethnography and fieldwork; (e) it operates through an abductive process, constantly moving recursively between empirical data and theory; (f) it examines multiple genres and public spaces, focusing on interdiscursive and intertextual relationships, with recontextualization serving as a crucial process to connect these genres, topics, and arguments; (g) it considers the historical context when interpreting texts and discourses; (h) the categories and analytical tools are adaptable, contingent on the problem under investigation; (i) it employs grand theories as a foundation, supplemented by middle-range theories that better serve analytical goals; and (j) it applies and communicates results to the public.

4. Methodology

In addition to providing background information about *Pravda.ru*, this section of the study demonstrates how the data was collected and the elements of analysis that were studied—specifically, the linguistic elements employed by *Pravda.ru* to convey meaning.

4.1. *Pravda.ru*

Pravda (Truth), the oldest Soviet newspaper, underwent a split in the late 1990s, resulting in two separate entities: *Pravda* and *Pravda Online*. *Pravda Online* is privately owned and offers editions in English, French, and Portuguese (Wikipedia, n.d.). Originally established in 1999, it later evolved into *Pravda.ru* (*Pravda.ru* website, n.d.). *Pravda.ru* was chosen for this study because it features an English edition, unlike some others.

4.2. Units of Analysis and Data Collection

Krippendorff (2019) distinguishes between three types of units of analysis: sampling units, recording/coding units, and context units. A sampling unit refers to what the researcher includes or excludes from analysis. In this study, the authors included all opinion articles published on the *Pravda.ru* website between February 25, 2022, and

February 24, 2023, related to the war in Ukraine—the first year of the war. A recording/coding unit refers to a specific segment (word, phrase, sentence, etc.) of a text that can be categorized or coded. In this study, all statements that discursively depict the war in Ukraine and portray the parties involved were categorized and analyzed for presuppositions and structural oppositions—two categories. A context unit refers to the meaning implied by the recording/coding unit. According to Krippendorf, the size of a context unit has no logical limit. To elaborate, the context unit of a word can be a sentence (the meaning of a word depends on its syntactical role in the sentence), the context unit of a sentence can be a text, and so on.

4.3. Elements of Analysis

This study formulated two research questions: (1) to identify the lexical strategies employed by *Pravda.ru* to refer to the war in Ukraine, and (2) to identify the representational strategies used to refer to the parties involved in the war. To address these questions, the following Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) elements of analysis were utilized: presupposition and structural oppositions. Examining these two elements helps provide answers to the research questions.

4.3.1. Presupposition

Machin and Mayr (2012) view presupposition as a linguistic strategy for concealment. According to the authors, it occurs when text producers imply meanings without explicitly expressing them or when they present contestable and ideological ideas as taken for granted. For instance, the statement that 'the school should not continue charging high fees on learners' presupposes that learners are currently paying high fees. According to Polyzou (2015), examining presupposition is crucial for uncovering textual manipulation and ideologies. There are two types of presupposition: pragmatic and conventional (Bekalu 2006). Pragmatic presupposition is non-linguistic and relates to the context of the utterance or text being analyzed (Norrick 2001; Stalnaker 2000), while conventional presupposition is linguistic and context-free. The most common means used to convey conventional presupposition are questions, definite descriptions, factives, and iteratives (Bekalu 2006). This study examines both types.

4.3.2. Structural Oppositions

Structural oppositions refer to pairs of concepts or expressions with opposing meanings (van Dijk 1998). They can be either implicitly or explicitly stated. When explicitly stated, as in 'them versus us,' they are referred to as ideological squares.

In conclusion, Critical Discourse Analysis is a complex field (van Dijk 1993: 253). It requires, in addition to multidisciplinary, an understanding of the intricate relationships between talk, text, social cognition, society, power, and culture. However, the authors' diverse backgrounds equip them with the multidisciplinary knowledge necessary to conduct this research: the corresponding author possesses a background in applied linguistics, discourse studies, conflict studies, mass communication, and public relations, while the second author has a background in English literature and applied linguistics.

5. Findings and Discussion

This section of the paper involves presenting, interpreting, explaining, and discussing the findings obtained from the analyses conducted to explore how *Pravda.ru* depicted the war in Ukraine and how it portrayed the parties involved, whether directly or indirectly.

5.1. Presupposition

The study utilized presupposition to discern how *Pravda.ru* depicted the war in Ukraine. Machin and Mayr (2012) argued that all language usage, even simple sentences, is replete with presuppositions. Based on the analyses, *Pravda.ru* employed various techniques to reference the war in Ukraine. To elaborate, in an effort to shape readers' perception of the war, *Pravda.ru* depicted it as a 'special operation,' a term described as a euphemism aimed at mitigating the impact of the word itself. Additionally, *Pravda.ru* portrayed the war as a 'proxy war,' which positions Russia as a victim, and linked the war to the past, effectively legitimizing Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

5.1.1. Euphemism

Euphemism refers to the use of a phrase or word to avoid a more direct or unpleasant expression. It often arises from the censorship of language (Keith & Kate 2006). Euphemisms, metaphors, and collocations are characteristic features of political discourse, challenging the notion of discourse producers' neutrality as a myth (Newmark 1991). Below are excerpts extracted from the analyzed articles:

Table 1: Statements that Refer to the War in Ukraine as a 'Special Military Operation.'

#	Excerpts	Publishing Date
1.	The entire world order has turned upside down after the start of the special military operation in Ukraine.	March 22, 2022
2.	Truss [British PM] is traveling to India to try to convince Modi to condemn the Russian special military operation in Ukraine.	March 31, 2022
3.	In the context of this special military operation in Ukraine, I see from day one the fascist practice of censorship by the European Union.	April 4, 2022
4.	So, the Ukrainian situation is by definition not a war, it is a special military operation.	May 9, 2022

#	Excerpts	Publishing Date
5.	My own take on the special military operation in Ukraine was the same take I have taken on the military campaigns in Iraq, Libya, Syria, and anywhere else.	June 22, 2022
6.	Almost six months have passed since the start of Russia's special military operation in Ukraine.	July 13, 2022
7.	Now as for the details of the special military operation in Ukraine, I was not privy to the decision.	September 26, 2022
8.	The more he [Putin] tries to pretend this is still a "special operation", the more NATO see it as a sign of weakness.	February 6, 2023
9.	This is the reason for the Special Military Operation...and Zelensky is the cause of all of it.	February 9, 2023

Source: *Pravda.ru* (2022-2023). Retrieved from <https://english.pravda.ru/opinion/>

A quick review of the extracts above in Table 1 reveals that *Pravda.ru* utilized definite descriptions to refer to the events in Ukraine. Describing the situation in Ukraine as a "special military operation" presupposes that it is not a war, aggression, or invasion. There is a distinction between wars and special military operations in terms of scope, objectives, and duration. Special operations are typically shorter in duration, limited in scope, and carried out to achieve specific objectives. Furthermore, the term "special" implies that the operation is exceptional or extraordinary. In terms of frequency, *Pravda.ru* iterated the phrase 'special military operation' in all the displayed extracts, often mentioning the location (Ukraine), which triggers a presupposition of uniqueness, referring to a specific and defined operation.

Kadmon (2001) noted that Gottlob Frege, a German philosopher, first used the term 'presupposition' in 1982. According to Kadmon (2001), Frege claimed that a presupposition of a sentence is also a presupposition of its negative counterpart. Negating all the statements in Table 1, except the fourth, presupposes the same underlying concept.

It appears paradoxical that *Pravda.ru* portrays Russia's actions in Ukraine as a special military operation while characterizing Ukraine's actions as part of a war against Russia. Interestingly, during the mid-1980s, specifically during the Cold War, "the USSR claimed to have been invited (euphemism) into Afghanistan" (Keith & Kate 2006: 50), which was widely seen as an act of aggression at the time. One possible reason behind describing the war as a special military operation could be to mitigate the emotional impact of words—employing euphemistic language. In other words, the words "war" and "aggression" have a more painful and traumatic emotional effect than the phrase "special military operation." Authors often do this to shape readers' perceptions of the war against Ukraine in a particular way (Machin & Mayr 2012).

Another possible reason for depicting the war in Ukraine as a special military operation could be that *Pravda.ru* does not perceive the events as aggression or war. However, two factors contradict this perception. First, international law defines aggression as "an act that either violates or threatens to violate sovereignty" (Frowe 2022: 50), which aligns with Russia's actions in Ukraine. Second, other Russian mass media outlets used distinct referential choices to depict the war in Ukraine. Excerpts from opinion articles published on the Moscow Times' website are provided below for comparison:

Table 2: The Moscow Times' Statements that Depict the Conflict as a War

A#	Extracts	Publishing Date
1.	I took part in a protest against the war in Ukraine along with around 20 other Russian migrants to Armenia.	January 12, 2023
2.	The impact of Russia's invasion of Ukraine on biodiversity and the climate was not part of the official agenda at two recent major UN environmental conferences.	January 20, 2023
3.	The Russian-led church has been used to justify the invasion on the grounds.	January 16, 2023

Source: The Moscow Times (2023). Retrieved from <https://english.pravda.ru/opinion/>

Finally, disputing the facts and claiming that what is happening in Ukraine does not meet the legal definition of aggression can be seen as forms of denial. This might be done to sow doubt about the authenticity of events and to repudiate the fact that Russia invaded Ukraine. According to Laqueur and Baumel (2001), denial involves "minimization, banalization, and relativization of the relevant facts and events" (p. 293).

5.1.2. Playing the Victim

Pravda.ru also employed the technique of victim playing to convey certain meanings. Victim playing occurs when one of the disputing parties portrays itself as the victim of the other or its actions. This strategy can be used proactively in various communication contexts, including mediation talks, everyday arguments, and public verbal disputes (Berrocal 2017). The following excerpts illustrate instances of victim playing:

Table 3: Statements that Depict the War in Ukraine as a 'Proxy War.'

#	Excerpts	Publishing Date
1.	Russia has accused NATO of trying to use the Ukrainian army as its proxy to enlarge NATO's military domination in the region.	March 11, 2022

#	Excerpts	Publishing Date
2.	If Immanuel Kant's 'Perpetual Peace' was taken seriously, today's Russia, America and Europe would have been at peace and avoided the proxy war within themselves and with the global community.	March 24, 2022
3.	He [Biden] should have told Ukraine to implement Minsk, given that he is now using Ukraine as a proxy, a pawn against Russia.	March 28, 2022
4.	[The West] has tried to use Ukraine and Ukrainians as a proxy to fight Russia and to try to do as much damage as possible.	May 9, 2022
5.	Three months into the war and it's quite obvious that Ukraine is used as a proxy for ulterior motives.	May 12, 2022
6.	Who can say how long the US proxy war against Russia will last?	May 16, 2022
7.	[China will be the biggest winner] after both the West and Russia will exhaust themselves in Ukraine as a prolonged proxy war.	May 23, 2022
8.	[Washington] is using Ukraine as a proxy in a war between NATO and Russia.	June 22, 2022
9.	It [Arming Ukraine] prolongs the conflict of course, and uses Ukrainians as proxy soldiers in a war against Russia.	September 26, 2022
10.	NATO's proxy war against Russia is now well established. The new UK Prime Minister Liz Truss publicly vowed that she would support Ukraine until Putin and Russia are destroyed.	September 30, 2022
11.	The USA Proxy War Against Russia will Unleash Hell. (Headline)	February 22, 2023

Source: *Pravda.ru* (2022-2023). Retrieved from <https://english.pravda.ru/opinion/>

Once again, a quick review of the excerpts provided in Table 3 reveals that *Pravda.ru* portrays the war in Ukraine as a proxy war, depicting Ukraine as a proxy fighting on behalf of third-party actors, such as Europe, the United States, and NATO. Pragmatically, framing the war in this manner presupposes that Russia is a victim of a conspiracy and has no alternative but to defend itself and its interests against the interests of these third-party actors. Interestingly, the stance taken by *Pravda.ru* regarding the war in Ukraine aligns with a recent statement made by Russia's foreign minister, Sergei Lavrov, at an international conference in India, where he claimed that a 'war was launched against his home country.' Notably, this statement was met with laughter, indicating a lack of international consensus on this characterization. Importantly, none of the excerpts mentioned above acknowledge that Russia initiated the conflict by invading Ukrainian territories.

Framing the war against Ukraine as a proxy war serves several purposes for Russia: (a) it portrays Russia as a victim of an unforeseen conspiracy, (b) it presents Russia's actions in Ukraine as self-defense, justifying its presence, (c) it downplays criticism and accusations of violating international law, (d) it challenges the narrative that Russia initiated the war by annexing Crimea in 2014 in response to the overthrow of Viktor Yanukovich, a pro-Russian president, (e) it somehow justifies Russia's losses in Ukraine, and (f) it reinforces Russia's propaganda that Ukraine is acting on behalf of the West and NATO, making it a third-party in the conflict. Playing the victim, as described by Berrocal (2017), serves a rhetorical purpose by eliciting sympathy for one's own party and morally charging the adversary, thereby deflecting guilt and diverting attention from key issues.

In a conventional sense, by explicitly naming Ukraine, its army, and Ukrainians (associating the term 'proxy' with them) in six out of the eleven excerpts presented in Table 3, and mentioning the USA, NATO, and the West in the remaining five, *Pravda.ru* triggers a presupposition of specificity, referring to a clearly defined proxy war. According to Frege, as noted by Kadmon (2001), for a sentence to be evaluated as true, its presupposition must be assumed true. Therefore, if there were no war in Ukraine, the presupposition that 'Russia was a victim of a conspiracy' would fail, rendering the sentence undefined or indeterminate.

In conclusion, framing the events in Ukraine as a special military operation on one hand and as a proxy war on the other aims to shape perceptions distinct from framing it as an invasion. This concept aligns with the psychological notion of priming, which refers to "how information is fixed in and accessed from memory" (Pace-Sigge 2018: 22). In essence, the term 'invasion' primes recipients to activate associations like aggression, danger, death, and reduced empathy. Conversely, the phrases 'special military operation' and 'proxy war' prime recipients to activate associations like empathy, support, and patriotism. *Pravda.ru* strategically employed the phrase 'special military operation' as the prime (explicit meaning) to implicitly activate empathy, support, and patriotism among its readers. Here, empathy, support, and patriotism are the intended targets, as described by McNamara (2005)—the prime is explicit, while the target is implicit.

5.1.3. Recalling the Past

Recalling the past was a third technique used by *Pravda.ru* to construct presuppositions. The following excerpts provide clear examples of how *Pravda.ru* employed this technique:

Table 4: Statements that Link the War in Ukraine to the Past

#	Excerpts	Publishing Date
1.	As the 20th century fades into history, Ukraine is still intent on fighting [the] Soviet Union that no longer exists and reverting back to the savagery of its Nazi past.	March 4, 2022

#	Excerpts	Publishing Date
2.	Crimea was always Russian until Kruschev, a Ukrainian General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, drunkenly signed the republic to Ukraine when all parties were inside the Soviet Union.	March 20, 2022
3.	Throughout history, European nationalism institutionalized the doctrine of war as a necessary means to promote national interest and racial superiority over "the other".	April 13, 2022
4.	And as in other tragic moments in history, the behavior of European leaders is once again irrational.	April 13, 2022
5.	The emerging conflict between Russia and Ukraine involve[s] contentious issues of geography, history and ethnic animosities.	May 19, 2022
6.	Have we already forgotten the CIA rape of Russia during the 1990s? To be precise, it was the second rape in a row. The coup d'état carried out by Jewish terrorists in October 1917 can hardly be described as anything other than a rape of Mother Russia.	October 21, 2022
7.	Likewise, is [a] historical fact Crimea has been part of Russia since 1789 and the "transfer" of it to Ukraine in 1954 is dubious at best.	February 1, 2023

Source: *Pravda.ru* (2022-2023). Retrieved from <https://english.pravda.ru/opinion/>

The extracts provided above clearly illustrate how *Pravda.ru* strategically used the past (history) to influence readers' perspectives on the war against Ukraine. Pragmatically, the act of recalling the past in these excerpts presupposes that Russia's war is legitimate and justified, asserting that Russia has the right to engage in this conflict. *Pravda.ru* employed various methods to recall the past in these extracts. For instance, the second and seventh excerpts emphasized that Crimea was historically part of Russia, while the fifth portrayed the conflict between Russia and Ukraine as having deep historical roots. Additionally, the first extract accused Ukraine of having a Nazi past, while the rest of the extracts depicted the conflict as a historical struggle between Russia and the Western world (Europe and the United States). This portrayal presupposes that the conflict is rooted in ideological differences.

In a conventional sense, by explicitly mentioning Ukraine, Crimea, the CIA, and Europe, *Pravda.ru* invoked a presupposition of specificity, referring to a well-defined and distinct conflict. Intriguingly, the act of recalling past experiences during conflicts is not limited to politicians and text producers; it is a common human instinct to draw upon historical events when discussing contemporary conflicts. *Pravda.ru* may have used this technique to legitimize Russia's invasion and war against Ukraine, as well as to shape perceptions about Russia's current actions. Another possible motive could be to evoke emotions among Russians in support of the war against Ukraine, as seen in the first, third, fourth, and sixth extracts. In the first extract, *Pravda.ru* linked the conflict to Ukraine's Nazi past and its intention to confront Russia. In the third and fourth extracts, it associated the conflict with Europe's historical doctrines promoting racial superiority over Russians. Lastly, in the sixth extract, *Pravda.ru* connected the conflict to the CIA's alleged role in destabilizing Russia in the 1990s.

5.2. Structural Oppositions

The study employed structural oppositions to analyze how *Pravda.ru* portrayed the parties involved in the war in Ukraine. Structural oppositions involve pairs of concepts or expressions with opposing meanings (van Dijk 1998; Machin & Mayr 2012). While one part of the opposition may be explicitly stated, the other can often be inferred from the context. When oppositions are explicitly expressed, such as 'them versus us,' they are termed ideological squares (van Dijk 1998). Based on the analyses, *Pravda.ru* utilized various techniques to depict the parties involved in the conflict in Ukraine and establish structural oppositions.

5.2.1. Stigmatization

Erving Goffman's concept of stigma encompasses abominations related to physical appearance, blemishes of character, and tribal affiliations such as nationality, religion, race, and gender (Solanke 2017). The excerpts below, taken from the articles analyzed, demonstrate how *Pravda.ru* employed stigmatization to label the 'other' in the context of the conflict:

Table 5: Statements that Stigmatize the 'Other.'

#	Excerpts	Publishing Date
1.	Russian-speaking Ukrainians [are] being massacred by the Azov Battalion of neo-Nazis wearing Fascist insignia.	March 4, 2022
2.	What I See in Ukraine: PURE EVIL. (Headline)	April 20, 2022
3.	He [Biden] should have told Kiev that having Fascists wearing neo-Nazi insignia in the official armed forces of the country is an insult to Russia after what happened in the second world war.	March 28, 2022
	This evil [Ukraine and its allies] can and will be defeated. It will just take some time.	September 22, 2022
5.	The US also funded Islamist extremists they called "freedom fighters" in the Middle East and their equivalent Nazi militias in Ukraine.	March 18, 2022

#	Excerpts	Publishing Date
6.	Something evil will arise in Kiev, who knows what will happen in Moscow without President Putin?	September 26, 2022
7.	It [Ukraine] said it had the right to allow Fascists openly wearing Neo-Nazi insignia in its official armed forces.	April 12, 2022
8.	The globalists [Americans] want to force humanity to conform to their evil wishes.	October 13, 2022
9.	Fascists began parading in neo-Nazi uniforms using neo-Nazi insignia and were officially integrated into the official armed forces of Ukraine.	May 9, 2022
10.	We [Russians] may be in the final battle between Good and Evil.	January 17, 2023
11.	Ukraine has Fascist forces strutting around in neo-nazi uniforms with quasi-swastika insignia.	June 22, 2022
12.	The plot goes like this...Evil man [Zelensky] did Evil thing purely because of being Inherently Evil.	February 9, 2023

Source: *Pravda.ru* (2022-2023). Retrieved from <https://english.pravda.ru/opinion/>

A quick review of the extracts above (Table 5) reveals that *Pravda.ru* portrayed Zelensky and Ukrainians as fascists, Nazis, and figures of evil, employing a black-and-white narrative. Specifically, *Pravda.ru* stigmatized Zelensky and Ukrainians (referred to as "the other") as fascists and Nazis in six extracts, while characterizing them as evil in the remaining six. It is essential to note that these examples represent only a fraction of the numerous instances where *Pravda.ru* employed such tactics in its articles.

In contrast, the extracts implicitly depicted Russians and the Russian regime as virtuous, anti-fascist, and anti-Nazi. This construction of structural oppositions is a common strategy among text producers for disseminating favorable information about 'us,' spreading negative information about 'them,' suppressing positive details about 'them,' and downplaying negative information about 'us' (Oktar 2001). In essence, *Pravda.ru's* approach aligns with van Dijk's concept of constructing the 'positive self' and 'negative other' (Wodak & Meyer 2009: 29), ultimately fostering a sense of difference, as described by Hinton (2002). Stanton (2013) highlights that categorizing people into groups is the initial step in the genocidal process, often referred to as classification.

Portraying Zelensky and Ukrainians as fascists and Nazis serves several purposes for Russia: Firstly, it provides a foundation for justifying Russia's military intervention in Ukraine. The third excerpt explicitly suggests that Ukraine's army includes Nazis, which can be seen as an affront to Russia, given its history during World War II. Furthermore, the twelfth excerpt portrays the war as a plot orchestrated by an inherently evil individual, Zelensky. Secondly, it morally charges Russia's adversaries. The tenth excerpt depicts the situation in Ukraine as a moral battle between good and evil, illustrating a clear ideological dichotomy. Thirdly, as outlined by Berrocal (2017), framing Zelensky and Ukrainians as evil, Nazis, and fascists deflects guilt and diverts attention from the core issue—Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Pettersson (2019) contends that such framing amounts to hate speech. Maussen and Grillo (2014) identify three commonly agreed-upon characteristics of hate speech: (a) it typically targets a specific visible minority, group, or individual, (b) it stigmatizes the target by explicitly or implicitly attributing undesirable qualities to them, and (c) due to these negative qualities, the target is viewed as a legitimate object of hostility. Framing Zelensky and Ukrainians as legitimate targets of hostility justifies Russia's military actions against them. This also sheds light on why Russia and *Pravda.ru* describe the situation in Ukraine as a special military operation rather than a war. Importantly, the United Nations' International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) deems all communicative interactions that may incite violence or hostility as illegal and subject to prohibition by law (Pettersson 2019).

5.2.2. Recalling Religious Affiliations

Another technique employed by *Pravda.ru* to establish structural oppositions involved recalling religious affiliations. The provided excerpts from the analyzed articles illustrate the 'religion recall' technique employed by *Pravda.ru* to construct these structural oppositions.

Table 6: Statements that Recall Religious Affiliations and Terms

#	Excerpts	Publishing Date
1.	Everyone in the four corners of the Earth knows we [Russians] are dealing with the Devil.	March 28, 2022
	In fact, the Jewish state was always incredibly silent when the Ukrainian neo-Nazis paraded through the streets of Kiev with all their fine trinkets and Nazi symbols in full view.	October 3, 2022
3.	The coup d'état carried out by Jewish terrorists in October 1917 can hardly be described as anything other than a rape of Mother Russia.	October 21, 2022
4.	Last year [,] Zelensky closed several Orthodox churches he accused of plotting with Russia to overthrow his government.	January 24, 2023
5.	Even the Russian Orthodox Church faced various forms of victimization.	January 2, 2023

#	Excerpts	Publishing Date
6.	The globalists [Westerners] seek to destroy Orthodox Christianity and the true and transcendent means of ultimate freedom (given to us all from God)[,] which they despise.	August 25, 2022
7.	Everybody knows Christians don't like Satanists [Western leaders,] and we have been their enemy for 2,000 years or more.	January 17, 2023
8.	He [Zelensky] this year expanded his religious persecution to include any Church "affiliated" with Russia, presumably meaning even those [who] speak the Russian language.	January 24, 2023

Source: *Pravda.ru* (2022-2023). Retrieved from <https://english.pravda.ru/opinion/>

A thorough examination of the excerpts provided above (Table 6) reveals that *Pravda.ru* employed the "religion recall" technique to categorize Russia and its allies on one side and Ukraine and its allies on the other based on religious affiliations. *Pravda.ru's* linguistic choices aimed to associate Russia and its allies with Orthodox Churches, Russian Orthodox Church, Orthodox Christianity, Christians (Russians), and any church linked to Russia as a religious affiliation relevant to "us." In contrast, *Pravda.ru* used linguistic choices such as the Jewish state, Jewish terrorists, Satanists, and the Devil to depict Ukraine and its allies as having religious affiliations relevant to "them."

It is crucial to note that invoking religious affiliations during times of conflict and war serves several key purposes. First, it morally legitimizes Russia's war against Ukraine and its allies by framing Russia's actions as acceptable and necessary for self-defense against perceived threats such as terrorists, Satanists, and the Devil. Second, it fosters a sense of identity, belonging, unity, and solidarity among Russians by emphasizing a common religious affiliation. Third, it mobilizes support for the war among the Russian population.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study, based on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), addressed two primary research questions. Firstly, it explored how *Pravda.ru* portrayed the war in Ukraine. The findings revealed that *Pravda.ru* employed various techniques, including depicting the conflict as a "special operation," framing it as a "proxy war," and linking it to historical events. Each of these techniques aimed to shape readers' perceptions of the war in specific ways. Secondly, the study investigated how *Pravda.ru* portrayed the parties involved in the conflict. *Pravda.ru* utilized stigmatization and religious affiliations to create structural oppositions, depicting the "self" as virtuous and the "other" as evil or threatening based on these categorizations.

These findings raise significant questions regarding the prevalence of stigmatization, euphemism, victimization, historical references, and religious affiliations in conflict discourse production. Additionally, this study paves the way for further research into a Discourse-Conflict Approach (DCA) for analyzing conflict discourse. While the paper focused on the war in Ukraine and *Pravda.ru's* discourse, it solely considered two elements of analysis: presuppositions and structural oppositions. Further research is encouraged to expand on this work and offer deeper insights into the discourse dynamics of conflict-related narratives.

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