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“The President is Here”. Legitimation Strategies in the Discourse of President Zelenskyy after 24 February 2022

Abstract: In February 2022, as the president of Ukraine, the relative political novice Volodymyr Zelenskyy had to face a full-scale war. In such a hard time he had to look not only for the citizens’ support, but foremost legitimize the actions of the authorities. This paper presents an analysis of the addresses to the citizens of Ukraine released by the president in two periods: the first month after the Russian attack and a year later, in February 2023. Two corpora have been built from scratch and analysed with corpus linguistics tools (Lancsbox# software). The results have been scrutinized with the use of van Leeuwen’s categorisation of legitimation strategies. The analysis reveals both continuities and shifts in Zelenskyy’s discourse over time. Similarities and dissimilarities between the collection periods have been observed. In both, Zelenskyy’s discourse relies on his charisma as a president and a leader (Personal Authority and Role Model Authority), while in 2023 he frequently references to international law (Abstraction). Zelenskyy also makes moral evaluations of the enemy and emphasizes the superiority of Ukrainians creating a sense of community. The conclusions of the analysis indicate the effectiveness of Zelenskyy’s legitimation strategies, since the majority of the public supports his decisions and trusts him.

Key words: political speech, legitimation, Ukraine, Zelenskyy, war, Critical Discourse Analysis

Introduction

Volodymyr Zelenskyy appeared on the political scene of Ukraine at a time when the country was struggling with economic problems, corruption and ongoing conflict with Russian-backed separatists in eastern Ukraine. Although presented by his opponents as a comedian and political novice, surprisingly, an actor and a businessman Zelenskyy won in a landslide victory in April 2019, and his party obtained a majority in the parliament. However, it was the war that made him the undisputed leader of Ukrainians. Following the events of February 24, 2022, Volodymyr Zelenskyy gained worldwide recognition almost instantly. When offered the chance to evacuate from Ukraine, he responded, “The fight is here; I need ammunition, not a ride” (Braithwaite, 2022). This statement resonated globally, earning Zelenskyy the title of Time’s 2022 Person of the Year. In the media of countries supporting Ukraine, Zelenskyy is widely portrayed as a hero, contrasted with Vladimir Putin, who is depicted as the “villain” (Baladrón-Pazos et al., 2022, p. 2). Its widespread popularity and strategic communication have prompted also extensive scholarly analysis. Within Western academic circles, assessments of

Zelenskyy's leadership are overwhelmingly positive. Zelenskyy has been likened to a modern-day David confronting his Goliath (Putin) (Pfleger, 2022, p. 59) and also has been dubbed "Churchill 2.0" (Camargo Fernández, Urbán Crespo, 2022), drawing parallels to Winston Churchill's famous WWII radio address. With his youthful energy, military-style attire, and strategic positioning against a powerful adversary, he embodies the classical hero, whose life follows the archetypal hero's journey (Pfleger, 2022, p. 58). His leadership is examined through the perspective of the Great Man Theory, as discussed by Clark and McQuade (2024) and Bass's concept of idealized influence in transformational leadership (Demczuk, 2023).

After the outbreak of war also gained the confidence of Ukrainians. In opinion polls conducted in July–August of 2021, only 32.6% trusted him, while 61% of Ukrainians expressed distrust in the president. A year after the outbreak of the war though, almost 85% trusted him and only 10% expressed distrust (Razumkov Centre, 2023), making him the most trustworthy politician for Ukrainians. This is also borne out in the President's official accounts on social media, which are regularly updated two to three times a day, and which number 3.2 m followers on Facebook, 842,000 on Telegram, and 1.4 m on Viber. Through daily communication with citizens President Zelenskyy attempts to create a "shared identity," a sense of "community" – "[H]e is an example of a leader who shows high ethical conduct, a perception of confidence, and acts in accordance with a collective sense of mission" (Demczuk, 2023, p. 337).

Despite criticism of his background in show business, Zelenskyy effectively leveraged his experience as an actor during his electoral campaign. From the outset of his presidency, he emphasized direct communication with the public as he used social media platforms (Donaj, Wochelski, 2022, p. 156). This strategy that has proven especially crucial in the context of the Russian invasion and his communication style – marked by transparency, accessibility, continuous engagement via social media, and a willingness to share information – not only fosters public trust but also enhances the credibility of his messages (Gregić, Božić, 2023, p. 104). Thereby it is crucial to explore how legitimizes his decisions in his communication with Ukrainian citizens.

Methodological Framework

Wodak and de Cilia claim that "language becomes more powerful when it is used by powerful people, who often make use of inclusionary and exclusionary strategies" (cited in: Filardo-Llamas, Boyd, 2017, p. 315). Critical Discourse Analysis sees language as a social practice and considers the context of language use to be crucial. Discourses are socially constitutive and socially conditioned (Fairclough, 1992). That is, discourses are produced within social situations, and at the same time, the discourse sustains, reproduces or transforms these conditions. The communication addressed every day to Ukrainian citizens is an example of how words are embedded in a social situation (of war) and how simultaneously they shape the context. Furthermore, it is significant that all speeches are translated into English and published on the official website of the President. This indicates that they are intended not only for Ukrainian citizens but also for the international community.

Widely cited in the fields of linguistics, political science, and communication studies definition considers discursive strategies of legitimation as “a type of argumentative justification, public justification, in which an action can be justified in terms of reasons and those reasons can themselves be justified as collectively accepted and recognized as ‘worthy of being recognized’” (Fairclough, Fairclough, 2012, p. 112). As Chilton claims, legitimisation and delegitimization are the core strategic functions of political discourse. The legitimisation serves to justify and reinforce the authority of regimes and their policies, establishing their right to be followed or obeyed. Conversely, delegitimation is strategically employed to undermine and discredit opponents or adversaries of the regime or political actor (Chilton, 2004, pp. 45–47). Within the framework of discourse analysis, legitimation is conceptualized as a socio-political act realized through text or speech. This act provides rationales, justifications, or socially acceptable explanations for actions – whether past or present – that might otherwise face criticism or dispute (Kostova, 2020, p. 54). Legitimated activities must be consistent with the moral order, conceived as a “system of laws, agreements or aims agreed upon by the majority of citizens” (Rojo and van Dijk, 1997, p. 528). Through reference to these, a powerful group or institution may accomplish normative approval for their actions.

In his book *Discourse and Practice. New Tools for Critical Discourse Analysis* (2008), Theo van Leeuwen proposes a complete framework for analysing legitimation. The starting point for van Leeuwen is the existing differences between social practices, understood as socially regulated ways of doing things, and their representations, which leads to various discourses on the same social practice. To put it simply, it is the difference between “doing it” and “talking about it” (van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 6). In the process of recontextualization, various transformations may take place, however, the most fundamental is the substitution of elements of the actual social practice with semiotic elements. The addition of contextually specific legitimation of social practices is one of the basic transformations and signifies the existence of “reasons that either the whole of a social practice or some part of it must take place or must take place in the way that it does. Texts not only represent social practices, they also explain and legitimate (or delegitimize critique) them” (van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 20).

Van Leeuwen’s framework includes four major categories of legitimation that may appear separately or in combination:

- 1) Authorization – legitimation by reference to the authority of tradition, custom, law, and/or persons in whom institutional authority of some kind is vested;
- 2) Moral evaluation – legitimation by reference to value systems;
- 3) Rationalization – legitimation by reference to the goals and uses of institutionalized social action and to the pieces of knowledge that society has constructed to endow them with cognitive validity;
- 4) Mythopoesis – legitimation conveyed through narratives whose outcomes reward legitimate actions and punish nonlegitimate actions (van Leeuwen, 2008, pp. 105–106).

The first category includes five types of legitimation distinguished according to who can exercise authority and how:

- Personal Authority vested in people based on their status or role in an institution;
- Expert Authority, when legitimacy is provided by expertise;

- Role Model Authority, when people follow the example of role models or opinion leaders;
- Impersonal Authority of laws, rules, and regulations;
- The Authority of Tradition;
- The Authority of Conformity.

Van Leeuwen emphasises that the distinction between authority legitimation and legitimization on moral value can be traced back to the Enlightenment, before which all legitimization was based on the authority of a God or King, though it does not mean that it automatically violated moral values (van Leeuwen, 2018, p. 147). The Moral Evaluation types are the following:

- Evaluation in which evaluative adjectives play a key role;
- Abstraction which foregrounds desired and legitimate qualities;
- Analogies – by comparing one practice to another social practice the positive or negative values attached to them are transferred to the original activity.

In Mythopoesis van Leeuwen differs between moral tales, when protagonists are rewarded for engaging in legitimate social practices or restoring the legitimate order, and cautionary tales, in which protagonists engage in deviant activities that lead to unhappy endings (van Leeuwen, 2008, pp. 117–118). The present paper does not examine the category of mythopoesis that should be the object of further qualitative analysis.

Data description

Public addresses constitute a distinct genre of political communication through which a national leader formally conveys the government's vision, policies, and strategic objectives to the public. These speeches are carefully crafted, employing persuasive language, rhetorical devices, and emotional appeals to engage and mobilize the audience (Kondratienko, 2022). Typically disseminated through various media channels they reach broad audiences and facilitate real-time engagement, allowing individuals to react and discuss the content. Since the onset of the war, Volodymyr Zelenskyy has delivered daily video addresses to the nation, typically released late at night. Throughout the day, he provides updates on social media, reporting on key activities such as meetings with national and foreign partners. Zelenskyy starts with a simple greeting “fellow Ukrainians” or “Dear Ukrainians!”. The body of the address contains the main points and arguments, which may include policy proposals, reflections on the current state of affairs, or calls to action. Zelenskyy typically concludes the video with closing remarks, summarizing key points, expressing gratitude to people and soldiers, and possibly providing a call to action or a message of hope or unity. A distinctive feature of Zelenskyy's speeches is the closing phrase, *Glory to Ukraine!* (*Слава Україні!*), to which Ukrainians customarily respond with *To the Heroes!* (*Героям слава!*).

As regards *Slava Ukraini*, there is a widespread belief that the origins of this expression trace back to the Ukrainian War of Independence (1917–1921) (Tsurkan, 2024). However, the earliest written mention was found in in Taras Shevchenko's 1840 poem “To Osnovyanenko” and there is evidence that this expression was a greeting in the proactive Ukrainian community at the end of the 19th century (*«Слава Україні!»: история и значение самого*

популярного лозунга современных украинцев, 2023). The modern "Glory to Ukraine!" was officially adopted by the Army of the Ukrainian People's Republic in 1920. With the suppression of the insurgency in Ukraine the Soviet authorities banned its use. It was until the late 1980s and early 1990s when the changes associated with *perestroika* led to a revival of the idea of Ukrainian independence, and Ukrainians took to the streets shouting "Glory to Ukraine! Glory to the nation! Death to the enemies!" and "Ukraine above all!" In the 21st century the greeting was associated with the Orange Revolution of 2004, the Revolution of Dignity of 2013–2014, the military operation launched by Ukraine in 2014 in response to the seizure of Donbas territories by pro-Russian militants. In 2020, Parliament officially approved "Glory to Ukraine!" as a greeting in the Armed Forces and the police («Слава Україні!»: історія і значення самого популярного лозунга сучасних українців, 2023). Since February 24, 2022, the greeting has acquired profound significance, resonating not only among Ukrainians but also within the international community. It functions as both a military cry and "a formula that is emblematic and well-established in the cultural memory of Ukrainians" (Pfleger, 2022, p. 6).

Zelenskyy's speeches transcend mere words, offering the audience an intimate experience through perspectives that appear to be filmed from his desk or a phone in hand. At the onset of the war, Zelenskyy reassured his audience by repeatedly stating, "I am here," affirming his presence and control within the endangered country. The use of deictic expressions such as "here" and "now" strengthens the emotional proximity of the conflict (Pfleger, 2022, pp. 65–66). Zelenskyy was trained as an actor and it helps him be aware of the importance of non-verbal communication (Goloshchuk, Tomczak-Boczek, 2024; Gregić, Božić, 2023). However, his communication strategy extends beyond voice modulation and body language. Since the war's outset, Zelenskyy has consistently worn an olive green T-shirt or hooded sweatshirt, often emblazoned with the Ukrainian national symbol.

Research questions and methodology

The research aims to reveal the legitimation strategies used by President Zelenskyy in the first month of the war and one year later. Corpus linguistics techniques were used to examine the content of presidential speeches. An analysis of corpora enables the identification of recurring patterns and serves as a foundation for further investigation. Two corpora were created from scratch: the speech texts were taken from the official website of the President, having the authorized English translations provided there. The first, called Corpus-22, includes addresses delivered from 24.02.2022 to 23.03.2022, and the second, Corpus-23, includes addresses delivered from 24.02.2023 to 23.03.2023. Corpus-22 contains 60 files and totals 60,823 tokens, while Corpus-23 has 37 files and 28,300 tokens.¹ We employ different techniques on the corpora to ensure the quality

¹ The data used in this study is available in the Official website of the President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy at <https://www.president.gov.ua/en>. This data was derived from the following resources available in the public domain: <https://www.president.gov.ua/en/videos/videos-archive?date-from=22-02-2022&date-to=23-03-2022>, <https://www.president.gov.ua/en/videos/videos-archive?date-from=22-02-2023&date-to=23-03-2023>.

of our analysis, as the methodological triangulation “facilitates validity checks of hypotheses, anchors findings in more robust interpretations and explanations, and allows the researcher to respond flexibly to unforeseen problems and aspects of the research” (Layder, 1993, p. 128, cited in: Baker, Egbert, 2016, p. 3).

The following corpus tools were used in the analysis: frequency list, keywords, collocations and concordances. An overview of the tools utilised in our work is given below.

To reveal the “aboutness” of the created corpora, frequency lists are generated, which are a list of all of the words in a corpus along with their frequencies and the percentage contribution that each word makes toward the corpus. As a quantitative methodology, this may be reductive and generalizing, however, it is a good starting point for the corpus analysis as it helps to determine the focus of a text. The second tool is the keyness, that is, “the relative frequency of a particular linguistic item in one text or corpus when compared against another text or corpus via statistical tests of significance (usually chi squared or log likelihood)” (Baker, Ellece, 2011, p. 66). The third, collocations show some regularity of co-appearance of words. According to Stubbs, collocation analysis helps to “show the associations and connotations they have, and therefore the assumptions which they embody” (1996, p. 172, cited in: Baker, Ellece, 2011, p. 17). Thereby collocations not only have ideological effects but may also prime readers to think in certain ways. All of the above tools can also combined in an analysis of concordances, i.e., a list of all of the occurrences of a particular search term in a corpus, presented within the context that they occur in. To analyse the corpora #Lancsbox software has been used (Brezina, Timperley, McEnery, 2018).

Results

Both Personal Authority and Role Model Authority are present and appear inseparable, as it seems impossible to separate Zelenskyy from his role as a president. He achieves legitimation by reference to his institutional authority as a president, but foremost using his special status to act as a role model for Ukrainians. In both periods the pronoun *I* appears before the first most frequent words (Corpus-22: 543 hits, Corpus-23: 310). In Corpus-22 the strongest collocations of *I* are the following: *am* (122), *grateful* (58), *want* (55), *you* (46), *spoke* (40), *know* (28), *will* (28). When appearing with the verb to be (*I am*), the following collocations were present *addressing, confident, grateful, sure, thankful, waiting*. Concordance analysis of the collocation *I am grateful* reveals that he is grateful to the international community, to particular states, to presidents of other countries, to defenders, warriors, *our heroes, everyone who defends Ukraine*. A year after, *I thank* is the strongest collocation (80), *I am* is the second (58) and the next is *I am grateful* (32).

The pronoun *I* collocates with a noun *president* 11 times in Corpus-22, and 10 hits are found in Corpus-23. Analysis of concordances shows that in the first moments of the war, Zelenskyy occasionally referred to himself as a president, for example: *My task as President is to protect our state*. Once, he used the third person singular: *And while our guys are there, the President is here*. However, the following sentence seems significant: *I spoke not just as President, but as a Ukrainian citizen*.

A year later there are no collocations of *I* with the term *president*, he relies more on the Role Model Authority. He emphasizes that he is one of the Ukrainians, that he is a leader rather than a president. However, in the initial months of the war, he also invoked Role Model Authority. This is evident in the analysis of the collocation *I believe*, with the verb *believe* identified as one of the keywords in the Corpus-22 (25 occurrences). President Zelenskyy repeated *I believe that our/ we can* (4), *I believe and I know* (5), with, for example, the following collocations: *We must fight. And we will win. I know that. I believe in that.* He also encouraged his citizens *Believe it. I believe.*

The third type of Authorization present in Zelenskyy’s addresses is legitimation by reference to the Impersonal Authority of laws, rules, and regulations. The president implicitly refers to the international laws of war, however, he does not mention any specific regulations.² Calling Russia *invaders* he directly points to the doer of the war. Interestingly though, *president Putin* has a surprisingly low frequency in both corpora (no hits in Corpus-22, and three in Corpus-23). A noun *defense* appears in both corpora with a high occurrence. To refer to a war and the Russian army he uses such words as: *invasion, invaders, enemy* (Corpus-22), *aggression, terror, occupier, occupation, evil* (Corpus-23).

In Corpus-23, the number of abstract nouns related to law is more numerous than in the Corpus-22. Zelenskyy refers to *justice, legal, court, punish, punishment, criminal, guilty, prosecutor, protection, resolution, restored, law, warrant, sentences, arrest, accountability, compensation, genocidal, verdicts* (frequency and relative frequency of some of these are presented in Table 1). The most frequent adjective occurring with the noun *justice* is *international* (8), e.g., *everyone who helps the work of international justices – the investigation of Russian crimes against Ukraine.* Zelenskyy claims justice for *our people, for Ukraine and Ukrainians.* The high frequency of the adjective *criminal* in Corpus-23 is due to the name of International Criminal Court. However, Zelenskyy also talks about *the scale of the criminal manifestations of Russia’s aggression or criminal war*, just as in the first month of the war he uses the adjective *criminal* with the nouns *tactic, orders, actions, invasion.* He consistently emphasizes the need of punishing the invaders, e.g. *We will punish everyone who committed atrocities in this war.* In 2023 he reiterates the need to punish *Russia for the war* (3), *Russian murderers* (2), *the terrorist state, the aggressor, and those responsible for aggression.*

Table 1

	Corpus-22		Corpus-23	
	frequency	relative frequency (for 10.000 words)	frequency	relative frequency (for 10.000 words)
Justice	9	1,48	59	20,89
Legal	2	0,33	22	7,77
Criminal	8	1,32	20	7,07
Punish	1	0,16	10	3,53
Punishment	4	0,66	14	95,00

² According to the article 51 of the U.N. Charter, States have an inherent right of to engage in self-defence in the face of an armed attack. Self-defence is also an implied right derived from an individual’s “right to life” found in numerous international human rights law agreements – most prominently the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Article 6) (Cherry, Rizzotti, 2021).

Throughout his addresses, he underlines the legality of Ukraine’s actions and the need for action by international institutions that must be *political and legal*. Thereby, *legal and fair* must be *sentences, judicial decisions; decisions; actions; consequences; results; verdicts; pressure*; for instance: *It is the moral and legal duty of the world to the victims*.

In a situation of war, the polarisation of “us” versus “them” is essential and facilitates moral legitimization. Van Dijk talks about “ingroup favouritism and outgroup derogation” that influence and manipulate discourses (van Dijk, 1995, pp. 250–251).

The corpora analysis reveals that between the ten most frequent words in both corpora there are: the inclusive pronoun *we*, the possessive *our* and *Ukraine* (table 2). Due to article length limitations, we focus on detailed analysis of the pronoun *we* in the Corpus-23. Concordances analysis shows that President most often uses with *we* the following adjectives: *free* (4), *strong* (4), *stronger, equals* (2), *capable* (2), *not afraid* (2), *not defeated* (2), *invincible, determined, powerful*. While talking about “what we do” Zelenskyy mentions: *endure* (5), *fight* (5), *do everything* (2). He also emphasises what Ukrainians did not do – they did not *break down, lose our grip, raise the white flag, surrender*. They *have freedom*. Again he creates the sense of unity: *we have become a team/ one big army/one big family/one; have grown stronger; preserve our unity* (2), *support each other, survived, reinforce the state we unite the world*. Even though *we have gone through good times and tragic times and lose Ukrainian sons and daughters*. Zelenskyy emphasizes the necessity of preserving memory – *we remember* e.g. *Bucha, numerous abuses and rapes*. He promises that *we will never forget*.

Table 2

	Corpus-22		Corpus-23	
	frequency	relative frequency (for 10.000 words)	frequency	relative frequency (for 10.000 words)
We	971	159,64	416	147,00
Our	1008	165,73	604	213,43

When the nation’s very existence is at stake, building a sense of community is vital – Zelenskyy effectively uses pathos *We are Ukraine* and *The main emotion we feel when we think about Ukraine is pride*. He talks also about successes: *Ukraine received EU candidate status, manage to mobilize the support, have appropriate potential and liberated our other cities*. Analysis of the collocation *we will* unveils goals. Zelenskyy, among other things, mentions the necessity of bringing *all Russian terrorists to justice, find the murderers, respond to the occupier, cleanse our land, dismantle this entire Russian genocidal system, liberate all our lands, return Ukraine to Ukraine*. Twelve times he repeats *we will do everything*. This is why Ukrainians *have to fight, defend themselves, gain victory, endure*. In short, they *will achieve victory and always hear ‘Glory to Ukraine!’*

In the president’s discourse, Ukrainians are free, strong, invincible and determined nation. During the war as *one family* they support each other which makes them able not only to survive but also to win. Though he talks about war crimes, those killed, and losses of Ukraine, his main emphasis is on positive discourse: Ukrainians will win and punish Russia. Zelenskyy empowers his people, saying *we will not lose our freedom, because we not only dream about it, we fight*.

Of the numerous expressions referring to the enemy, *Russian* is the most frequent, it is also the sixth in the frequency list (after removing function words): it occurs 169 times the addresses in Corpus-23. Table 3 shows the most frequent collocations with this adjective. Zelenskyy repeatedly calls the attacking country *Russian evil*, which is *godless* and talks about *Russian genocidal system*. *Russian* is aggression (e.g. *men and women who were killed by Russian aggression*) *Russian terror* or *terrorist/s*. Another recurring collocation is *crime* or *criminals* who must be brought to justice. Other nouns co-occurring with these adjectives are: *tyranny*, *revanchism*, *repression*, *atrocities*. It is worth noting the adjective *Russian* is frequently employed in descriptions of daily wartime struggles, often modifying terms such as *attack*, *bomber*, *bombs*, *assets*, *artillery*, *missiles*, *shelling*, *strikes*, *tank columns* and *weapons*. However, almost all of these collocations occur just once or twice in the whole Corpus-23.

Table 3

<i>Russian</i> 169 occurrences	Collocate	Number of collocations
	<i>aggression</i>	29
	<i>terror</i>	20
	<i>terrorist/s</i>	9
	<i>crime, criminals</i>	20
	<i>murderers</i>	6
	<i>evil</i>	8
	<i>army</i>	5
	<i>soldiers</i>	2

President Zelenskyy constructs Russians as criminals, murderers and terrorists, and only twice does he talk about Russian soldiers. Mainly he uses nominations such as *aggression*, *terror*, *crime*. In order to see the full picture of in-group and out-group representation, a detailed analysis of all the expressions used to refer to Russian soldiers should be drawn up. However, based on the above analysis, we can conclude that the image of Russians is clearly and indisputably immoral.

The frequency list of both corpora contains abstract nouns and adjectives that foreground desired and legitimate qualities. In Corpus-22 these include the following: *peace*, *freedom*, *peaceful*, and in Corpus-23: *security*, *justice*, *freedom*, *peace*, *free*, *good*. With keyword tools, the tendency to use more abstract nouns and adjectives in the second year of the war is even more notable. Keywords in the Corpus 2023 include *bravery*, *resilience*, *willingness*, *civilized*. Zelenskyy says, for example: *Now is the time when our bravery and our weapons can restore peace*. He mostly uses the noun *resilience* when thanking soldiers and citizens, e.g. *I am grateful to all the warriors whose resilience and perseverance destroy the occupier's army in Donbas!* Zelenskyy highlights that *our resilience is higher than anyone's expectations*. In both periods Zelenskyy contrasts the civilised world with Russia: *It is the security duty of the civilized and democratic world to any nation that may be threatened by the same aggression as Russia*. *Civilized* also collocates with *means*, *life in the world*, *civilized and democratic countries*, *system of the world*.

The following quote illustrates how the president invoked core values in an effort to uplift the morale of a nation in crisis: *It was a year of resilience. A year of care. A year*

of bravery. A year of pain. A year of hope. A year of endurance. A year of unity. A year of invincibility. A furious year of invincibility.

Comparing one social practice to another one means that the positive or negative values attached to them are transferred to the original activity. After the Russian attack, Zelenskyy mentioned the Second World War (12) and even the First World War (1) to warn about the Russian invasion. He evaluates Russia's military action as *the worst war since World War II*. Finally, he adds that during the Second World War Europe *talked 'never again' [...]* *But this is it! Again. Now. In 2022*. He also compares the blockade of Mariupol to the blockade of Leningrad during II WW. Zelenskyy warns: *This, they say, will lead to escalation, will lead to World War III*. In the first month the president also compares the Russian attack to Nazi rule a small number of times, e.g.: *perhaps for the first time since the Nazi invasion, a child died of dehydration*.

Speaking of rationality van Leeuwen distinguishes two types: "instrumental rationality legitimizes practices by reference to their goals, uses, and effects. Theoretical rationality legitimizes practices by reference to a natural order of things" (van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 113). In Corpus 2023 the keyword analysis suggests that two terms indicate instrumental rationality. A keyword absent in the Corpus 2022 is *results* (16). Zelenskyy talks about *good, greatest, new, concrete and sensitive, obvious* results for which he thanks soldiers, as in the following example: *Glory to all those delivering results for Ukraine in the toughest battles!* These results are foremost achieved by soldiers, however, a few quotes refer to international efforts. Likewise concordances with a word *success* (3 in the Corpus 2022; 10 in the Corpus 2023;) show that *success of Ukraine in the battle is the strategic goal*.

Conclusions

As Weber noted, "Every system of authority attempts to establish and cultivate the belief in its legitimacy" (1977, p. 325). Legitimations respond to the spoken or unspoken questions: "Why should we do this?" or "Why should we do this in this way?" (van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 105), as John Oddo remarks, "[W]ar is certainly one social practice that begs the question – why? Indeed – as a dangerous, deadly activity – war must be assigned legitimacy before it is undertaken" (2011, p. 289).

The case described above differs from those typically examined by Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) researchers, as the call-to-arms rhetoric is employed by the president of a country under attack in Europe, rather than by a leader preparing to wage war against a distant nation. Nevertheless, Zelenskyy's objective remains the same: to generate support for the war and to justify the decisions made by his government in this extraordinarily challenging situation. When a country is besieged by an enemy, public morale and attitudes become critical. Thus, the president's central responsibility lies in boosting the spirits of his citizens while simultaneously providing them with justifications for the actions taken by the authorities.

In this article, we have demonstrated that differences in the strategies of legitimation employed by Zelenskyy in his addresses can be observed. While Zelenskyy consistently refers to his Personal Authority and Role Model Authority in both periods, a notable shift

occurred a year after the Russian invasion. During this later period, his rhetoric increasingly appeals to international laws and norms, emphasizing the principles of justice and the punishment of aggressors. Another significant change is the absence of comparisons to the Second World War and the Nazis in the second period, which had been present to some degree in the first. This shift highlights the Ukrainian president's adaptation to a changing context. Initially, Zelenskyy's primary focus was on calling for the establishment of humanitarian corridors to protect civilians, reflecting his hopes for a swift Ukrainian victory. A year later, however, it becomes clear that the conflict will persist, and his addresses emphasize the urgent need for international aid and continued support on the front lines.

One of the defining features of political discourse during moments of perceived or actual threat is the construction of a binary opposition between "us" and "them." As Oddo observes, "this binary poses Us, the essentially good and innocent protagonists, against Them, the thoroughly evil aggressors who are poised to attack" (2011, p. 289). Zelenskyy's rhetoric is no exception, as he frequently employs such comparisons, particularly in the second analysed period, referring to Russians as *evil* or *terrorists*. These semantic macro-strategies of positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation, as conceptualized by Van Dijk (1998), warrant further scholarly investigation to fully understand their role in shaping public perceptions and fostering national unity.

While there is no direct measure of the effectiveness of legitimacy, the selection of legitimation strategies in President Zelenskyy's addresses appears neither accidental nor ineffective. His communication methods seem particularly successful in gathering public support for both his leadership and policies. Following the outbreak of Russia's full-scale aggression against Ukraine, public sentiment shifted markedly. The proportion of citizens who believed that Ukraine was moving in the right direction increased significantly from 20% in December 2021 to 51% in September–October 2022, reaching an unprecedented peak of 61% in February–March 2023 (Razumkov Centre, 2023). This surge in optimism is particularly striking given the severe civilian casualties, the volatile military situation on the frontlines, and the mass displacement of Ukrainians in the early months of the war. Counterintuitively, survey data reveal that Ukrainians were most optimistic about overcoming challenges during late 2022 and early 2023 – a period of intense conflict – in contrast to their relatively pessimistic outlook prior to the full-scale invasion. In December 2021, only 17.7% of respondents believed that Ukraine could resolve its existing problems within a few years. By September–October 2022, this figure had risen to 40.6%, and by December 2023, nearly 50% of respondents expressed similar confidence (Razumkov Centre, 2023).

This notable shift in public perception cannot be attributed solely to Zelenskyy's rhetorical strategies. Nevertheless, his adept use of communication has undoubtedly played a significant role in fostering resilience and mobilizing public support. This is particularly evident in the unprecedented surge of volunteers joining the Ukrainian armed forces. Over 20,000 individuals from 52 countries have participated in Ukraine's defence efforts (Demczuk, 2023, p. 334). Zelenskyy's strategic communication has, therefore, emerged as a crucial factor in consolidating national morale and international solidarity during a time of profound crisis.

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„Prezydent jest tutaj”. Strategie legitymizacji w dyskursie prezydenta ZELEŃSKIEGO po 24 lutego 2022 r.

Streszczenie

W lutym 2022 roku, jako prezydent Ukrainy, względny nowicjusz polityczny Wołodymyr Zełenski musiał stawić czoła pełnoskalowej wojnie. W tak trudnym czasie musiał nie tylko zabiegać o poparcie obywateli, ale przede wszystkim legitymizować działania władz. Niniejszy artykuł przedstawia analizę przemówień skierowanych do obywateli Ukrainy opublikowanych przez prezydenta w dwóch okresach: w pierwszym miesiącu po rosyjskim ataku i rok później, w lutym 2023 roku. Zbudowano dwa korpusy od podstaw, które zostały przeanalizowane za pomocą narzędzi lingwistyki korpusowej

(oprogramowanie Lancsbox#). Następnie wyniki zostały zinterpretowane przy użyciu kategorii strategii legitymizacji zaproponowanych przez Theo van Leeuwen. Analiza ujawnia zarówno ciągłość, jak i zmiany w dyskursie Zeleńskiego – zaobserwowano bowiem tak podobieństwa, jak i różnice między badanymi okresami. W obu przypadkach dyskurs Zeleńskiego opiera się na jego charyzmie jako prezydenta i lidera (kategorie: Autorytet osobisty i Autorytet wzoru do naśladowania), podczas gdy w 2023 r. częściej odwołuje się do prawa międzynarodowego (Abstrakcja). Zeleński dokonuje również moralnej oceny wroga i podkreśla wyższość Ukraińców, tworząc tym samym poczucie wspólnoty. Wnioski z analizy wskazują na skuteczność strategii legitymizacyjnych Zeleńskiego, większość społeczeństwa wciąż popiera jego decyzje i ma do niego zaufanie.

Słowa kluczowe: dyskurs polityczny, legitymizacja, Ukraina, Zeleński, wojna, Krytyczna Analiza Dyskursu

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