

Ideological Bias in Intersemiotic News Translation of The Russo-Ukrainian War

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This thesis examines news articles of various outlets of differing political affiliations (Russian, Ukrainian, and Western) reporting on the same issues of the Russo-Ukrainian war. The purpose of the thesis is to examine political biases found within the intersemiotic translation of said articles, especially in the form of strategic word choices and framing, utilising both news framing analysis and critical discourse analysis. Political bias is found in differing quantities within all of the articles examined in this thesis, even in those traditionally thought of as impartial and unbiased. Euphemistic and dysphemistic wording and framing in the articles mainly act to either cause indignation toward the opposing side or arouse support for the other. The findings of this thesis highlight the importance of media literacy and critical thinking.

Key words: Political bias, news translation, Russo-Ukrainian war, news framing analysis, critical discourse analysis

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1 Introduction

The spread of contemporary news – both reliable and less so – is unprecedentedly quick and easy in the modern digitalised age. The role of these news sources is ever more pivotal in shaping the views and opinions of the public on contemporary issues on which they report, such as the highly “trending” and abundantly covered Russo-Ukrainian war of 2022. While the most reputable news sources are relatively well established as the main sources of information for the general public, at least in much of the West, lots of false or otherwise biased news is still published. While outright misinformation in reputable news sources is more often than not noticed and corrected, the biases of their writers can oftentimes still manifest in the intentional or unintentional use of loaded language, even in sources traditionally viewed as neutral and reputable. In the translation process, in both inter- and intralingual translation as well as in intersemiotic translation, these biases can either stay true to the original or amplify or reduce, depending on the framing for which the translator is aiming (D’Angelo and Kuypers 2010, xiii).

In this thesis, I research articles from various news sources reporting on the Russo-Ukrainian war, analysing examples of the aforementioned loaded language and strategic word choices, as well as the framing of the articles in general, from the point of view of media framing analysis and critical discourse analysis. I examine how different intersemiotic translations of the same piece of news change, however subtly, the overall message of the news reporting with the use of deliberate, differing choices in wording. I argue that the chosen news sources aim to influence the stance of their consumer on the issue reported upon by the strategic usage of language and terms with strong connotations, either negative or positive.

I begin my thesis by introducing the theoretical and the contextual background of the subject matter, as well as some key concepts and terms essential for the paper. This is followed by the Materials and methods section, in which I introduce and describe the news materials I have chosen for research and the manner of their collection. I also introduce the research methods of media framing analysis and critical discourse analysis, both of which I use to analyse the collected materials. I then move on to analyse the materials examined in the Analysis and discussion section, which is followed by the Results section, wherein I examine and describe the results of my findings and analyses. Finally, I conclude the thesis with a short summary.

2 Background

This section introduces and explains the relevant theories, terminology, and contextual background central to my thesis. I first introduce framing and one of its more specialised branches, news framing analysis, as well as critical discourse analysis, all of which are central to my research. I then briefly explain loaded language and other key terms related to it, such as indignant language and euphemisms, followed by a summary of the contextual background of the Russo-Ukrainian war, explaining some details that are important in analysing texts related to it. Lastly, I briefly explain the use of intersemiotic translation in this thesis.

2.1 Framing

Framing, or the study of frames, especially in the context of communication studies, is commonly seen to originate from sociologist and writer Erving Goffman's classic book *Frame Analysis* (D'Angelo and Kuypers 2010, 46) where he expands upon the original concept of frames as introduced by anthropologist Gregory Bateson in his paper *A Theory of Play and Fantasy* (Goffman 1986, 7). Framing is a wide umbrella term and has no single definition (Lecheler and de Vreese 2018, 2). One of many is Entman's definition, which focuses on framing in mass and news media and defines framing as "the presence or absence of certain keywords, stock phrases, stereotyped images, sources of information and sentences that provide thematically reinforcing clusters of facts or judgments" (Lecheler and de Vreese 2018, 5).

This branch of framing research, news framing analysis (NFA for short), also known as media framing, has an essential role in my thesis. The research method is focused on analysing frames used in news and mass media, stemming from the work of Robert Entman (Lecheler and de Vreese 2018, 8). These 'news frames' are defined as "a central organizing idea or story line that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events" (Lecheler and de Vreese 2018, 3). The focus of the research is to examine the often small changes in the presentation of an issue or an event and explain why and how said changes can strongly sway opinions one way or another (Lecheler and de Vreese 2018, 8). Much of the research focuses on how issue advocates – politicians and stakeholders, for example – use journalists to communicate to the public their own preferred version of the events and topics, the framing of which are usually made interesting to appeal to the journalists (D'Angelo and Kuypers 2010, 1). In addition to making the framing interesting, which exaggeration amplifies, sources – especially political

ones – almost always have a type of bias (ibid.). This bias is often reflected upon the source material, similarly to how the biases of the journalist might be superimposed in the reporting of the source material (ibid.).

2.2 Critical discourse analysis

Another key research method in this thesis is critical discourse analysis, or CDA for short. CDA as a theory is attributed mainly to the work of linguist Norman Fairclough and is a fairly new field of research stemming from the more general study of discourse analysis (Le and Short 2009, 4). CDA aims to examine, among other things, power relationships, social injustices, and ideologies in discourse, uncovering hidden meanings therein (ibid.). Texts contain a plethora of potentially ideological properties, of which the most important for this thesis are vocabulary, grammar, presuppositions, implicatures, and politeness conventions (Fairclough 1995, 2). The definition of ‘discourse’ as a term, however, is under much debate among practitioners of CDA. One relatively vague definition is “something larger than a sentence”, written or spoken (Le and Short 2009, 5).

Critical discourse analysis is an interdisciplinary field (Le and Short 2009, 3). One discipline in which it can be used is media studies, being quite similar in analysis to framing research. According to CDA, ideology, which this thesis largely examines, is inherently present in textual discourse, often in the form of the choice of vocabulary (Le and Short 2009, 12). According to Fairclough (1995, 2), the one who controls discourse has the power to hold “particular ideological investments in dominance over other alternative practices”. This means that the one in control chooses what topics are discussed and in what framing, promoting a particular ideological point of view. Thus, text shaped by ideology in turn affects the mental representations the text evokes to its reader (Le and Short 2009, 13). In other words, according to CDA ideological choices in the wording of text influence how the subject matter is received and perceived. This kind of ‘loaded language’ is often used in texts meant to sway public opinion in a certain direction.

2.3 Key terms

Loaded language is a type of language purposefully designed to influence opinions with the strategic use of emotive words. These are words with strong connotations, such as ‘war’ or ‘terrorist’, that are aimed to evoke emotional responses in the listener, thus influencing their opinions one way or another (Macagno and Walton 2014, 5). A common use of loaded

language is to exaggerate and amplify the negative aspects of what someone has done in order to cause indignation towards them (Macagno and Walton 2014, 14). This so-called indignant language often contains dysphemisms – unpleasant terms replacing neutral ones – and negative adjectives expressing, for example, a considerable lack of pity, strategically chosen to make the target appear less favourable or supportable (ibid.). For example, whereas one side might refer to armed militants as “freedom fighters”, the other side might frame them with the very negative dysphemism “terrorists”.

Euphemisms are the opposite of dysphemisms yet are still a part of loaded language.

Euphemisms are positive terms replacing neutral or negative terms, often used to soften the impact of harsh issues or events (Macagno and Walton 2014, 17). Euphemisms are often used when reporting on war, especially on one’s own side: instead of a highly negative term, such as ‘killing civilians’ or ‘torture’, more convenient, though less detailed or informative ‘collateral damage’ and ‘enhanced interrogation’, respectively, might be used (Wittman 2016, xvi). In order to “sanitise atrocities”, vagueness usually goes hand-in-hand with euphemisms in, for example, political language and mass media, as vague terms tend to arouse feelings that are less negative, especially in the rather large portion of the population who consume news without further delving into what they might actually mean (ibid.). In other words, vague euphemisms are often used in media and politics in attempt to downplay atrocities and to keep negative opinions from forming.

Salience is an important part of framing. As defined by Entman (1993, 52), salience is “to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient”, that is, “more noticeable, meaningful or memorable to audiences” (Entman 1993, 53). Salience is the opposite of vagueness and plays an important role in the focus of the framing of an article.

2.4 Contextual background

Though the Russo-Ukrainian war (or the more loaded term “Russian invasion of Ukraine”, by which it is widely known in the West) has constantly been in the news, some context of its wider background is necessary to fully understand all the analysed materials in this thesis. The Russo-Ukrainian war started on the 24th of February in 2022 with the Russian president Putin’s declaration of a “special military operation”, also abbreviated as SMO or SVO (from the Russian term ‘Специальная военная операция’) – a full-scale invasion of the neighbouring Ukraine. The conflict can be seen having its roots as far as the Cold War, when

the Russian-majority Crimea was transferred from the Russian SFSR to the Ukrainian SSR, which would in 2014, coupled with increasing pro-EU and NATO sentiment of Ukrainian politics, culminate to Russia occupying and annexing the peninsula after conducting a widely disputed referendum, facing much international condemnation (Fedorchak 2024, 45).

In April of the same year started the war in Donbas in the Eastern Ukrainian Russian-speaking-majority territories of Donetsk and Luhansk, the Russian-backed separatists of which seized government buildings and proclaimed the independent People's Republics of Donetsk and Luhansk, respectively (*ibid.*). The fighting was periodically paused with the signing of multiple ceasefires, but no particular progress was made. The war in Donbas is still highly relevant, as one of the many reasons Russia has used as justification of the war is the "liberation" of the People's Republics of Donetsk and Luhansk (henceforth abbreviated as DPR and LPR, respectively), which can be seen in some of the materials analysed. Though some Russian sources support the liberation of the republics, other sources refer to the Donbas region as a rightful territory of Russia, stemming from a mix of the region, along with the whole of Ukraine, having been part of both the Russian empire and the Soviet Union, and nowadays having either a Russian-speaking majority or a considerable minority.

It is important to note that as the relations between Russia and the West have even further deteriorated since the start of the war in Ukraine, so has the mutual trust in the sources of one another. Few Western news agencies use Russian sources when reporting on the war and the same applies in reverse – with some exceptions, of course. For this reason, direct news translations from one side of the war to the other are scarce. Therefore, in this thesis I focus mainly on the aspect of intersemiotic translation. Intersemiotic translation is described as translation from one semiotic system to another – from verbal language to text, for example (Jakobson 1959, 233). Instead of focusing on a direct translation, the emphasis is on the translation of the overall message (Jakobson 1959, 234). Thus, the war – the events themselves and the emotions and audiovisual components involved therein – can be thought of as a type of semiotic source, which can be intersemiotically translated into a textual journalistic report. The process does, however, involve both intralingual (from official government reports to journalistic reports) and interlingual (from Ukrainian or Russian to English) translation as well, but the intersemiotic whole is in focus in this thesis. In these translations, at least in the ones examined in this thesis, the translator's bias is often either clearly or more subtly noticeable in the text and the accompanying visual elements of the article.

3 Materials and methods

In this section I introduce the materials analysed in the thesis, as well as the news sources from which they are gathered. The news sources from which the analysed materials are collected, apart from the more neutral source, are chosen, contrary to most other studies, due to the lack of their reliability and impartiality. This is because biases, which this thesis examines, are especially noticeable in sources not too bothered by impartiality. These biased sources are TASS, UNN, and Ukrainska Pravda, whereas the mainly impartial, albeit not entirely unbiased, source is Reuters. For clarity's sake, DeepState, an important source for the examined Ukrainian and Western articles, is also briefly introduced. I also elaborate on the theoretical framework and the manner in which I analyse said materials.

3.1 News sources

DeepState, Deep State, or Deep State UA, is an online news source based on the messaging app Telegram. It is a non-governmental organisation focused on providing real-time updates of the Russo-Ukrainian war in the form of both news reports and an interactive map of the war, using as its sources photo and video evidence on social media, satellite imagery, human sources on the frontlines, the Ukrainian military, and ordinary civilians in the area of the reporting (Halka). According to the author of the map, Russian sources are not taken into account, although some visual evidence may be used (*ibid.*). DeepState has often been cited in both Ukrainian and international (Western) news sources. Because of its Ukrainian affiliation, however, Russian news sources barely use it, instead preferring Russian sources, such as the Russian Defence Ministry or Russian Telegram channels.

The Russian News Agency TASS (*TACC*), or TASS for short, also formerly known as ITAR-TASS, is a news agency owned by the government of Russia. It has been criticised for spreading biased news, disinformation and propaganda (Watanabe), which is why it is chosen as a source in this thesis. The pro-Russian bias of the agency is, although in some cases subtle, quite obvious in the examined materials, making it an ideally biased source for this thesis. It is also the largest news agency in Russia and noticeably large on an international scale, and thus is in a highly influential position over a great number of opinions. It offers news articles in both Russian and in English, the latter of which are used in this thesis.

Information Agency Ukrainian National News (Українські Національні Новини), or just UNN (*VHH*), is another key news source in my thesis, acting as a Ukrainian counterpart to

the Russian TASS. It is a private news agency, and even though the agency's website offers news in both Ukrainian and (in most cases) English, information of the agency, at least on Google, is very limited, with most of the scarce information having no English translation at all. Similarly to the previous source, although UNN claims on its website to be completely unbiased and impartial, it is nevertheless examined in this thesis for its very obvious bias, which in some cases is even more noticeable than that of TASS.

Ukrainska Pravda (Українська правда) is another privately owned Ukrainian source, offering news in Ukrainian, Russian and English. During the first days of the war the online newspaper was the second most popular website in Ukraine after Google and currently has about eight million international readers (Ukrainska Pravda, support us -section), making it an influential source of (translated) news. It is analysed in this thesis because, much like UNN, due to the agency being Ukrainian it is intrinsically pro-Ukrainian, albeit to a much lesser degree than UNN.

Reuters, based in London, on the contrary, is one of the largest news agencies in the world, and unlike the previously mentioned sources, is widely known for being a reliable, unbiased and impartial news source. Reuters is used in this thesis as the 'neutral counterpart' to which the more biased sources are compared in the case of the first group of articles. It is important to notice, however, that not even Reuters is completely without bias, as can be seen in the analysis.

3.2 Analysed materials

The table below lists the articles analysed in the thesis. They are listed in groups on the basis of what they are reporting on.

Table 1. Examined news articles.

Article reference	Article designation
TASS 27.11.2024. "Russian troops liberate Novaya Ilyinka community in Donbass region over past day"	Article 1a
UNN 20.11.2024. "DeepState: Occupants seized Nova Illka [sic] and are advancing on several fronts"	Article 1b
Reuters 28.11.2024. "Russian Defence Ministry says Moscow's forces take another east [sic] Ukrainian settlement"	Article 1c

TASS 3.9.2024. “Russian forces launch missile attack on Ukrainian military school in Poltava — politician”	Article 2a
Ukrainska Pravda 3.9.2024. “Russia hits educational institution in Poltava with ballistic missiles, many people under rubble”	Article 2b

The news articles mentioned in Table 1 are collected from various news sites, which are also mentioned in the table. The articles are divided firstly into numbers (article 1 and article 2) on the basis of the wider event they are reporting on, and then into subsections (article 1a; 1b; 1c) based on the affiliation of the source, wherein ‘a’ is the ‘pro-Russian source’, ‘b’ is the ‘pro-Ukrainian source’, and ‘c’ is the ‘neutral source’. In the case of Article 2, no neutral source will be examined. Articles of the first group discuss the Russian capture of a Ukrainian settlement, whereas articles of the second group discuss a Russian missile strike on a Ukrainian military school.

3.3 Methods of research

I primarily examine the materials analysed through the lens of the aforementioned news framing analysis, henceforth abbreviated as NFA. As mentioned before, the focus of NFA is to examine how a small change in the presentation of an issue can greatly influence the opinions of its readers (Lecheler and de Vreese 2018, 8). At the core of examining news frames is the presence or absence of certain thematic keywords (Lecheler and de Vreese 2018, 5), as well as ‘framing devices’ and ‘reasoning devices’ (D’Angelo and Kuypers 2010, 19). The former consists of, for example, metaphors and catchphrases, whereas the latter is made up of problem identification, cause diagnosis, moral judgement, and suggestion of remedy (Entman 1993, 52). Of these reasoning devices, especially moral judgement and problem definition are central to this thesis. Specific theme-enforcing keywords, such as indignant or euphemistic synonyms, are also important aspects to inspect (D’Angelo and Kuypers 2010, 20). All these corresponding devices make up a larger ‘frame’, referring to ‘how the story is told’, which is at the core of NFA (D’Angelo and Kuypers 2010, 94). It is important to note that news frames are often based and built on larger ‘frames’ of the wider public opinion (ibid.). This ‘social frame’ is crucial to a thorough analysis, as it largely dictates the underlying opinions and biases of the writer of the text. The analysis of materials in this thesis therefore starts with a brief explanation of the wider ‘social frame’ affecting the sources.

Also explained in the Background section, another method I utilise in the research is critical discourse analysis, henceforth abbreviated as CDA, albeit to a somewhat lesser extent due to the intertwining features of the two methods. Due to its critical nature, CDA is especially interested in the relations between language and power and ideology, focusing especially on the smaller details rather than a larger frame. Though there is no one right method for applying CDA due to its highly interdisciplinary nature, one method is the examination of 'linguistic instruments', among which are figurativeness, vocabulary, and argumentation types (Wodak and Meyer 2001, chapter 2). The most relevant instrument to this thesis is vocabulary, which Fairclough (2001, 111) divides into (1) 'experiential values of words', such as ideologically contested words, rewording and overwording, and classification schemes; (2) 'relational values of words', such as euphemisms and dysphemisms and markedly formal or informal words; (3) 'expressive values of words', such as the personal opinions of the writer; and (4) 'the use of metaphors'. Points (1) and (2) are especially prevalent in the examined materials.

4 Analysis and discussion

In this section, I analyse and discuss the materials examined. As mentioned before, each article is divided into two groups based on the event on which they are reporting. I analyse both groups individually, even though they share some similarities. Before the analysis proper, I first present the wider ‘social frame’ of the subject issue (D’Angelo and Kuypers 2010, 94). I then examine the articles from the view of news framing analysis, searching for recurring themes and narratives. Afterwards, I analyse the articles using critical discourse analysis, examining the linguistic instruments used therein. Lastly, I briefly examine the visual elements of the articles and discuss their overall intersemiotic translation.

Both examined groups of articles are presented in the form of a table, where the first line is the ‘article designation’ (1a; 1b; 1c), the second line is the headline of the article, and the following lines are content corresponding (more or less) to the other article or articles. Both tables are coded by highlighting the intertwining similarities between the analysed articles, which is further specified alongside each table.

4.1 Group 1: Nova Illinka / Novaya Ilyinka

The first examined group of articles – 1a, b, and c – reports on the Russian capture of Nova Illinka (Ru: Novaya Ilyinka) in the Russo-Ukrainian war. The articles are from TASS, UNN, and Reuters, respectively. As for the ‘social frame’ of the situation, the general consensus in Western countries is that Russia is unjustified in its invasion, whereas in Russia the opinion, at least that of the government, is the opposite. Therefore, most Western news sources tend to be pro-Ukraine, whereas Russian sources tend to be pro-Russia. This is due to the pressure of both the political and the public “frame advocates” and “sponsors” of the countries of the news sources (ibid.). The influence of the ‘social frame’ on the frames published by news sources is especially visible in the case of Russian and Ukrainian sources, where due to the war the opinions of the public and the frame sponsors (the state in the case of TASS, for example) tend to be strongly against the adversary (Lecheler and de Vreese 2018, 29). Article 1a uses as its source the (very obviously pro-Russian) Russian Defence Ministry, whereas 1b cites the pro-Ukrainian DeepState. Article 1c cites both sources.

The table below contains corresponding excerpts from articles 1a, 1b, and 1c. Not all excerpts are in the order in which they are in the articles. The table is coded, where **bolded** indicates the ‘doer’, *italicised* the ‘action’, **bolded and underlined** the ‘location/target of action’,

underlined the ‘wider location’, text enclosed in strokes (//) the ‘wider context’, and in brackets ({}) the ‘sources’. Each article has its own word choices for the coded parts, but the general function of the highlighted part is the same.

Table 2. Article group 1.

1a	1b	1c
<p>Russian troops liberate <u>Novaya Ilyinka</u> community in <u>Donbass region</u> over past day</p>	<p>{DeepState:} Occupants seized <u>Nova Illka [sic]</u> and are advancing on several fronts</p>	<p>{Russian Defence Ministry says} Moscow’s forces take another <u>east Ukrainian settlement</u></p>
<p>Russian troops liberated the community of <u>Novaya Ilyinka</u> in the <u>Donetsk People’s Republic (DPR)</u> over the past day in /the special military operation in Ukraine/, {Russia’s Defense Ministry reported on Wednesday}.</p>	<p>{According to DeepState}, enemy troops occupied the village of <u>Nova Illinka</u> and reached new positions [...].</p> <p>Terrorist forces continue /active offensives/ in <u>the Donetsk region</u>.</p>	<p>{Analysts and war bloggers say} Russian forces are advancing in <u>eastern Ukraine</u> at the fastest rate since the early days of /the February 2022 invasion/, capturing village after village.</p>
<p>“Battlegroup Center units liberated the settlement of <u>Novaya Ilyinka</u> in the <u>Donetsk People’s Republic</u> as a result of /successful operations/,” {the ministry said in a statement}.</p>	<p>The aggressor occupied <u>Nova Illinka</u> and advanced in several directions on the front line.</p> <p>{This is reported by DeepState, according to UNN}.</p>	<p>{Russia's Defence Ministry said} on Wednesday its forces had taken control of the settlement of <u>Nova Illinka</u> [...].</p> <p>{Ukraine's military made no mention} of <u>Nova Illinka</u> in its daily dispatches. [...]</p> <p>{But Deep State [...] said more than a week ago} that <u>Nova Illinka</u> had <i>fallen into Russian hands</i>.</p>

All three articles have framed the reported issue very differently. This is especially apparent in their headlines. Firstly, the Russian article 1a refers to the capture of the settlement as “liberation”, presenting its problem definition (the issue) (Entman 1993, 52) as highly beneficial, and its cause diagnosis (the ‘doer’) (ibid.) as a neutral choice of “Russian troops”. Article 1b is the polar opposite, referring to the same event as a “seizure” of the settlement,

defining the problem as a negative loss and an aggressive seizure by the enemy. The article identifies as its causal agent a negative choice of “occupants”, who are implied by the word choice to be unwanted invaders. 1c, instead, takes a more neutral stance, although still affected by the wider Western pro-Ukrainian public sentiment, defining the problem as a Russian military advance.

Overall, the moral evaluation of the issue in article 1a is strongly positive and made highly euphemistic by the writer, largely in result by the use of euphemisms (ibid.). The article emphasises the Russians as liberators or defenders of the settlement, implying Ukraine’s control of it to be unjust compared to either the rule of Russia or the DPR. The positive and euphemistic framing is made to influence the reader to react more positively to the issue. The article also suggests the future to contain continued success as a “result of successful operations”. 1b, on the contrary, frames the issue as strongly negative from a pro-Ukrainian and anti-Russian perspective, emphasising illegal aggression and occupation using highly dysphemistic word choices, such as the aforementioned “occupants”. The framing is made to influence the reader to react negatively to the issue and towards Russia, suggesting as a remedy continued resistance against it. 1c, although much more neutral than the other articles, has a subtly pro-Ukrainian framing as well, which can be seen from word choices such as “the February 2022 invasion” (as opposed to the more euphemistic “special military operation in Ukraine” in 1a), and “fallen into Russian hands”, “take” or “capture [the settlement]” (implying it to be negative, forceful, and unjust). The framing subtly implies Russia to be unjust in its invasion, evoking in its reader sympathy and support for Ukraine.

Moving from news framing analysis to critical discourse analysis, all three articles use ideological language and ideologically contested words to affect the mental representations of the issue of its readers (Le and Short 2009, 13). The first striking difference between the articles is the aforementioned difference in the ideological framing of the issue. Article 1a uses the most euphemisms, such as referring to the capture of the settlement as “liberation”, painting Ukraine as the occupier from which the areas are in need of freeing. It also refers to the war as a “special military operation”, obscuring the definition often seen as negative, compared to the much more indignant “active offensives” and “invasion” of 1b and 1c, respectively. Article 1b, instead, uses the most dysphemisms, referring to the issue as an illegal “seizure” and “occupation” of the settlement. It also at all times refers to the Russian troops with dysphemisms, such as “occupants”, “enemy troops”, “terrorist forces”, and “the aggressor”. The vocabulary of 1b is highly indignant, painting in a sort of “us versus them” or

a “good versus evil” narrative (Le and Short 2009, 31), as opposed to 1a that refers to the troops with a more neutral “Russian troops” or even a more localised and ‘relatable’ “Battlegroup Center units”, evoking a sense of familiarity in its Russian readers. Though not as outwardly indignant as 1b, 1c refers to the Russian troops as “Moscow’s forces”, a term that is seldom used if not to give the text an evil empire-esque tone, as well as to perhaps emphasise the authoritarianism of the state.

The articles contain more subtly ideologically contested language, too. Whereas 1b and 1c use the Ukrainian spelling of the name of the settlement, “Nova Illinka”, 1a uses the Russian spelling “Novaya Ilyinka”, as well as the Russian spelling of “Donbass” as opposed to the Ukrainian spelling of “Donbas”, subtly implying Russian right over the area and feeding into the framing of the Russians as its liberator. 1a also refers to the settlement as part of the DPR, further implying the Russians (or the Russian-speaking population of the area) to hold a more legitimate claim over the land as opposed to Ukraine. These word choices aim to evoke support of Russia and the war, legitimising it with the original cause of “liberating” the Russian separatists of both the DPR and the LPR from Ukraine, as well as strengthening the Russian claim over the area with the use of Russian localisations of Ukrainian location names.

All three articles emphasise what Russia has done. Article 1a emphasises Russia as the protector of the “oppressed” people of the Donbas region, as well as justifies and obfuscates the war with the use of euphemisms such as “liberation” and “special military operation”. Article 1b, instead, emphasises Russia as a brute aggressor with highly indignant dysphemisms such as “terrorist forces” and “the aggressor”. The more neutral article 1c emphasises that Russia has “apparently” advanced again, although emphasising uncertainty with word choices such as “Russian Defence Ministry says” and “Ukraine’s military made no mention [of the issue]”. As previously mentioned, however, 1c does also use some indignant language, such as “the February 2022 invasion”.

The Russian article 1a opts for a positive and reinforcing intersemiotic translation of the event. This is further amplified by the article’s one striking visual element: a large, overall bright picture of a neatly dressed Russian soldier in front of a firing artillery piece (see Picture 1 in Appendices). Alongside the textual elements, the visual elements of the destruction caused by the fighting are thus “translated” into a glorified visual representation of the event with strength-evoking imagery. On the contrary, the Ukrainian article 1b presents an overall grey picture of a group of soldiers with a Russian flag in the blurry background (Picture 2),

giving off a gloomy and mournful impression, translating the event into something woeful and depressive. Similarly, article 1c includes a picture of an overall grey, destroyed cityscape, presumably shelled by artillery (Picture 3).

4.2 Group 2: Poltava missile strike

The second group of articles – 2a and 2b – report on the Russian ballistic missile strike on the Ukrainian Poltava higher military command school of communications in the city of Poltava. The articles are from TASS and Ukrainska Pravda, respectively. The ‘social frame’ is the same as that of Group 1: TASS, as stated before, is pro-Russian, whereas Ukrainska Pravda is pro-Ukrainian due to its frame sponsors (Lecheler and de Vreese 2018, 29).

The table below contains corresponding excerpts from articles 2a and 2b. Not all excerpts are in the order in which they are in the articles. The table is coded, where **bolded** indicates the ‘doer’, *italicised* the ‘action’, *italicised and underlined* the ‘effects of the action’, **bolded and underlined** the ‘location/target of action’, underlined the ‘secondary target of action’, text enclosed in strokes (/) the ‘wider context’, and in brackets ({}) the ‘sources’. Each article has its own word choice for the coded parts, but the general function of the highlighted part is the same.

Table 3. Article group 2.

2a	2b
<p>Russian forces launch <i>missile attack</i> on <u>Ukrainian military school</u> in Poltava — {politician}</p>	<p>Russia hits <u>educational institution</u> in Poltava with ballistic missiles, <i>many people under rubble</i></p>
<p>Russian forces have delivered <i>a missile strike</i> on <u>the former Poltava higher military command school of communications</u>, /which was lately used to train specialists in radar and electronic warfare systems for the Ukrainian army/, {Vladimir Rogov, chairman of the 'We Are Together with Russia' movement, said. }</p>	<p>Russia launched <i>a ballistic missile attack</i> on <u>one of the educational institutions</u> in the city of Poltava on 3 September.</p> <p>[...]</p> <p>Update: {Volodymyr Zelenskyy, the President of Ukraine, reports} that an <u>educational institution and a hospital nearby</u> were struck.</p>

<p>"It was <u>this manpower</u> [of the military school] that was hit by <i>a missile strike</i>. [...] <u>The enemy's losses amount to hundreds of people</u>," {he wrote on his Telegram channel. }</p>	<p>Preliminarily, over <u>40 people</u> <i>have been killed</i>, <u>almost 200</u> <i>have sustained injuries</i>, and <u>many people</u> <i>are still trapped under the rubble</i>.</p> <p>[...]</p> <p>Details: {The Ministry of Defence stressed} that one of the institute's buildings was <i>partially destroyed</i>, and <u>many people</u> <i>have been trapped under the rubble</i>. Thanks to the coordinated work of rescue workers and medics, <u>25 people</u> have been rescued [...].</p>
	<p>Quote: "[...] <i>This tragedy</i> is yet another evidence of the enemy's /underhandedness, which stops at no crime/ to <i>try to intimidate</i> Ukrainians.</p> <p>We urge everyone to remain calm and trust only official sources of information. Any speculation on <i>this tragedy</i> is unacceptable."</p>

Both articles frame the reported issue differently. The cause diagnosis of both articles is the same: Russia or Russian forces. The same goes for the problem definition: Russian forces have conducted a missile attack on an educational institution. The use and focus of saliency in the articles, however, greatly differs. Article 2a emphasises that the educational institution hit was a military school used by the Ukrainian army. The salience is further enhanced by the repetition (Entman 1993, 53) of the term “military school” in all instances wherein the school is mentioned, as well as the added context that the school “was lately used to train specialists [...] for the Ukrainian army”. In comparison, article 2b opts for a more vague description of the school, referring to it as an “educational institution”, leaving its military-use out of the context. 2b also emphasises that alongside the school a nearby hospital was hit, something that 2a completely left unmentioned, as well as bringing into greater salience the civilian casualties of the missile strike. Article 2b, much like 2a, uses heavy repetition of the terms “educational institution” and “nearby hospital” to enhance their saliency.

What the articles have chosen to make more salient greatly reflects the moral evaluation of their framing. The pro-Russian article 2a emphasises that the target of the strike was a school in use by the Ukrainian military, obfuscating the nearby hospital being struck, justifying the

attack as a strike against the military, not the civilian population. While not outwardly celebratory, the article insinuates the issue as something positive and morally correct from a Russian (military) point of view. The Ukrainian article 2b presents an opposing moral evaluation. The article obfuscates the military-function of the targeted school, emphasising the secondary targets of the attack – the nearby hospital as well as the people killed and under rubble. 2b also leaves unmentioned the people being military personnel, which 2a focuses on when the casualties are mentioned: “It was this manpower [of the military school] that was hit.” Article 2b presents the issue as highly negative, and, unlike 2a, insinuates the attack to be more against the people than the military, presenting it more akin to a terrorist attack than a military procedure, thus evoking support and sympathy for Ukraine and indignation towards Russia. 2a also brings into salience the rescue workers, thanks to whom “25 people have been rescued”, bringing to light a positive side of the news as well.

Moving on to CDA, both articles use ideologically contested language, though not as widely as the first group of articles. Apart from the ideological salience and obfuscation already examined under NFA, there are some word-level ideological choices to be looked at. Firstly, the Ukrainian article 2b uses the term “people” multiple times when discussing the people who died in the attack, making the human losses a major part of the news. Article 2a, in comparison, only mentions them very briefly as a sort of side note in the form of “manpower [of the military school]” and “the enemy’s losses”. This may be in order to dehumanise the people of the opposing side of the war as just a part of the military, evoking less negative feelings about their losses. The opposite is true in 2b, which puts emphasis on the humanity of the losses, evoking sympathy in its readers, which is further enhanced by negative word choices such as “have been killed”, “have sustained injuries”, and “was destroyed”, as well as referring to the missile strike as a “tragedy”. While both articles use the very negative term “enemy” of one another, 2b uses some more outwardly politically loaded language, mostly in the quoted section of the Ukrainian president Zelenskyy. Firstly, the quote mentions “the enemy’s underhandedness, which stops at no crime”, clearly showing disdain against Russia, accusing them of cheap tactics and implying the reported issue to be a crime, amplifying the indignation in the article. The quote also mentions it to be an attempt “to try to intimidate Ukrainians”, furthering the Ukrainian perspective of Russia as a “terrorist state” (ukraine.ua/faq/countries-border-ukraine).

Both articles use as their source a more or less Ukrainian source. The pro-Ukrainian article 2b naturally uses sources such as the press service of the Ukrainian Ministry of Defence and the

president himself. 2a cites as its main source the Telegram channel of politician Vladimir Rogov, chairman of the ‘We Are Together with Russia’ movement, a pro-Russian collaborationist organisation based in the Russian-captured Zaporizhzhia Oblast. Quoting a semi-local official is most likely meant to bring legitimacy to the claim, as well as to the war and occupation itself, emphasising the role of the chairman of a pro-Russian group.

The Ukrainian article 2b aims for a highly negative intersemiotic translation of the event. The visual elements of the article, too, signal tragedy and loss in the form of a picture (see Picture 4 in Appendices) of rescue workers, ambulances, and other emergency vehicles at the site of the missile strike, emphasising the human losses of the event. The Russian article 2a, on the contrary, includes no pictures or visual elements other than the text itself. This further acts to obfuscate the reality of the destruction and deaths the missile strike caused, offering instead just a short, concise textual report of the happenings, perhaps to further dehumanise the opposing side of the war. Unlike all previous articles in both examined groups, article 2a translates the event as neither positive nor negative – only justified from a strategic perspective.

5 Conclusion

This thesis examined political bias in the intersemiotic translation of five news articles on the currently on-going Russo-Ukrainian war published by news outlets of the opposing sides. By utilising both news framing analysis and critical discourse analysis, the study came to the conclusion that in each article some degree of bias was present.

The analysis revealed significant differences in how Russian, Ukrainian, and other Western outlets frame news about the conflict. Russian media often employs the use of euphemisms, strategic word choices, positive framing, and obfuscation in order to frame military actions as justified liberation efforts. In contrast, Ukrainian media is more prone to highlighting the negative aspects of said actions, often utilising dysphemisms, negative framing, and indignant language to evoke negative feelings towards Russia and feelings of sympathy for Ukraine. Western media, while much more impartial, also reflects a subtly pro-Ukrainian stance. The same applies also to the visual elements of the articles, with Russian articles offering positive or obfuscated pictures, compared to the negative pictures of the pro-Ukrainian articles.

The examined articles largely reflect the opinions of their frame sponsors and the wider public. Whereas the examined Russian articles are by a state-owned news outlet, thus naturally pro-Russian due to its frame sponsors, the articles by the privately owned Ukrainian news outlets reflect the overwhelmingly anti-Russian views of the public and thus their frame sponsors, too. The one examined Western article also reflects the pro-Ukrainian stance of the majority of the Western nations, albeit in a much more subtle manner than the others.

The examined articles contained both blatant and subtle biases. While blatantly biased text, such as slandering the opposing side, is easy enough to notice, the more subtle strategic word choices can go unnoticed, yet still greatly affect the opinions of its readers. This highlights the role of language in shaping narratives and swaying opinions, due to which the importance of media literacy and critical thinking is ever more relevant.

It is important to note that this thesis is limited to just a handful of news articles on just two different incidents during the Russo-Ukrainian war, with the specific intention to find articles that are as biased as possible. Thus, this study is not a perfectly accurate representation on a larger scale. Future studies on this matter could incorporate a larger number of articles to examine, as well as expand the scope of the study to include other conflicts, providing a much broader understanding of the subject matter.

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Appendices

Article pictures




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Picture 1. Picture of a Russian soldier used in article 1a.



Picture 2. Picture of a group of Russian soldiers used in article 1b.



A view shows a destroyed bridge, amid Russia's attack on Ukraine, in the town of Pokrovsk in Donetsk region, Ukraine November 4, 2024. REUTERS/Inna Varenysia/File Photo [Purchase Licensing Rights](#) 

Picture 3. Picture of a destroyed Ukrainian cityscape used in article 1c.



RESCUE WORKERS ARRIVE AT THE SCENE OF THE STRIKE. PHOTO: POLTAVSHCHYNA, A LOCAL MEDIA OUTLET

Picture 4. Picture of Ukrainian rescue workers used in article 2a.