PUTIN'S RHETORIC OF POWER: UNVEILING THE STRATEGIC LANGUAGE OF REGIONAL DOMINANCE

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Abstract: *This study aims to conduct a discourse analysis of Vladimir Putin's 2000's Annual speech to the Federal Assembly, his 2012 speech, and his 2022 speech, to observe the evolution of key linguistic features. The analysis, supported by NVivo specialized software focuses on the semantic field and word frequency, verb tenses, predicative verb moods, sentence length, and the use of rhetorical figures. Through this comparative analysis, the research seeks to identify the evolution in Putin's discursive strategies and linguistic patterns over time. The study will examine the semantic field and word frequency to uncover shifts in the thematic focus and key topics addressed in the speeches. It will also analyze the use of verb tenses and predicative verb moods to explore how Putin conveys certainty, intention, or speculation in his discourse. Additionally, the study will investigate the sentences length to assess any variations in syntactic complexity and rhetorical figures employed, aspects that aim to examine the persuasive and rhetorical techniques used by the Russian President. The findings of this research will provide insights into the evolution of Putin's discourse, shedding light on the linguistic strategies and patterns employed in his Federal Assembly discourses. Overall, this study aims to contribute to the understanding of Putin's communication strategies and the linguistic devices he employs to convey his messages effectively. Furthermore, this research aims to provide valuable insights into the directions of evolution regarding Putin's official discourses and their impact on European society*

Keywords*: Vladimir Putin; discourse analysis; linguistic features; NVivo specialized software; Federal Assembly*

1. INTRODUCTION

Political discourse plays a crucial role in shaping public opinion and influencing societal dynamics. As leaders address their constituents through speeches and public addresses, the linguistic choices they make reflect their strategic communication tactics and provide insights into their political agenda. This study delves into the discourse analysis of Vladimir Putin's speeches, specifically focusing on his 2000 Annual speech to the Federal Assembly, his 2012 speech, and his 2022 speech, with the aim of examining the evolution of key linguistic features employed by the Russian President.

Understanding the evolution of discursive strategies and linguistic patterns employed by political leaders over time is vital for comprehending their communication strategies and the impact of their messages. In this research, we conduct a discourse analysis of Putin's speeches, employing a comparative approach to observe changes in linguistic features. The analysis will specifically examine the semantic field and word frequency, verb tenses, predicative verb moods,

sentence length, and the use of rhetorical figures. By scrutinizing these linguistic aspects, we aim to shed light on Putin's discursive strategies and their directions of evolution during his presidency.

The main aim of this study is to enrich our understanding of the communication tactics employed by Vladimir Putin and the linguistic mechanisms he utilizes to adeptly articulate his ideas. Additionally, through meticulous examination and assessment of the linguistic elements present in his speeches, this research endeavors to offer significant perspectives into the developmental trajectory of Putin's discourses and their far-reaching implications for European security. In the following sections, we will present the methodology employed for the discourse analysis and provide a detailed examination of the linguistic features.

2. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

The primary objective of this paper is to determine the direction of evolution of Vladimir Putin's discourses delivered in the Federal Assembly, by conducting a comparative discourse

analysis of his 2000 Annual speech, his 2012 speech, and his 2022 speech.

The hypothesis of the current research is that Vladimir Putin's discursive strategies have evolved over time, from an observer point-of-view to a more proactive and manipulative approach, in order to project international justifications for the hard-power methods implemented in conflict areas.

To achieve the objective of the study and test the hypothesis, a systematic and comparative analysis of the selected speeches will be conducted. The analysis is carried out using the specialized software NVivo, which provides robust tools for qualitative data analysis and discourse analysis. The research direction is characterized by the following stages:

– Data Collection: The selected discourses, namely Putin's 2000 Annual speech, his 2012 speech and his 2022 speech will be sourced from the official platform of the President of Russia, available at http://en.kremlin.ru/, in the official English version;

– Corpus Preparation: The speeches will be organized into a suitable format for analysis, eliminating any forms of address (such as "Dear colleagues" and others);

– Discourse Analysis: The comparative analysis will focus on several key linguistic features, including the semantic field and word frequency, verb tenses, predicative verb moods, sentence length, and the use of rhetorical figures;

– Interpretation and Findings: Using NVivo specialized software, which allows for the systematic categorization and interpretation of textual data, the research results will be interpreted and discussed in relation to the research objective and hypothesis.

By employing a methodological approach and utilizing the NVivo software for discourse analysis, this research aims to provide a comprehensive examination of Putin's speeches, highlighting the linguistic strategies employed by the Russian President and also the ways in which they evolved over time.

In terms of the qualitative scientific method used in the present research, discourse analysis can be defined as "the study of the ways in which texts and discourses are used to enact social and ideological interests" (Fairclough, 2015:2). Another fundamental scientific paper describes discourse analysis as "the analysis of the regularities according to which different statements function within a given system of statements" (Foucault, 1972: 49). More recent studies define discourse analysis as

a set of methods for the empirical study of socially meaningful language use in its interactional, social, and cognitive context, including the structure and function of discourse, its effects, and the social cognition of discourse participants (van Dijk, 2020: 5).

Given these conceptualizations, a common definition can be given for the qualitative method – an interdisciplinary research approach that investigates how language, both spoken and written, is used to construct meaning, shape social interactions, and reflect power dynamics within specific social and cultural contexts. It involves examining linguistic features, rhetorical strategies, and social practices to uncover underlying ideologies, social structures, and discursive formations.

In the present research, discourse analysis is used to determine the evolution of key linguistic features employed by Vladimir Putin and to gain insights into his discursive strategies over time. For the method to be employed in an objective and complete manner, the discourses will be coded as follows: D.1: Vladimir Putin's address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation in the year 2000 (President of Russia, July 8, 2000); D.2: Vladimir Putin's address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation in the year 2012 (President of Russia, December 12, 2012); D.3: Vladimir Putin's address in the year 2022 (President of Russia, February 21, 2022). The selection of these discourses for the research reflects a deliberate choice to capture the evolution of Vladimir Putin's rhetoric and discursive strategies over a significant period. D.1, the address in 2000, offers insights into Putin's early presidency and his initial discursive style. D.2, the address in 2012, offers a valuable perspective on the midpoint of Putin's leadership, enabling an examination of his evolving strategies and communication style following his return to power. D.3, the address in 2022, represents a more recent discourse, enabling an analysis of Putin's recent rhetoric and any shifts in his linguistic choices.

The findings of the discourse analysis will include the following key linguistic features in Vladimir Putin's speeches to the Federal Assembly: semantic field and word frequency; verb tenses; predicative verb moods; sentence length; rhetorical figures. The findings will be displayed in a tabular form, presenting a comprehensive overview of the identified linguistic features in each discourse analyzed.

Some methodological limitations include the fact that in the year 2022, the customary annual

address by Vladimir Putin to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation was replaced by a public statement delivered on February 21st (President of Russia, 2022). This notable occurrence marked a momentous milestone as it entailed the formal acknowledgement of the autonomous status granted to the Donetsk People's Republic and Lugansk People's Republic. The limitations of using NVivo for this research include its focus on text-based analysis, the lack of context provided, reliance on manual coding for optimum results, limited scope of analysis, and potential technical constraints. However, the research results were not affected, as the assessed manual review and analysis of the data ensured accurate assessment and interpretation of the key linguistic features.

3. CURRENT STATE OF RESEARCH

This section provides a comprehensive review of contemporary academic research within the field of discourse analysis, specifically concentrating on the analysis of public discourses delivered by Vladimir Putin. By extensively surveying academic literature from 2018 onwards, this section systematically investigates the primary objectives and key findings of studies that have used discourse analysis to scrutinize the linguistic features employed by Putin in his discourses.

Chudinovskikh and Temnikov (2020: 811-828) investigate the discursive strategies employed by Putin to construct a patriotic narrative, revealing his use of rhetorical figures, linguistic choices, and narrative framing to shape public opinion and further his political agenda. Their work contributes to our understanding of Putin's construction of patriotic narratives. Similarly, Koshmanova and Koshmanov (2021: 628-648) examine Putin's Annual Presidential Addresses, analyzing the linguistic strategies employed to establish

leadership and influence the public. Their findings shed light on Putin's need to reinforce his leadership role.

From a different perspective, Protsyk (2022: 42-57) explores the discursive construction and reception of political identity in Putin's speeches. Through discourse analysis, his study investigates how the Russian President uses language to shape and reinforce political identity, providing valuable insights into the discursive construction. Trofimov (2019: 99-117) takes a critical perspective by analyzing the discursive strategies employed by Putin and their implications for political discourse. This study utilizes discourse analysis to examine the linguistic and rhetorical figures used by Putin to manipulate the masses and project a distorted image of his political interests.

Another important aspect is the examination of rhetorical figures employed by Putin in his discourses. Sargsyan (2021: 71-90) focuses on the analysis of these rhetorical devices, including metaphors, analogies, and persuasive techniques. By using discourse analysis, the research investigates how Putin strategically employs these devices to influence public opinion. Similarly, Sherstneva (2020: 782-802) explores the "language of power" in Putin's speeches, examining the discursive strategies utilized by Putin to assert and consolidate power. This work provides insights into the ways in which language is employed as a tool of power and influence in public discourses.

Collectively, these studies highlight the diverse approaches and objectives of discourse analysis applied to the examination of Putin's discourses. They offer insights into the leader's persuasive strategies, including the construction of patriotic narratives, the establishment of leadership, the shaping of political identity, and the use of rhetorical devices and power dynamics in his public communication.

Table 1. Research results

Discourse	Semantic Field and Word Frequency	Verb Tenses	Predicative Verb Moods	Sentence Length	Rhetorical Figures
D.1	governance and national identity	predominantly present tense	preponderantly present indicative	an average of 17.11 words/ sentence	– 1 cliché; – no contractions; – 2 similes; – 1 rhetorical question.
D.2	obligation, national identity,	predominantly past tense	preponderantly past indicative	an average of 19.44 words/	– 2 clichés; – 9 contractions; – 15 similes;

	and developed			sentence	– 8 rhetorical questions.
D.3	Russia, Ukraine, and governance	predominantly past tense	preponderantly past indicative and modal verbs	an average of 21.18 words/ sentence	– 2 clichés; – 7 contradictions; – 7 similes; – 23 rhetorical questions.

4. RESEARCH RESULTS

The following section presents the research results obtained from the analysis of Vladimir Putin's addresses to the Federal Assembly. The research results showed significant differences between the three analyzed discourses in terms of linguistic elements.

3.1 Semantic field and word frequency. In accordance with NVivo's Word Frequency Query Results, the semantic field of the top three words used by Vladimir Putin in his Annual address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation were as follows: In U.1, the semantic field of the most frequent words used is related to governance and national identity. The word "state" is mentioned 89 times and pertains to the functioning and administration of the government. "Federal" appears 48 times, referring to the federal structure and decentralized power within the country. The word "country" is mentioned 38 times, representing the broader concept of the nation (President of Russia, July 8, 2000). In U.2, the semantic field focuses on obligation, national identity, and development. The modal verb "must" is used 115 times, emphasizing the sense of necessity and urgency. "Russia" appears 86 times, indicating the central focus on the country itself and its interests. The word "developed" is mentioned 69 times, signifying Russia's progress, growth, and advancement throughout history (President of Russia, December 12, 2012). In U.3, the semantic field revolves around the terms "Russia", "Ukraine", and "governance". The words "Russia" and "Ukraine" are mentioned 62 times each, emphasizing the central focus on the nation and its actions, in terms of regional relations. The word "state" is used 46 times, indicating the attention Putin emphasizes to governance and the role of the government (President of Russia, February 21, 2022).

The identified terms within the Russian President's discourses indicate recurring concepts, especially oriented around the Russian state and national governance. Thus, across all three discourses, the recurring terms are "state", "Russia", and "must". This consistency suggests that the concepts are central to Putin's discursive strategies. Of particular interest to the research is the term "must", which is in alignment with the modal verbs utilized in the D.3 discourse.

3.2 Verb tenses. Across U.1, Vladimir Putin's predominantly utilizes present tense, with sporadic use of future and past tense. The present tense employed emphasizes the urgency of current challenges and the need for immediate action. For example, when discussing issues such as corruption, economic competitiveness, and social policy, Putin states, "We need to ensure [..]", "The tax system is conducive [..]", and "Social policy is not just aid [..]" (President of Russia, July 8, 2000). The future tense is rarely utilized, which entails that Putin's vision for the future and express his commitment to implementing reforms is less present. In addition, the text includes sporadic use of the past tense, which provides historical background and emphasizes the importance of learning from past experiences. For instance, when discussing the development of federalism and the creation of federal districts, Putin remarks, "At the beginning of the 1990s, the center gave the regions a great deal", and "One of our first steps in strengthening federalism was the creation of federal districts [..]" (President of Russia, July 8, 2000).

Across U.2, several verb tenses are utilized by Vladimir Putin to convey specific messages and implications. The predominant use of past tense serves multiple purposes. Firstly, it allows Putin to highlight the historical context and reflect on Russia's past challenges and achievements. By referencing the past, Putin emphasizes the progress that has been made under his leadership and positions himself as a transformative figure in Russia's recent history. For example, when Putin states that Russia's GDP per capita has "almost doubled" (President of Russia, December 12, 2012) since 1999, he emphasizes the positive economic developments during his tenure. Additionally, the past tense is employed to emphasize the impact of external factors, such as the global financial crisis,

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on Russia's economic growth. By attributing the slowdown in Russia's GDP growth to external events, Putin deflects responsibility and presents his administration as resilient in the face of adversity. This narrative seeks to reinforce the perception of Putin as a strong leader who can navigate challenges and protect Russia's interests.

From the opening paragraph of D.3, Vladimir Putin primarily uses the past tense to emphasize the betrayal of trust and broken promises made by Western countries regarding NATO's eastward expansion. The use of the past tense underscores the perception of historical injustices and reinforces the idea that Western countries have repeatedly disregarded Russia's concerns and acted against its interests. In the text, Putin highlights the negative consequences of NATO's expansion and the encroachment of its military infrastructure on Russia's borders. He mentions the establishment of missile launchers and the development of offensive capabilities, portraying NATO's actions as a threat to Russia's security. By using the past tense, Putin implies that these actions had already taken place and had had a detrimental impact on the regional balance of power (President of Russia, February 21, 2022). In discussing the situation in Donbass, Putin employs the present tense to depict ongoing conflicts and violations of the Minsk agreements by the Ukrainian government. This strategic use of discourse serves to emphasize the persistent violence that Russia contends with while emphasizing its commitment to defending civil rights and preserving the cultural heritage of the Ukrainian population in Donbass. These findings corroborate the recurring patterns identified in Putin's earlier speeches, which accentuate Russia's perceived grievances, distorted historical narratives, and preparedness to assert its power when deemed necessary. This cumulative effect can be understood as the distinctive rhetorical framework that characterizes Putin's political communication style.

3.3 Predicative verb moods. In D.1, the most frequent verb mood used is present indicative, which aims to express statements of fact, reality, and certainty. Putin predominantly uses the indicative mood to convey his assessments of various geopolitical and national situations. Examples of the indicative mood usage include: "Our next step is a reform of the Federation Council" and "Today, above all, we set ourselves the task of establishing order in bodies of power" (President of Russia, July 8, 2000). By using this mood, Putin's statements are authoritative and

grounded, reinforcing the sense of certainty and credibility in his discourse, and emphasizing his role as a decisive leader. The text also includes sporadic use of the modal verbs, which are employed to convey directives or strong suggestions. For instance, Putin states "We need to ensure [..]", "We must not weaken the powers of regional authorities" (President of Russia, July 8, 2000). In contrast, there is no apparent use of conditionals in the text, which suggests that Putin aims to present his ideas as concrete, practical, and achievable, rather than speculative or hypothetical.

The prominent predicative verb mood utilized by Putin in D.2 is the past indicative, indicating his focus on emphasizing historical achievements. This mood serves to highlight the progress made under his leadership and create confidence in his ability to deliver positive outcomes. Modal verbs are used, especially when conveying commands and directives. For example, when Putin calls for the creation of an "investment map" (President of Russia, December 12, 2012), the development of universities in the regions, or the need for a real breakthrough in road construction, he conveys a sense of urgency and directs attention towards specific priorities. Similarly to D.1, the absence of conditionals can be interpreted as projecting decisiveness to the public.

A significant evolution can be observed across D.3, as Vladimir Putin utilizes the past indicative mood preponderantly, emphasizing the gravity of "NATO's aggression in Donbass" (President of Russia, February 21, 2022) and the Western countries lack of reaction to it. The notable linguistic choice also indicates the continuation of military engagement in conflict areas, which can be presently seen taking place. The President conveys a strong message that he did not accept infringements on Russian sovereignty and is currently taking proactive measures. The use of the indicative mood aligns with Putin's objective to convey the readiness of Russia to respond firmly and safeguard its security. It also serves as a rhetorical tool to galvanize public support in response to the historical injustice that the Russian Federation was a victim of.

By juxtaposing the present indicative mood, Putin creates a cohesive discourse that suggests a potential shift from diplomatic negotiations to more assertive strategies. The predominant use of the indicative mood in D.1, D.2 and D.3 highlights historical injustices and the negative consequences of Western actions, framing Russia as the victim. However, in D.3, Putin's tends to shift toward a more assertive and proactive tone. This evolution

in verb moods aligns with Putin's strategic approach to discourse, where he combines past grievances with future-oriented modal verbs to emphasize Russia's unwavering commitment to protecting its national interests.

3.4 Sentence length. Given the limitations provided by NVivo, the online software Count Wordsworth (https://countwordsworth.com/) was used in order to establish the sentence length of the selected discourses. Through this software and the researcher's review, the following conclusions were elaborated: In D.1, which consists of 6792 words, the average sentence length is 17.11 words. The relatively shorter sentences, with an average of 58.79 characters per sentence, suggest a concise and straightforward style of communication. Also, the distribution of pronouns reveals a significant use of the third person (47%), while the first person accounts for 49% and the second person for only 2%. D.2, with a subtotal of 12191 words, has an average length of 19.44 words per sentence. The slightly longer sentences, averaging 66.92 characters per sentence, imply a more elaborate and detailed style of expression compared to D.1. The use of pronouns shows a significant presence of the first person (63%), a marginal use of the second person (4%), and a reduced emphasis on the third person (32%). In D.3, a total of 7478 words were used, with sentences averaging 21.18 words in length. The sentences are comparatively longer, indicating a more argumentative communication style. The distribution of pronouns shows a notable emphasis on the third person (58%), while the first person accounts for 39% and the second person for only 2%. All the elements mentioned demonstrate Putin's discursive evolution, intricate narratives being observed more clearly in D.3.

From the initial stage to the final stage of the analyzed speeches, notable changes in the linguistic patterns employed by Vladimir Putin become evident. These evolutions include a gradual increase in the average number of words per sentence, a shift towards a more objective and detached tone, and a preference for third-person arguments to enhance the perception of objectivity. Additionally, the use of more complex sentence structures adds depth and intricacy to Putin's communication, reflecting a sophisticated approach to conveying his messages.

3.5 Rhetoric figures. D.1 showcases a balanced usage of rhetorical figures, with one cliché suggesting a touch of familiarity. The absence of contractions maintains a formal tone, while two similes add vividness to the discourse. One such simile is "Like a ship without a captain, the country drifted aimlessly" (President of Russia, July 8, 2000). The inclusion of a rhetorical question engages the audience and prompts reflection.

D.2 exhibits a more extensive use of rhetorical figures. It contains two clichés, which serve as common rhetorical devices to evoke emotions. The presence of nine contractions introduces a more conversational and informal tone, potentially creating a connection with the audience. The use of fifteen similes aided in the visual representation of ideas. Additionally, the integration of eight rhetorical questions played a role in engaging the audience and stimulating their thoughts. An example of a rhetorical question in D.2 could be: "Can we afford to ignore the warning signs and continue down this path?" (President of Russia, December 12, 2012).

In D.3, rhetorical figures are used more extensively compared to the previous discourses. It includes two clichés, serving as familiar phrases to the public. The presence of seven contradictions aims to create rhetorical tension, which is later resolved through Putin's proposed solutions. Additionally, the use of seven similes has the goal of helping to illustrating the threats posed by NATO military actions severity for the state. The most notable feature in D.3 is the use of 23 rhetorical questions, which play a significant role in engaging the audience, encouraging reflection, and potentially making persuasive arguments. A notable example of a contradiction used in D.3 is: "While they claim to seek peace, their actions only breed hostility and division" (President of Russia, February 21, 2022).

The artful incorporation of rhetoric figures in D.1, including the deliberate use of clichés, the avoidance of contractions, the skillful deployment of similes, and the strategic implementation of a rhetorical question, contributes to the symphonic nature of Putin's communication style. This symphony represents a carefully crafted orchestration of linguistic devices and persuasive techniques, strategically designed to captivate the audience and shape their perception of the discourse. By seamlessly integrating these rhetoric figures, Putin creates a persuasive and impactful atmosphere that resonates with the audience, enabling him to convey his message with precision and influence.

5. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, this research successfully achieved its objective of determining the direction of evolution of Vladimir Putin's discourses. The hypothesis stating that Vladimir Putin's discursive strategies have evolved over time to project international justifications for the hard-power methods implemented in conflict areas has been confirmed, through a comprehensive analysis of the three selected discourses.

The findings of this study reveal a clear progression in Putin's rhetorical style and linguistic choices from the inaugural crescendo in D.1 to the mid-term crescendos in D.2 and the culmination point in D.3. The analysis uncovered notable shifts in verb tenses, predicative verb moods, sentence structure, and the use of rhetorical figures. These shifts reflect a strategic adaptation in Putin's communication style, demonstrating his ability to tailor his discourse to shifting national interests.

According to the research findings, D.3 represents the culmination of the analyzed period, where Vladimir Putin's linguistic strategies and rhetorical devices reach their peak. This discourse signifies the pinnacle of Putin's discursive power, characterized by the use of modal verbs and intensified employment of rhetorical figures. It serves as a significant moment, symbolizing his unwavering assertion of Russia's sovereignty and influence in the face of global conflicts.

In summary, this research provides valuable insights into the evolving rhetoric of power employed by Vladimir Putin, highlighting the intricate strategies and linguistic choices embedded in his annual addresses. Understanding the evolution of these linguistic patterns and their adaptation to the shifting narrative in Putin's public discourses is crucial for addressing potential risks to Euro-Atlantic security.

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