From Conflict of Discourses to Military Conflict: Multimodality of Identity Construction in Russo-Ukrainian War Discourse

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Abstract. This study is an attempt to grasp the discursive nature of Russo-Ukrainian war. The critical discourse analysis of the conflicting ways Russian and Ukrainian identities are constructed in discourse and by discourse can shed light onto the covert reasons of the unprovoked military aggression Russia has been executing against Ukraine. Our assumptions are based on the idea that identity is a manifold of stances taken by individual as well as collective speakers in various situations of communication. Having epistemic and affective dimensions, stances are inherently interactive, and, thus, have a collective or social nature. Generally speaking, conflictual stances, built in war discourse, express national, political, or sociological worldviews of the stance-takers, reflecting their ideologies, values, and beliefs. The way people see the conflict differs according to what "frames" they choose to see it through. In this study, the frames circumscribing Ukrainian and Russian conflictual identities, as they are built in Ukrainian and Russian media discourse, including social media, have been deconstructed and analyzed. As there are diverse semiotic systems that are used to create, transmit and understand meanings (e.g., verbal and non-verbal, written and oral, visual and audial) various modalities employed in the process of discursive construction of these identities were taken into consideration.

Keywords: discourse, identity, multimodality, stance, stancetaking, semiosis.

Ущина Валентина. Від конфлікту дискурсів до воєнного конфлікту: мультимодальність конструювання ідентичності під час російсько-української війни.

Анотація. Це дослідження є спробою осягнути дискурсивний характер російсько-української війни. Критичний дискурс-аналіз конфліктних шляхів конструювання російської та української ідентичностей у дискурсі та за допомогою дискурсу може пролити світло на приховані причини неспровокованої військової агресії, яку Росія здійснює проти України. Наші припущення ґрунтуються на ідеї, що ідентичність – це сукупність позицій, котрі займаються індивідуальними та колективними мовцями в різних ситуаціях спілкування. Маючи епістемічний та афективний виміри, позиції за своєю суттю є інтерактивними, і, таким чином, мають колективну або соціальну природу. Інакше кажучи, конфліктні позиції, вибудувані учасниками дискурсу війни, виражають національний, політичний чи соціологічний світогляди суб'єктів позиціювання, відображаючи їхні ідеології, цінності та переконання. Те, як люди трактують конфлікт, відрізняється залежно від того, у які фрейми вони його вкладають. У цій роботі на основі критичного аналізу українського та російського медіа-дискурсу, було деконструйовано та проаналізовано фрейми, що окреслюють українську та російську конфліктні ідентичності. До уваги бралися різноманітні семіотичні

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системи, які використовуються для створення, передачі та розуміння значень (наприклад, вербальних та невербальних, письмових та усних, візуальних та аудіальних), а відтак були враховані різні модальності, що використовуються у процесі дискурсивної побудови цих ідентичностей.

Ключові слова: *дискурс, ідентичність, мультимодальність, позиціювання, станс, семіозис.*

Introduction

This study aims at researching discursive mechanisms of conflictual identity construction in the discourse of an unprovoked war, launched by Russia against independent Ukraine. The notion of "identity" is seen here as a complex phenomenon which can be researched both as an individual, as well as a collective issue. Identity is multifaceted and multidimensional. Identity is fluid, unstable, and consequential. But first and foremost, identity is discursively constructed. Therefore, this study focuses on discursive structures deployed by the discourse participants to build their respectful identities in the context of Russo-Ukrainian war. Identity communication processes become crucially important in the times of conflicts, when the very existence of identities may be questioned, debated, and even aggressed. In his essay, published in July 2021, Vladimir Putin, the President of the Russian Federation, asserted that Ukraine never truly existed as a sovereign country, and that the territories of Ukraine are basically the Russian lands. He, along with other Russian public actors, claimed that "Ukrainian is an artificial identity, mistakenly created by Bolsheviks" (Putin, 2021). Consequently, Russians officially deny Ukrainians the right for their ethnic and national self-identification as an independent people with their own history, culture, and language. Such claims apparently represent the discursive reproduction of power abuse (van Dijk, 2008b, p. 6), and, thus, are best approached in the theoretical framework of critical discourse studies (CDS), specifically interested in the investigation of social problems of inequality, ideological domination, and power abuse in their relation to discourse practices and language use. According to van Dijk (2008b, p. 87), "language use, discourse, verbal interaction and communication belong to the micro level of the social order, while power, dominance, and inequality belong to a macro level of analysis". "This means, as van Dijk further explains, that CDS has to theoretically bridge the 'gap' between micro and macro approaches" to discourse, as well as its cognitive and social dimensions.

Situated within CDS as the general theoretical and analytical framework, a sociocognitive approach was used to analyze verbal and non-verbal elements in the process of Ukrainian identity discursive construction. This particular approach to discourse analysis builds on the study of discourse structures to make explicit the relations between discourse, cognition and society. Van Dijk stresses the role cognition plays in the mediation between discourse structures and social structures: "[T]o explain how real language users go about producing and understanding discourse, how their personal and socially shared beliefs affect discourse production and how these are in turn affected by discourse. No critical account of discourse is

theoretically complete without such a cognitive interface" (van Dijk, 2008a, p. 79). In the current aggressive Russian discourse, it is important to detect the underlying attitudinal mental representations shared by Russians who support the physical and cultural destruction of Ukraine. As a result, such analysis might offer an explanation to the general permissibility of military offensive among the Russian audience and trace the discursive ways of its legitimization in Russian society.

The overall discursive architecture of national ideologies concerning conflicting identities is an extremely complicated issue for analysis, yet I shall assume that it is approachable via the notions of "stance" (Du Bois, 2007; Englebretson, 2007; Jaffe, 2009; Kiesling et al., 2018) and "indexicality" (Silverstein, 1979; 2003), where stances (verbal and non-verbal means for discursive manifestation of positions in communication) are seen as a building material used for identity construction, and indexicality is seen as contextually bound meaning. In an indexical theory of stance (Eckert 2004), linguistic and non-linguistic forms of stancetaking become significant if they acquire certain social meanings, and become recognizable by the members of certain social groups, or in other words, become identification resources. As a broad term, stance covers a range of linguistic features that have long been studied separately, such as modality, evaluation, evidentiality, hedging, affect, footing etc. The advantage of stance is that stancetaking is a public act of taking a point of view rather than somebody's private opinion on an issue. It also is interactive, involving aligning or disaligning with others. Accumulating, discourse stances signal stance-takers' identities, both individual and collective.

There are various definitions of identity relevant for discursive and sociolinguistic investigations. Among them we choose the ones that treat identity as an ever-changing and fluctuating discursive construct rather than pre-existing and stable entity. Identity is the product rather than the source of linguistic practices (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005, p. 585). One of the most influential theorists of identity, Michael Foucault (1988) argued that identity is constructed through certain techniques or practices, by which we get to understand and shape ourselves. Giddens (1991), another researcher of identity, considered identities as dynamic, ever-changing and evolving. Giddens argued that we constantly create and revise our personal narratives, our "life stories", on the basis of information from our environment. This process is undertaken through the resources we have at our disposal. In the last decades, the variety of instruments people use for identity creation has grown dramatically. We use signs belonging to diverse semiotic systems to create, transmit and understand meanings: verbal and non-verbal, written and oral, visual and audial, gestures and facial expressions, spatial structures and movements. Moreover, everyone who has access to Internet, automatically receives access to global audiences, which makes discursive stancetaking a potential tool for mutual identification. In this article, I attempt to analyse multimodal resources engaged for stancetaking activities in Russo-Ukrainian war discourse. I start my analysis with interpreting the semantics of several pictorial images, media photographs, and some song lyrics. Further, I offer a detailed critical discourse analysis of a case study represented by a scandalous programmatic article published in the Russian state

media. In my analysis I focus on specificity of Ukrainian identity construction through the lens of discursive stance.

Material and Methods

While approaching identity as a discursive construct which is not stable, but created during the multimodal interactive practices, I needed an approach that would suit this view of identity and would best serve my analytic needs. Such approach, to my mind, could be found through the notion of "bricolage", introduced by the famous social anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss (1962). According to Lévi-Strauss, bricolage is the ability of a "bricoleur" (the person involved in the process of bricolage) to use the variety of available resources to construct and interpret signs. Lévi-Strauss bases his explanations of "bricoleur's" work on Saussure's interpretation of the linguistic signs when he explains how the mind of a "bricoleur" operates (Saussure, 1916 [2011]). According to Lévi-Strauss, signs or bricolage elements (the so-called "bricks") link language, concepts, and reality. They act as mediators between a surrounding reality on the one hand and an interpretation of this reality on the other. He compares the bricoleur's actions to those of an engineer: they both create something new out of what building material they have at hand. To sum it up, the process of bricolage functions very much as a metaphor for discursive (re)construction of identity creation. It can offer an explanation on how identities are negotiated through language or other semiotic systems in postmodern communicative conditions.

In my deconstruction of Ukrainian identity in the discourse of Russo-Ukrainian war, I treated discursive stances as "bricks", used for identity "bricolage". Each instance of stancetaking involves a "stance triangle" (Du Bois 2007), in which two (or more) speakers commonly and intersubjectively construct their stances on a certain object, evaluating it, positioning themselves towards it and aligning with each other. Stancetaking is a public act, not a private cognitive state. Thus, there should be evidence in the text of WHAT is being signaled and of HOW the readers interpret those signals in context. The stance markers indicate a person's position on a certain issue, including such information as knowledge, affect, evaluation. The stance markers may include both "all-topics" lexical units and can be context-specific. It should be noted that an awareness of the important role public discourse plays in society makes critical discourse analysts themselves take explicit positions (or stances) in their analysis. That is why the CDS subjects can never be neutral in their assumptions and conclusions. And their stances are meant to resist social injustice and power abuse, as well as lies and manipulation.

Because the 21st century can be described as the era of creating images of reality by means of various modalities, I paid attention to the stance tools involving these diverse modalities. A multimodal social semiotic perspective that has developed in linguistics of the last decades (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2001), enabled examining sign-making via multiple modes beyond language. Such an approach is

seen as especially relevant for the study of multimodality of identity creation in modern media, where signs are often made in combinations of different modes. A multimodal perspective suggests that all the modes equally contribute to the complexity and efficiency of meaning-making in social semiosis.

The data for this study consists of two blocks – verbal (language and text) and non-verbal (mainly graphical: pictorial images and photos). The conclusions were based on the analysis of 52 images and 178 texts: 68 media articles and 110 blogs by popular Ukrainian and Russian bloggers (49,874 words; 334,150 characters). The corpus was manually gathered during the period of three months (from March till June 2022) from open sources of the Ukrainian segment of Facebook, Telegram, Twitter, and Instagram, as well as from the state news agencies Ukrinform (Ukraine) and RIA Novosti (Russia). As an illustrative case study for this article, I used the programmatic piece entitled "What Russia should do with Ukraine?", published by RIA Novosti in early April 2022.

Results and Discussion

I'd like to start my deconstruction of Ukrainian identity bricolage by looking at pictorial images profusely used in present-day media to create the identity under analysis. Framing of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict through non-verbal signs of different nature can be very potential in modern multidimensional discursive environments, as they activate different ways of information transmission and information perception. Among multiple illustrations of Ukraine, deployed by the modern Ukrainian media, female images are among the most popular in metaphorizing Ukrainian identity. Usually, this "*Ukraine-as-a-woman*" construal (Fig. 1) is represented through the image of young, beautiful, and courageous woman.

Figure 1
An Illustration of Ukraine

She is strong and tender at the same time. Female images representing Ukrainian identity are deployed not only in social networks media, but also in modern Ukrainian literature, song lyrics, and murals. For instance, in a popular song (released in 2018) by "Numer 482", Ukraine is romantically personified as "*mala*" [little girl, sweetheart] which often is the way young Ukrainian men address their beloved girlfriends: "*Добрий ранок, Україно, прокидайся вже, мала! Я несу тобі, єдина, чашку кави й молока*" [=Good morning, Ukraine! Get up, my little girl! I'm getting a cup of coffee and milk for you, my only one!]. Such an unusual "animate" (personified) treating of the country could be interpreted in different ways but one of the main underlying implications is that the addresser sees his Motherland as someone worth loving and taking care of. Another Ukrainian singer Max Barskikh similarly serenades his love for his country in a chant: "*Ти і я, Україна. Ти – моя половина*" [You and me, Ukraine! You are my other half], verbalizing his stance towards his Motherland in a matrimonial frame (i. e. Ukraine is represented as the stance-taker's young wife; together they are a family). So, the affective component of stance found in pictorial impersonation of Ukraine as a young and beautiful woman, as well as in the verbalized address forms used in song lyrics, constitutes positive evaluation of the stance-taker to Ukraine as the object of their stancetaking. Such stances are indexical of the views of Ukrainian identity characteristically shared by the representatives of the Ukrainian society.

Identities are not just framed in discourse and by discourse, but they also can be re-framed or re-semanticised. As an example of such re-framing of an identity image, I can offer a photograph of a young woman breastfeeding her newly born baby in a Kyiv metro station (Fig. 2), where she was hiding from the Russian bombings in early March 2022.

Figure 2
A Young Woman Breastfeeding Her Newly Born Baby in a Kyiv Metro Station

This photograph was shared on multiple Internet platforms and became viral, having got the global attention and popularity. As a symbol of motherhood and

sufferings, this image not only became an icon of a Ukrainian woman in semiotic sense, but later it was used as a religious icon representing saint Madonna in one of the catholic churches in Naples, Italy. So, an image of a regular woman that was feeding her baby under irregular circumstances of undeclared war was transformed into the image of a Holy Mother, gaining some features of metaphysical fortitude and absolute positivity of a saint.

Another case of social semiosis during war time could be illustrated by the photoshoot of Ukrainian First Lady Olena Zelenska, produced by famous American photographer Annie Leibowitz for Vogue magazine. Entitled "Portrait of Bravery" (Fig. 3), this photo-narrative became an iconic symbol of Ukraine, and was used not only as an emblematic simulacrum of national resilience and heroism, but also as an instrument for popularization of Ukrainian identity in the world.

Figure 3
Olena Zelenska, *Vogue* Cover

Having powerful ethical, feminist, and political implications, it caused strong resonance in Ukrainian society and abroad, including hot discussions of its somewhat controversial aesthetics.

In the Russian discursive tradition of the last months, Ukraine is represented in a very contradictory way. On the one hand, Russian propagandists try to depict Ukraine as an ugly "neo-nazi" country – mean and despicably cruel, but on the other hand, Ukraine is often shown as impoverished, weak and easy to conquer. As it often happens, conflictual construction of the warring identities is based upon ideological opposition of US and THEM, where US usually is associated with positive evaluations, and THEM is characterized by negative stances. Such antithetical contrast may be found in the monument erected in Belgorod (a Russian city on the Eastern border of Ukraine) at the early stages of invasion (Fig. 4).

Figure 4
A Monument in Belgorod, Russia

The monument depicts poor, old, and presumably Ukrainian woman, seeing the Russian soldiers in, with the red (Soviet) flag in her hands. She is supposed to represent Ukraine as a tired, elderly female, happy to be "liberated" by the Russians. Consequently, Russian pictorial representation of Ukrainian identity is usually neither about beauty nor about courage, but rather about Ukraine being an inseparable part of Russia and Soviet Union, which is the reflection of the Russian narrative of a non-existent Ukrainian identity as it is portrayed by Russian mass media.

No less emblematic are the textual properties of the political rhetoric on the war Russia launched in Ukraine. One of the most striking cases, exemplifying such aggressive textual bricolage of identity is the media piece entitled "What Russia should do with Ukraine?"[1] (Sergeytsev, 2022). The article was published on April 3, 2022, by the state Russian news agency RIA NOVOSTI. This medium voices the Kremlin's positions on various social, political and cultural issues. Consequently, the analyzed piece can be treated as a programmatic proclamation of the intended actions by Russia concerning Ukraine. The level of openly manifested disrespect for the sovereignty of Ukraine and the rules of international law is off the charts, which makes the public discourse of this kind valuable material for critical discourse analysis.

According to van Dijk (2008a, p. vii), "it is not the social situation that influences (or is influenced by) discourse, but the way the participants define such a situation." Instead of a direct naming the Russian aggression against Ukraine, official Russian media continue using euphemism "Special Military Operation" directed on "denazification" of Ukraine. The intended implicature hidden in this terminological

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[1] Translation into English is mine

creation presupposes that there is some inherent "nazism" in the very existence of Ukraine as a sovereign country, and, thus, it paints Ukrainian identity into very gloomy colors. The abundance of terms, synonymous with "nazism" is striking. The procedure of simple word count provides us with the following information: lexeme 'fascist' is used four times in different collocations with Ukraine; the word *нацист* ['nazi', n.] is repeated 29 times; *нацизм* ['nazism', n.] – 18; *нацистский* (-ая, -ие) ['nazified', adj.] – 6; *денацификация* ['denazification', n.] – 31; *денацифицировать* ['denazify', v.] – 8; *денацификатор* ['denazifier', n.] – 1, *укронацизм* ['ukronazism', n.]. So, the word "nazi" and its derivatives are used 96 times within the flow of this piece (1962 words), that makes almost 5% out of all the lexemes (including function words). Such frequency undoubtedly advances "fight against Nazism" into a topical dominant, as well as makes it the designed core message of this text.

The stance of the author (=official Russia) is framed already in the headline "*What Russia should do with Ukraine*?" where two stance subjects (Russia and Ukraine) and a stance object ("What") can be distinguished. In this stance triangle, the most prominent is the AGENCY of the participants. As is well-known, through AGENCY, it is possible to detect how social, ethnic or economic groups are represented in various discourses and practices. And within Western philosophy, since Hegel, agency has always been tied to the "subject" in power. So, as a grammatical subject of the sentence, Russia is an Agent of the action, while Ukraine is represented as a Patient. Such syntactic positioning immediately delimits the horizon of readers' expectations concerning the power / dominance relations between these two actors. Such AGENT-PATIENT disposition is consistently reproduced throughout the whole text, and not just in syntactic structures but also in the choice of words and flexions (e.g. Ukraine as a Patient is "a denazified country", while Russia as an Agent is "the denazifying state", or "denazifyer"). From such verbalization of the participants' (Russia and Ukraine) roles, readers may infer the initially strong belief of the authors into one of the actors' power and privilege to execute aggressive actions involving missiles, aviation and numerous ground troops on the territory of the neighboring sovereign country with no fear of consequences or punishment. Moreover, Russia's agency is intensified by the use of the verb "*должна*" ('must', 'should') with the meaning of deontic modality that inherently entails the semantics of obligation and duty rather that possibility and / or choice.

The "WHAT" part of the stance triangle or the object of stancetaking is presented as a detailed plan that outstretches for more than 30 years (for longer than one generation) and involves such different spheres of life as politics, economics, religion, and education. It consists of such radical actions against Ukrainian identity as an imminent change of the country's name ("*The name "Ukraine" apparently cannot be retained*"); liquidation of Ukrainian elites ("*Ukrainian elites must be eliminated*"); necessary ethnic assimilation with Russians ("*to achieve the goals of denazification, the support of the population is necessary, its transition to the side of Russia after liberation from terror, violence and ideological pressure of the Kiev regime*". *The social "mud" must survive the hardships of war and assimilate the*

experience as a historical lesson and atonement for its guilt"); current and future military actions ("*Military victory over Kyiv regime*". "*Liquidation of armed "Nazi" formations*". "*Permanent Russian military presence in the West of Ukraine due to its potential non-compliance with the Russian civilization*"); change of information policy ("*Deployment of Russian information space*", "*Adoption of supervision of Russia and liquidation of Russia haters*". "*Establishments of memorials and monuments to the victims of Ukrainian Nazism*"); education policy ("*Withdrawal of Ukrainian educational materials and prohibition of educational programs*").

Discursive construction of the participants' identities is framed through power relations between several acting pairs, in which Russia is omnipresent and always plays a leading role:

1. Russia and Ukraine, where Russia is a dominant supervisor, and Ukraine is a subordinate culprit needing to "be punished" or "denazified". All the efforts to depict Ukraine as a "*terrorist, monstrous Nazi creation*" are broken up by the numerous discursive disclaimers of Russia's attitude to Ukraine as a weak and dependent state: "*amorphousness and ambivalence of Ukraine*", "*Ukraine is a subordinate element*", "*Ukraine is Little Russia*". On the other hand, the very existence of Ukraine is seen as a threat to Russia. Ukraine is not just the enemy of Russia but it is its antipode ("*anti-Russia*", "*Ukrainism is an artificial anti-Russian construction*" which has to be "*eradicated*").

2. Russia and Europe, where Russia is portrayed as an "altruist savior" of "historical Europe" ("*the Old World*"), outstretching the hand of friendship but also feeling offended that its efforts were not appreciated; while Europe is represented as an ungrateful and not very smart relative ("*Russia will be forced to acknowledge itself the last resort of protection and preservation of historical Europe's (the Old World's) values*").

3. Russia and collective "West". Here Russia is depicted as a fair and sacrificing guardian, the so-called "*fighter for the future of civilization*", while "the West" is seen as a "*degrading and disintegrating totalitarian regime*", controlled by the "superpower of the USA" (e.g. *Everything that Russia has done for the West, it has done at its own expense, by making the greatest sacrifices. The West ultimately rejected all these sacrifices, devalued Russia's contribution to resolving the Western crisis, and decided to take revenge on Russia for the help that it selflessly provided*).

4. Russia and "the countries oppressed by the West". In this pair Russia fulfills the role of a "*leader in the global process of decolonization and liberation*". (e.g. "*Further, Russia will go its own way, not worrying about the fate of the West, relying on another part of its heritage - leadership in the global process of decolonization. As part of this process, Russia has a high potential for partnerships and allies with countries that the West has oppressed for centuries and which are not going to put on its yoke again. Without Russian sacrifice and struggle, these countries would not have been liberated*").

5. Russia and "the World". This is the most interesting pair of participants, because on several occasions Russia opposes itself to "the World", as if it is not the part of it, but it stands aside or even higher that the world, being its guardian (e.g.

"*Ukronazism*" *carries a great threat to the world and Russia*". *Russia came to grips with the West for the future of the world*").

As we may see, in the analyzed piece, the author depicts Russia as a powerful and dominant world leader. The Russian identity is discursively constructed through the variety of stances on many political, military, economic and educational issues, but from the perspective of Russia's alignment with Ukraine. Ukrainian identity is portrayed antithetically – as a weak but wicked antagonist ('anti-Russia'). However, fairly often the author's arguments are immanently faulty and self-contradictory. For instance, after acknowledging that "*there is no main Nazi party, no Fuhrer, no full-fledged racial laws*" in Ukraine, he makes an irrelevant and unproven conclusion that "*Ukronazism*" not only exists but "*carries a great threat to the world and Russia*". Such fallacy of reasoning can be treated as an argumentative ploy that enables disclosing the hidden intention of the author – justification and legitimization of the inhuman aggression of Russia on Ukraine. Generally speaking, proclaimed "denazification" equals de-Ukrainization and de-Europeanization of Ukraine. Through the verbalization of inevitable Russia's isolation in this process ("*Russia will have no allies in the denazification of Ukraine, since it is purely Russian business*"), the author signifies the maleficence of Russia's actions and his own awareness of it.

Summarizing, I'd like to outline two basic ways (see Fig. 5 and 6) the Russian and the Ukrainian stances on the current war are discursively framed and constructed (both verbally and non-verbally) in the context of Russo-Ukrainian war. My modeling is based on the stance triangle by Du Bois (2007, p. 163).

In these models, Russia and Ukraine are represented as the collective stance-takers – subjects of the process of identity creation and identity negotiation. Russo-Ukrainian war is seen as the object of stancetaking. It is worth mentioning that outlined stances are characteristic for 99 % of the analyzed Ukrainian official and other public media, and 98% of Russian official and propagandist media. At the same time, these "official" stances are not so voluble when it comes to private twitter, telegram or Facebook accounts. The numbers of such stance patterns fall to around 90 % of Ukrainian stance-takers, and up to 76 % of the Russia-based communicators.

So, in the Ukrainian stance triangle (Fig. 5), war as an object of stancetaking is represented as "*Russian aggression against Ukraine, a source of grief, a fight for freedom, and a necessity to defend Ukraine and the Ukrainian identity*". While the Russian stance depicts the war as "*the noble mission, fight against nazi, liberation, and defense of the Russian world and the Russian identity*". It is interesting that the Russian stance-takers never openly call it a war, but prefer using euphemistic "*Special military operation*" or abbreviation (SMO). The affective component of Ukrainian stance is associated with the negative identification of Russia as an "*invader, intruder, aggressor, occupant, terrorist state, fascists, rascists, Terrorussia etc.*" At the same time, Ukraine positively self-identifies as a "*defender, winner, hero, victim, fighter for freedom, savior*".

Russian verbalization of Ukrainian identity is also indexical of the Russian societal values and beliefs, political actions, and ideological attitudes. Ukraine is labelled "*nazi state, non-existent state, anti-Russia*", while Russia is seen as "*a*

savior, defender, protector, warrior". So, we can see that self- and mutual identification of Russia and Ukraine in their official stancetaking activities is very similar. They use basically the same lexical units to build antithetical senses. Consequently, in a hostility of Russo-Ukrainian war discourse, the antagonistic identities are being created and promoted. However, while Ukrainians defend their identities both in discourse and on the battlefield, Russians aggressively attack them.
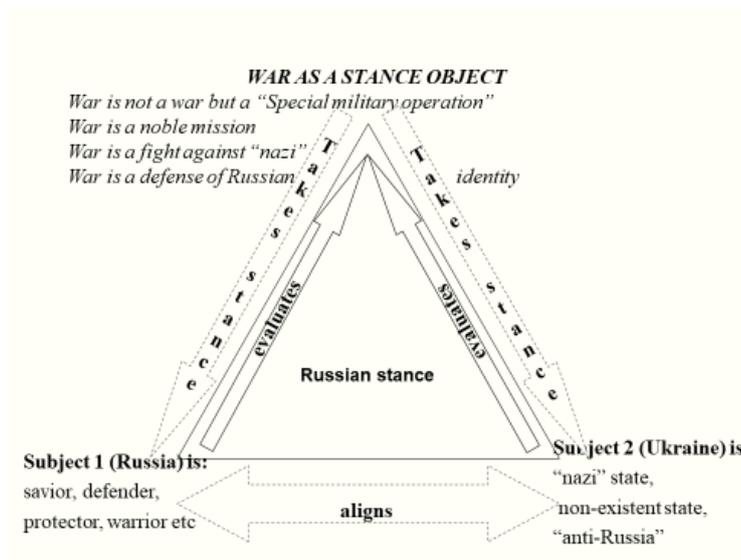
Figure 5

The Ukrainian Stance Triangle

Figure 6

The Russian Stance Triangle

Conflicting stances, laid out in the above models, compile, accumulate, and expand. As a result, stance clusters become semiotically significant and ideologically indexical of the conflicting identities the main participants construct in their discursive activities.

Conclusions

Ukraine's identity construction can be seen as an important component of Ukraine's fight for its statehood and as an inherent element of the Russia's network-centric warfare, which is the complex of communicative strategies, techniques, and procedures, meant to have a systematic manipulative impact on modern society. These are new war tactics emerging in the Information Age, where along with the fights in physical battlefields, the aggression spreads to virtual space, involving influence on people's worldviews, beliefs and ideological positions. As a consequence, multimodal bricolages of stances and identities become inseparable and an important part of network-centric wars. The main discursive strategy used in the Russian discourse on Ukrainian identity during Russia's war against Ukraine can be defined as the strategy of "demonstrative falsehood". The use of this strategy presupposes that any object of stancetaking (be it a person, a nation, or an event) is discursively distorted or falsified. By means of this strategy the discourse subjects shift the Overton's Window from absurdity to reality, so that completely paradoxical assumptions slowly are integrated into the societal perception and finally are tolerated and even accepted as socially and morally normal. In such a way, invasion is seen as a liberation, occupation is treated as homecoming, and the independence of a neighboring country is represented as Nazism. Identity work fulfilled by the Russian war discourse actively exploits the tactics of "alternative facts production" and "alternative reality creation", which may be very dangerous due to their ability to influence the cognitive perceptions of surrounding life. Discursively inflated hatred changes the way people see the world, makes them believe into the virtues of murder and torture. As a result, and as witnessed by the whole world now, Ukrainian identity is being aggressed not only verbally but it is being physically assaulted, damaged, and destroyed, which could finally bring the whole nation to full extinction if not resisted.

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