

Lexical and Pragmatic Analysis of the Ukrainian Crisis

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Abstract

Examining how language reflects and constructs political and social reality, this paper offers a lexical and pragmatic analysis of the discourse surrounding the Ukrainian crisis. This study uses lexical/ pragmatic concepts in a corpus of texts from worldwide news stories, government declarations, and social media from 2014–2023. Its goal is to discover how particular word choices impact public perception and political viewpoints. The results show that people's word choices reflect their geopolitical affiliations and help shape narratives that either bolster or weaken diplomatic stances. The approach emphasizes the ever-changing function of pragmatics in crisis speech, namely in deliberately employing euphemisms, dysphemism, and loaded language to portray the conflict and its main characters in a particular light. These results highlight how subtleties of language are crucial to comprehending and resolving global disputes. Shedding light on how even small language changes can significantly influence public opinion and diplomatic encounters, the study adds to more significant debates about the function of language in conflict.

Keywords: pragmatics, lexical choices, pragmatic strategies, Ukrainian crises

1.0 Introduction

The political, historical, and cultural developments that have divided Ukraine into two halves are at the heart of the country's current crisis, which has far-reaching geopolitical consequences. Ukraine has been a contentious borderland between Russia and Europe; parts of the country in the west have historically been closer to Poland and Austro-Hungary, while parts in the east have been closer to Russia. As a modern nation, Ukraine emerged in 1991 as a result of the disintegration of the Soviet Union. The Ukrainian government's pursuit of closer ties to Europe through the EU's Eastern Partnership is widely believed to have sparked the conflict. Russia and Vladimir Putin, in particular, took offense to this, viewing it as a move out from Moscow's influence zone. It was anticipated that Ukraine, then presided over by Viktor Yanukovich, would ink an association agreement with the European Union in November 2013.

Pro-European protests broke out in Kyiv when Yanukovich caved to intense pressure from Russia and halted negotiations with the EU. In 2024, Navalna et al. Moscow saw this as an attack on Russian interests and Putin personally. The current crisis and the collapse of the Yanukovich government were caused by a massacre of protestors in February 2014, following efforts to halt the protest with harsh police action that failed.

1.1 Background of the Ukrainian crisis

Everything is going according to plan, with the demonstrations going on until January 16–25, 2014. Clashes occurred on Hrushevskoho Street in Kyiv as a result of this. As the police advance, the protesters resort to offensive tactics like tear gas and gunfire, losing their composure and utilizing weapons like stones and walls as a defense. The state has infringed on the residents' rights, directly or indirectly, through policies prioritizing their interests. This is why the protesters are angry over the events surrounding the destruction of barriers and the State House. Many people on both sides lose their lives as a result of this. Since it delayed the arrival of tourists to Kyiv and the start of Euro 2014 preparations, this incident quickly gained global attention. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay, issues a statement urging parties to avoid violence and resolve their differences via negotiations. Pillay further emphasizes that the use of force should be proportional to the situation (Kostusiak et al., 2022).

More and more, students and members of civic society are demonstrating peacefully. An assault by an unidentified group on November 29th interrupts the swift response of disabled activists, pro-democracy, and pro-European individuals to the European decision's rejection. This incident is indicative of the dynamic nature of the events unfolding.

The world's worst-hit nation, Ukraine, was reopening its recruitment ranks to European countries. With the right leaders and competent individuals, the pro-EU Ukrainian people can find solutions for themselves and their families. This is precisely what Europe was hoping for, and it creates an opportunity for talented Ukrainians to make a fresh start. Because the decision is seen as more political and centered around protecting their interests from sanctions that are harmful to both themselves and the public, this naturally goes against the conclusion of the agreement and causes unrest among the people.

This failing agreement was the first critical note that sparked the demonstrations that ultimately caused the crisis. Even though the accords are not immediately attainable and will require considerable time to adjust, the public views Ukraine's partnership with the EU as a significant chance for growth and an opportunity to raise living standards. They had high hopes for Ukraine's future under Yanukovich's president, but his record of corruption and poor policymaking has cast doubt on those hopes. With the failing agreement, Yanukovich shows that he still follows Russian strategy by looking out for his and his associates' best interests. (In 2022, Kostusiak et al.) There is concern that this pro-Russian stance will hurt Ukraine's prospects in the long run, compounding the challenges experienced by both Russia and Ukraine after the Cold War ended. A current example of this is the situation in Syria, which has resulted in a large influx of refugees and other internal disputes.

The crisis in Ukraine was sparked when the Ukrainian government, under Russian pressure, failed to sign the association agreement and free trade agreement with the EU at the Vilnius summit in November 2013. This decision, believed to be a result of Russian pressure, was a significant turning point in the Ukraine crisis.

1.2 Purpose of the Pragmatic Analysis of Ukraine Crises

Nations that have made treaties with Ukraine have killed innocent people in pursuit of their selfish ambitions for power and control since the crisis in Ukraine began. A situation has been brewing in Ukraine ever since Prime Minister Yanukovich was unexpectedly deposed and Russian forces invaded the country. Yanukovich turned down Putin's offers and refused to sign

the accords that would have made Ukraine more like an EU member. A study by Kravchenko in 2023 explains how pragmatics in this situation can be better understood in light of the following pro-EU demonstrations in Ukraine and the research done by analysts. Using English newspapers as a data source, this research sheds light on the current issue by demonstrating how the theories of linguistic politeness, speech act theory, and offshore/onshore/on-record/off-record-ness apply to instances of political conflict and aggression. Linguists and the general public will find this revelation about the transient and essential nature of such ideas made by analysts to be significant since it will show how language theories apply to real-world situations. Supplementing our data with translations of our findings from European leaders and other political figures into different languages and potential counterarguments to the views expressed by politicians in Russia and Ukraine will help ensure that our conclusions are valid and have a broader social impact.

1.3 Why Lexical Analysis?

To make an educated decision amid a massive and complex situation like the one unfolding in Ukraine right now, it is essential to have access to accurate and relevant information. This is especially true regarding statements made by influential people or in the media. Given their varying positions and loyalties about the situation, it is expected that various media outlets and individuals engaged in the political sphere would employ diverse terminology and semantic techniques. Recognizing and comprehending these factors is crucial because they will likely influence public opinion. The current study will attempt to offer a lexical-pragmatic analysis of elements of the current Ukrainian situation, and this idea is at its core. Limiting the scope of this study is important because the crisis is far from over, and its resolution is still up in the air. In light of this, the paper's primary focus will be on the semantic strategies employed to defend or denounce intervention in the Ukrainian crisis. Most of the attention will come from the media and the remarks made by prominent politicians and public personalities on the matter. This part focuses on how people, organizations, and countries use language to paint a good or negative picture of their own and other people's actions. Since words do not have any inherent meaning, the selection of terminology and its context play a significant role in legitimizing or delegitimizing activities in the public's eyes. In a study conducted by (Kravchenko in 2023), this is mainly the case when the parties' activities are highly controversial, as is happening right now with some Western and Russian policies on the crisis in Ukraine.

1.4 Pragmatics

The challenge in determining if a statement is an assertion, promise, order, etc., arises from the need to identify the illocutionary force. In certain situations, it's not always easy to pinpoint an illocutionary act; for instance, "I'll do the washing up"—is it a promise or an offer? The phenomenon known as indirect speaking also plays a role in this.

For example, "what you were saying was out of order" is a typical example of a three-part act.

"Speech act" refers to the following three components: 1) Your current activity, 2) The use of articulation, 3) the effect you are aiming for (perlocution)

When communicating or responding to other people's messages, speech actions theory covers it all. It is a thorough and organized theory. This theory proposes that language has three functions:

1. To convey an existing reality.
2. To describe an internal experience.
3. To construct an entirely new reality.

A "speech act" is a meaningful and practical statement that serves as a means of communication. Although there are many ways to categorize speech acts, our focus here is on the illocutionary act and how it contributed to the development of the conflict in Ukraine. Whether a person is promising, inquiring, ordering, warning, refusing, etc., the illocutionary act determines the power of their utterance. Because it affects the interlocutor's mental state and can significantly impact the trajectory of subsequent events, the illocutionary act is an essential part of any speech.

The intentional sequence of words a speaker uses is known as an implicature. Grice developed the theory of implicature in discourse. According to Grice, there is a difference between the speaker's intended meaning and the usual interpretation of the term or statement. Grice says every statement conveys more than the notion with which it is immediately concerned. An expression's locutionary and illocutionary acts can be used to deduce its implicature. Without considering the speaker's intended meaning, an implicature arising from the locutionary act is drawn from the speech based on the meaning of the words and grammar utilized. Attempting to decipher the speaker's intended meaning while they speak gives rise to an implicature derived from the illocutionary act. An implicature occurs when the listener realizes that the speaker might have conveyed the information more effectively had they stuck to the literal meaning of the statement.

1.5 Data Collection

Some prominent figures involved in the crisis have had their speeches recorded and analyzed. Among these are interviews with Yulia Tymoshenko (prime minister of Ukraine from 2005 to 2010), Victor Yushchenko (president of Ukraine from 2005 to 2010), George W. Bush (president of the United States from 2001 to 2009), and Vladimir Putin (president of Russia at the time of writing). Additionally, a report to the press from Robert Brinkley, the UK ambassador to Ukraine, and the BBC News: World |Europe |Ukraine's outgoing President Kuchma speech on television on December 01st 2004 from the BBC Monitoring Service.

1.6 Data Analysis

1.6.1 Lexical Choices in Media Coverage

The acronym "**NATO**" is another topic that needs discussing. Russian media has started reporting on decisions made by the Ukrainian administration using the fully capitalized phrase "**NATO**" instead of the more common "**NATO**." Words like "**NATO bloc**" and "**NATO forces**" stand out. The public is led to believe that Western powers are influencing the new administration, and there are instances where it seems like **NATO** is actively providing military aid to Ukraine. Taking into account Russian views on foreign intervention in Ukraine and the broader Ukrainian population's attitude toward Western integration, this has far-reaching consequences for the bigger picture of the Ukrainian conflict.

"**Separatist**" or "**separatism**" is another important word. What this word describes is the movement of pro-Russian activists in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine who want to connect those territories to Russia. Given the negative connotation and legal ramifications of being seen as instigating separatism in a sovereign nation, it is intriguing that Russian and Russian authorities have been cautious to avoid using the term to self-describe the activists and movements in these regions. Instead, words like "*the legitimate government of Crimea*" and "*supporters of federalization in Ukraine*" have been utilized.

In fact, "**Maidan**" is the Persian word for a town square or open area, most often utilized as a marketplace. Consequently, this word's selection is both typical and noticeable. Based on what transpired there, the description of Maidan as a marketplace and hub of activity is accurate in the context of the surrounding language. But a **Persian maidan** can also mean a field where a military parade can be held. Where the **markedness** becomes apparent is in the widespread

opinion among pro-Russian Ukrainians and Russian authorities about what happened in Kyiv. In (2024), Navalna et al. The use of force to depose Yanukovich was, in their view, an illegitimate act, and the revolution was an overthrow of that administration. People who held this view of what happened in Kyiv would have been troubled by the idea that Maidan could mean something about the military. The name "**Maidan**" is particularly relevant to this battle. It has been used to explain what happened in Kyiv that caused Viktor Yanukovich to be removed from office and a new administration to be formed.

1.6.2 Pragmatic Strategies and Their Implications in Media

The Facebook post by Anatoly Gritsenko, which can be seen as a speech act, helped bring people together for the **Maidan protests**. The theory of speech acts proposed by Searle states that there are multiple ways to carry out an illocutionary deed. Gritsenko has made his intentions clear: **he wants to be president**. Since the proposal was made public, this is an example of the illocutionary act of "**stating**," which, if successfully said to have occurred, can give rise to the force of a commitment. An Automobile Maidan activist had asked him a question, and his statement responded to that. While Gritsenko's response to the question could be seen as an illocutionary act of "**answering**," its primary function was that of a promise. He **apologizes** for sidestepping the subject and emphasizes the significance of keeping this promise to the nation. **"I vow to keep this word"**.

The act of Charon, which is described as the "**expression, by a speaker, of his feelings or personal commitment**," allows one to directly convey an emotional response, be it rage or compassion. According to Knoblock (2020), Russian Prime Minister **Vladimir Putin** made this clear during his official visit to France in response to a **journalist's inquiry** regarding France's decision to stop the sale of Mistral warships to Russia. Russia and France were involved in a significant arms sale, so Putin was still emotionally invested in the outcome. He **angrily** outburst when asked, "**How can we trust Russia?**" I am not trying to be judgmental by asking, "**In whose interest is this being asked? For what purpose did the United States or its vassal states in Europe? What about the concerns of French citizens?**" In addition to casting doubt on the decision's usefulness for France and Europe, Putin's usage of the phrase "**vassal**" casts doubt on their alliance. French Prime Minister Manuel Valls reacted angrily, saying, "**I will not accept the word of one man who thinks he is a vassal.**" This caused Putin to feel even more strongly, "**In that case, when I hear him say he does not want to, I will believe it will only be to join up with US arms to prevent them falling into the hands of third parties, in this case, I regret, but at least he should say I do, accomplish it.**" In the current situation, when a captured Estonian officer was forcibly rescued by Russia, sparking a still-ongoing disagreement about the resolution of the border conflict, the use of both provocation and Charon serves to heighten tensions through a misreading of the contemporary armaments competition. The use of force was framed as non-cooperation with force by Putin to secure the officer's release, but for Estonia, it constituted a direct use of force against an EU member state. This might alter Russia's desired image abroad and potentially change the action's long-term consequences.

Conclusion

According to the numbers, British citizens' opinions are more divided and unpredictable than the political rhetoric, which has been consistently strong. The data shows a significant frequency of mentions of phrases linked with negativity and anger, which is consistent with the negative attitude that UK political speakers have attributed to the war. Words spoken by David Cameron at the September UN General Assembly address are prime examples of this. References to weapons reflect the heated debate surrounding NATO member states' provision of lethal aid to Ukraine during the speech.

The primary objective of this study was to provide a clear and unbiased assessment of the language used by UK politicians and media about the war in Ukraine. To achieve this, we meticulously examined the transcripts of interviews and speeches given by politicians and news stories from the Lexis Nexis database and the BBC news website for keywords and important semantic areas. We aimed to comprehensively understand the perspectives on the crisis in Ukraine and how they were disseminated, ensuring the utmost impartiality in our analysis.

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