

IJACT 23-9-9

A Critical Discourse Analysis of the New York Times' Ingroup and Outgroup Presentation in the Russia-Ukraine War Editorials

Bokyung Noh

*Prof., Dept. of Korean-English Interpretation and Translation,
Seoul University of Foreign Studies, Korea
james1130@naver.com*

Abstract

The ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine increases concerns around the world. Russian President Vladimir Putin attacked Ukraine, with a clear aim to protect ethnic Russians from Ukraine, and further to keep Ukraine from joining NATO. However, as the war takes longer than expected, Russia is getting more isolated from the world. Given this, we analyzed editorials from the New York Times by paying attention to the newspaper's viewpoint or ideological stance to the war, under van Dijk (1998)'s ideological square within the framework of critical discourse analysis. The analysis results are as follows: first, Ukraine, the United States and the Europe were designated as the ingroup, whereas Putin was as its outgroup; second, the editorials used negative words for their outgroup presentation, highlighting the outgroup's bad properties, while the positive words for their ingroup presentations were rarely used, indicating that the editorials reinforce outgroup exclusion only; third, it was only Russian President Vladimir Putin who was in their outgroup, while Russians were depicted as scapegoats to satisfy the pleasures of the maniacal Putin. Thus, it can be concluded that with the strategy of negative exclusion, the editorials clearly show their negative ideology towards the war by using negative words for the outgroup almost six times as often as positive words for the ingroup.

Keywords: *The war between Russia and Ukraine, New York Times, ingroup, outgroup, ideological square*

1. INTRODUCTION

The war between Russia and Ukraine began on Feb. 24, 2022 when Russian President Vladimir Putin launched an invasion of Ukraine, at least with two claims: the protection of Russians in the country and the prevention of the Ukraine's joining to NATO. However, the war is still ongoing and unfortunately shows no signs of ending. Most democracies are supporting Ukraine, sending arms and supplies to Ukraine, severely blaming Russia for their invasion to Ukraine. Now after more a one year of war, Russia is getting isolated from the world and Russian President Vladimir Putin is designated as an aggressor.

Given this, the paper aims to investigate the western media's attitude towards the Russia, particular Russia President Putin by analyzing editorials printed on the New York Times based on van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis as a theoretical framework. Since the media's attitude and viewpoint to the war is mainly related with ideology, editorials were employed as a tool for the analysis in that they represent the official view of the paper or publication which publishes them, contrary to straight news which mostly clearly and accurately depict a

Manuscript received: July 28, 2023 / revised: August 10, 2023 / accepted: August 25, 2023

Corresponding Author: james1130@hanmail.net

Tel:***-****-**** Fax: +02-02-2182-6090

Professor, Dept. of Korean-English Interpretation and Translation, Seoul University of Foreign Studies., Korea

given situation related with news episodes. Four editorials were selected from the New York Times, namely “A Brutal New Phase of Putin’s Terrible War in Ukraine,” (Jan.21, 2023), “What Happens to Putin Now?,” (Jan, 27, 2023), “Putin began his unjust war one year ago. Here’s what Ukraine needs Now,” (Feb, 18, 2023), and “ Vladimir Putin Is the World’s Most Dangerous Fool” (Mar. 9, 2023). Thus, a thorough analysis of the editorials would be a valuable window to reflect the media’s viewpoint to the war.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1. Conflict between Russia and Ukraine

The first armed conflict in Ukraine took place in 2014 after Russia’s annexation of Crimea after Crimeans voted to join the Russian Federation. The crisis intensified ethnic conflicts, and then pro-Russian separatists in the eastern Ukrainian regions of Donetsk and Luhansk had the independence referendums on their own. Then the armed conflict in the regions quickly took place between Russian-supported forces and the Ukrainian military. Russia denied any military involvement, but both Ukraine and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) didn’t trust Russia’s claims and found the buildup of Russian troops and military equipment in the targeted regions.

Then, beginning in February 2015, France, Germany, Russia, and Ukraine tried to start negotiations to end the violence in the regions. However, it was found useless. They failed to reach a diplomatic settlement. Until the war between Russia and Ukraine broke out in 2022, the two countries had continuously skirmished. In this sense, the current war between the two countries is a continuation of the long-lasting conflicts between the two countries.

2.2. Critical Discourse Analysis and Ideological Square

Van Dijk’s Critical Discourse Analysis (2006) [1] is discourse research that investigates social events by analyzing texts and discourse in the social context in order to better understand social episodes. From the stance, newspapers which explain, depict, analyze social and political episodes can be utilized as a standard tool in analyzing the media’s viewpoints to the episodes. Particularly, analyzing editorials can produce more remarkable results in that the ideological boundary is much clearer than any other types of media discourse. For example, editorials tend to show a media bias toward a certain issue than straight news. Bell (1991) claimed that editorials represent the newspaper's official statement on a certain issue [2]. Even Ban and Noh (2016) gave a warning that the language of the news media needs to be taken very seriously in that they can frame the ideology and viewpoints for a certain issue [3]. van Dijk (1989) pointed out that the editorials genre necessarily requires the summarizing or recapitulating of events, but this summarizing, selection, and focusing presuppose ideologically framed opinions (p. 235) [4]. In particular, for these reasons, we can easily find some extreme and polarized words or some rhetoric expressions in describing social events. In this analysis, media discourse in editorials is considered as the basis for the investigation of social, political, or cultural practices in the discourse because media discourse shows the interconnection between social practices and language in a clear way, as language cannot be interpreted and decontextualized from the real world. Given this, the central aim of this paper is to identify how discourse linguistic features are used to distinguish ingroup from outgroup in terms of van Dijk’s ideological square within his critical discourse analysis. So, the van Dijk's model plays a key role in this study, although other works from Fairclough (2001) [5] are minimally incorporated for the lexicon analysis. This model shows how the particular ideology is revealed through two strategies of ingroup and outgroup. That, it divides groups into two groups: ingroup and outgroup through two strategies of emphasis and mitigation.

3. SCOPE AND METHOD

This paper aims to figure out the New York Time’s official stance to the war between Russia and Ukraine. So, to pursue this aim, four editorials are selected from the New York Times, namely “A Brutal New Phase of Putin’s Terrible War in Ukraine,” (Jan.21, 2023)[6], “What Happens to Putin Now?,” (Jan, 27, 2023)’ [7],

“Putin began his unjust war one year ago. Here’s what Ukraine needs Now,” (Feb, 18, 2023)” [8] and “Vladimir Putin Is the World’s Most Dangerous Fool” (Mar. 9, 2023) [9]. The editorials were searched with the following terms, the Ukraine and Russia war and Putin because editorials are official viewpoints of the newspaper toward issues. In this sense, all the others such as the letters to the editor, writing on blogs and twitters were excluded because they rely heavily on the perspectives or ideologies from the public, in comparison with editorials. A column is also excluded in that a column is the opinion or the viewpoint of the individual writing it. So, only editorials are analyzed in the framework of van Dijk’s ideological square under the Critical Discourse Analysis.

4. FINDING AND ANALYSIS

This analysis is based on van Dijk’s Ideological Square (2006) which addresses the concept of ingroup and outgroup presentation under his critical discourse analysis. According to him, for ingroup presentation, the writer tends to highlight positive image while emphasizes negative image of outgroup in the presentation. So, it is natural for the writer to use negative words to underscore some negative image for the outgroup, while using positive words for the ingroup. This is well represented in the targeted editorials’ headlines as follows:

- (1) a. A Brutal New Phase of Putin’s Terrible War in Ukraine (Jan.21, 2023)
- b. What Happens to Putin Now?” (Jan, 27, 2023)
- c. Putin began his unjust war one year ago. Here’s what Ukraine needs Now (Feb, 18, 2023)
- d. Vladimir Putin Is the World’s Most Dangerous Fool (Mar. 9, 2023).

The underline lexicons such as *brutal*, *terrible*, *unjust*, *most dangerous*, and *fool* clearly demonstrate negative stances on Russia President Putin, implying that Putin is described as the outgroup. What is denoted by the lexicons like *brutal*, and *terrible* is cruelty and relentlessness which usually are used to modify a crazy person who is mostly uncivilized, unethical and uneducated. The adjective phrase *most dangerous* denotes that Putin poses a threat to the world. In a similar way, the lexicon *unjust* implies that Putin is too mean in that he intentionally attacked Ukraine, since Putin already recognized that Ukraine was much weaker than Russia in military power. That is, the editorials clearly show their negative stance to its outgroup Putin, thus showing that the editorials show negative stance to the war between Ukraine and Russia in that Putin initiated the war. For the distinction between the ingroup and the outgroup, the New York Times’ editorials clearly show which countries are categorized as members in the ingroup as shown below.

- (2) the United States has pledge billions in new arms and equipment, including a roughly \$2.5 billion package (Jan. 21, 2023)
- (3) The United States and its major allies have been steadfast in their resolve to support Ukraine in its fight, and their people have largely accepted the enormous cost (Jan. 27, 2023)
- (4) Outside Europe and the United States, support for the Ukrainian cause is much less solid, making efforts to punish Russia for its aggression less effective (Jan. 27,, 2023)
- (5) Ukraine and its backers hope that the Western arms will be decisive, giving Ukraine a better chance to blunt a Russian offensive and drive the Russians back (Jan. 27, 2023)

As shown in the underlined, the USA and the Europe with Americas’ major allies are considered as member of the ingroup in that they are sending arms and equipment to Ukraine to win Russia or to end the war. Here, the conjunction *and* are used to denote that they are in one team with America, as shown in (3) and (5). In particular, it is shown how adamant the United State is in regard to the war, as denoted by the lexicons *steadfast* in (6), and the phrase *accepted the enormous cost* in (6). But, a member in its outgroup is not specified, implying that the outgroup is in the countries outside the Europe and the United States. One editorial is further officially asking for aids for Ukraine, with clear explanations of why other countries support Ukraine as below.

- (6) To strengthen the alliance supporting Ukraine, as the second year of this terrible and unnecessary conflict begins, it is useful to examine why it is in the interest of the United States and other democracies to expend so much wealth, and to take so great a risk in confronting a nuclear power. The first reason, and the one that prompted an immediate response from the West, is the moral and ethical obligation of the world's democracies to help a nation whose freedom is threatened by an authoritarian power (Jan. 27, 2023)

As shown in the underlined in (6), as for why many democracies should support Ukraine in this war, one practical reason is that we need to be free from the threat posed by nuclear weapons to avoid *a risk in confronting a nuclear power*, while as a humanitarian aid, the editorials say that we need to uphold morals and ethics as long as we are living with *moral and ethical obligation*. These claim that Russia is a risky country which is *authoritarian* or undemocratic, making harms to the world peace.

Here, for the New York Times' journalists, Putin and Russian people are not in the same group. Only Putin is depicted as an enemy against the world. In one of the editorial, it is clearly stated that Russians are afraid of saying their opinions, although they really do not want a war, as denoted by the lexicons *terrible* and *useless* war, as in the paragraph saying," as shown in the underlined in (7). So, the editorials state that Putin is playing with Russians and Russians are just there to satisfy Putin's play or desire only.

- (7) It is difficult to ascertain what Russians are privately saying or thinking, given how dangerous any open criticism of the "limited military operation" has become. Most Russians should be asking when and how this war will end. That is why this editorial is addressed in part to the Russian people: It is in their name that president is waging this terrible and useless war; their sons, fathers and husbands are being killed, maimed or brutalized into committing atrocities; their lives are being mortgaged for generations to come in a state distrusted and disliked in many parts of the world (Mar. 9, 2023)

So, from the editorials' viewpoints, only Putin who should severely criticized for the ongoing war from the world, leading to conclude that only Putin is their outgroup, while Russians have to wait with bated breath for the next thing because they have to follow Putin's directions helplessness. This is explained by James Bond movie in the editorials as in (8).

- (8) The events playing out in Russia feel like the trailer for the next James Bond movie: Vladimir Putin's ex-chef/ex-cyberhacker/recent mercenary army leader, Yevgeny V. Prigozhin, goes rogue (Mar.9, 2023)

As shown from the above examples, America, its major allies, Europe, and democratic countries are the ingroup members, denoting Putting as the outgroup only. Here the editorials use the strategy to highlight negative or bad properties of the outgroup to deliver that they have negative stances towards the war, in that Putin initiated the war.

Table. 1 shows the number (a percentage) of the ingroup and the outgroup which were mentioned in statements in each editorial. The number of the word *Putin* cited in statements is counted, while as the number of words such as *United States, America, allies, backers, and supports* are counted as the ingroup members. For example, in the fourth editorial (Ed. 4), the word *Putin* was cited 25 times in 64 statements, representing 39%, while the words denoting the ingroup was cited 3 times only in 64 statements, representing 4%). So, it was in the four editorials found that the word *Putin* denoting the outgroup member was cited 116 times, while the words denoting the ingroup members was 50 times cited. That is, the ratio of the former on the statements is 53%, while the ratio of the latter is 23%, showing that the word denoting the outgroup were used more than two times as often as the word denoting the ingroup members. Similarly, the ratio holds true in the ratios of the

former and the latter to the total number of words in all editorials: They are respectively 0.82% (ingroup) and 1.9 (outgroup) which show that the word for the outgroup presentation were used more than twice than the words for the ingroup presentation.

Table 1. Number of Ingroup and Outgroup Cited in Statements

Ed.	S*(Word)	Ingroup	Outgroup
1	55(1496)	15(27%)	39(70%)
2	43(1448)	9(21%)	27(62%)
3	56(1404)	23(41%)	25(44%)
4	64(1696)	3 (4%)	25(39%)
Sum	218(6044)	50(23%)	116(53%)

S* (statement) / Word (word count)

Then, the next question is the ideological stance to the ingroup and the outgroup. First of all, it is clearly shown that the words describing the ingroup members are much fewer in the four editorials, as shown in Table 2. The number of words describing good properties of the ingroup members was only six, with no word describing bad properties of the ingroup members. The words are *democratic, neutral, brave, courage, and good*.

Table 2. Ideological Stance to the War: Bad and Good Quality of Ingroup

Editorial	Bad Quality	Good Quality
1	0	2
2	0	1
3	0	1
4	0	1
Sum	0	6

However, this does not work for the outgroup. As shown in Table 3, it is found that the words describing the bad qualities of the outgroup Putin are used 35 times in the four editorials, with no word describing good properties of the outgroup. The words expressing the bad qualities of the outgroup include the followings: *punitive, criminality, fool, omniscient, corrupt, fascist, dirty deal, brutal, cruel, authoritarian* and so.

Table 3. Ideological Stance to the War: Bad and Good Quality of Outgroup

Editorial	Bad Quality	Good Quality
1	9	0
2	8	0
3	9	0
4	9	0
Sum	35	0

The tendency does not seem to follow van Dijk’s ideological square framework. According to the framework, both bad properties for the outgroup and good properties for the ingroup would be emphasized together in order to highlight one’s ideological viewpoints. However, in the four editorials, only bad properties of the outgroup were highlighted. The negative words for the outgroup (35 times) were used almost six times as frequently as positive words for the ingroup members (6 times). This clearly shows that the editorials show their negative stance to the outgroup *Putin* and the war, reinforcing outgroup exclusion.

5. CONCLUSIONS

It was February, 2022 which Russia invaded Ukraine. Most people thought that the war would end in a short time. But contrary to our assumption, the way is still ongoing. Unfortunately, even none can expect when the war will end.

The paper aimed to figure out how the New York Times looks at the war. To pursue this aim, van Dijk's ideological square was used within the critical discourse analysis. For the analysis, four editorials were selected from the New York Times. As a result, within the framework of ideological square, it was found that Ukraine, the United States and the Europe were depicted as the ingroup, whereas Putin was as the outgroup. According to the principles of ingroup and outgroup presentation within van Dijk's ideological square, good properties of the ingroup should be highlighted while at the same time emphasizing bad properties of the outgroup. That is, such two strategies are usually employed to maximize the effects for ingroup homogeneity and outgroup exclusion. However, this does not hold in the four editorials from the New York times in that instead of using two-track approaches emphasizing both good properties of the ingroup and bad properties of the outgroup, the editorials highlighted the bad properties of the outgroup only. In particular, the word *Putin* (the outgroup) was used more than two times as often as the words describing the ingroup members. Moreover, the negative words for the outgroup were used almost six times as often as the positive words for the ingroup were used.

Given this, the key points are as follows: First, positive lexicalizations for the ingroup were rarely shown in the editorials; Second, negative lexicalizations were much more actively utilized for their outgroup presentation, thus highlighting the outgroup's bad properties. It indicates that the editorials reinforce outgroup exclusion only. Third, Russians were not designated as the members of the outgroup. Instead, they are described as scapegoats who have to lose their lives at the cost of satisfying the crazy Putin's war play. Thus, it can be concluded that utilizing only one strategy of highlighting negative properties for outgroup presentation can be effective in expressing one's ideological stance toward an issue, at least when there is a clear dichotomy between two distinctive groups in terms of properties, as in the case of the war between Russia and Ukraine.

REFERENCES

- [1] T. A., van Dijk, 'Ideology and Discourse Analysis,' Journal of Political Ideologies, 11, 115-140, 2006.
- [2] A. Bell, The Language of News Media. Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1991.
- [3] H. Ban and B. K. Noh, 'Analyzing Quotation in News Reporting from Western Foreign Press: Focusing on Evaluative Language,' International Journal of Advanced Culture Technology, 4-3, Sept. 2016
- [4] T. A., van Dijk, 'Race, riots, and the Press: An analysis of Editorials in the British press about 1985 disorders,' Gazette, 43, 229-253, 1989.
- [5] N. Fairclough, Critical Discourse Analysis, New York: Longman Group Ltd., 1995.
- [6] "A Brutal New Phase of Putin's Terrible War in Ukraine," the New York Times, Jan. 21, 2023.
- [7] T. L. Friedman, "What Happens to Putin Now?" the New York Times, June 27, 2023.
- [8] "Putin Bgan His Unjust War One Year Ago. Here's What Ukraine Needs Now." the New York Times, Feb. 18, 2023.
- [9] T. L. Friedman, "Vladimir Putin is the World's Most Dangerous Fool" the New York Times, May 9, 2023.