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LEGITIMATION THROUGH AUTHORIZATION AND MORAL EVALUATION IN DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF RT NEWS

Summary. The purpose of the current study is to identify two strategies of legitimation, authorization and moral evaluation, as defined in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) by Teo van Leeuwen, in the propagandistic discourse of RT (Russia Today). His research principles define the basic method of the study, which also aims at finding out which modes of legitimation are resorted to in RT news production. The article lists the most conspicuous examples of CDA and cites 9 news items out of 86 which constitute the legitimation corpus. Authorization and moral evaluation are unevenly distributed throughout the news items. The factors are the article size, authorship, geopolitical aspects, allies or enemies engaged, the obvious weak position of RT on moral, etc. As the turbulent zones around the globe increase, CDA is to modify the present-day news perception and encourage a more critical insight into the media coverage.

Keywords: critical discourse analysis, CDA, legitimation, authorization, moral evaluation, propaganda.

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ЛЕГІТИМАЦІЯ ЧЕРЕЗ АВТОРИЗАЦІЮ ТА МОРАЛЬНІ ЦІННОСТІ В КРИТИЧНОМУ ДИСКУРС АНАЛІЗІ НОВИН RT

Анотація. Мета даної статті полягає у визначенні двох стратегій легітимації, авторизації та моральної оцінки, окреслених Ван Леувеном у пропагандистському дискурсі RT. Численні українські та західні джерела, науковці, дослідники та політики визначають цей канал як пропагандистський. Завдання даної статті – прослідкувати два вищезгадані прийоми легітимації на підтвердження пропагандистського спрямування каналу RT. Стаття також спрямована на те, щоб дізнатися, де ці стратегії розходяться і до яких способів легітимації вдаються на RT у продукуванні новин та в якій мірі. Основний метод дослідження – це критичний дискурс-аналіз (КДА), визначений Тео ван Леувеном. У статті перераховані найпомітніші приклади КДА та наведено дев'ять повідомлень новин із 86, які складають корпус аналізу легітимаційних стратегій. Тематика новин охоплює міжнародні події кінця 2018— першої пол. 2019 рр. і включає політичну кризу у Венесуелі, країнах Центральної Америки, політичні стосунки між США та Росією. Деякі повідомлення, що містять мультимодальні форми КДА, будуть використані для дослідження подальших форм легітимації. Проаналізувавши корпус новин через призму двох форм легітимації за Ван Леувеном – авторизація та моральна оцінка – дослідження виявило, що вони розподілені нерівномірно по всіх новинах. Чинними факторами є розмір статті, авторство, геополітичний аспект, залучені союзники чи вороги, очевидна слабка позиція РТ щодо моралі, тощо. Кожен з цих критеріїв може, у свою чергу, стати окремою темою подальших досліджень. Як показує аналіз, принципи розповсюдження новин та веб-кастингу останнім часом піддаються значним змінам; вони взаємопов'язані з актуальною геополітикою та конфліктними зонами у світі. У функцію КДА входить змінити сприйняття сучасних повідомлень новин та заохотити більш об'єктивне та критичніше ставлення до запропонованої інформації у ЗМІ з боку читацької аудиторії.

Ключові слова: критичний дискурс аналіз (КДА), легітимація, авторизація, моральна оцінка, пропаганда.

Introduction. The present study offers an Lanalysis of the ways RT (formerly Russia Today) exploits legitimation practices and strategies designed to validate prevailing viewpoints, actions and value systems that this network is associated with. The news items examined in the paper cover both domestic and foreign issues, but primarily the Venezuela crisis of 2018-19. The analysis is carried out within a broader field of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) for social practices. The database for the research includes information items mainly from RT Online News, which is a Russian news agency considered to be one of the most propaganda-engaged newscaster corporations. This view has been expressed by multiple critics, most notably by the Atlantic Council [14], Liz Whal, a former RT anchor [36], Peter Pomerantsev, a British journalist, author and TV producer, and the author of Nothing is True and Everything is Possible [37, 38], and others. RT is a global, 24/7 news network of eight TV channels, broad- and web-casting news,

current affairs and documentaries in six languages, such as English, Arabic, Spanish, German, Russian and French. It targets audiences outside Russia and is available to people in more than one hundred countries [15]. Another reason for focusing on this news source is that this government funded agency directly reflects a political and economic involvement of Russian oil industry and its vested interests in Venezuela's state oil company PDVSA and its world-richest oil reserves [17].

It must be noted that there is an ever growing concern about RT and its propagandistic content around the globe. Bodner, Kupfer and Jardine's Welcome to The Machine: Inside the Secretive World of RT voices out the anxieties within academic circles over the propagandistic nature of RT, which, according to Editor-in-Chief M. Simonyan, brings in the balance in the pro-Western media [16]. It sheds light on techniques and practices of the Russian government and its information war [18]. When asked why Russian journalists were barred

from taking part in his press pool, French President Emmanuel Macron said: "Russia Today and [its sister publication] Sputnik did not behave as media organizations and journalists", rather than "agencies of influence and propaganda, lying propaganda – no more, no less" [19]. In order to promote and legitimize its cause, RT employs writers from the West, e. g. Robert Bridge, one of its most recognizable contributors, to publish retaliation articles. However, neither CNN or BBC do not feature him as a contributor; but he is much favoured by the Kremlin [35]. According to Ben Nimmo from the Atlantic Council, it's much easier to tell a story when you are not [bound] by the facts<...>, the narratives pushed by the bots and trolls are the more dangerous weapons. They try to make you so angry and so scared that you stop thinking,<...>And once you stop thinking, they've got you [20]. This view is also supported by RAND scientific experts in their article The Russian "Firehose of Falsehood" propaganda model, which unveils the propagandistic principles of organizing and delivering news for target recipients [21]. It should be noted, however, that public media seem to be outgrowing their innocent age of truthful and objective coverage and becoming battle grounds for winning over the public opinion worldwide. RT's efforts directly mirror the Russian government's intentions to promote their cause abroad not only by forefronting domestic advances but also by tarnishing other media's credentials, which we shall see in the RT news analysis below.

The **corpus** of texts under analysis comes from the online platform of RT Question More and consists of news stories on the Venezuelan crisis as well as on major world events from the winter of 2018-19 to summer 2019. They represent regular news reports and larger editorials on Venezuela, Russia, the US and other issues. These news stories reflect a global geopolitical design, where Russia assumes its role of a leading power claiming the imperial legacy of the former Soviet Union after its collapse [22]. The news items were selected through random sampling irrelevant of their length or political significance. This corpus cannot reflect the full scope of the Russian propagandistic influence within the political crisis in Venezuela and elsewhere, since a huge amount of information is streamed via visual, audio and video channels.

Throughout history the notion of *legitimation* has been associated with lawful practices, but recently it has undergone considerable modifications [23]. LDOCE defines *legitimize* as to make something that is unfair or morally wrong seem acceptable and right [24].

Max Weber wrote more than a hundred years ago: "Indeed, the continued exercise of every domination <...> always has the strongest need of self-justification through appealing to the principles of its legitimation". He was the first to address the issue of legitimation at the level of scientific analysis [1, p. 124]. The most fertile area of legitimation use is bureaucratic administration, such as law-making, state governance, taxation, school systems, migration procedures, etc. These environments have long instituted their own linguistic culture, which pervades every case of language use. Modern news agencies have also developed their own ways of legitimation, including forms of address, paperwork,

advertising, etc., which both reflect and make an impact on social values, relationships and moral standpoints.

On the other hand, Berger and Luckmann have even stated that all of language is, in fact, legitimation. They also brought forth habitulization and its constructive role in disseminating propaganda. Habitulization lies at the root of many daily human activities, as well as basic cognitive and analytical mental processes; manipulative misinformation modes of reporting and broadcasting also rely on this principle [2, p. 70].

Legitimation is commonly regarded within a broader framework of Critical Discourse analysis (CDA) which focuses on complex communicative relations between people, events and structures in terms of their social dominance, power relations and other means of social influence [4, p. 16].

More recently many renowned researchers have made their contribution to the sphere of Critical discourse analysis (CDA), viz. Malcolm McDonalds [3]. Norman Fairclough [4], Teun van Dijk [7: 110], Garth Jowett [6], Peter Berger [2], et al. In the present paper the research is based on the legitimation strategies developed by Theo van Leeuwen. His classification of legitimation falls into four major categories:

- 1) authorization, legitimation by reference to the authority of tradition, custom and law, and of persons in whom institutional authority is vested;
- 2) moral evaluation, legitimation by reference to discourses of value;
- 3) rationalization, legitimation by reference to the goals and uses of institu-tionalized social action, and to the social knowledges that endow them with cognitive validity; and
- 4) mythopoesis, legitimation conveyed through narratives whose outcomes reward legitimate actions and punish non-legitimate actions [12].

As any theoretical precept, the four modes of legitimation as formulated by van Leeuwen can occur both separately and in different combinations of varying ratio. They can also be used to de-legitimize, or to criticize, and they all can be realized at the word, sentence, text and discourse levels by various techniques and their configurations. The primary function of legitimation, as set aside from other aspects of CDA, such as intertextuality, presupposition, modality, implicatures, exclusion, etc. is to establish credibility in the speaker or data source and to create trust between the news consumers and the sources of information [12, p. 94]. The four modes of legitimation conveniently combine into two groups where the first two primarily involve personality and the personal, while the third and fourth ones are more centered on social practices and acceptances. We follow the model of van Leeuwen in this paper. However, for reasons of obvious article limits and a great number of samples that illustrate the four modes of legitimation, we have confined ourselves to the first two strategies, i.e. authorization and moral evaluation.

The **goal** of the present paper is to research the manipulative techniques of RT within the framework of legitimation by authorization and moral evaluation as defined by Theo van Leeuwen [12, p. 91]. In the center of our approach is the analysis of different plains of text composition, viz.

what kind of information forms the background to a story, which is neutral, and which is foregrounded by linguistic and often non-linguistic means. The latter tend to enhance the impact of a news item and are readily available and easily transmitted in modern multimedia communication.

The findings and feedback of critics and scholars who do research in the sphere of disclosing the manipulative tactics of propagandistic media will be also taken into consideration, such as A. Halas [8], H. Pocheptsov [9], G.S. Jowett and V. O'Donnell [10], S.B. Cunningham [11], and others.

Having analyzed the content of the news stories, one may conclude that their most conspicuous features correspond to the methods and means of propaganda in media communication [8, p. 4], such as a) imposition of a single idea until taken as truth; b) verbal assault of the opponents themselves, but not their principles; c) appealing to (anonymous) authority, traditions or majority; d) emotionally charged but not meaningful lexis; e) glorification of heroes and demonization of enemies, we vs they; f) the use of linguistic means and literary figures, such as metaphors, pathos, oxymoron, irony, rhetorical questions [8; 10; 11].

Authorization. If the news was stripped of all the markers of credibility, e. g. titles, affiliations, honors, and other attributive or descriptive phrases, it would be hardly readable. In the above excerpts we came across a typical authorization, e. g. Wehrschuetz, who started his journalistic career in the mid-1980s, Dmitry Zhuravlev, head of the Institute of Regional Problem, RIA Novosti, the cabinet, etc. In the following news items we will analyze authorization in its multifaceted representations.

Institutional authorization could be talked about when legitimate authority is vested in an institution because of their widely recognized status or role in a particular political domain, e.g. the UN, NATO, Troika of Tyranny (Venezuela, Cuba, and Nicaragua), etc. The latter metaphorical construction occurred in It's not just Venezuela: Nicaragua & Cuba also on the way of American imperialism [24] "...Bolton denounced Nicaragua, Cuba, and Venezuela as a "troika of tyranny" and saying that he looks forward to watching their governments fall". The US National Security Advisor John Bolton refers to the three states by a collective numeral and chooses alliterative metaphor conjuring up a frame of Russian realia, i. e. a cart or sleigh drawn by three horses abreast. He might have chosen another word – triad or trio – yet in collectively naming them so an idea is put across that troika and tyranny stem from the same source. The reason why RT did not censor it out could be the promotion of Russian culture abroad not only by positive and attractive content. And using the name of the US high official without any credentials here as well as elsewhere in this text, is a sing of de-legitimation. And that is far from an oversight, as most politicians' names from beyond the "enemy line" are less often used with their honorifics, e. g. Trump, Pompeo, Guaido, Bolton, rather than President Maduro, President Putin, President Hugo Chavez.

Institutional authorization is exemplified in the following cascade of authoritative bodies: <...> The legislation is a clear violation of international law and the Charters of the United Nations and the Organization of American States, both of which condemn such actions [i.e. a possible military intervention into Venezuela] [25]. The old empires of Europe ripped off the people they controlled but were overthrown or driven out after the Second World War [ibid.] World War II is very often mentioned in the news if only to remind the world of the no-longer-existing Soviet Army. On the whole, such authorities do not need any legitimate justification apart from the title or other honorifies that would license their credibility. Let us consider this excerpt from Refusal to hand over Venezuelan gold means end of Britain as a financial center. This news item contains another call to action for those countries which do not adhere to American policies:

The freezing of Venezuelan gold by the Bank of England is a signal to all countries out of step with US interests to withdraw their money, according to economist and co-founder of Democracy at Work,

Professor Richard Wolff [26].

The passage, in essence, disparages the renowned British institution. At first sight the authority of professor leaves no doubts, yet further investigation yields some interesting facts: studied at Yale University for a year (1966-67), was influenced by K. Marx, F. Engels [39]. The expression out of step with comes from infantry drills and pictures a row or a file of soldiers (i.e. countries-allies of the USA) marching in step with the commander (i.e. the US), which belittles the reputation of other democratic nations.

Let us consider the story US plans for space wars are real.

US plans to pursue development of space-based interceptors signals that Washington would use space for military operations, the Russian Foreign Ministry has warned.

The Foreign Ministry has also expressed regret that the US abandoned "constructive dialogue" and returned to the 1980s 'Star Wars' missile defense program of President Ronald Reagan, when the space-based interceptors were first envisioned [27].

RFM has the ground and authority to warn people, which per se sets this institution to the category of people-loving ones. What is conspicuous is that no information is provided on who initiated "constructive dialogue" before abandoning it. Since one party rebuked it, the other must have started it. But there is no information, so that a reader is left with a groundless assumption, which because of its simplistic dualism, tends to stick in people's minds, as a result of that provocative hint. The excerpt also contains latent criticism of the US outdated mode of politics and the reference to Star Wars might be taken as a signal that US is capable of causing a large scale warfare.

Another type of legitimation is **expert authorization**, consisting in references to the acknowledged celebrities in the relevant spheres, followed by their credentials and honorifics. Nowadays, in the age of multimedia and multimodal texts, the status of the authority may be further enhanced by visuals, such as insignia, attractive and meaningful interior or exterior, top-brand vehicles, sea cruisers or aircraft, other experts or professional attributes, etc. Read mainly by non-experts, the quotes often carry an accompanying subconscious message of significant and competent data and they

are not to be questioned, e. g. in the article Russia'a top-notch Avangard hypersonic glider can travel at whopping 30,000 km/h – deputy PM.

Outstanding mobility makes the Avangard one of the hardest targets, Borisov explained: "There's almost no missile that can shoot it down at such speeds".

It is extremely hard to predict the glider's trajectory, which essentially leaves any missile defense system off-guard. "Any missile defense becomes useless, it is very tough to detect and hit the projectile," Borisov told.

China, the US, and Russia are considered the most advanced nations to possess hypersonic technologies, and Moscow claims it is leading in the race with the Avangard [28].

Apart from grorifying Russia's technical advances, the listing of the superpowers is quite peculiar. Virtually anyone can retain three items in both short and long term memory, with the third item standing out because of and before it. In such catalogues each preceding member serves as a basis for the next one, resembling Halliday's theme and rheme relationships [13]. The last listed item is conceived against the background of the preceding ones. Besides, the article contains assurance statements (underlined) displaying strong modality. In fact, the very name Avangard (Cyrillic version of avant-garde) is matched by the whole array of similar vocabulary: outstanding, the hardest target, extremely, very tough, advanced, hypersonic, leading.

Another subclass of authorization is **role model** authority [12, p. 95], when people follow the example of popular opinion leaders. They can be modern celebrities of media world, leading politicians, pop stars, etc. and their beliefs or adherence to a political issue is often sufficient to promote the cause and raise a required response of their followers. What makes this type of authorization effective is the fact that many celebrities are instantly recognizable and they usually evoke a pleasurable and cozy feeling of the first impressions of discovering them, mostly at a young age of esthetic tastes formation. Usually accompanied by attractive pictures, role models, particularly engaged in the actions to be legitimized, can be a most effective means of public persuasion. The theoretical basement of this way of authorization was defined in the first half of the 20th c. and organized in 1934 by American philosopher George Herbert Mead in his work *Mind*, *Self and Society*, in particular how individuals use language and significant symbols in their communication with others, and how "repeated, meaningful interactions among individuals come to define the makeup of 'society' [29]. This school maintained that meanings are continuously evolving through individual interpreting processes of mutual interaction. Consequently, people assume the meanings and attitudes of the groups they identify with and of the "significant others" in their general cultural environment. And in due course such groups define their leaders who tend to exert their influence in many aspects of social life, from politics to consumerism. A graphic example of this kind of authorization is in the article Leave the Venezuelan people alone': Roger Waters calls US actions 'insanity.'

Former Pink Floyd frontman Roger Waters has lashed out at the US government for destroying "real democracy" in Venezuela, calling for an end to "Trump's coup" in the Latin American country.

The legendary rock musician expressed his outrage at how the US is treating Venezuela on Twitter and Facebook, demanding that Washington leave the people there alone [30].

Laws, rules, statutes and regulations are also used as a way of **impersonal authorization** [12, p. 96]. The impact on the target reader is tinged with the notion of "mandatory" or "unquestionable," e. g. in the story *China's newest oil hotspot is in America's backyard*. The title itself mocks American inability to snatch the opportunity of extracting oil so close. At the same time, it also praises China's technological advances and the compliance with law is emphasized:

In a statement that shows how oil and geopolitics often intersect, even in the Caribbean, Venezuela's Foreign Minister Jorge Arreaza said on April 9 that his country would "fulfill its commitments" to Cuba despite US sanctions targeting oil shipments from the South American country to its ideological ally.

Arreaza said he would not reveal Venezuela's "strategy," but that the sanctions would not stop the shipments. "When the conventional power of capitalism attacks you, you have to know how to respond through non-conventional means, always respecting international law," Arreaza told reporters [32].

Moral evaluation Van Leeuwen argues that moral evaluation legitimation belongs to a stratum of social conformity where judgment is done on the basis of long established moral values [12, p. 97]. From early childhood we are reared with the notions of good and bad, and perceive this world mostly in terms of dichotomous planes. Discourses of moral value are often accompanied by adjectives and text markers such as healthy, it is (not) normal/natural/expected, etc., which are usually recognized by our cultural knowledge. Often one can find a photo next to the text of a story which visually emphasizes the effect of the message. Consider the following story *Hate in the heartland:* America is stumbling towards disaster one virulent tweet at a time by American writer and journalist Robert Bridge, author of the book *Midnight in the* American Empire.

Once word of the 'altercation' between the student and the Native Indian was made public, the social media warriors, forever on standby with their sense of self-righteousness and unwavering morals, set upon the Catholic students with so much vitriol, violence and toxic idiocy it would have made a medieval Inquisitor blush in shame [31].

The article features a direct reference to moral values, yet connects them to the media in an ironic way. Such contextualization of media correspondents questions their morality, and comparing them to the Inquisition makes them seem even more violent. This idea is sustained by such military vocabulary as warrior, on standby, violence, etc. The reference to the American Empire in the author's background introduces a sense of a non-democratic nation and might contain a reference to Midnight Children by Salman Rushdie, which is well-hidden hint that it's time to revolt against the Empire as in 1947 when the British Rule came to an end in India.

The mission of the news item Wife of Russian programmer 'suspected of cyber attacks on US' shares details about his arrest was most definitely

to evoke pity on the part of the world community. Its heartbreaking lines contain highly emotional vocabulary, the juxtaposition of *we* vs *they*, grim predictions of the suspect's wife. This piece would have certainly been much weaker from the masculine perspective, which might deem less sympathetic for the general audience.

The wife of detained Russian programmer Pyotr Levashov has spoken to RT of her anguish of never seeing her husband again "if he is extradited to the US" from Spain "on suspicion of cyber attacks on

US governmental sources.'

As the story progresses the journalist resorts to emotionally charged vocabulary, e. g. nightmare, our ... apartment was stormed, smashed the door, We were all forced to the floor, then locked me, wouldn't let me speak with my husband, will never see him again, They will cook up anything, etc. Such description deviated from the commonly accepted norms of suspect detentions, especially those dealing with computer software. And the choice of vocabulary is set to appeal to parents, who form the core of reading audiences. Besides, anonymous sources are cited, which wraps the whole story into mystery [33].

Another example of accusatory practice is Welcome to coup university: A Pentagon scholar's

guide to overthrowing governments:

Few nations have universities dedicated to the art of the coup, but few nations have a history of foreign intervention quite like the US. Since the end of World War II, the United States has brought its military might to bear on dozens of countries and sponsored scores of insurgencies and regime change operations worldwide. Irwin [author] was first faced with the task of whittling down the list to something manageable [34].

What follows is saturated with metaphorical phrases, e. g. the talk of the town, US proxy wars ... in Syria, Ukraine and Libya, the US's willingness to get into bed with shady 'resistance' fighters, hawks in Washington, etc. The ironic conclusion of the above excerpt is a well calculated figure, stating that the number of US wrongdoings abroad exceeds manageable limits. This selection and its leftovers in the text create a sarcastic picture of US invasions, making them morally repugnant, but fail to

overbalance them with all the invasions of the former USSR and Russia nowadays.

Results. The two forms of legitimation, authorization and moral evaluation, can freely combine and, as the analysis of the corpus shows, they are rarely used in their pure form. Besides, some modes of legitimation can be enhanced nowadays with the help of visual or auditory means, e. g. comic strips, visualization, films, video clips, comments, captions, posts, etc.

Having analyzed the corpus of more than one hundred news articles from RT from the viewpoint of four modes of legitimation – authorization, moral evaluation, rationalization and mythopoesis – we can argue that authorization is used most frequently that moral evaluation. The mixed-mode forms of legitimation are spread unevenly throughout the corpus. The tendency is that mythopoesis is more often combined with moral evaluation when a political issue is being raised, and with rationalization when an economic or social issue is raised.

As far as authorization and moral evaluation are concerned, they are the most readily combined, since any public figure raised in the news is bound by some moral standpoint and obligations, be it the defense of motherland, confronting the enemy, glorifying one's technical advances or intellectual achievements.

Conclusion. In 74 out of the 86 analyzed stories RT resorts to authorization, and in 23 to moral evaluation in order to promote its positive image abroad. Besides, the analysis has shown that other types of CDA are employed to achieve the desired effect, viz. modality, implicatures, presupposition, omissions, etc.

In complicated modern world, CDA is becoming an indispensable component of multi-media literacy and as such might even constitute a separate discipline or a university course. It might be instrumental in deeper reading of the news, in political debates, election campaigns, geopolitical surveys. Such analysis might also be used in order to find most effective ways to upgrade the general outlook of modern societies, to make the news-consumers more aware of the indirect ways of persuasion, and how to withstand propagandistic content.

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