

## WORLD LEADERS' RHETORIC AS A MARKER OF THEIR STANCE ON UKRAINE WAR

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Language has always been a powerful tool in the world of politics and diplomacy. Public statements delivered by world leaders both define the developments on the global arena and reflect expectations of voters in their home countries. In times of crisis, the weight of what people of power say increases considerably and has an immediate impact on the state of things in the world. Since Russia annexed Crimea and started a war in the East of Ukraine in 2014, it can be seen how political statements of the world leaders and diplomats have mirrored their stance on the aggression and the aggressor. This article analyzes the language of the public statements delivered by the US President Joe Biden, the UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson, the German Chancellor Olaf Scholz and the French President Emmanuel Macron at two time points – in February-March 2022, shortly after Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine, and in May 2022, after the world had seen the atrocities committed by the aggressor. The aim of the analysis was to find linguistic evidence for the popular opinion about the uneven stance of the leaders of the United States, the UK, Germany and France towards Russia and personally Putin in the context of Ukraine war and to see whether the language data confirmed a change in this stance over the first four months of the war. Two statements of each leader, pronounced one early in the war and the other later, in May, were analyzed specifically with the aim to track a change (if any) in their evaluative language. As a result of the analysis of the four leaders' evaluative references to the aggressor in their speeches, it has been confirmed that, firstly, the overall verbal evaluation of Russia's invasion of Ukraine grew more negative over the first four months of the war and, secondly, the verbal stance of the leaders of the four countries on Russia's and personally Putin's actions in Ukraine varies in terms of its critical intensity and identification of the aggressor. The conducted research also fully confirmed the role of language in marking political stances.

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## РИТОРИКА СВІТОВИХ ЛІДЕРІВ ЯК ПОКАЗНИК ЇХНЬОГО СТАВЛЕННЯ ДО ВІЙНИ В УКРАЇНІ

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**Ключові слова:** мова політики, промови, оцінна лексика, оцінне мовлення, політична позиція, агресія Росії проти України, ідентифікація агресора.

Мова завжди була і є потужним інструментом у царині міжнародної політики та дипломатії. Публічні заяви світових лідерів визначають розвиток подій на світовій арені, формують міжнародний порядок денний та відображають очікування виборців у їхніх країнах. У кризові часи вага того, що говорять політичні лідери, значно зростає і чинить безпосередній вплив на ситуацію у світі. Відколи Росія у 2014 році анексувала Крим і розв'язала війну на Сході України, можна прослідкувати, як політичні заяви світових лідерів і дипломатів віддзеркалювали їхню позицію щодо агресії та агресора. У цій статті аналізується мова публічних заяв президента Сполучених Штатів Америки Джо Байдена, прем'єр-міністра Великої Британії Бориса Джонсона, канцлера Німеччини Олафа Шольца та президента Франції Еммануеля Макрона, з якими вони виступили в лютому – березні 2022 року, незабаром після того, як Росія почала своє повномасштабне вторгнення в Україну, і в травні 2022 року, коли світ побачив жахливі злочини, скоєні агресором. Мета аналізу полягала в тому, щоб знайти лінгвістичні докази поширеної думки про певну неоднаковість позицій лідерів Сполучених Штатів Америки, Великої Британії, Німеччини та Франції щодо Росії та особисто Путіна в контексті війни в Україні та перевірити, чи підтверджують мовні дані еволюцію їхніх позицій протягом перших чотирьох місяців війни. Автором проаналізовані по дві промови кожного із зазначених лідерів з метою простеження змін в їхньому оцінному мовленні. У результаті здійсненого аналізу оцінних висловлювань чотирьох лідерів щодо агресора підтверджено, що, по-перше, загальна вербальна оцінка вторгнення Росії в Україну протягом перших чотирьох місяців війни стала більш негативною, а по-друге, відображена у промовах позиція лідерів чотирьох країн щодо дій Росії та особисто Путіна в Україні відрізняється ступенем критичності та ідентифікації агресора. Проведене дослідження також повністю підтвердило роль мови у визначенні політичних позицій.

**Problem statement.** Language has always been an essential instrument of international diplomacy. Language and language choice affect people's views on politics, their views and evaluations of others, and how they make decisions [1, p. 2].

A critical analysis of diplomatic language can give us an understanding of both the explicit and implicit messages sent out by world leaders. Since 24 February 2022, people in Ukraine and worldwide have been particularly attentive to what presidents and prime ministers of the leading world powers say about Ukraine war and how they position themselves towards the aggressor. In the time of the greatest

crisis on the European continent since World War II, the words of world leaders once again, as in the time of Churchill and Roosevelt, have gained a particular weight, for millions becoming either a source of endurance, hope and the feeling of unitedness, or on the contrary, disappointment and irritation. What and how global policy-makers have publicly communicated about the war in Ukraine has redefined the geopolitical landscape, and in more immediate, and often awfully painful, terms, impacted the military and humanitarian situation. Also, the key statements on Ukraine war delivered by the four major leaders of the free world, Joe Biden,

Boris Johnson, Olaf Scholz and Emmanuel Macron, have both echoed and fuelled public opinion in their countries, making their rhetoric a significant point of reference in their voters' eyes. A number of factors – the leaders' personal ambitions and principles, their political commitments, awareness of the public opinion in their home countries, and others – seem to explain certain differences in their verbal assessment of the situation and the way it has evolved since the start of the war. In fact, the verbal stance of the four leaders regarding Putin's aggression, no less than their actions, have placed them on a ranking scale of Ukraine's supporters both in expert assessment and in the minds of common people.

In view of its impact on the global situation, the major political players' rhetoric in the time of today's crisis calls for linguistic research, which is to give evidence on how the language plays its part in the new reality emerging from Putin's invasion.

#### **Analysis of recent research and publications.**

Adrian Beard emphasized the key role of the language in political discourse, writing that "language is ... a means of presenting and shaping argument" [2, p. 18]. In his book "The Language of Politics" he looks at how politicians describe their political stances and analyzes characteristic linguistic features of political speeches. He argues that "when analysing the language of a political text ... it is important to look at the way the language reflects the ideological position of those who created it" [ibid.].

Nick Stanko in [3] writes that "the use of language in diplomacy is of major importance, since language is not a simple tool, vehicle for transmission of thoughts, or instrument of communication, but very often the very essence of the diplomatic vocation" [3, p. 39].

V. Skriabina in [4] studied the linguistic aspects of persuasion in diplomatic discourse, underlining the point that if earlier this communication was supposed to be predominantly neutral, with the personal, subjective touch reduced to the minimum, today, under the influence of social and political changes, the diplomatic discourse is getting more aggressive and expressive [4, p. 267].

Diplomatic language as a reflection of a political stance regarding the conflict in Eastern Ukraine was the subject of research in [5]. The analysis of the speeches delivered at an UN Security Council meeting on the situation in eastern Ukraine results in a conclusion that "any cases of deliberate emotionality, explicit evaluation of other participants' actions and deviation from diplomatic impartiality and ambiguity cannot be considered accidental and are meant to signal the speaker's distinctive position on the agenda" [5, p. 183].

**The research goal and tasks.** The goal of this research is to find linguistic evidence for the often-claimed uneven stance of the leaders of the US,

the UK, Germany and France towards Russia and personally Putin in the context of the war in Ukraine and to see whether and how this stance evolved over the first four months of the war in terms of the leaders' evaluative language. To achieve this goal, two hypotheses were formulated and verified:

H1. The overall verbal evaluation of Russia's and personally Putin's actions in Ukraine by the leaders of the four countries grew more negative over the first four months of the war.

H2. The verbal stance of the leaders of the four countries on Russia's and personally Putin's actions in Ukraine varies in terms of its critical intensity and identification of the aggressor.

**The object of the research** is Joe Biden's, Boris Johnson's, Olaf Scholz's and Emmanuel Macron's verbal evaluation of Russia's and Putin's war against Ukraine as expressed in their major statements on situation in Ukraine delivered in February-March and May 2022. Two statements of each leader, pronounced one early in the war and the other later, in May, were analyzed specifically with the aim to track a change (if any) in their evaluative language.

**The focus of the research** was on the vocabulary used by the leaders of the four countries to characterize Russia's and Putin's actions in Ukraine, specifically, its placement on the positive-neutral-negative scale and connotation intensity. Besides, the speeches were analyzed in terms of how explicitly the speakers identify the aggressor.

**Research material.** For the initial stage of the war, the following four speeches were analyzed: Joe Biden's speech delivered on 26 March in the Royal Castle in Warsaw [6], Boris Johnson's speech of 1 March in Poland [7], Olaf Scholz's statement on 27 February in the Bundestag [8] and Emmanuel Macron's address to the nation on 2 March [9]. The May speeches are Joe Biden's Remarks on the Security Assistance to Ukraine pronounced in Troy, Alabama on 3 May [10], Boris Johnson's address to the Verkhovna Rada on 3 May [11], Olaf Scholz's video address on 8 May commemorating World War II [12] and Emmanuel Macron's speech at the closing ceremony of the Conference on the Future of Europe on 9 May [13].

**Research methods.** The first hypothesis was verified with the help of a word cloud generator, a popular tool used for textual data visualization. Words and phrases used by the four leaders in conjunction with the lexemes "Russia", "Russian", "Putin", "Kremlin" and "Moscow" were fed into a word cloud generator, which produced two word clouds visualizing the verbal evaluation of the aggressor at the beginning of the war and three months later. Only references which can be marked as positive or negative were included, the neutral ones were ignored.

To verify the second hypothesis, we relied on semantic and contextual analysis, which allowed us to arrange these words and phrases along an evaluative axis, marking them as positive, neutral or negative – individually for each of the four speakers.

It is necessary to point out that for the purpose of this study the original English vocabulary of Joe Biden's and Boris Johnson's speeches had to be put on the same level with Olaf Scholz's and Emmanuel Macron's translated words originally delivered in German and French. The possibility of such approach, in our view, is due to the assumption that the translation is supposed to carry the same connotations as the original word.

**Results and discussion.** Figures 1 and 2 below present two visualizations generated for Joe Biden's, Boris Johnson's, Olaf Scholz's and Emmanuel Macron's verbal evaluation of Russia's aggression against Ukraine as delivered in their statements in February-March and May 2022, respectively.

Figures 1 and 2 show that the references to Russia and Putin in May are visibly more negative compared to those in February-March. The word *aggression* takes the central position signifying its prominence. The next word in frequency in May speeches is *atrocities*, which was not used by the speakers at the beginning of the war. Another heavyweight is the phrase *war crimes*. The new references emerging in May are noticeably more severe in their criticism – *murderous*, *murdering*, *unspeakable crimes*, *barbaric*, *atrocious*, *grotesque and illegal campaign*, *deranged imperialist revanchism*, *tyranny*, *historic folly*, *terrible mistake*. Also, in May speeches, we no longer see any positive references present at the beginning of the war, aimed at separating Russia as a nation from its leadership – *great people* and *great country and civilization*. Thus,

the comparison of the two visualizations confirms the first hypothesis that the overall verbal evaluation of Russia's and personally Putin's actions in Ukraine by the leaders of the four countries grew more negative over the first four months of the war.

Having analyzed the speeches of the leaders of the US, the UK, Germany and France, we noticed that each of them shows certain characteristic vocabulary markers.

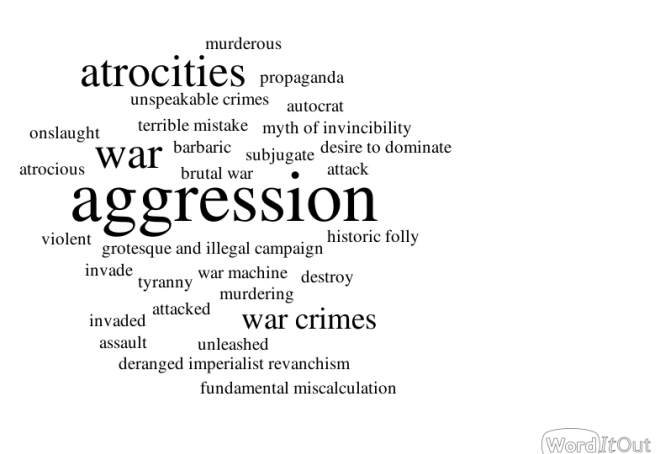
*Joe Biden.* When referring to Putin and his actions in Ukraine, Joe Biden recurrently uses the words *brute*, *brutal* and *brutality*. Characteristically, the US President does not draw a line between Russia and Putin's regime – in his Warsaw speech he says that “Russia ... invaded neighboring nations”, “Russia was bent on violence from the start”. In fact, at a certain moment in his speech he puts Russia and Putin together in one subject: “But Putin and Russia met each of the proposals with disinterest in any negotiation, with lies and ultimatums”.

Biden calls Putin an *autocrat*, a *tyrant*, a *dictator*, *not much of a student of history*, and his goal of “de-Nazifying” Ukraine a *lie*, *cynical* and *obscene*. In contrast to many politicians and diplomats who were reluctant to blame Putin directly, Biden accentuates Putin's personal responsibility: “... it is Putin – it is Vladimir Putin who is to blame, period”.

In his Warsaw speech, the US President makes an emotional appeal to the people of Russia, emphasizing “You, the Russian people, are not our enemy”, “This war is not worthy of you, the Russian people”. He invokes memories of World War Two when the Russians were living through the same horrors the Russian army is committing today in Ukraine, and points out that a great nation, a twenty-first century nation cannot act like this.



**Fig. 1. Visualization of Joe Biden's, Boris Johnson's, Olaf Scholz's and Emmanuel Macron's verbal evaluation of Russia's aggression against Ukraine in their speeches delivered in February-March 2022**



**Fig. 2. Visualization of Joe Biden's, Boris Johnson's, Olaf Scholz's and Emmanuel Macron's verbal evaluation of Russia's aggression against Ukraine in their speeches delivered in May 2022**

Joe Biden's Alabama speech on 3 May contains much more categorically phrased, castigating references to the aggressor, and a much more emotional vocabulary, e.g. "We see ... atrocities and the war crimes that are being committed by Russian forces in Ukraine, directed by Vladimir Putin. And it really is gut-wrenching". As Burhanettin Duran of Daily Sabah writes, "... it is not lost on anyone that US President Joe Biden's critique of Russia and its president keeps getting more vocal" [14].

And there is another distinction – in May speech there are no more appeals to the Russian nation.

Mass media explain that Joe Biden took Putin's aggression very personally – this is proved by emotional personal experiences included in his statements. The Washington Post commented that "for Biden ... the crisis in Ukraine is deeply personal" [15], which was echoed by the Financial Times – "Biden has been deeply moved by the atrocities in Ukraine and his forceful words reflect that" [16].

*Boris Johnson.* The UK Prime Minister is credited for his "belligerent approach towards Russia" [17], "scathing criticism of Vladimir Putin" [18] and "vocal condemnation of Russian aggression in Ukraine" [ibid.]. Boris Johnson's speech in Poland on 1 March 2022 from the outstart is highly agentive – the Prime Minister is very particular about naming the person who unleashed the war. In fact, Putin's name is mentioned in the speech 23 times, all in a negative context, ranging from *aggression*, *imperial ambitions*, and *war machine* to much stronger *savagery* and *unleashing carnage*. Like Joe Biden in his March speech in Warsaw, Johnson is trying to make a distinction between Putin's regime and the common Russians. He says, "But I must emphasise that we are not motivated by any hostility towards the Russia or Russians: quite the reverse. All our hearts ache for the Russian soldiers sent to die in this futile venture: we all grieve with their parents". He calls Russia "a great country and civilisation", and recalls "her sacrifice in the struggle against fascism". He reiterates, "... this is not Russia's war, not the Russian people's war, this is Putin's war".

Boris Johnson's address to the Verkhovna Rada on 3 May has nothing of his March appeal to the Russian people. It is noteworthy that Russia is not mentioned a single time throughout the speech. Johnson uses only the adjective "Russian", combining it with the nouns *aggression*, *armour*, *tanks*, *soldiers*, and *army*. Putin's name is used 13 times and with what seems to be unrestrained resentment. The references are considerably more negative and intensive compared to the March speech: *deranged imperialist revanchism*, *tyranny*, *grotesque and illegal campaign*, *onslaught*, *violent and murderous aggression*, *historic folly*.

*Olaf Scholz.* On 26 June 2022, the Washington Post wrote, "Scholz has been lampooned as taking

a dithering, confused stance as the war has unfolded in Ukraine ..." [19], at the same time taking note of the "more forthright language from the chancellery in recent weeks", following Scholz's visit to Ukraine [ibid.]. The analysis of Olaf Scholz's vocabulary in his two statements delivered on 27 February and on 8 May confirms the shift.

In his statement in the Bundestag delivered on the second day of Putin's invasion, Olaf Scholz asserts that "Putin has started a war of aggression in cold blood", refers to his *oppressive regime* and *utter lack of scruples*, calls Putin a *warmonger* and characterizes his actions as *inhumane*. Russian aggression is qualified as *a flagrant breach of international law* and *an absolutely unjustifiable attack*. At the same time, exactly like Biden and Johnson, Olaf Scholz believes it important for him to specify that "... Putin, not the Russian people, has decided to start this war. And so it must be clearly stated that this war is Putin's war!". At this point, Olaf Scholz avoids calling Russia an aggressor or giving Russia any negative evaluation.

This stance changes in the video address to the nation commemorating WWII, delivered on 8 May. A shift in Olaf Scholz's rhetoric is seen in two main aspects. Firstly, Russia now is fully identified with the aggressor – the Chancellor says "Russia has unleashed this war" and calls it "Russia's atrocious war". Secondly, though in this address Olaf Scholz does not make many references to Russia and Putin, the ones he does make reach the level of a stigma – he uses very strong words *murdering*, *atrocious*, *barbaric* and *infamy*, which do not have any parallels in his statement of 27 February.

*Emmanuel Macron.* The French President has drawn much criticism for being keen on not "humiliating" Russia. France 24 commented on 6 June 2022 that "Macron's remarks underline a difference in approach to the conflict between France on one hand and Ukraine, eastern European nations, and the United States and Britain on the other" [20]. The analysis of Macron's two speeches confirms the difference.

In Emmanuel Macron's address to the nation on 2 March, he mentions the words "Russia" and "Russian" 19 times, out of which only once he allows himself a negative evaluation, calling Russia *the aggressor*. Macron emphasizes that France is "not at war with Russia", adding "We are mindful of our deep connections with the Russian people – one of the great peoples of Europe – who sacrificed so much during World War II ...". Putin's name is mentioned 5 times, characteristically always with the appositive *President*, which marks Macron out among the four leaders as the only one deliberately stressing such deferential stance. Out of these 5 mentions, only one occurs with a critical evaluation, when Macron calls Putin's attack on Ukraine *brutal*, and even this

adjective modifies not Putin but his attack. Such careful language is in line with Macron's words "I am very careful with some terms these days... I am not sure the escalation of words is helping the cause." [16].

In Emmanuel Macron's speech at the closing ceremony of the Conference on the Future of Europe on 9 May 2022, Putin's name is not mentioned at all. Obviously, for the sake of keeping channels of communication with Russia's president open, which Macron obstinately insists on, he chooses to keep Putin's name out of the critical discourse. Characterization of Russia is visibly more negative compared to 2 March – Macron uses such words as *unspeakable crimes committed by Russia in Ukraine*, but this is the only evaluative context he allows himself throughout the speech. The general impression is that the French President makes a point of avoiding hurting the Russian leadership as much as possible.

#### Conclusions and prospects of further research.

The conducted analysis fully confirmed both the hypotheses of the research – the overall verbal evaluation of Russia's and personally Putin's actions in Ukraine by the leaders of the United States, the UK, Germany and France grew more negative over the first four months of the war and the verbal stance of the leaders of the four countries on Russia's and personally Putin's actions in Ukraine varies in terms of its critical intensity and identification of the aggressor. The linguistic data echoes the opinion about the world leaders' "divergent approaches to Russia" [21] and their vision of the post-war peace. The conducted analysis also confirmed the role of language in marking political stances and the effect of words on world politics. And this is not exaggeration – it suffices to recall what effort the White House officials took to downplay Joe Biden's words about Putin, "For God's sake, this man cannot remain in power". The prospects of further research are seen in studying a wider range of political statements on war in Ukraine, including those coming from the leaders of the countries which Russia calls its "friends".

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