

Retoryka inkluzywności Rhetoric of Inclusivity

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REVIEW/RECENZJA

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The Russian-Ukrainian war is one of the most disruptive and devastating contemporary armed conflicts in Europe. However, it is not only a fight with missiles and drones, but also a fight of meanings and discourses. The war over words happens in news coverage, social media interactions, political narratives, and public interpretations. Understanding the persuasive dimensions of discourse production, construction, circulation, and reception has become an important task for scholars in many fields – including rhetoric. The 2026 collection of essays and studies in the book *Mediated Discourses of Conflict Across Languages and Genres: Coverage and Reception of the War in Ukraine*, edited by Katarzyna Molek-Kozakowska and Simina-Maria Terian, offers valuable insights into these problems based on the tailored multilingual corpus of media texts covering the war from various perspectives.

The book is a result of the international project named *The coverage and reception of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict in Polish, Romanian, and English-language media. A comparative critical discourse study with recommendations for journalism training* (CORECON), which was funded by NextGen EU instrument and realized at the “Lucian Blaga” University of Sibiu throughout 2024-2026. Sixteen authors who contributed fourteen chapters of this volume represent a variety of academic disciplines and build on diverse theories and methodologies to study representations and narratives of conflicts related to the Russian-Ukrainian war. All of the authors come from Poland and Romania – post-Soviet, Central-Eastern European countries, EU and NATO members – which means that the book represents a regionally situated, and pro-Ukrainian positionality and perspective

on the ongoing war as the military operations take place in a neighboring country, impacting internal safety concerns of both Poland and Romania.

Even though the book is situated mainly within Critical Discourse Studies and Media Communication fields, it offers valuable insights for rhetorical research, as directly mentioned by the editors Katarzyna Molek-Kozakowska and Simina-Maria Terian in the “Introduction: Conflict Discourses in the Media,” for example by referring to rhetorical terminology (e.g., *topoi* and metaphors), as well as classical and contemporary rhetorical readings. The analyses collected in the volume bring rich empirical accounts for, among others, the further study of mediated persuasion, persuasive agenda-setting, legitimization strategies, argumentation, rhetorical framing, or visual rhetoric of conflict discourses.

The book follows a non-paradigmatic toolbox approach, where specific research methods and analytical protocols are chosen to match the research problems. The chapters are grouped by the editors into three parts: (1) *Comparative and/or Corpus-Assisted Studies of Mediated War Coverage*, (2) *Qualitative and/or Critical Case Studies of Language Used in Conflict Reporting*, (3) *Studies of Journalistic Strategies and Receptions of Conflict Representations*. This split mirrors the diversity of scholarly perspectives of the authors involved in this project, and the methods they chose to use. It also shows the complexity of the studied issue. What unifies all of the chapters in this volume is the consistent data-based, comparative, and critical focus in studying the mediation of the Russian-Ukrainian war. The editors introduce the key terminology in “Introduction: Conflict Discourses in the Media,” showing that the whole volume is not just a collection of different studies, but a comprehensive and planned academic work where interdisciplinarity and diversity are used as assets.

Rhetorical aspects are explicitly used in a few chapters dealing with questions on how rhetorical mechanisms like, e.g., *topoi*, metaphors, delegitimization, or emotionalization work in the media in situations of war. For example, in her chapter on “Framing the Past, Shaping the Present: The Weaponization of Historical Narratives in News on the Russian-Ukrainian Conflict?” Ecaterina Iliș employs the discourse-historical approach for the analysis of how different *topoi* (e.g., of victimhood, history, historical injustice, existential threat) and shortcuts to collective memory (e.g., of Holodomor or Stepan Bandera) serve as rhetorical resources that are instrumentally used in Romanian media discourse. This is useful in studying the persuasive use of references that build up collective memory and national identity, especially as historical and nationalist narratives often seem to be at the center of contemporary public discourse in the case of many important debates.

Meanwhile, in “What’s in a ‘War’? A Corpus-Assisted Comparative Study on (De)legitimizing Linguistic Labels of the Russian-Ukrainian Conflict in Romanian and English-Language Media,” David Morariu shows how war-related terms (e.g., war, conflict, invasion) are used for delegitimization of the adversary narrative. The author uses methods of corpus linguistics to show how official Russian claims regarding the *special military operation* clash with Western terms like *aggression* or *invasion*. He also shows how characteristic enemy phrases are quoted to express ironic distance and undermine the Russian propaganda perspective. Labeling strategies are also explored to show how the image of the enemy is being built in discursive choices. From the rhetorical perspective, this study shows how competitive framings operate at the lexical level, so the struggle over the meaning happens not only in the selection of counter-arguments but in the very choice of words, which contest the specific framing.

Rhetoric is also a prominent topic in the chapter by Julia Kaproń, entitled “Media Narratives Regarding Refugees from Ukraine in Selected Polish Opinion Weeklies,” which deals with the solidarity and exclusionary narratives about forced migrants in Polish opinion media outlets. The author shows how migrants are delegitimized (“us versus them” dichotomy) through various rhetorical tools, e.g., metaphors of WATER (e.g., *tsunami* or *wave of migrants*) and WAR (e.g., migrants as *invaders*), or topoi (e.g., of threat). The chapter is an interesting study that uses classical rhetorical tools to analyze different framings depending on ideological and political editorial lines of the selected Polish media outlets. This might be useful for those interested in rhetoric of inclusion and exclusion, as well as for the researchers concerned with polarization and framing research in war and migration contexts.

Przemysław Wilk presents an interesting pragma-linguistic study of (de) legitimization strategies in social media journalism in his chapter “From Fact to Opinion and Back Again: A Case Study of Marcin Ogdowski’s Facebook War Reporting.” The analyzed case is a sample of advocacy journalism by a Polish journalist and influencer Marcin Ogdowski on his Facebook fan page. Wilk uses tools from critical discourse studies to show how legitimation is built in the contemporary social media ecosystem. This study is especially valuable for the scholars of digital rhetoric, as it shows genre hybridity on social media platforms, where fact, opinion, analysis, and advocacy converge in posts. It offers a solid and transparent methodological foundation also for different rhetorical studies concerned with problems of contemporary ethos and public persona building, as Wilk shows well how the traditional journalistic principle of neutrality is being replaced with authenticity, emotions, and moral investments.

The chapter “Military Conflicts in the Post-Truth Era: An Analysis of the Russian-Ukrainian War in a Romanian Newspaper” by Iulia-Maria Ticărau is inspired by the classical rhetorical research of political speech-making. The author analyzes news media citations from two Romanian politicians, Diana Șoșoacă and George Simion, looking at both as using post-truth rhetoric. The analysis shows the expulsion of proofs, facts, and expertise in favor of emotion, conspiracy, and a sense of injustice, as political support is gained through building a binary distinction between “us” (people) and “them” (corrupted elites). The author sees here a Romanian version of populist mimicking Donald Trump’s rhetorical style, documenting that his rhetorical repertoire might be effectively used by populists also in other democratic countries outside of the US. In more general rhetorical terms, this study shows how affect (pathos) replaces facts and reason (logos) in the public debate.

Isabela Dragomir and Valerica Sporiș, in “Discursive Framing of National Security Concerns in Romanian Media’s Coverage of the Russian-Ukrainian Conflict,” explore journalists’ routines of threat construction in reporting national security issues. They show the nuanced applications of various techniques, including rhetorical questions, speculation, exemplifications, amplification, or irony. These journalistic devices tend to be used for persuasive purposes of creating a sense of constant threat in local media discourse.

In the book, there are also several chapters that do not directly use rhetorical tools but are functionally rhetorical, as they contribute to rhetoric by applying terms and tools from neighboring disciplines (e.g., discourse analysis or media communication), which might be a source of methodological inspiration and nuance. For example, in “Empire, the Media, and Peace: A Corpus- and AI-Assisted Analysis of Stances on Peace in Polish, Romanian, and English Coverage of the Russia-Ukraine War,” Bogdan Vătavu proposes an interesting analysis based on methods of corpus linguistics supported with AI-driven use of large language models (LLMs) for the identification and categorization of stances towards peace in the Romanian and English-language research material. This methodological innovation might be an inspiration for research within rhetoric, where LLMs might support rhetorical analysis through automatic identification of stances, or in other ways, e.g., upscaling the coding of argumentative schemes, rhetorical devices, or other categories in a bigger dataset. The analysis shows how apparently neutral terms (e.g., *peace*) might be used in various meanings (pragmatic, positive, or negative) for the sake of implicit persuasion in the war context. This chapter interestingly links studies of texts to the socio-political notions of “empire” and “civilization” developed within peace studies, as envisioned by Galtung (1996).

Similarly, Rafał K. Matusiak, in his comparative study of “International Legal Terminology in Polish and Romanian Media Discourse,” argues that specialized forensic or legal terminology (e.g., war crime, aggression, genocide, etc.) is used in public discourses in Polish and Romanian media as a tool of evaluation of events. The transfer of legal terms into public discourse serves as moral framing, reinforcing or challenging the international legal consensus. This may be close to what rhetorical scholars draw from Kenneth Burke’s notion of “terministic screens” (1966) and how they approach the potential and actual rhetorical use of conflict-related terminology.

Radu Drăgulescu, in his study of “Discourse Representations of Ukrainian Refugees in Romanian Online News,” also uses tools of critical discourse analysis and corpus linguistics to show how the Ukrainian forced migrants are pictured in Romanian news outlets. This study contributes to the broad field of research on discourses on migration, documenting the Romanian context at a given historical moment. While the author does not make use of rhetorical terminology, it still might be used as a reference in rhetorical studies, as it demonstrates the patterns of strategic use of language to build solidarity with forced migrants, and scale up the public support for them. Conversely, media can also entrench certain expressions that rhetorically modify the negative appraisal of migrants through naming, categorization, hierarchy building, and other discursive tools, which should be avoided in responsible journalism.

Denisa-Maria Bâlc is the author of “Visual News Values: Mapping the Construction of Newsworthiness and Ideology in Romanian Media Imagery,” which analyzes visual news values, mainly by showing how affect (e.g., compassion and moral outrage) is being built through strategic selection and composition of visual materials (e.g., close frame, focus on people’s emotions, especially on suffering). This might be useful for researchers in the field of visual rhetoric, as the study shows how contemporary media use emotions (pathos) in their reporting not only in text, but also in the choice of visuals to boost the newsworthiness of the coverage, promote a given ideology, and create sympathy, moral outrage, or panic.

Minodora Sălcudean explores “Media Emotionscape: Fear Narratives and the Romanian Elections in Times of War,” dealing with the use of fear appeals in political rhetoric. Perfectly sampled examples from Romanian media discourse show how existential fear is raised through exposing topics related to the deployment of atomic weapons, a potential catastrophe at a nuclear electricity plant, or forced recruitment to the army. The identified arguments relying on generating the sense of fear (rhetorical pathos) are often used by populists to delegitimize political adversaries (*we guarantee safety when they are going to involve us in war*). This research again shows how pathos dominates over logos

in political campaign discourse; however, the author also argues that the use of emotions is not necessarily manipulative, as it might be a legitimate framing of events. This argument is interesting in the face of popular framing of emotions in public discourse as a problem and fear exclusively as a populist rhetorical device, and the issue needs further research and assessment.

In her chapter on “Marginal Narratives in Romanian Media Coverage of the Russian-Ukrainian Conflict,” Monica Borș pays attention to the functions of minor narratives, showing how insignificant events and issues are aligned with the most important topics, and how they are used ideologically by media outlets for the sake of moral positioning. This can be a source material for further research on ideological and rhetorical functions of such soft news stories, which are popular and which (as the author claims) use topoi of solidarity, resilience, equality, or cooperation through cultural meanings, rather than geopolitical arguments, that are embedded in these stories. In the end, it turns out that even marginal news on fashion, entertainment or travel carries ideological elements and as such might have persuasive functions.

Finally, the chapter entitled “How Amateur War Tourist Accounts Position Themselves against Mainstream Media Representations of the Russian-Ukrainian War” by Corina Selejan explores amateur war tourism in YouTube videos. This is another study illustrating the digital transformation of the contemporary mediascape that is specifically concerned with conflict coverage and representation by non-professionals, such as influencers. Selejan discusses the role of social media platforms in the coverage of the Russian-Ukrainian war, and (similarly to Wilk, who studies Facebook posts by Marcin Ogdowski) points out the value of eyewitness relations in building influencer credibility (which might be seen as rhetorical ethos) through participation, proximity, informality, and direct contact. This study also shows the distinctive character of social media platforms, which might be used to challenge mainstream media narratives, styles, and ideologies.

Mediated Discourses of Conflict across Languages and Genres is an important and valuable volume that offers a solid basis for the understanding of varieties of contemporary mediated war and conflict discourses. Its interdisciplinary character, empirical insights, and orientation towards practical use make it useful for researchers and practitioners of communication and rhetoric. The book was published within Springer’s series on the Language and Politics; however, its great value is that it does not focus exclusively on institutional political discourse, but shows the various rhetorical facets of both professionally produced outputs (e.g., by political actors, media managers, editors, journalists) and non-professional (influencer, amateur) media content. As is visible through this short overview of chapters above, even though not all of the texts deal with strictly rhetorical

questions or use rhetorical terminology, they might be useful to understand rhetoric understood broadly as strategic use of discourse, including narratives, frames, visuals, legal terms, and other devices influencing the infosphere around the Russian-Ukrainian war.

Understanding the complexity of representations in the mediation of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict is important not only for historical reasons, but also for practical ones, especially in terms of giving the war journalists some insights, analytic tools and adequate knowledge on how to report responsibly on armed conflicts, and how to strengthen citizens' resilience within the increasingly confusing and affective public sphere, rife with manipulation, disinformation, and fake news. This practical orientation of the book is of special value, as the studies presented in the volume might be a good basis for increasing public awareness and might be used as source materials in these endeavors.

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