

The Crimean Conflict on Russian and Ukrainian TV

A Discourse-Theoretical Approach

Kseniia Semykina



DiscourseNet
Collaborative Working
Paper Series
no. 6 | November 2021

About the author

Kseniia Semykina is Research Assistant at Laboratory for Studies in Economic Sociology – Higher School of Economics, Moscow.

Contact: semykina.k.s@gmail.com

Discussants

This paper has received a peer commentary from Thomas Jacobs (Université Saint-Louis – Bruxelles).

About the CWPS

The DiscourseNet Collaborative Working Paper Series (CWPS) reflects ongoing research activity at the intersection of language and society in an interdisciplinary field of discourse studies. Prolonging the activities and publications of DiscourseNet, it welcomes contributions which actively engage in a dialogue across different theories of discourse, disciplines, topics, methods and methodologies.

All contributions to the CWPS are work in progress. The CWPS offers an environment for an open discussion of the drafts, reports or presentations. Authors are provided with two expert commentaries for their paper and more extensive discussions of their ideas in the context of DiscourseNet Conferences.

The CWPS seeks to provide support for the advancement and publication of the presented works. It does not inhibit further publication of the revised contribution.

For further information on the CWPS visit:

<https://discourseanalysis.net/dncwps>

© Kseniia Semykina 2021

Any reproduction, publication and reprint in the form of a different publication, whether printed or produced electronically, in whole or in part, is permitted only with the explicit written authorisation of the authors.

Typeset by David Adler

Citation

Semykina, Kseniia (2021): The Crimean Conflict on Russian and Ukrainian TV: A Discourse-Theoretical Approach, DiscourseNet Collaborative Working Paper Series, no. 6, <https://discourseanalysis.net/dncwps>.

The Crimean Conflict on Russian and Ukrainian TV

A Discourse-Theoretical Approach

Kseniia Semykina

The paper explores discourses on Russian and Ukrainian television related to the Crimean conflict of 2014. Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory serves as a theoretical framework of the study. The study contributes to academic debates on two levels: on a substantive level, it provides insights into the logic of the Crimean conflict; on the methodological level, it suggests the method of corpus-assisted semantic network analysis for empirical analysis in discourse-theoretical studies. News reports devoted to events in Crimea on a Russian TV channel *Channel 1* and a Ukrainian TV channel *Inter*, which were broadcasted from 28.02.2014 to 16.03.2014 served as empirical data for the study. In total, 390 news reports, accounting to 19 hours and 20 minutes of coverage, were analyzed. The analysis showed that the Russian channel's discourse emphasized decision-making processes in Crimea, Crimean residents and Russian-speaking population of Ukraine, as well as Ukraine's relations with the West. Ukrainian channel's discourse emphasized military actions in Crimea and Russia's involvement in the events in the region. Both sides' interpretations were based on hegemonic discursive constructions: it was anti-Westernism for the Russian discourse, and 'Russia as a potential enemy' for the Ukrainian discourse. At the methodological level, the method of corpus-assisted semantic network analysis proved useful for empirical research in a discourse-theoretical study. It allowed to analyze an extensive corpus of texts and make conclusions about prominent patterns in discourses based on parameters of semantic networks.

Keywords: discourse theory, semantic network analysis, Crimea, Russia, Ukraine

Introduction

The Crimean conflict is an important event in international politics that deserves thorough exploration. The fact that Russia undertook the annexation of Crimea, a part of the sovereign territory of Ukraine, came as a surprise to the international community. What Russian authorities framed and many Russian citizens understood as a symbol of justice and military glory, the international community perceived as a disregard of international law. Diplomatic and economic consequences followed: Russia was excluded from the G8 and economic sanctions were imposed on the country. Many argue that the Crimean conflict marked a revival of Cold-War style international relations (Allison, 2014; Black, Johns, & Theriault, 2016).

The beginning of the conflict is traced to the change of power in Kiev in February 2014, when, after several months of large-scale protests, Victor Yanukovich, the president of Ukraine at that time, fled the country. This political change caused public unrest in Crimea, as many people anticipated that the new government would impose policies they did not approve of (Azar, 2014). Later, Russian support of those opposing the new Ukrainian government became increasingly evident. On March 1, 2014, the Russian parliament gave Putin formal permission to use armed forces on Ukrainian territory. On March 16, a referendum was held in Crimea, where, as the Russian side states, 97 % of valid votes were cast in favor of Crimea joining the Russian Federation. Soon, this decision was written into Russian law, which changed the status of Crimea from an au-

onomous Ukrainian republic to a region of Russia. Ukraine condemned these actions, declaring that Crimea was still a Ukrainian region, but with a status of an occupied territory. Western countries developed a harsh position against Russia's actions, claiming the referendum legitimizing the decision to make Crimea a Russian region was unlawful.

This study considers discourses on the Crimean conflict, which appeared on Russian and Ukrainian television. Investigation of the discourses disseminated by television channels in Russia and Ukraine allows us to understand how the most-watched and trusted mass medium in both countries (FOM, 2018, p. 29; Orlova, 2016, p. 453) represented the conflict. The study was guided by the following research question: What discourses were present on Ukrainian and Russian television channels during the Crimean conflict? The theoretical framework for the analysis of these discourses is Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory. Discourse theory has received criticism based on the fact that it lacks methodological specification. Using the ideas of the Discourse-Theoretical Analysis methodology, I argue that the method of corpus-assisted, semantic network analysis is compatible with the terminology of discourse theory. It is a useful addition to how empirical studies in the discourse-theoretical framework can be conducted.

Literature Review

Scholarly explanations of the Crimean conflict, or, more generally, the Ukrainian conflict, typically focus on the influence of Russia and/or the West on the situation. Much literature is concerned with looking for a scapegoat, and the scapegoat is typically Russia (Sakwa, 2015, p. 29). All blame is put on Russia, who violated the international order and broke international law, as well as agreements with Ukraine, to promote its interests (Allison, 2014; Bebler, 2015). In reaction to this view, some scholars suggested that it was the West who provoked such actions from Russia (Desai, Freeman, & Kagarlitsky, 2016; Mearsheimer, 2014). There are also positions emphasizing the actions of both sides, tracing the origin of the conflict to structural tensions in the post-Cold War international system (Sakwa, 2015) or misperceptions of each others' positions by the West and Russia (Legvold, 2014). Some authors highlight the role of sociopolitical processes within Ukraine as partly explaining the conflict (Kiryukhin, 2016; Sakwa, 2015). This study focuses on the dynamics in the relationship between Russia and Ukraine, rather than Russia and the West during the Crimean conflict.

Some literature on the Crimean conflict is dedicated to its discursive dimension. More studies focused on the role of Russia's identity discourse. Hopf (2016), showed that the pro-Western government in Ukraine, that came to power as a result of the Euromaidan demonstrations, posed an existential threat to Russia's identity, which had to be sustained by preserving Crimea under Russian authority, even if it

meant annexing the region. Teper (2016), considered Russia's identity discourse as an instrument to achieve its political goals, rather than a cause of Russia's actions. The role of Ukraine's national identity in the conflict is seldom considered. Studies show, however, that Ukraine's identification against Russia had been an integral part of Ukraine's national project (Kiryukhin, 2016, p. 444; Sakwa, 2015, p. 51). This article focuses on the interplay between discourses in Russia and Ukraine, unlike most studies in which only one country is considered.

Mediatized discourses during the Ukrainian conflict have also received scholarly attention. Russian major mediatized narratives of the conflict were the anti-western narrative, the World War II narrative and narratives of Russian statehood. The anti-western narrative portrays the West as a threat and an aggressive enemy; the World War II narrative relates to the Great Patriotic War as a symbol of struggle against the ultimate evil of fascism; and the narrative of Russian statehood is based on the two aforementioned tropes (Hansen, 2016; Hutchings & Szostek, 2015; Khaldarova & Pantti, 2016). Ukrainian mediatized discourse during the conflict did not receive as much scholarly attention. Generally, its important feature is treating Europe as a normative ideal (Orlova, 2017). Since the European condition was understood as normal, those not supporting Eurointegration were seen as abnormal and labelled as being outside the Ukrainian identity (Baysha, 2018). In this article, I consider Ukrainian discourse during the Crimean conflict, which has been largely overlooked.

Assessing the role mediated discourses and the media, in general, played during the conflict, most researchers turn to the idea of hybrid warfare. Russia's use of media communication channels is commonly understood as a part of the hybrid military operation aimed at annexing Crimea (Darczewska, 2014; Galeotti, 2015). Pomerantsev and Weiss (2014), show that information has been weaponized by Russia, to make it serve the strategic needs of the Russian government. Ukraine's information strategy is described as defense against Russia's information warfare. Unlike Russia, who had prepared for an active information management strategy (Galeotti, 2015), Ukraine had a less developed media infrastructure at its disposal (Sienkiewich, 2016). Its major strategy was more reliant on the international advocacy network to promote its viewpoint, so a major task was to attract the attention of Western mainstream media (Sienkiewich, 2016, p. 21).

Theory

The theoretical framework for the analysis is Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's discourse theory. Seminal formulation of discourse theory is presented in their work "Hegemony and socialist strategy" (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985). Discourse theory presents, first and foremost, a social ontology: a specific vision of what the society is and what the logics are

according to which it functions. Two major characteristics of discourse theory's social ontology are the primacy of the political and the fundamental openness of the social.

Laclau and Mouffe view the political as a primary realm, in which the social is constructed and defined. As Howarth (2000, p. 104) put it, "systems of social relations, which are understood as articulated sets of discourses, are always political constructions". Politics are not viewed as one realm in which social processes take place, but as the pre-condition of formation of social boundaries and changes of these boundaries.

This is connected to the second important characteristic of Laclau and Mouffe's social ontology – the idea of fundamental openness of the social. It relates to the fact that any social formation is vulnerable to the political forces that are excluded from the current social formation (Howarth & Stavrakakis, 2000, p. 9). Contestations of social order by the excluded actors show the borders of the current discursive formation, since "no hegemonic logic can account for the totality of the social and constitute its center" (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985, p. 142).

The concept of discourse, rather evidently, serves as the key concept of discourse theory. *Discourse* is defined as "a differential and structured system of positions", a "relation totality" (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985, pp. 108–110), "a structure in which meaning is constantly negotiated and constructed" (Laclau, 1988, p. 254). Rather than denoting any particular collection of texts or speech acts, "the concept of discourse describes the ultimate *nonfixity* of anything existing in society" (Laclau, 1988, p. 254).

Discourses are comprised of *discourse moments* – signifiers or differential positions that have been articulated in a discourse (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985, p. 105). Some discourse moments gain more prominence in discourse than others. These central and prominent discourse moments can also be called *nodal points*, or "privileged discursive points" around which other discourse moments are organized to partially fix meaning (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985, pp. 112–113). Nodal points are constructed through the process of *articulation*, or "any practice establishing a relation among elements such that their identity is modified as a result of the articulatory practice" (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985, p. 105).

What accounts for changes of discursive and social formations is the existence of an irreducible *surplus of meaning*: there are always more signifiers than discourse moments that have been articulated into current formations (Torfing, 1999, p. 92). Alternative articulations and contestations of meaning are, therefore, always possible. The signifiers creating this surplus of meaning are called *discourse elements*, and they exist outside of discourses, in the *field of discursivity* (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985, p. 105). It is through articulations of discourse elements with existing discursive structures, or disarticulation of discourse moments and their moving to the field of discursivity, that changes in social structure are possible.

Methodology and Method

As noted in the previous section, Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory is a high theory, which is rather abstract, aimed mainly at formulating a specific social ontology, rather than describing a methodology that could be used for empirical analysis. Such a stance and the lack of methodological clarity, indeed, create problems for those who attempt to conduct empirical research within this theoretical tradition, which invoked methodological criticism (Carpentier and De Cleen 2007, pp. 272–273).

To overcome this issue of the original work by Laclau and Mouffe and, at the same time, leave sufficient flexibility of the conceptual framework, an approach called Discourse-Theoretical Analysis (DTA) was proposed (Carpentier and De Cleen 2007; Carpentier 2010, 2017). At the heart of transforming discourse theory into an analytical framework is the idea that concepts of discourse theory can be understood as sensitizing concepts. This way, discourse theory can be viewed as a toolbox that provides the researcher with sensitizing concepts (Carpentier & De Cleen, 2007, p. 266), as well as with the underlying social ontology and normative implications of the empirical research (Carpentier, 2010, pp. 259–260).

The analytical method proposed in this study is *corpus-assisted semantic network analysis*. It relies on corpus linguistics to navigate the textual corpora, namely, to discern the keywords that are most prominent in a discourse, and then constructs a semantic network of these keywords. Essentially, in line with DTA methodology, it treats the concepts of discourse theory as sensitizing concepts, while adding the quantitative element and the networked perspective into the analysis. To articulate this method, I use the following sensitizing concepts: discourse, articulatory practice, elements of discourse, moments of discourse, nodal points.

Corpus-assisted semantic network analysis entails the identification of two major network elements: nodes (keywords) and edges (their co-occurrences). Firstly, keywords and key phrases are identified. These keywords and phrases serve as proxies to *discourse moments*, or signifiers that were articulated in a discourse. The next step is to identify links (co-occurrences) between keywords and key phrases. I understand links as *articulations* of *discourse moments*.

To identify keywords and key phrases, two corpus-analytic tools are used. Firstly, not only separate words, but also N-Grams are identified in the analysis. A certain word can make sense only in combination with other words, so it is crucial to consider N-Grams in which a word appears. Secondly, keywords and key N-Grams are identified based on their *keyness*, or "the degree to which a word is more common in one corpus than in a comparison or reference corpus" (Subtirelu & Baker, 2017, p. 113). I used Fisher's Exact Test as a measure of keyness. Its use is recommended when some words are absent from one of the cor-

ment' is also among discourse moments closely connected to Crimea, which may indicate some attention to decision-making processes in Ukrainian discourse.

Channel 1		Inter	
Signifier	Freq.	Signifier	Freq.
Crimean referendum	62	Ukraine	35
Russia	38	Crimean referendum	29
Kiev	35	Crimean parliament	15
Ukraine	31	territory	14
adopt, accept	22	territory of Crimea	14
territory	20	Kiev	14
Sevastopol	19	military	13
Simferopol	16	continue	11
structure of Russia	16	journalist	10
the head	15	troops	10

Table 2: Most prominent articulations of the nodal point 'Crimea'.

Note: Darker cells contain different signifiers.

Channel 1		Inter	
Signifier	Freq.	Signifier	Freq.
Crimean referendum	29	Crimea	14
Crimea	14	Crimean parliament	11
Ukrainian	10	territory	11
border	8	Ukraine	10
Crimean resident	8	Crimean referendum	9
power, authorities	8	Russian	7
Russia	7	presence	6
Ukrainian authorities	7	Simferopol	5
isthmus	7	military	5
structure of Russia	7	part of Ukraine	5

Table 3: Most prominent articulations of the nodal point 'Territory of Crimea'.

Note: Darker cells contain different signifiers.

Channel 1		Inter	
Signifier	Freq.	Signifier	Freq.
Crimea	38	Ukrainian	13
Crimean referendum	24	Crimea	9
entity, subject	17	frequency	7
Ukraine	16	territory of Crimea	7
reunification	12	military man	6
for reunification	12	ship	6
composition	10	TV channel	5
citizen	10	to support	5
Black Sea fleet	10	negotiations	5
structure of Ukraine	10	Ukraine	4

Table 4: Most prominent articulations of the nodal point 'Russia', 'Russian'.

Note: Darker cells contain different signifiers.

Table 3 shows articulations with the nodal point 'territory of Crimea'. Common articulations of Crimean territory in both discourses include 'Crimean referendum', 'Crimea', 'Russia', 'Ukraine', 'Ukrainian'. These are generally important nodal points for both discourses. It is more interesting to consider the differences. Importantly, in Russian discourse, 'Crimean resident' appears in connection to the territory of Crimea. Residents are granted importance in this discourse. In the discourse of the Ukrainian channel, again, military aspects are emphasized with the signifiers of 'military' and 'presence'. 'Crimean parliament' is also rather central, again, as some attention is paid to the decision-making processes in the region. 'Part of Ukraine' is also among the signifiers most connected to 'territory of Crimea'. This might be used to emphasize that Crimea is Ukrainian territory and Russia's actions in the region are illegitimate.

Table 4 shows articulations of the signifier 'Russia, Russian'. To consider articulation specific to Russian discourse, 'Russia' is connected to signifiers '(for) reunification', 'entity, subject', 'structure', 'structure of Ukraine'. All of them relate to claims to the territory of Crimea. The Black Sea fleet is also important in connection to Russia, and it is a case when military topics are discussed in Russian discourse. The Ukrainian channel emphasized signifiers 'military man', 'ship', likely to be about military actions and the Russian fleet.

Table 5 presents articulations with the nodal points 'Ukraine', 'Ukrainian'. In Russian discourse, the signifier 'Western' appears closely connected to Ukraine. This relates to the importance of the West in Russian public discourse and points to the presence of the anti-Western narrative (Hutchings & Szostek, 2015; Khaldarova & Pantti, 2016), during the Crimean conflict. The signifier of 'Russian-speaking population' is also important to the Russian

Channel 1		Inter – 'Ukraine'		Inter – 'Ukrainian'	
Signifier	Freq.	Signifier	Freq.	Signifier	Freq.
Crimea	31	Crimea	35	Russian	13
Russia	16	Constitution	11	ship	10
Russian-speaking population	10	territory of Crimea	10	(military) unit	9
Ministry of Internal Affairs	9	Ministry of Defence	8	Crimea	9
Western	9	Crimean referendum	8	sailor	8
Kiev	8	troops	8	Ukraine	7
Crimean referendum	8	territory	7	Ukrainian Naval Forces	6
power	7	Ukrainian	7	TV channel	6
autonomy	6	Sevastopol	7	territory	6
border	6	decision, solution	6	border guard	6

Table 5: Most prominent articulations of the nodal point 'Ukraine', 'Ukrainian'.

Note: Darker cells contain different signifiers.

articulation of Ukraine. This probably relates to the Russian ‘compatriots abroad’ policy (Laruelle, 2015), which scholars have understood as Russia’s soft-power influence on other regions (Sergunin & Karabeshkin, 2015). For the discourse of the Ukrainian channel, signifiers related to military actions are again important: ‘Ministry of Defense’, ‘troops’, ‘(military) unit’, ‘Ukrainian Naval Forces’.

To sum up, after the analysis of the semantic networks, top-10 nodal points, and articulations of some of the nodal points in the two discourses, we could observe major trends within discourses on the Russian and Ukrainian channels. *Channel 1* gave importance to decision-making processes in Crimea to the residents of Crimea. The Russian-speaking population of Ukraine was also important for the Russian channel. The role of the West was emphasized in relation to Ukraine. *Inter* emphasized mostly military actions in Crimea, decision-making processes were also given some attention. It also emphasized Crimea as Ukrainian territory, violence against journalists, and blocking of Ukrainian TV channels broadcasting.

Discussion

The findings of this study on the nature of discourses on Crimean conflict support a certain version of how the conflict unfolded. The Russian channel’s discourse paid a lot of attention to the processes and attitudes inside Crimea, as the decision-making processes in Crimea illustrate. The Russian-speaking population of Ukraine was also important in the discourse. This way, *Channel 1* could be perceived as presenting the position of those who care about the region and its residents. Since the coverage of events on the channel is likely to be in line with the Russian state’s position (Schimpfossel & Yablokov, 2014), Crimean residents could be prone to seeing Russian authorities as caring for them. It is rather clear that it was not only concerned about the population which motivated Russian authorities to act in the way that they did. Russia had military interests in the region and interest towards Russian speakers in Ukraine is part of the Russian ‘compatriots abroad’ policy (Laruelle, 2015; Sergunin & Karabeshkin, 2015). Yet the interest towards the people was articulated in Russian discourse, which was likely to attract their sympathy towards Russia’s position.

In the discourse of the Ukrainian channel, the interests of the people and the region were not central. Neither were the interests of the Russian-speaking population. This is in line with the fact that, after the former president, Victor Yanukovich, fled the country and new authorities came to power in Kiev, “the Parliament of Ukraine voted to abolish the law granting Russian the status of official language in several Southeastern regions of Ukraine, heavily populated by ethnic Russians” (Baysha, 2017, p. 4). The vote did not result in adopting the new legislation due to mass protests, but it was perceived by Russian-speaking people in these

regions as disregarding their interests. In this situation, it was likely that people in Crimea expressed more sympathy towards the discourse on Russian television since it addressed their interests to a larger extent than Ukrainian discourse did.

An important topic in the discourse of the Ukrainian channel was Russian involvement in the events happening in Crimea, especially military involvement. This vision of the events in Crimea seems to be based on the image of Russia as Ukraine’s antagonist (Kiryukhin, 2016). The danger of this narrative lies in the fact that it presents partly internal conflicts – tensions about the political rights of the Crimean authorities and language policy – as international. In this logic, regular people and power elites who do not agree with the authorities in Kiev could be seen as influenced by another state and serving their interests. In a strong form, this logic entails that either you agree with the center or you are a potential pro-Russian separatist. It leads to the inability to distinguish between those against central policies, but support no separatism, and those who wish a region seceded from the state.

The narrative of the Russian threat, as a primary cause of the events in Crimea, could lead to the perception of the new Crimean authorities as separatists and rebels against the new Ukrainian government. The new power elite in Kiev launched criminal investigations against them, even though the new Crimean authorities stated on several occasions that they did not intend to secede and join Russia, but to discuss the possibility of widening the scope of questions the autonomy’s authorities could decide for themselves (“Krym ne sobiraetsya...”, 2014; “Krym ne vynashivaet planov...”, 2014). Another argument for the idea that the Crimean authorities did not intend to secede from the onset is the fact that the referendum was first scheduled for May and talked only about the political rights of the region without mentioning secession. It was rescheduled to March with a question about secession from Ukraine, only after harsh gestures from the central government. Thus, the author agrees with Richard Sakwa’s statement that “timely concessions over the Russian language, federalization, and other core long-term demands may have been enough to avert the region’s secession” (Sakwa, 2015, p. 157). Indeed, the unwillingness of the center to negotiate with Crimea seems to be an important dynamic in the conflict over the status of Crimea.

The analysis above does not intend to deny the fact that the Russian military operation in Crimea took place; it obviously did (Galeotti, 2015; Sakwa, 2015, p. 157). However, looking only at this aspect of what was happening is not enough to understand the whole picture. Such a view of the events blames external forces instead of taking seriously the part of the conflict that is internal, and that the Ukrainian authorities have more influence over. Baysha (2017, p. 4), has made a similar argument about the insurgencies in Donetsk and Luhansk regions, which escalated in April 2014: “the roots of the insurgency were local, despite its co-opting by Russia for its own geopolitical interests.”

The notion of the field of discursivity makes possible the analysis of alternatives to the discourses which were articulated during the conflict. Ukrainian discourse could have articulated the interests of the Crimean people and authorities. Could it look beyond the image of Russia as an enemy influencing the events in Crimea, it may have been possible to consider why Russia's support was so attractive for people and acknowledge their needs which had not been fulfilled. Moreover, the Ukrainian channel's discourse did not articulate the West as an important actor in the conflict, although it does seem like an important one. For instance, several representatives from Western countries visited the Maidan demonstrations in Kiev (Black & Plekhanov, 2016, p. 239), which then led to the ousting of Yanukovich. On December 11, Victoria Nuland, the US Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian affairs, together with the US Ambassador to Ukraine, Geoffrey Pyatt, famously distributed cookies and pastries to the protesters and the police in a symbolic act of support for a peaceful resolution of the conflict (Black & Plekhanov, 2016, p. 239). Baysha (2017), also shows that the President of the US, Barack Obama, simplified the reality significantly, when claiming that all Ukrainian people supported the Maidan protests and the political course for Europeanization¹. In Russian discourse, the relations between Ukraine and the West were a prominent topic. Of course, Russia's anti-western narrative, at times, exaggerates the influence the West has over Ukraine, but it may also not be correct to disregard this influence completely.

In the Russian channel's discourse, Russia's military actions in Crimea did not hold a prominent position. An alternative would be clear statements about Russia's military interests in Crimea. Also, Russian discourse could de-emphasize the relation of the new Ukrainian authorities and the West. It is clear that they had at least some legitimacy among the Ukrainian population, especially among those supporting the Maidan agenda, and the change of power was not a result of the sheer influence of the West.

It is easier to suggest these alternatives than to realize them because the discourses which guided the perception of the conflict were, to a large extent, hegemonic. As for the Russian side, according to current 'rules of the game' in the sphere of military operations, it is unconventional to openly talk about military interests in a region. Since the 'war-as-a-last-resort' narrative is hegemonic in current global politics (Carpentier, 2017b, p. 27), this could also mean the authorities saw this military operation as the only course of action in this situation. Negotiations with the new authorities were not considered as an option. One reason for that could be the perception that they were under the influence of the West, which has been seen as a threat and an aggressive enemy (Khaldarova & Pantti, 2016, p. 5). This image of the West is part of a hegemonic discursive construction, closely

related to the current nation-building project in Russia (Hutchings & Szostek, 2015, p. 178).

For the Ukrainian side, looking beyond the hegemony of the image of Ukraine as a nation, based on the Ukrainian language, in which Russia is imagined as an antagonist and the oppressor of Ukrainian culture throughout history (Kiryukhin, 2016, p. 444), is not an easy task. As the conflict's logic shows, the 'oppressor-other' can be transformed into an 'enemy-other'.

The presented view of the conflict is somewhat in line with the ideas of Legvold (2014), who explained the dynamic of the conflict by the fact that misperceptions of each side's position by the other side took place². What this analysis adds to this position is that these misperceptions are based on hegemonic discourses. This makes the situation particularly difficult to overcome since hegemony is, by definition, "a dominant horizon of social orientation" (Torfing, 1999, p. 101), beyond which it is hard to look. Given this situation, uncovering the working of hegemonic discourses and suggesting alternatives, even if they seem unrealistic under current hegemonies, is an important task for researchers.

Conclusion

This study adds to the literature emphasizing the discursive dimension of the Crimean conflict. Moreover, it draws attention to the mediated discourse on the Crimean conflict in Ukraine, which has been, to a large extent, overlooked in the existing literature. The study generated systematic data on discourses on the Crimean conflict specifically, while previous studies mostly considered larger time frames and paid only partial attention to the conflict.

The study has shown that the residents of Crimea, as well as Russian-speaking citizens of Ukraine in general, and the decision-making processes in Crimea were important for the discourse on the Russian TV channel. These topics were not among the central ones in the discourse on the Ukrainian channel. It is likely to have been an important cause of sympathy with the Russian position among the Crimean population. Ukrainian discourse emphasized military actions and Russian influence on the situation in the region. The overreliance on the 'Russia as enemy' narrative (Kiryukhin, 2016), could be one reason why the authorities, who came to power after the Revolution of Dignity in Kiev, refused to negotiate with the new Crimean, pro-Russian authorities, and brought criminal charges against them instead. This narrative could also contribute to the growing perception of the conflict as an international one, rather than a conflict between local and federal authorities inside Ukraine. Russian discourse also emphasized the connection

1 So did Vladimir Putin in his speeches on the Ukrainian crisis, although his construction was different.

2 The author talked about the dynamics between Russia and Western countries, but in my view the same logic can be applied to the communication between Russian and Ukrainian authorities during the conflict.

of the West to the events in Ukraine, which points to the presence of an anti-Western narrative that is characteristic of Russian discourse (Hutchings & Szostek, 2015).

This interpretation of the conflict is in line with the position that the conflict was largely a result of misinterpretation of each other's positions by the sides (Legvold, 2014, although he considered only the 'Russia vs. the West' dimension). The discourse-theoretical perspective allows adding the concept of hegemony to the picture. The sides could hardly manage the conflict, because each was under the influence of a hegemonic discourse: for Russia, the hegemonic discourse was anti-Westernism, and Ukrainian discourse saw Russia as a potential enemy. It is hard to imagine alternatives to hegemonies since they represent horizons of social imagination. This makes studies deconstructing hegemonic discourses a particularly important task.

It is also important to note that the method applied in the study and the design of the study have their limitations. The issue of synonyms detection and problems of interpretation of some semantic network fragments are common to approaches dealing with natural language texts computationally. In a similar vein, topic modeling has been compared to "reading tea leaves" (Chang, Boyd-Graber, Garrish, Wang, & Blei, 2009). An alternative would be to rely on the researcher's judgment to identify patterns within a discourse, which also has its drawbacks. Also, the Ukrainian channel, analyzed in the study, broadcasted most content in Russian. Since language use has a political meaning in Ukraine (Charnysh, 2013; Kulyk, 2010), the results of this study cannot be generalized to all Ukrainian television discourse. Whether the same discursive patterns can be found in journalistic texts produced in the Ukrainian language remains a question for future research.

Acknowledgements

This article is an output of a research project implemented as part of the Basic Research Program at the National Research University Higher School of Economics (HSE).

References

- Allison, R. (2014). Russian 'deniable' intervention in Ukraine: How and why Russia broke the rules. *International Affairs*, 90(6), 1255–1297. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2346.12170>
- Azar, I. (2014, February 27). Poluraspad poluoostrova. Kak Krym soprotivlyaetsya ukrainskoy revolyutsii: Reportazh 'Lenty.ru'. Retrieved from Lenta.ru website: <https://lenta.ru/articles/2014/02/27/crimea/>
- Baker, P. (2006). *Using corpora in discourse analysis*. A&C Black.
- Baker, P., Hardie, A., & McEnery, T. (2006). *A glossary of corpus linguistics*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Baysha, O. (2017). Synecdoche that kills: How Barack Obama and Vladimir Putin constructed different Ukraines for different ends. *International Communication Gazette*, 80(3), 1–20.
- Baysha, O. (2018). *Miscommunicating social change: Lessons from Russia and Ukraine*. Lanham, Boulder, New York, London: Lexington Books.
- Bebler, A. (2015). Crimea and the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. *Romanian Journal of European Affairs*, (15), 35–54.
- Black, J. L., Johns, M., & Theriault, A. (Eds.). (2016). *The Return of the Cold War: Ukraine, the West and Russia*. London; New York, NY: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group.
- Black, J. L., & Plekhanov, S. (2016). Chronology of Key Events to Minsk II. In J. L. Black, M. Johns, & A. Theriault (Eds.), *The Return of the Cold War: Ukraine, the West and Russia* (pp. 238–279). London; New York, NY: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group.
- Bolshakova, O., Voloshenyuk, O., Hoyan, O., Ivanov, V., Kotozhynska, T., Kulakov, A., Moroz V., Romashko K., Rizun V., Rozkladay I., Khomenok, O. (2012). *Ukrainian media landscape*. Konrad Adenauer Schiftung.
- Carpentier, N. (2010). Deploying discourse theory. An introduction to discourse theory and discourse theoretical analysis. *Media and Communication Studies Interventions*, 251–266.
- Carpentier, N. (2017a). Discourse-Theoretical Analysis (DTA). In J. Flowerdew & J. E. Richardson (Eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Critical Discourse Studies* (pp. 272–284). Taylor & Francis.
- Carpentier, N. (2017b). *The Discursive-Material Knot. Cyprus in Conflict and Community Media Participation*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Carpentier, N., & De Cleen, B. (2007). Bringing discourse theory into media studies: The applicability of discourse theoretical analysis (DTA) for the study of media practices and discourses. *Journal of Language and Politics*, 6(2), 265–293.
- Chang, J., Boyd-Graber, J. L., Garrish, S., Wang, C., & Blei, D. M. (2009). Reading Tea Leaves: How Humans Interpret Topic Models. *Advances in neural information processing systems*, 288–296.
- Charnysh, V. (2013). Analysis of current events: Identity mobilization in hybrid regimes: Language in Ukrainian politics. *Nationalities Papers*, 41(1), 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00905992.2012.750288>
- Darczewska, J. (2014). *The anatomy of Russian information warfare: The Crimean operation, a case study*. Ośrodek Studiów Wschodnich im. Marka Karpia.
- Desai, R., Freeman, A., & Kagarlitsky, B. (2016). The Conflict in Ukraine and Contemporary Imperialism. *International Critical Thought*, 6(4), 489–512. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21598282.2016.1242338>
- Dutsyk, D. (2010). Media ownership structure in Ukraine: Political aspects. *Public Service Broadcasting: A German-Ukrainian Exchange of Opinions*. Eds. Khabyuk, Kops. Conference Papers, University of Cologne, 29–40.
- FOM. (2018, November 22). About the media and journalists. Retrieved November 30, 2018, from FOM database website: http://bd.fom.ru/report/map/dominant/dom_4618/d461809?pk_vid=6f26c0b8cf39ce4115435263804ceac2.
- Galeotti, M. (2015). 'Hybrid War' and 'Little Green Men': How It Works, and How It Doesn't. In A. Pikulicka-Wilczewska & R. Sakwa (Eds.), *Ukraine and Russia: People, Politics, Propaganda and Perspectives* (pp. 149–156). Bristol, UK: E-international Relations Publishing.
- Hansen, F. S. (2016). Mediatized Warfare in Russia: Framing the Annexation of Crimea. In M. Pantti (Ed.), *Media and the Ukraine Crisis: Hybrid Practices and Narratives of Conflict* (pp. 89–106). New York: Peter Lang.
- Hopf, T. (2016). 'Crimea is ours': A discursive history. *International Relations*, 30(2), 227–255.
- Howarth, D. (2000). *Concepts in Social Sciences. Discourse*. Open University Press.
- Howarth, D., & Stavrakakis, Y. (2000). Introducing discourse theory and political analysis. In D. Howarth, A. Norval, & Y. Stavrakakis (Eds.), *Discourse Theory and Political Analysis: Identities, Hegemonies and Social Change* (pp. 1–23). Manchester University Press.
- Hutchings, S., & Szostek, J. (2015). Dominant narratives in Russian political and media discourse during the Ukraine crisis. In A. Piculicka-Wilczewska & R. Sakwa (Eds.), *Ukraine and Russia: People, Politics, Propaganda and Perspectives* (pp. 173–186). Bristol, UK: E-international Relations Publishing.
- Khaldarova, I., & Pantti, M. (2016). Fake News: The narrative battle over the Ukrainian conflict. *Journalism Practice*, 10(7). <https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2016.1163237>

- Kiryukhin, D. (2016). Russia and Ukraine: The clash of conservative projects. *European Politics and Society*, 17(4), 438–452.
- Krym ne sobiraetsya otsoedinyat'sya ot Ukrainy, – Vladimir Konstantinov [Crimea is not going to secede from Ukraine—Vladimir Konstantinov]. (2014, February 28). Retrieved from The Website of the Supreme Council of the Crimean republic website: http://crimea.gov.ru/news/28_02_14_9
- Krym ne vynashivaet planov po prisoedineniyu k Rossii, – deputat VS ARK Ol'ga Kovitidi [Crimea does not plan to join Russia—Deputy of the Supreme Council of Crimea Ol'ga Kovitidi]. (2014, February 28). Retrieved from The Website of the Supreme Council of the Crimean republic website: http://crimea.gov.ru/news/28_02_14_3
- Kulyk, V. (2010). Ideologies of language use in post-Soviet Ukrainian media. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, 2010(201). <https://doi.org/10.1515/ijsl.2010.005>
- Laclau, E. (1988). Metaphor and social antagonisms. *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, 249–57.
- Laclau, E., & Mouffe, C. (1985). *Hegemony and socialist strategy: Towards a radical democratic politics*. London: Verso.
- Laruelle, M. (2015). Russia as a 'Divided nation,' from compatriots to Crimea: A contribution to the discussion on nationalism and foreign policy. *Problems of Post-Communism*, 62(2), 88–97.
- Legvold, R. (2014). Managing the new Cold War: What Moscow and Washington can learn from the last one. *Foreign Affairs*, 93(4), 74–84.
- Mearsheimer, J. J. (2014). Getting Ukraine Wrong. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://nyti.ms/1dUeUQa>
- Novikova, L. (2014, October 29). SMI i doverie k ukrainskim i rossiyskim SMI. Retrieved from KIIS: Kiev International Institute of Sociology website: <http://www.kiis.com.ua/?lang=rus&cat=reports&id=425&page=2&y=2014>
- Oates, S. (2006). *Television, democracy, and elections in Russia*. London: Routledge.
- Orlova, D. (2016). Ukrainian media after the EuroMaidan: In search of independence and professional identity. *Publizistik*, 61(4), 441–461.
- Orlova, D. (2017). 'Europe' as a Normative Model in the Mediatized Discourse of Ukrainian Political Elites. *Europe-Asia Studies*, 69(2), 222–241.
- Pomerantsev, P., & Weiss, M. (2014). *The menace of unreality: How the Kremlin weaponizes information, culture and money*. Institute of Modern Russia New York.
- Russian National Corpus. (2017). Retrieved from <http://www.ruscorpora.ru/en/index.html>
- Ryabinska, N. (2014). Media Capture in Post-Communist Ukraine: Actors, Methods, and Conditions. *Problems of Post-Communism*, 61(2), 46–60. <https://doi.org/10.2753/PPC1075-8216610204>
- Sakwa, R. (2015). *Frontline Ukraine: Crisis in the borderlands*. IB Tauris.
- Schimpfoss, E., & Yablokov, I. (2014). Coercion or conformism? Censorship and self-censorship among Russian media personalities and reporters in the 2010s. *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization*, 22(2), 295–311.
- Sergunin, A., & Karabeshkin, L. (2015). Understanding Russia's soft power strategy. *Politics*, 35(3–4), 347–363.
- Sienkiewich, M. (2016). Open Source Warfare. The Role of User-Generated Content in the Ukrainian Conflict Media Strategy. In M. Pantti (Ed.), *Media and the Ukraine Crisis: Hybrid Practices and Narratives of Conflict* (pp. 19–34). New York: Peter Lang.
- Subtirelu, N. C., & Baker, P. (2017). Corpus-based approaches. In J. Flowerdew & J. E. Richardson (Eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Critical Discourse Studies* (pp. 106–119). Taylor & Francis.
- Szostek, J. (2014). The media battles of Ukraine's EuroMaidan. *Digital Icons*, 11, 1–19.
- Telegraph View. (2014, March 18). Russia's crime in Crimea must not go unpunished. Retrieved from <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/vladimir-putin/10705820/Russias-crime-in-Crimea-must-not-go-unpunished.html>
- Teper, Y. (2016). Official Russian identity discourse in light of the annexation of Crimea: National or imperial? *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 32(4), 378–396. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1060586X.2015.1076959>
- Torring, J. (1999). *New Theories of Discourse: Laclau, Mouffe and Žižek* (Blackwell Publishing Ltd.). Hoboken, NJ.
- Vartanova, E. (2012). The Russian Media Model in the Context of Post-Soviet Dynamics. In D. C. Hallin & P. Mancini (Eds.), *Comparing media systems beyond the western world* (2nd ed, pp. 119–142). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Volkov, D., & Goncharov, S. (2014). Rossiyskiy medialandshaft: Televidenie, pressa, Internet [Russian media landscape: Television, the press, the Internet]. Report of Levada Center. Retrieved from <http://www.levada.ru/old/books/stal-dostupen-otchet-rossiiskii-media-landshaft-televidenie-pressa-internet>