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ZELENSKY'S COMMUNICATIVE STRATEGIES AGAINST "TERROR"

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Abstract

War is spreading in many parts of the world, regardless of the geopolitical situation. We, as glocal citizens, are, nevertheless, consciously, or unconsciously, cast into a daily maelstrom of news ranging from loathing to empathy signalled in diverse discursive exchanges across media indebted to communication in crisis. This has led to the analysis of, for example, President Zelensky's addresses to a wide variety of interlocutors, seeking support against the so-called Russian invader. Rather than a purely interpretive claim, underlying much research in several strands related to discourse and pragmatics, the current ongoing research, of exploratory and principled interdisciplinary kind, is intended to draw on a pragmalinguistic and discursive theoretical framework supported by a lexico-metric approach to identify lexico-grammatical salient items of some of Zelensky's communicative strategies against "terror", in his own words. Therefore, this case study is meant to analyse a selection of 21 of his initial direct addresses (Feb. 2022 — March 2023), retrieved from the official site in its English version, to offer a quantitative basis for subsequent qualitative interpretation of Zelensky's rhetorical endeavour allegedly to save Ukraine's face. In this context, findings reveal that Zelensky, firmly speaking on behalf of the Ukrainians, does not offer extensive use of offensive words against the nation's enemy, which may translate his effort to create ingroup relations to disempower the perpetrator.

Keywords: Discourse; Lexico-metric and pragmalinguistic approach; Facework; Zelensky; Communication in crisis.

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1 Introduction

There is an increasing interest in multidisciplinary approaches to political communication for crisis times (Davis, 2017). Following Johansson and Odén (2017), media news exerts some influence on framing, follow-ups and news stories coverage, particularly disseminated in the digital media environment (Baym, 2015) and at times of crisis. In their words, "the perception of the journalist–source relation

is, however, to some extent varying between different public authorities and types of crisis" (Johansson & Odén, 2017, p. 1489). Nonetheless, the current case study was triggered by Zelensky's direct addresses in English, retrieved from the official English-language website of the President of Ukraine, therefore not media-driven but rather focusing on the actual words uttered. Hence, Zelensky's first initial addresses delivered during key phases of the Russian invasion were selected as situated crisis events.

The corpus (15,601 words; 3,323 tokens; 2,042 hapax, representing 13% of the total word count) captures a range of communicative situations, including domestic crisis moments, direct adversarial address, and international diplomatic engagement. It comprises a direct address to citizens of Russia (February 23, 2022); addresses to Ukrainians (greetings on Christmas and New Year's Eve; the execution of a Ukrainian captive; the meeting of the staff of the Supreme Commander in Chief at the front line; the rescue operation in the Dnipro region; February 2023; Kherson; and the destruction of the Kakhovka reservoir, two addresses in June 2023); and addresses to foreign interlocutors (Dutch Parliament; special plenary session of the European Parliament; Houses of Parliament of the United Kingdom; Conference 31 May; joint meeting of the US Congress; Canada 11 June 2023; US Memorial Day; EU Committee of the Regions; session of the G7 Summit and Ukraine; 4th Summit of the Council of Europe; and the meeting of the leaders of the European Political Community). The corpus texts were retrieved from the official presidential website (https://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/speeches).

The pragmalinguistic and discursive framework indebted to this paper is intended to uncover the president's communicative strategies undermining the so-called "frames", in Perloff's words (2021, chap. 9, online), "in an age of online media", related to "agenda-setting effects, processes, and contingent conditions". Thus, the "frames" in use related to Zelensky's political communication strategy are worthy of scrutiny as providing examples "to illustrate the ways political communicators use language and themes to highlight particular aspects", in this case of war (Perloff, 2021, chap. 9, online).

While diverse theoretical approaches to political discourse have been considered in isolation, this case study borrows from a principled interdisciplinary concern with the way speakers, in this case Zelensky, manage accountability, credibility, and moral positioning in high-stakes contexts. Thus, the main goal of this study is not merely to analyse communicative strategies, but to identify, and empirically substantiate the linguistic realisation of crisis-response strategies in Zelensky's direct addresses across different audiences and crisis moments, using corpus-based frequency patterns as a foundation for discourse-pragmatic interpretation. More specifically, and from a pragmalinguistic discursive perspective, the analysis of the addresses follows a two-step logic: lexico-metric approach and discursive and pragmatic analysis, including facework, stance, (im)politeness, and interpersonal meaning. The texture of political addressivity will be focused on the analysis of lexico-grammatical salient data, notably pronouns and

determiners, naming, marked in-/outgroup relations, and modality (to account for power, legitimation, moral authority, and ingroup/outgroup construction).

2 Theoretical and Methodological Approach

Within critical discourse studies, crisis has been conceptualised not merely as a momentary disruption but as a historically embedded condition marking profound and often irreversible sociopolitical transformation (Krzyżanowski et al., 2018, p. 3). This perspective foregrounds the interdependence of discourse, power, and socio-political context, emphasising how crises are discursively constructed, normalised, and contested over time. However, while productive for analysing institutional narratives and media representations of crisis, this macro-level perspective offers comparatively limited analytical traction on the micro-level linguistic strategies through which political leaders enact crisis management in situated communicative events.

A complementary body of research within crisis communication studies directs attention toward strategic discourse as a means of shaping public interpretations of crisis events and the actors implicated in them. Coombs' (1995) work demonstrates that crisis-response messages function as strategic interventions designed to protect legitimacy, manage responsibility, and maintain trust. Subsequent studies extend this insight beyond organisational contexts, showing that crisis discourse is performative and evaluative, oriented toward moral positioning and audience alignment (Huang, 2006; Orgad, 2012; Nikunen, 2015; Chouliaraki & Stolic, 2017; Baldoni, 2023). While this literature provides a typology of crisis-response strategies, it tends to privilege functional classification over linguistic scrutiny, offering limited analysis of how such strategies are enacted through pragmatic and discursive choices in political speech. As a result, the linguistic mechanisms through which crisis-response strategies become interactionally effective remain under-specified.

Addressing this gap requires engagement with pragmalinguistic and discourse-analytic traditions foregrounding meaning-in-use, stance-taking, and interpersonal positioning. Research on pragmatics and political discourse shows how evaluative language, implicature, and speech acts contribute to authority and alignment (Leech, 1983; Haugh, 2007; Wodak, 2015). In parallel, facework theory demonstrates how speakers manage threats to individual and collective face in adversarial or high-stakes contexts (Goffman, 1967; Brown & Levinson, 1987), with later refinements highlighting the strategic deployment of face-saving and face-enhancing moves in political interaction (Bull & Fetzer, 2010). These approaches are pertinent to wartime leadership discourse, where the speaker must project resolve, maintain credibility, and sustain solidarity under existential threat. Additionally, the concepts of ethos and collective ethos (Amossy, 2010) contribute to the construction and co-construction of self-presentation and ethos through linguistic material shaping the speaker's self-image in interaction.

Recent research on Zelensky's wartime communication (Chiluwa & Ruzaite, 2025) acknowledges the rhetorical and symbolic force of his addresses, often situating them within narratives of resistance, heroism, or mediatized leadership. References to pragmatics or politeness theory are frequently invoked at a general level without being operationalised through explicit analytical categories or procedures, resulting in a fragmented account in which insights from media studies, pragmatics, and political communication coexist but are not integrated.

This paper bridges this gap by analysing Zelensky's addresses as instances of crisis communication in which pragmalinguistic choices and facework strategies, supported by corpus-based and lexico-metric approaches, are mobilised to construct authority, resilience, and collective alignment against "terror".

2.1 Methods and techniques

Existing scholarship on Zelensky's wartime communication has largely adopted rhetorical, media-oriented, or interpretive perspectives, offering insights into leadership style, symbolism, and narrative framing. However, this work remains predominantly qualitative and impressionistic, with limited use of systematic corpus-based evidence. As a result, claims about communicative strategies — such as solidarity building, moral positioning, or ingroup/outgroup construction — are rarely grounded in replicable linguistic patterns or quantitatively observable clines across audiences and communicative settings.

Corpus-assisted approaches to political crisis discourse have tended to prioritise large institutional datasets (e.g. media coverage, parliamentary debates), leaving leader-centred crisis addressivity underexplored from a lexico-metric perspective.

This exploratory, integrative study addresses this gap by combining a pragma-discursive framework with corpus-based and lexico-metric approaches, analysing linguistic realisation (pragmalinguistics) and interpreting interpersonal effects (facework).

The analysis follows two sequential stages. First, a quantitative lexico-metric analysis is conducted using corpus-analysis software allowing research replicability. The addresses were codified and analysed using Hyperbase 9 (Brunet, 2011), which provided frequency lists (n = 100) and lexical frequency as the primary indicator of salience. High-frequency items were used as an empirical filter to identify recurrent discursive patterns, then interpreted through a pragma-discursive lens. Frequency is thus treated not as an end, but as a heuristic grounding qualitative claims in observable linguistic regularities.

Rather than treating frequency data as descriptive output, the analysis uses lexical salience as an entry point into identifying and interpreting crisis-response strategies, facework, and moral positioning in Zelensky's wartime addresses. Although limited in size, the corpus maintains methodological rigour and sequential logic of bias control to guide similar future studies of larger corpora.

2.2 Research questions and hypotheses

Drawing on the theoretical-methodological claims, this study is anchored by the following research questions, intended to ensure that quantitative findings (frequency, salience, recurrence) are systematically linked to qualitative interpretation within a pragma-discursive framework:

RQ1. Which lexical items and semantic fields are salient in Zelensky's wartime addresses, and how do they contribute to the construction of crisis narratives?

RQ2. What pragmalinguistic resources (evaluative language and speech acts) are mobilised to realise these crisis-response functions?

RQ3. How are face-threatening, face-saving, and face-enhancing strategies deployed to manage authority, credibility, and collective alignment under conditions of armed conflict?

RQ4. How are crisis-response functions — such as legitimisation, attribution of responsibility, and mobilisation of solidarity — realised through recurrent lexical and evaluative patterns?

RQ5. How do frequency-based lexical choices support facework strategies, particularly the construction of collective self-face (Ukraine, allies) and the delegitimisation of outgroups (Russia, aggressors)?

The following hypotheses align with the mixed-method methodology adopted and are testable through frequency lists, keyword analysis, and qualitative interpretation:

H1. Lexical concentration hypothesis

Zelensky's wartime addresses will exhibit a high frequency of evaluative and moral lexemes.

H2. Audience differentiation hypothesis

Addresses to international audiences will display a higher frequency of institutional and value-based lexemes, whereas domestic addresses will prioritise collectivising and affective lexemes.

H3. Ingroup/outgroup asymmetry hypothesis

Lexical frequency patterns will show systematic asymmetry in agency and evaluation, assigning positive agency to the ingroup and allies and negative or destructive agency to the outgroup.

H4. Facework hypothesis

Recurrent lexical items will function as face-enhancing resources for collective self-face and as face-threatening resources toward the adversary.

These hypotheses are operationalised through corpus-driven tables and figures testing communicative strategies and audience alignment. Lexical frequency and collocational patterns are treated as empirical indicators of discursive strategy, enabling identification of discursive markers related to lexical salience, defence-related semantic fields, solidarity markers (e.g. "we", "our", "together"), institutional alignment (e.g. "Europe"), and evaluative stance resources such as modality.

Analytical categories such as legitimation strategies, moral evaluation of actors, and appeals to unity and resilience function as interpretive frames guiding linguistic analysis. Facework analysis identifies lexico-grammatical items underpinning face-threatening moves, face-saving strategies, and face-enhancing strategies.

3 Results and Discussion

A clear picture of the reality represented in Zelensky's addresses is offered by the list of high frequencies (n = 100) synthesised in Table 1, which presents high-frequency lexical items across the corpus and serves as the empirical entry point for identifying dominant discursive patterns. Rather than treating frequency as purely descriptive, the table assesses whether moral and evaluative lexis is salient, thereby testing the hypothesis that moralisation constitutes a central strategy in the locutor's wartime addresses. The prominence of particular lexical and grammatical items provides a quantitative basis for subsequent qualitative interpretation within a contextual and pragma-discursive framework.

Among the most frequent grammatical items, the following pronouns and determiners stand out:

- we (303), us (77), our (59);
- I (186), my (23);
- all (166), everyone (36), everything (29), every (64), together (46), each (24);
- you (123), your (74);
- they (59), them (32), their (47).

Among content words (Table 1), salient items include:

- perception verb: *know* (27);
- gratitude expressions: *thank* (33);
- modal verb: *will* (24);
- auxiliaries: *be*, *have*;
- concrete nouns: world (77), people (58), Ukrainians (29), children (27);
- proper nouns: Ukraine (118), Russia (74), Europe (74);
- abstract nouns: peace (32), freedom (40), evil (27), war (51), time (25), aggression (25), life (32), lives (23), victory (22);
- modifiers: Russian (75), Ukrainian (26), international (25), important (23);
- adverbs: now (48), not (48), today (45), more (38), very (30), just[1] (29), only[2] (21), also[3] (18).

[1] *N.B.* The scrutiny of the occurrence of the lemma "just" (29 ocs.) unveiled its use as an adverb in 25 instances.

[2] *N.B.* Out of 24 occurrences of the lemma "only", there are 21 instances as an adverb in the corpus.

[3] *N.B.* There are 27 occurrences of the lemma "also", yet it is used as an adverb in 18 occurrences.

This overview of frequent lexico-grammatical items and collocational tendencies provides a basis for further analysis of how Zelensky constructs relations with audiences and represents himself, his fellow citizens, allies, and adversaries, as examined in Sections 3.1.1–3.1.3.

Following Amossy's (2010) concept of collective ethos, the analysis identifies linguistic markers of self-presentation through enunciative examination of singular and plural pronouns, possessives, collocates (Figure 3), and register features (selected co-texts in Sections 3.1.1–3.1.3). These choices reveal both what the speaker explicitly states about himself and what is conveyed implicitly through the modalities of his speech (Amossy, 2010, p. 113, translation ours).

Table 1. Lexical salience and moral evaluation in Zelensky's wartime addresses (n=100)

rang	frq	mot	rang	frq	mot	rang	frq	mot	rang	frq	mot	rang	frq	mot
1	1170	.	21	121	with	40	57	by	60	36	everyone	81	27	know
2	1076	the	22	118	Ukraine	41	54	"	61	35	how	82	27	evil
3	962	,	23	116	on	42	51	which	62	33	thank	83	27	children
4	661	and	24	103	are	43	51	war	63	33	one	84	27	also
5	607	of	25	83	but	44	48	now	64	33	…	85	26	Ukrainian
6	492	to	26	77	world	45	48	not	65	32	them	86	26	have
7	323	in	27	77	us	46	48	Dear	66	32	peace	87	25	time
8	303	We	28	76	from	47	47	their	67	32	life	88	25	Not_only
9	279	for	29	74	your	48	46	together	68	31	So	89	25	international
10	275	is	30	74	Russia	49	45	today	69	31	other	90	25	aggression
11	243	a	31	74	Europe	50	45	at	70	31	its	91	24	will
12	217	!	32	73	Thank_you	51	44	what	71	30	very	92	24	there
13	198	that	33	68	as	52	43	such	72	30	be	93	24	s
14	197	this	34	65	Russian	53	42	about	73	29	Ukrainians	94	24	only
15	186	I	35	64	when	54	40	freedom	74	29	or	95	24	each
16	183	it	36	64	every	55	40	an	75	29	just	96	23	my
17	166	all	37	59	they	56	38	no	76	29	everything	97	23	lives
18	146	–	38	59	our	57	38	more	77	29	?	98	23	important
19	132	who	39	58	people	58	37	against	78	28	security	99	22	where
20	123	you				59	36	these	79	27	was	100	22	victory
									80	27	those			

Source: Hypertext Programme – Hyperbase version 9.0 (n=100)

3.1 Pronouns and determiners

The search of pronominal reference and corresponding frequencies in the corpus points to the overriding occurrence of:

- we / us / our / ours / ourselves (freq. 833): +Ukrainians; +Europeans; +Americans, +Japanese, among others;
- I / me / my (freq. 215);
- you /your / yourself / yourselves (freq. 201)
- they / them / their / theirs / themselves (freq. 143): + Ukrainian; + Russia; + Russians
- together (13 oc.): +you and us; Ukrainian family
- he / his / himself (freq. 13): +aggressor; +Putin; +terrorist; the Ukrainian pilot; +His Majesty the King; +friend; +diary/ boy from Mariopol

3.1.1 I and the Other

The involvement is carried out by commissive and performative verbs, most preceded by a straightforward "thank-you note" (e.g., *thank, grateful*), in diverse degrees of politeness as nation face-saving strategies, operationalised through illustrations derived from the methodological procedures adopted in this research (see Figure 1).

Figure 1 focuses on lexico-pragmatic choices contributing to the construction of ingroup relations. The wordcloud displays recurrent lexical patterns indexing collective identity, shared responsibility, and positive agency, functioning as face-enhancing resources through which collective self-face is constructed and maintained under crisis conditions.

The frequency of the personal pronoun *I* shows Zelensky's active national and international engagement, many occurrences appearing in "thank-you expressions" (118 ocs.) and expressions of gratitude (25 ocs.).

Aware of his role as representative of a state, he addresses interlocutors according to diplomatic and ethical norms in crisis communication, possibly avoiding further risks and unexpected turns in national and supranational contexts, and devising an inside-out perspective (ethos and logos): the statesman, the warrior among fellow citizens, promoting shared citizenship and a common goal — defending the territory from intruders — in his words, any act towards "the rescue operation" (Zelensky's address to Ukrainians, Feb. 2022, titled *Rescue operation Dnipro region*).

Figure 1. Lexico-pragmatic construction of ingroup solidarity and collective agency (Source: Wordcloud generator - https://www.freewordcloudgenerator.com/#google_vignette)

Zelensky's addresses are rounded up by exhortations to collective effort (Bowe et al., 2017; Fraser, 2010) to defend the country for the sake of a free world and an expected victory, conveyed through war metaphor (Koller, 2004) in several linguistic forms displayed in Figure 2.

Figure 2 maps the semantic field of defence across the corpus, showing how security-related lexis contributes to framing war as a collective and morally justified struggle and linking lexical choice to broader crisis narratives of protection, resistance, and legitimacy.

Figure 2. Defence-related semantic fields and the discursive framing of security
(Source: Wordcloud generator -
https://www.freewordcloudgenerator.com/#google_vignette)

Linguistic forms are also introduced by the phrase "Glory to", involving diverse interlocutors in local, national, and supranational realms. These are punctuated with emotional appeal while triggering cognitive schemata and reinforcing identity and diversity. Political correctness stands out not only in appeals to Ukrainian citizens but also to the world, as illustrated in the concordance lines retrieved from the corpus:

Glory to Ukraine! (11 oc.)
Glory to all who fight and work for our country!
Glory to all our warriors! And thank you for this day on the frontline!
And glory to every hero who fights for life to win! To win now!
Glory to all who fight against this evil!
Glory to our troops!
Glory to our beautiful people!
Glory to everyone in the world who is determined to fight for freedom together with us
Glory to all Ukrainian men and Ukrainian women who are in combat!
Glory to each and everyone who works for the victory of Ukraine!

3.1.2 I /me /my

The locutor frequently uses first-person subject and object pronouns together with possessive determiners and collocates associated with real-time, personal, and fact-based experience, rendering his account reliable and persuasive.

The following corpus excerpts[4] illustrate the concept of face (Goffman, 1967, 1995; Brown & Levinson, 1987; Spencer-Oatey, 2007) and reveal Zelensky's strategies for saving, gaining, and maintaining face. They function as markers of

[4] Emphases ours.

political discourse and balanced self-representation vis-à-vis negative representation of the Other, i.e., the aggressor.

> Russia killed - and this is why **I** will use such wording
> It is always an honor for me to represent Ukraine, and **I** am proud of our beautiful and strong people.
> It's a great honor for **me** to be at the US Congress and speak to you and all Americans!
> When **I** was in Bakhmut yesterday, our heroes gave **me** the flag. The battle flag. The flag of those who defend Ukraine, Europe and the world at the cost of their lives**.** They asked **me** to bring this flag to the US Congress …
> How can **I** be a nazi? Say it to **my** grandfather who fought in World War II as a Soviet infantry man and died a colonel in an independent Ukraine.
> **I** address everyone in the world for whom life is a value
> Today, **I** held a separate meeting on water supply and safety of people in the cities and communities of Dnipropetrovsk region - I was there personally
> **I** am in constant communication with our military
> **I** thank each of our warriors!
> **I** want to thank each and everyone of you who are involved!
> **I** also thank all those who encourage international organizations, foreign leaders, and other states to see what happened and call things by their names
> First of all, **I** would like to thank you for the fact that in this battle for the free future of Ukraine and of our whole Europe, we defend ourselves together.
> **I** am grateful to everyone who is helping Ukraine!
> I am grateful to every organization, every volunteer, every company that has joined the rescue operation.
> And I **am sure**: no matter how difficult it may be, we will overcome the consequences of this disaster and all Russian evil.
> On behalf of all Ukrainians, **I** would like to honor the courage and self-sacrifice of all Americans who stood in defence and keep defending freedom.
> I **am sure** that the heart of the Netherlands today will feel what the hearts of Ukrainians long for.

3.1.3 We / us / ourselves

Zelensky's addresses to Ukrainians and international interlocutors are marked by frequent inclusive possessive forms followed by a wide range of collocates, as shown in Figure 3.

The visual representation of the possessive pronoun *our* and its collocational environment constitutes a key resource for constructing collective self-face. The wordcloud shows how possession extends beyond material objects to values, institutions, and moral qualities, reinforcing shared ownership and collective responsibility and supporting claims that collectivisation functions as a face-saving and face-enhancing strategy in wartime leadership discourse.

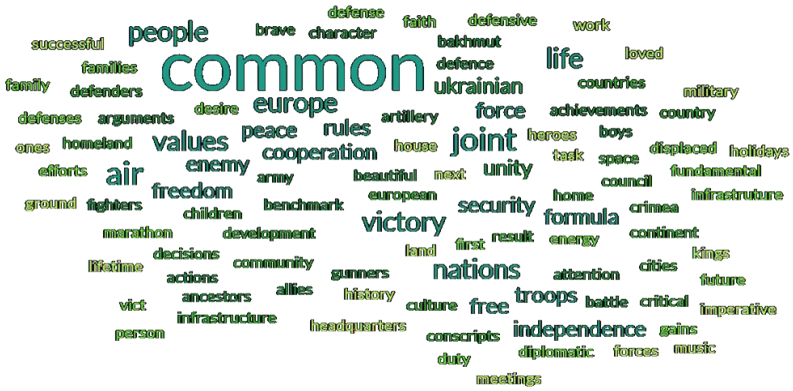

Figure 3. Collective self-face and possessive pronoun usage: "our" and its collocates (Source: Wordcloud generator - https://www.freewordcloudgenerator.com/#google_vignette)

Following Amossy's stance (2010, p. 154) on ethos construction, Zelensky's references may be perceived as "a matter of collective management", since "my image of myself is always subject to the reaction of others" (Amossy, 2010, p. 154). This reflects the coexistence of individual and group image, for example when addressing political leaders (Bull & Fetzer, 2010):

> And you prove that our community is based not on bureaucracy, but on common values which give us a strong course!

The concordance lines below illustrate first-person plural forms (*we, us, ourselves*) and their collocates:

> **We** do not rely on words - **we** act**.** We do not cower before the enemy - **we** stand. **We** do not waste time - **we** change ourselves and **we** implement changes.
> Neighbors always enrich each other's cultures. However, **we** are not part of one whole. *You cannot swallow* ***us*** *up*. **We** are different. But this difference is not a reason for enmity. **We** want to determine **our own** course and build **our own** history: peacefully, calmly, and honestly.
> Because **we** combine integrity and energy. **We** are all equal in representing Europe, and **we** are diligent as each of **us** is a leader of Europe in **our own** particular life.
> Europe will always remain free. As long as **we** are together and as long as **we** care about **our** Europe!
> Of course**, we** will do everything to guarantee people a basis for life even after this disaster. But **we** need to make sure that there is not a single desert or ruin or dead zone left after this disaster. And this can only be ensured by joint efforts**,**
> But will it last forever? This is a question for **all of us**. The answer is no! No! Europe! **We** are defending **ourselves** against the most anti-European force in the modern world. **We** are defending ourselves**.**
> **We**, Ukrainians**,** are on the battlefield with you.

> I thank you for the fact that **we** are defending ourselves together!
> And **we** must defend **ourselves**!
> No matter who **we** are**, we** always fight against contempt**.** Wherever **we** live, **we** always rely on good faith**.** Whatever **we** dream of for **our** children, for **our** grandchildren, the unconditional background for these dreams is peace - peace and security.
> Will all of this be possible if **we** do not defeat the anti-European force that seeks to steal Europe from **us**, from all of **us**? No. It is only **our** victory that will guarantee all of this - each of **our** common European values**. Our** imperative victory!

The excerpts illustrate Amossy's account of self- and other-image construction through direct address, dual address, and composite audience, reinforced by action verbs, performatives, and expressions of volition, obligation, and commitment (e.g., *act, stand, combine, care, fight, defeat, want, will, can, cannot, must, need*).

3.1.4 Lexical markers of solidarity: "together" as a discursive resource

Likewise, the lexeme *together*, used as an adverb or adjective, reinforces Zelensky's call for collective action against ongoing and further intrusion, as evidenced in the lines below:

> I thank you, dear leaders**,** who helped Ukraine with air defence! **Together we** have saved thousands and thousands of lives from Russian missiles.
> No nation should be left to face such challenges alone! But there is no answer yet to how **we** can overcome all this **together.**
> Please, let**'s** work **together** to make sure that there are no more ecocides.
> **We** are fighting **together** for children - for all children, for all future generations, for their rights and liberties
> And the more **we** all work **together**, the less likely anyone else in the world will follow Russia's insane path´
> For almost 15 months of full-scale war, **we** have made hundreds of security decisions **together**

Together functions as a discourse marker of solidarity and alignment, minimising distance between speaker and audience. Its recurrence across address types suggests that solidarity is not context-specific but a stable component of Zelensky's crisis-response strategy.

3.1.5 You / your / yourself / yourselves

Based on the concept of *face*, Zelensky's use of the second-person pronouns marks positively evaluated qualities rather than negatively evaluated ones, when addressing diverse interlocutors.

> We see **your** heroism, and we are grateful to **you for every minute of your life** – a life that is truly the life of Ukraine

> **You and us both struggle for peace**, but instead we are forced to face the rage that seeks to deprive us of peace and everything else that is valuable in life.
> **Thank you for telling the truth about Russian war crimes!** Thank you for using your power – probably the highest power in the modern world – the power to decide what holds people's attention and what people know. **Thank you** for using **your** power to give guidance for people and humanity.
> **Thank you** Canada and **you**, Justin, my friend, the friend of Ukraine, Mister Prime Minister!
> **You** know what we value. So stop and listen to **yourselves**, to the voice of reason, to the voice of common sense.

At times, the locutor resorts to sarcasm (Botas, 2025) to reinforce the negative face of the aggressor:

> **Do you Russians want a war?** I would very much like to know the answer, but that answer depends **only on you, on the citizens of the Russian Federation**.
> No matter what we encountered on different stages of our and **your formidable history**, **you and us and the whole mankind achieved similar result – evil lost**.
> If **your «Patriots» stop the Russian terror against our cities**, it will let Ukrainian patriots work to the full to defend our freedom.

3.1.6 They / them / their / theirs / themselves

Zelenky's addresses are imbued with features of the political discourse genre along with balanced ways of keeping a positive self-representation vis-à-vis a strategic representation of the Other at times of crisis: i. the enemy (outgroup relations); ii. Ukraine & Allies (ingroup relations). The negative Other-representation is particularly conveyed in the use of the third-person pronoun singular "it", demonising the opponent, that is Russia / the evil:

> **The evil** now claims not just one country but values – our values. **It** claims to destroy **them**.
> **Russia** killed - and this is why I will use such wording - **Russia** killed 483 children at least. It killed **them**.

Enemy

> **They** told you that I would order an attack on Donbass, order indiscriminate shootings and bombings. Bombings
> **They** build, **they** do not destroy, as **they themselves** have told you day after day on television.
> **They** said once that European Union is a bureaucracy.
> Russian terrorists are trying to further aggravate the situation **they** have caused with their ecocide.
> Russia is ruled by savages. Savages who **themselves** are the biggest disaster on the planet today.

Ukraine & Allies

> But the Ukrainian people are free. **They** remember **their** own past and will build **their** own future.
> The Ukrainian people want peace, as does **their** government. Not only do **they** want it, but **they** demonstrate that desire for peace. **They** do everything **they** can.
> It is about peace and principles, of justice, of international law. It is about the right to self-determination, that every person might determine **their own** future.
> I spoke today with the Prime Ministers of Japan and the Netherlands. I briefed **them** on our rescue operation in the southern regions
> Our defenders were awesome, and on January 1 **they** showed **themselves** very well.

3.1.7 He / his / himself

The locutor makes it clear that the negative Other-presentation is conveyed by the 3rd person singular pointing to the aggressor, the offender, the dictator, the terrorist, Putin.

> No aggressor will now think that **he** can burn the values of our Europe in the fire of aggression!
> After we win together, any aggressor – big or small – will know what awaits **him** if he attacks international order.
> Any aggressor who will try to push the boundaries by force. Who will inflict destruction and death on other peoples. Who will try to endure **his** dictatorship at the expense of other people's blood in criminal and unprovoked wars, as the Kremlin does. Any aggressor is going to lose, ladies and gentlemen!
> Any terrorist counts on only a few forms of results for **himself**: the suffering of people, the intimidation of people, and the ruins that terror leaves behind

> This disaster is Putin. What **he** does. What **he** personally orders to do.

3.2 Naming

Zelensky knows only too well how to communicate win-win and losses in the war (53 ocs.) they have been forced to fight and to seduce the Other (pathos), namely Europe.

> "And this is important not only for European countries. Not only for the communities of Europe."

Figure 4 examines the lexical item *Europe* and its collocates to show how institutional alignment and shared values are discursively constructed in international addresses. The patterns frame Europe not only as a geopolitical entity but as a moral and normative community, supporting the hypothesis that such addresses foreground value-based legitimisation strategies.

Figure 4. Institutional alignment and value framing: "Europe" and its collocates
(Source: Wordcloud generator-
https://www.freewordcloudgenerator.com/#google_vignette)

The Other is represented through references to the invader as institution (Kremlin — 8 ocs.), nation (Russia — 86 ocs.), nationality (Russian — 82 ocs.), and the derogatory term *Ruscits* (1 oc.), marking outgroup relations discursively.

Figure 5 displays naming practices associated with the outgroup, focusing on lexical choices that attribute agency, responsibility, and moral evaluation to the adversary and illustrating asymmetrical ingroup/outgroup representation.

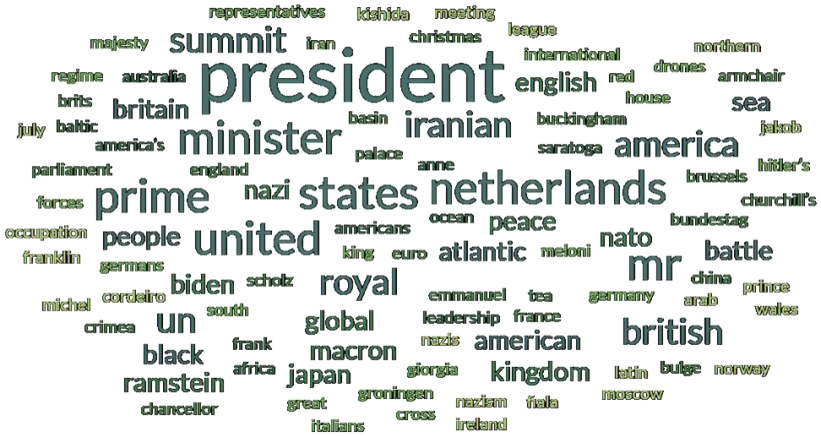

Figure 5. Outgroup construction and moral delegitimisation in naming practices
(Source: Wordcloud generator -
https://www.freewordcloudgenerator.com/#google_vignette)

In seeking international support in the battle against terror (19 ocs.), Zelensky gradually hardens his wording about the aggressor (10 ocs.) and aggression (30 ocs.), evidenced through discursive shifts across addresses. Notably, the proper noun *Putin* appears only three times:

> It may be Russia that will be left devastated after Putin, but not Ukraine.
> This disaster is Putin. What he does. What he personally orders to do.

> … American soldiers, which held their lines and fought back Hitler's forces during the Christmas of 1944, brave Ukrainian soldiers are doing the same to Putin's forces this Christmas.

3.3 Pragmalinguistic insight

The selected addresses point to the locutor's concern with communicative strategies drawing on face-saving mechanisms, Gricean cooperative maxims, and interlocutors' social cognition. These are reinforced by fact-based accounts and current narratives supporting a universal claim conveyed through intentional morpho-syntactic and semantic choices. Short utterances intertwine with recurrent topics to make appeals memorable and signal in-/outgroup relations, shifting focus from emotion to cognition (Brekhus, 2015) within a discursive-pragmatic continuum (ideational, interpersonal, transactional dimensions) consistent with Meyerhuber's (2019) framework on theme-centred interaction, as illustrated below:

> **The famous Churchill's armchair**. A guide smiled and offered me to sit down on the armchair from which war orders had been given. He asked me – how did I feel? And I said that I certainly felt something. But it is only now that I know what the feeling was. **And all Ukrainians know it perfectly well, too**. It is the **feeling of how bravery takes you through the most unimaginable hardships** – to finally reward you with **Victory**.

3.3.1 Marked outgroup relations

The conceptual metaphor *Russia/Russian* is explicitly associated with lexico-semantic choices identified in Table 2 and linked to notions of evil and moral degradation, frequently realised through hyperbolic formulations, as illustrated below:

> Russia is ruled by **savages**. **Savages** who themselves are the biggest disaster on the planet today.
> Children who would have been alive if a bunch of **thugs** in the Kremlin, in Moscow, had not considered themselves **chieftains** who allegedly had the right to decide the fate of nations.
> This total war that has been **unleashed** by Russia is not just about territory in one part of Europe or another.
> Its threat is not only in the fact that there is **a dictator** with **huge stockpiles of Soviet weapons** and weapons inflow from other **dictatorships**, in particular the Iranian regime.
> In order to be able **to wage this war**, **the Kremlin** has been consistently destroying, step by step, year after year, what we see as the basis of our Europe.
> The sacred value of human life has been destroyed in Russia as well. No one matters to the authorities there, except those inside **the Kremlin walls**, **their relatives and their wallets. For them, for the Kremlin**, **all others**, **all one hundred and forty million citizens are just bodies capable of carrying**

> **weapons** - carrying weapons to Ukraine, carrying weapons on the battlefield, **keeping others in line or being in line themselves.**
> **The rule of violence and obedience** are the rules there **instead of law**. The Russian regime not only hates everything, **any sociality and any diversity**, but also deliberately invests in **xenophobia** and tries to make **all the inhuman things** that happened in the 1930s and 1940s **part of the norm** on our continent.

These examples construct the demonised image of the Other — Russia — through lexical items such as *occupier* (15 ocs.), *enemy* (7), *villainy* (5), *murderers* (2), *tyranny* (3), *horror* (1), *hardship* (1), *savages* (2), *beast* (2), *thugs* (2), *primitive* (1), *bandits* (1), *pathetic* (1), *insane* (1), *dictator* (1), and *xenophobia* (1).

Table 2. Russia / Russian and correlates

Lexical items	Concordances
evil (27 ocs.)	And I am sure: no matter how difficult it may be, we will overcome the consequences of this disaster and **all Russian evil**…
evil state (1 oc.)	the time will come when children on Earth - in Ukraine and elsewhere – will be protected from **such evil as Russian evil** and from such aggressions…
meanness (1 oc.)	That is why it is so important that the power of justice, the power of accountability, be a powerful reminder of every life that was taken **by evil**, **by Russia**. Russia launched a second missile strike... **Absolute meanness. Absolute evil.**
terrorists (24 ocs.)	They are even shelling evacuation points, which is a manifestation of evil that perhaps no **terrorists** in the world, except for Russian ones, have ever done.
terrorism (1 oc.)	**Russian terrorists** must leave our entire territory, every meter of which they are trying to use for evil and disasters. The damage caused by the **Russian act of terrorism** is very significant, this is clear to everyone

3.3.2 Modality: modal verbs and semi-modals

Following Bally (1965), Charaudeau (1992), Charaudeau and Maingueneau (2002), Amossy (2010), and Wales (1989), it is relevant to examine how modality in Zelensky's addresses — conveyed through modals and semi-modals — reflects the speaker's relation to the hearer, himself, and his enunciative content. Modality entails multidisciplinary insight involving logic, semantics, semiotics, and philosophy beyond linguistic description.

The corpus analysis highlights the verb of volition and prediction *will* (24 ocs.) among the 100 most frequent items (Figure 6). It is frequently followed by performatives signalling projected outcomes and proactive stance (e.g., *will* + *have* + *-ed*: protected, deployed, guaranteed, destroyed, heard, taken, left).

Figure 6 presents *will* and its collocates as indicators of commitment, resolve, and projected future action, showing how future-oriented commitment is

linguistically enacted and supporting the claim that leadership authority in crisis is constructed through repeated modalised assertions.

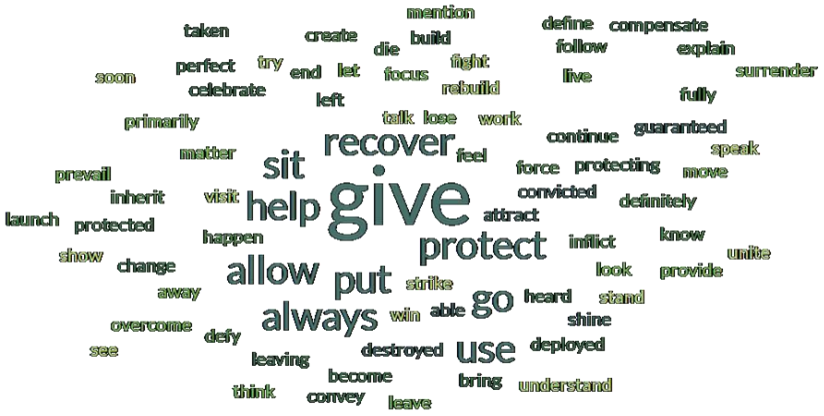

Figure 6. Modal commitment and authority construction: "will" and collocational patterns (Source: Wordcloud generator – https://www.freewordcloudgenerator.com/#google_vignette)

The locutor's line of argumentation is also reinforced by the statements in which the following modals are used to convey:

i. (im)possibility / (in)ability / (in)capability (together with the lexemes "capability/ies" and "capable") carried out by the modal "can", "can't"/ "cannot" (cf. figure 7) and "could" as well as the modals "may"/ "might" (may + suffer/use/be willing/well remember; might+have studied/determine/seem);

Figure 7. Capability, constraint, and agency: "can / can't" in crisis communication (Source: Wordcloud generator – https://www.freewordcloudgenerator.com/#google_vignette)

The wordcloud focuses on the modals *can* and *can't* to analyse how capability and constraint are distributed across actors. The collocational patterns reveal whether agency is attributed primarily to the ingroup, allies, or the adversary, thereby providing empirical grounding for claims about agency asymmetry. This analysis links modality to both facework and moral evaluation.

ii. suggestion, prediction (would + act /be /order/not be able/bring /have been alive; wouldn't have happened) beyond the sematic prosody of the collocates signalling positive face ("would like" / "would very much like") or polite ways to address the on-site audience;
iii. obligation is actualised both by the use of the modal "must" (cf. figure 8) and the semi-modal "have to" (and concordance lines underneath)

Figure 8 underpins the analyses of deontic modals expressing obligation in order to examine how moral and political necessity are constructed in crisis communication. The collocational environments of *must* and *have to* reveal whether obligation is framed as collective duty, moral imperative, or external necessity. This wordcloud offers an overview of the operationalization of normative leadership as a linguistically observable phenomenon.

Figure 8. Deontic modality and normative leadership: "must" and "have to"
(Source: Wordcloud generator - https://www.freewordcloudgenerator.com/#google_vignette)

Have to (9 ocs.)

Moreover, the destruction of the dam and the reservoir is a man made strike on the environment, after which nature **will have to recover** for decades.
But we know that we **have to return** them all. We know that we must restore the rights and security of all Ukrainian children
Today, Ukraine went through a difficult challenge – an intense Russian missile attack. Such challenges are what **we all have to pay attention** to now.
We have to achieve this to the maximum to bring joint peace faster!
We live in special times. And all our holidays are special. And **we have to break** some of our traditions to protect our traditions.
Yet, **we have to do** whatever it takes to ensure that countries of the Global South also gain such victory.
Yet, the battle continues! And **we have to defeat** the Kremlin on the battlefield.
If they attack us with Iranian drones and **our people will have to go to bomb shelters** on Christmas eve – Ukrainians will still sit down at a holiday table and cheer up each other. And we don't have to know everyone's wish as we know that all of us, millions of Ukrainians, wish the same – victory. Only victory.

iv. obligation /duty/propriety

Figure 9 focuses on the modal *should* as a resource for expressing moral recommendation and evaluative alignment without coercion. The wordcloud shows how *should* functions to guide audience interpretation and behaviour while maintaining solidarity. This supports the argument that moral authority is often enacted through recommendation rather than command.

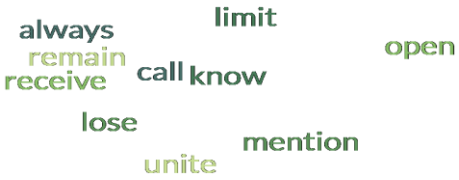

Figure 9. Moral recommendation and evaluative alignment: "should" and its collocates (Source: Wordcloud generator - https://www.freewordcloudgenerator.com/#google_vignette)

v. Necessity correlating with possibility underpins the locutor's concerns to render a logical unfolding of his addresses, as evidenced in the use of the lexical / semi-modal "need", unveiled in the following concordance lines:

The truth is that **this needs to end** before it is too late.
Of course, we will continue to do everything possible to save as many people as possible. And **we need** the world's support in this. And not just with rhetoric, but with actions.
we need an immediate and maximum global response to Russian terror
Democracy **needs more.** I think **we need** the clear global leadership of democracy. This is the main thing that we provide with our cooperation.
Of course, in order to punish the aggressor, **we need a Special Tribunal** for the crime of aggression by Russia against Ukraine and an international compensation mechanism that will force Russia to compensate for the damages they caused.
Peace! That Ukraine **needs so m**uch. That absolutely **every country presented here today needs**.

3.3.4 Modality: illocutionary

The illocutionary force in Zelensky's addresses is supported by adverbs expressing point of view, illustrated in the concordance lines in Table 3. These stance adverbials encode evaluation and certainty, reinforcing moral positioning and interpretive framing and evidencing the pragma-discursive construction of stance in crisis communication.

Table 3. Stance adverbials and the linguistic encoding of speaker evaluation

Adverbs (ocs.)	**Concordances**
likely (1)	And the more we all work together, the less likely anyone else in the world will follow Russia's insane path. But is this enough?
maybe (1)	In two days, we will celebrate Christmas. Maybe, candlelit. Not because it is more romantic. But because there will be no electricity
probably (2)	Thank you for telling the truth about Russian war crimes! Thank you for using your power – probably the highest power in the modern world
certainly (2)	He asked me – how did I feel? And I said that I certainly felt something. open on Christmas night. And if at this time you ask the higher powers about your dream, it will certainly come true
absolutely (6)	Russian terrorists are trying to further aggravate the situation they have caused with their ecocide. This is absolutely deliberate … The catastrophe has been expanding there for two days now. And this is also an absolutely conscious choice of the Russian leadership. millions of families and children whose homes were destroyed by Russia absolutely deliberately
perhaps (4)	If Russia's leadership does not want to meet us across the table for the sake of peace, perhaps it will sit at that table with you. They are even shelling evacuation points, which is a manifestation of evil that perhaps no terrorists in the world, except for Russian ones, have ever done.
unfortunately (13)	Russian troops do not stop artillery strikes at the very territory where people are being evacuated. Unfortunately, there are wounded from these terrorist attacks. And the longer this goes on, the more victims there will be, unfortunately.
obviously (3)	But Russian troops are now shelling the areas where the evacuation is underway. Obviously, it is Russia that is interested in the disaster. Obviously, the Kakhovka reservoir has been turned into a large grave for millions of living beings.

The analytical output concerning the set of research questions and hypotheses presented can be synthesised as follows.

(H1) Zelensky's initial wartime addresses exhibit a high frequency of evaluative and morally charged lexical items, reflecting the moralisation cline of crisis communication as evidenced in the list of high frequencies provided in Table 1, together with selected adverbs and collocations conveying point of view displayed in Table 3, and reinforced by a high frequency of lexico-grammatical items (e.g. pronoun reference and naming) signalling evaluative polarity (positive/negative) and moral semantics (e.g. *justice, terror, freedom, evil*). Adverbs and adverbial

collocations (e.g. *clearly, deliberately, brutally*) are analysed as stance markers that intensify moral judgement. It may therefore be inferred that moral evaluation is not incidental but lexically salient and systematically foregrounded, supporting the claim that moral positioning constitutes a core crisis-response strategy.

(H2) The corpus of addresses to international audiences prioritises institutional and value-based lexical fields (e.g. *democracy, security, Europe, alliance*), whereas domestic addresses foreground collectivising and affective lexis (e.g. *we, Ukrainians, our people, strength*), as shown in visual displays and concordance lines including lexical and semantic fields related to defence, Europe and its collocates, and the lexeme *together*, analysed respectively as indicators of security framing, value-oriented discourse, and solidarity alignment. This evidence enables a comparative reading of audience-oriented strategy, demonstrating how lexical choices adapt to communicative context while maintaining a coherent crisis narrative.

(H3) Agency and evaluation are asymmetric. Lexical frequency and collocational patterns indicate a systematic contrast between ingroup representation (*Ukrainians, allies, we/us/ourselves*) and outgroup representation (the Other, *Russia, Russians, Russits, savages*), with positive agency attributed to the former and negative or destructive agency to the latter. Ingroup references are realised through collectivising nouns, evaluative adjectives, and positive agency assignment, whereas outgroup naming strategies emerge through lexical patterns of dehumanisation, moral condemnation, and agency attribution.

(H4) Recurrent lexical and modal choices function simultaneously as face-enhancing resources for collective self-face (e.g. *resilience, dignity, unity*), as face-threatening resources toward the adversary (e.g. *terror, crime, destruction*), and as authority-asserting mechanisms in crisis leadership discourse. This is observable in pronoun patterns (*our* and its collocates) and modal constructions (*will* + collocates; *can/can't* + collocates), suggesting that authority and resolve are systematically enacted through modalised commitment rather than inferred impressionistically.

In addition, normativity, obligation, and moral authority emerge clearly in the analysis of other modals and semi-modals such as *must*, *have to*, and *should* and their collocates. These forms were examined through their collocational environments, distinguishing moral obligation, political necessity, and collective duty. Deontic modality is thus strategically employed to construct normative alignment in crisis discourse, with particular attention to whether obligation is attributed to the speaker, the ingroup, allies, or the adversary. The data analysed empirically support claims about normative leadership, showing how moral authority is linguistically enacted through obligation rather than coercion.

This case study provides empirical support for the communicative strategies identified in Zelensky's crisis discourse and addresses the research questions outlined in Section 2. The findings show that repetition of grammatical and lexical patterns, interdiscursive blending of narrative and argumentation, and the use of assertive speech acts function together as mechanisms guiding interlocutors toward alignment and action. A pragma-discursive corpus-based approach further reveals

how face-saving strategies are realised through topical framing, authentic narratives, and references to other global crises that extend the scope of appeal beyond immediate audiences.

Unlike opponents' discourse characterised by direct threat, Zelensky's addresses frequently invite reflection through expressions of willingness, futurity, possibility, and likelihood aligned with cooperative maxims. The high frequency of *thank* ("thank you"), often occurring in initial or final position, functions as a marker of positive politeness that presupposes emotional involvement and encourages future engagement. His recurrent briefings and fact-based accounts similarly reinforce credibility while sustaining audience attention.

Overall, these findings suggest that Zelensky's linguistic choices do not merely describe crisis realities but actively construct them, shaping audience perception and participation. In this sense, the recurrent exhortation *Glory to* operates not only as a formulaic expression but as a performative appeal extending beyond Ukrainian audiences toward a broader moral community. This observation aligns with claims that analysing crisis discourse contributes to understanding how crises can be managed and their effects mitigated (Coman et al., 2021, p. 1).

4 Conclusion

This case study addresses the interdisciplinary gap by adopting a discursive pragmatic approach supported by lexicometric data drawing on a set of Zelensky's initial addresses in the Russia/Ukraine war. Methodologically speaking, the analysis combines (i) discursive strategies with (ii) a pragmalinguistic examination of evaluative positioning, and facework. Crisis communication theory provides the functional lens through which these linguistic resources are interpreted, enabling the identification of how crisis-response strategies—such as legitimisation, attribution of responsibility, and appeals to solidarity—are realised in and through language. This study attempted to demonstrate how Zelensky's addresses function not only as political statements but as interactional performances designed to manage crisis, construct authority, and align domestic and international audiences against "terror."

The analytical framework is not eclectic but layered and integrative: discourse analysis provides the structural foundation; crisis communication theory defines functional goals; pragmatics and facework specify linguistic and interactional mechanisms; and rhetorical effects are treated as analytically observable outcomes. This restructuring transforms the theoretical apparatus from a set of cited traditions into a coherent, theory-driven framework capable of producing replicable and explanatory analysis.

By accounting for quantitative data (cf. the so-called "politics of numbers" in Broome & Quirk, 2015) and referring directly to a wide variety of interlocutors on national and supranational settings, Zelensky has sought to make an appeal in the field of development aid and global benchmarking. Yet, these collocate with marked

language unveiled in the corpus–based approach: grammatical and lexical features, particularly, pronoun reference, naming, adjectives and modality.

Zelensky, firmly speaking on behalf of the Ukrainians, gradually hardens his wording against the nation's enemy (i.e., "and call things by their names" or "the power to decide what holds people's attention and what people know", "So stop and listen to yourselves, to the voice of reason, to the voice of common sense", to borrow from his own words), which may translate his effort to create ingroup relations to disempower the aggressor defined by a panoply of marked language. Offence is conveyed mainly by direct assertions and first-hand accounts evidencing NPs (mostly abstract nouns of state, quality and action), VPs and collocations marked by a metaphorical undertone: murderers, enemy, tyranny, aggression, war, invasion, sabotage, villainy, horror, terrorist acts, terrorist weapons, terrorist state, attack, absolute evil, absolute meanness, "by evil, by Russia", Putin /disaster, among others.

This exploratory study has pointed out the main discourses and frames underlying Zelensky's public addresses and self and Other-representations having steered interlocutors' frames of interpretation given the locutor's alternate yet coherent face-change.

Zelensky's communicative strategies in crisis situations was presented through a diverse mindset: that of a politician, an ordinary citizen, a conflict manager, an officer, etc. In other words, corroborating the claims of threat/crime, securitisation, economisation, empathy/solidarity/hospitality (Chouliaraki & Stoili, 2017), and the spaces likely to raise solidarity (Nikunen, 2019), thereby challenging deep-seated attitudes and avoiding generalisations and universals in human interaction.

As a final remark, this paper acknowledges that new media are increasingly emotionally driven, disputed and controversial be it in mainstream media, or on social media, along with several online networks, as contexts of meaning making. Communication in crisis situations implies the analysis of media representations and coverage of political matters along with interlocutors' voices and agency conveyed directly or indirectly (e.g., images, organisations, etc.) to foster reflective paths and alternative endeavours.

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