Putin's Claims on the War in Ukraine: A Pragmatic Study

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Abstract

The present study was devoted to the pragmatic investigation of Putin's claims on the war in Ukraine. Putin, as a political figure, adopted different manipulative and persuasive strategies in his speeches to justify his decisions regarding the war in Ukraine. The strategies he utilised were believed to contain different pragmatic aspects and interpretations. Therefore, this study aimed at identifying the pragmatic aspects which were found in the selected speech and figuring out the logicality of Putin's claims and justification concerning the addressed issue. The study was a qualitative in nature which was based on an eclectic model that included Walton's (1995) and Johnson's (2000) theories of fallacies and argumentation. One of Putin's speeches, in which he addressed the Security Service Board, was selected as a sample of the current study. After analysing the selected data, it was assured that Putin used different pragmatic strategies via which he intended to manipulate and convince his audience of the logicality of his claims and justification. The criteria that he violated and the pragmatic devices which he depended on proved him to be illogical and his decisions were unreasonable.

Keywords: Putin's claims, Justifications, Pragmatic Strategies, Logic, Ukraine Crisis.

1. Introduction

The Ukrainian crisis became a political problem in 2014, resulting in a military confrontation between Ukraine and Russia in the east of the country and the annexation of several Ukrainian areas. It was suggested that the current situation is both the effect and the exacerbation of NATO and Russia's antagonistic and foreign policies towards Ukraine's disputed boundaries (Aron, 2015).

Regardless of the Ukrainian domestic dimension relating to the country's recent and imperfect transition following the fall of the Soviet Union and its independence, the Ukrainian problem has an

inescapable international dimension. From an international standpoint, the situation that began in Kyiv in November 2013 can be related to NATO and Russia's battle for stability in their shared vicinity (Batou, 2015).

The Crisis's continuous and relevant character connects to the numerous assessments aimed at understanding Putin's objectives for involvement in Ukraine. According to Mearsheimer, Russia is moving forcefully to oppose NATO expansion. Because Ukraine functions as a buffer state, a move to the West would put NATO directly on Russia's doorstep, endangering its security (Mearsheimer, 2014). According to McFaul, Mearsheimer, and Sestanovich, Putin's activities were motivated by a desire for regime consolidation and internal stability. Thus, the annexation of Ukrainian territories was a direct outcome of Russia's own difficulties, notably its shrinking economy (Mearsheimer, McFaul, & Sestanovich, 2014).

Putin initiated a military attack against Ukraine on February 24, 2022 which was regarded as the beginning of a new period in modern world politics. Putin lays forth a broad range of arguments, justifications, and historical references in order to encourage Russian military personnel, describe his strategic vision, and persuade the global community of the legality of his war. Thus, the current study investigates Putin's claims and justifications on the war against Ukraine.

1.1. Problem Statement

Politicians frequently conceal their intentions, which was one of the key characteristics of political speech and may be represented in the language through the use of certain linguistic techniques to affect their audience. In most research, manipulation is viewed as a collection of language procedures unique to political discourse (Allison, 2014). This is because of the fact that in today's political arena, a language, or rather a word, is the primary weapon for exercising power; it is "the tool for establishing social power" (Allison, 2014).

Putin camouflaged his war activities by employing deception strategies to legitimise the attack on Ukraine and retain his image as a "lawful actor." Putin experimented with the constitutional basis for aggression and the notion of self-determination to justify his actions (Allison, 2014, p. 4). Putin employed a variety of claims through opaque legal terminologies, and his disdain for international law had filled the global community with doubt and trepidation (Allison, 2014). Allison went on to say that Putin legitimised his acts by claiming "to be protecting Russian citizens from danger" (Allison, 2014, p. 6).

Putin's claims on the war in Ukraine were presented through different linguistic strategies via which Putin intended to manipulate the international community and persuade them of his justifications. The

linguistic structure of his claims encompassed some pragmatic aspects that have different meanings and interpretations. The current study intends to reveal the pragmatic meaning of Putin's claims and his intentions to prove himself logical.

1.2. Research Objectives

This study aims at:

1. Identifying Putin's justifications for his claims on the war in Ukraine.

2. Figuring out the pragmatic aspects that were found in these justifications and their influence on manipulating the addressed community.

1.3. Research Questions

The present study intends to answer the following questions:

1. What were Putin's justifications for his claims on the war in Ukraine?

2. What were the pragmatic aspects that were found in these justifications and how they were used to mislead and manipulate the addressed community?

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Pragmatics of Logic

"p Pragmatics is the field that was concerned with in analysis words and expressions within the linguistic and social contexts in which they were used (Al-Majdawi & Abbas, 2017). Pragmatics was regarded as a coherent field of study that could be used together with other discipline to the investigation of language use and meaning (Al-Hilu and Turkey, 2020). One of the disciplines that was combined with pragmatics was logic. According to Parret, Sbisa, and Verschueren (1981), logical pragmatics is a field that may be defined in two ways: logicising pragmatics or pragmatising logic (p. 6). Walton (1990) defined logic as "the study of how normative models of reasoning are used in different contexts of dialogue" (p.417). Its primary goal is to assess logic in argumentation. According to Walton (2007), reasoning is no more theoretical, but rather contextual (pragmatics) (p.10). Logical pragmatics is a functional field that studies elements in the context of a conversation. Walton (1990) offered a comparison of (semantical/ syntactical) logical theory and logical pragmatics (or informal logic). Huang (2014) stated that pragmatics is at the heart of any theory that attempts to explore human language use. Johnson (2009) suggested that "because arguments in real life are always situated in some context, it is natural to associate informal logic with pragmatics" (p.26). The two fundamental purposes of pragmatics are

giving implicit (unexpressed) assumptions and explaining the meaning of argument."

2.2. The Pragmatic Perspective of Fallacies

Fallacies were said to have a pragmatic perspective. Such aspect was believed to depend on the interpretation of the language user's intention (Walton, 2007).

The fallacy was defined as the process of defending a particular argument by another that was declared faulty for breaking one or more of the precision standards for no other purpose than to encourage those being addressed to reply positively to that argumentation. This shows that the mistake included three stages. Each level has its own set of mechanisms and sub-stages. The stages were the start-point stage, the debate stage, and the end-point stage.

The start-point stage displayed the topical perspective sub-stage, where the speaker expressed the topic that needed to be demonstrated. In this sub-stage, the speaker might use inductive or deductive reasoning. The start point stage included an additional sub-stage referred to as audience orientation, during which the speaker used two elements: deixis and politeness.

At the argument stage, the speaker delivered the faulty argument's sub-stage, which was composed of two pragmatic components: excellent argument criteria and the cooperation principle. However, it appeared that the argument stage included another sub-stage, namely the presentational devices, which were composed of two pragmatic components: rhetorical devices and influence principles.

The role of fallacy was assessed at the third phase, i.e. the end-point stage, to check if it worked in convincing the audience or not. The function of the addresses at this point was to analyse and reply to the erroneous argument.

Walton (1995, p. 45) asserted that the addressees' response came from challenging the argument by asking critical questions about it. Such a response could occur in dialogical cases that were not of interest to the current study because the data examined here were political speeches in which the addressee had no right to respond linguistically (Walton, 2007), who stated that addressees in these situations can only respond non-linguistically to any argument.

2.2.1. The Start-Point Stage

This stage was composed of two sub-stages: topical potential and audience adaptation.

2.2.1.1. Topical Potential. The speaker should present the issue to be explored at the topical potential sub-stage. Speakers may differ in their

methods of introducing topics, but they do it primarily through the use of argumentation. At this point, the arguments were either inductive or deductive in nature. They may convey the claim that the arguer attempted to support in the following step by giving a false argumentation.

2.2.1.2. Audience Orientation. The audience Orientation is demonstrated through deixis and politeness techniques. As for deixis, it was realized by first person deixis of integration employed to raise some sort of empathy and communion with the addressed group. Politeness strategies included; claiming a common ground, attending to hearer's interests, seeking agreement, being indirect, minimizing Imposition and Being pessimistic. This involved showing pessimism towards what the speaker wants the hearer to do (Watts, 2003, p. 90).

2.2.2. The Argument Stage

This phase has two sub-stages these were the fallacious argument and the presentational strategies.

2.2.2.1. The Fallacious Argument. An argument should be evaluated on two levels: the dialectical tier and the illative core. Johnson (2000) presented dialectical relevance for assessing dialectical tier flawed arguments. Johnson (2000) defined dialectically relevant argument as one that adds to the aims of the context in which it occurs. At this stage, the major technique was to issue the faulty argument that violated dialectical relevance. Fallacious arguments of dialectical relevance happened when the argument was unrelated to the previous argument(s) that it was supposed to support.

The illative core referred to the internal structure of the argument. The pragmatic strategies of issuing fallacious argument at the illative core were proposed by Johnson (2000, p. 191). These were the following; violating the acceptability, the truth, the relevance and the sufficiency

2.2.2.2. Presentational Devices. The second sub-stage, the presentational devices, encompassed two components: rhetorical devices and principles of influence. Concerning the rhetorical devices, there were three types which could be used in political language including; padding, profound words, and weasel words. The following were examples of these devices (Cavender & Kahane, 2006). In terms of influencing principles, politicians have been reported to appeal to: fear, reciprocity, flattery, authority, interest, and commitment.

2.2.3. The End-point Stage

This phase was related to assessing the addressee's reaction to the faulty argument. Fallacious arguments, as previously stated, have a convincing purpose. They are used by the arguer to persuade the addressee to do or accept anything. At this point, the addressee might

express his opinion and answer such arguments. In mono-logical settings, their response was demonstrated by non-linguistic behaviours. The audience's principal non-linguistic behaviours in such instances might include cheers, applause, cooperation nods, expressions of terror, and agreement nods.

3. Methodology

The research methodology used in the current study was qualitative in nature. The aim of qualitative research analysis was to investigate things within their natural setting and it has nothing to do with summing up conclusions based on certain frequencies and percentages (Al-Mjdawi & Jabi, 2020). Similarly, Brymann (2012) defined qualitative methods as those which give the investigator the opportunity to see the situation through the person's point of view. As a result, the analytical technique could yield strong qualitative results, bridging the gap in social research. In other terms, qualitative research tended to focus on smaller sample sizes in which the researcher could function as an instrument and capture the material in a natural setting to find its significance using a range of qualitative methodologies such as explanation, interpretation, and investigation (Suter, 2011).

Curtis et al. (2000, p. 1002) suggested that sample selection in qualitative research "has to be addressed carefully and is essential to our comprehension of the validity of qualitative research". Evidently, there is occasionally an obvious need to specify a representative sample prior to, or before beginning, a qualitative inquiry approach in order to construct the resources for the study. In qualitative research analysis, the sample selection was based on the criteria of saturation and sufficiency. That is to say, the selected samples should be sufficient to the analysis and providing more samples would provide no additional information but it would lead to some redundancy and repetition (Nakhilawi, 2016).

As a result, the researcher in the current study argued that saturation was achieved by selecting six speeches by Putin from an online website. They varied in length and content in order to address the research questions directly associated with Putin's claims on the war on Ukraine. The study would tackle this problem from the pragmatic perspective, according to Walton's (1995) and Johnson's (2000) theories of fallacies and argumentation in order to provide an integrated analysis.

4. Data Analysis

The pragmatic meaning of the selected speech was constructed by utilising different pragmatic components and devices. The first pragmatic strategy that was proved to exist in this speech was the topical potential.

Extract 1

"I want to note that 2022 was a special year for the entire country and your service. Federal Security Service units directly participated in the special military operation, dealt with complex, non-standard field tasks, protected the state border, cracked down on terrorism, organised crime, corruption and extremism."

This speech, as could be seen in the above extract, was presented in a deductive way where Putin was supposed to discuss some justification that would prove the existence of terrorism, extremism and crimes. Putin ought to mention some reasons and justifications which could prove him logical or illogical.

In order to justify his claims, Putin appealed to the audience orientation strategies. The first part of these strategies was the use of deictic expressions.

Extract 2

"I want to note that 2022 was a special year…I want to thank the leadership…I already said that our Armed Forces have acquired invaluable combat experience…we know that there have been losses in our ranks…We will always remember their heroism and bravery…we need to strengthen our counterintelligence…They have always used all means at their disposal against us".

This extract included several forms of deictic expressions such as "I", "we" and "they". These deixes were used as symbols of social relationships in that each one of them represented a group of people whom Putin addressed in his speech. The deictic "I" represented Putin who talked about himself as the high authority and the main actor in the events. The deictic "we" symbolised the Russian people including; citizens, Arm forces, officers and everyone who supported Putin in this war. The expression "they" referred to those who were regarded as Russia's enemies and against whom Putin announced this military operation.

The other part of the audience orientation strategies was represented by the politeness strategies which were represented in the following extracts.

Extract 3

"We know that they have never had any qualms relying on radicals and extremists when it suited their agenda, despite all their vociferous talk about fighting international terrorism."

This extract included the seeking agreement as one of the politeness strategies. Putin wanted to gain his audience's agreement with his claims that the West always sought to destroy Russia. He assumed that the West employed different forms of agenda such as terrorism and extremism to attack Russia. Putin wanted his audience to agree with him and consider it a logical reason.

Extract 4

"Countering the terrorist threat remains on your agenda. Over the past year, there was a growing number of such crimes. It is obvious that this is attributable to the attempts by the Kiev regime to use terrorist methods, as we know all too well, since they have been using them in Donbass for quite a while now, as well as attempts by the West to revive extremist and terrorist cells formed by their so-called old-time friends on our territory."

The other politeness strategy that was adopted in the above extract was the being pessimistic strategy. Putin depended on being pessimistic as a way to make his audience lose hope in having a safe and peaceful life if they do not continue to defend their country. He discussed some issues that happened and caused a real threat and danger to Russia and which needed to be faced and stopped.

Extract 5

"Comrade officers, I would like to say a few words about the priorities of your future work."

This extract encompassed a minimising imposition strategy by which Putin aimed at reducing an expected imposition that would result from his orders to the Security officers. Putin presented his instructions politely by using a certain style of speech which included expressions such as "comrades" and "a few words". He appealed to such expressions in order to reduce the impact of his speech and make it acceptable.

The strategies of fallacious argument were also utilised in this speech. These strategies were represented on the illative core and dialectical tire levels, such strategies were grasped in the following extracts:

Extracts 6

"Western intelligence agencies have always kept a close eye on Russia. Today, they have assigned even more staff and added technical and other resources to use against us."

In the above extract, the maxim of quantity was violated when Putin said less than was required. Vividly, he did not support any clear evidence about how the West kept an eye on Russia. This violation was related to the dialectical tire and it verified that Putin's speech entails a conversational form of implicature. Putin meant that the Western agencies always spied on Russia and made many conspiracies via which they intended to attack and destroy his country. By saying such a claim, he wanted to justify his decisions.

Extract 7

 "And, of course, it is important to expose and curb the illegal activity of those who are trying to divide and weaken our society by using separatism, nationalism, neo-Nazism and xenophobia as their weapons. These weapons have always been used against our country – and recently, of course, the attempts to bring all this hideousness to our land have particularly intensified."

The strategies of the illative core were expressed through the violation of certain criteria. The above extract comprised a violation of the sufficiency criterion. Putin meant that the reason behind this war was attributed to the claims that there were illegal activities against Russia. These activities, as Putin claimed, included New-Nazism, separatism, terrorism and xenophobia. Therefore he justified his decisions by the claim that he wanted to protect Russia from these threats and illegal issues. The sufficiency criterion was violated because these claims were not enough to function as a justification and therefore did not reflect Putin, to any extent, as logical.

In terms of the presentational devices, Putin's speech was believed to include some rhetorical and principles of influence devices. Such devices were shown in the extracts below:

Extract 8

"I would like to say a few words about the priorities of your future work".

Rhetorically speaking, this extract consisted of expressions which represented two forms of rhetorical devices. The words "would" was regarded as a padding expression and "few" represented a weasel device. These strategies are adopted by Putin to make his speech influential, desirable and persuasive in that Putin attempted to

convince the addressed community in order to regard his justifications as reasonable and rational.

Extract 9

"Obviously, we must continue exposing and preventing the activity of those perpetrators who use the internet and social networks to promote terrorist and extremist ideology and who attempt to recruit our citizens to become members of terrorist groups".

This extract included one of the principles of influence strategies which was the commitment. Put used the commissive speech act to show his insistence and determination to prevent anyone who might threaten Russia and its safety. He promised to stop those who wanted to use the network to spread terrorism among the Russian community.

5. Conclusion

After analysing the selected data, it was proved that Putin adopted different pragmatic strategies such as deixis, politeness, implicatures, speech acts, rhetorics and principles of influence strategies. These strategies besides the criteria of the illative core were used by Putin to manipulate his audience and convince them of his decisions. Putin tried to justify his claims by presenting some reasons that made him take the decision of starting the war on Ukraine. Putin's justifications included different forms of pragmatic elements that made his speech persuasive and manipulative. Putin violated different pragmatic maxims and criteria that made his justifications insufficient and unacceptable. Since these justifications are seen as insufficient then his decisions were assured to be illogical and irrational.

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