

Linguistic strategies of power and persuasion: A critical discourse analysis of Putin's war declaration and Federal Assembly speeches

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Abstract:

This study applies Critical Discourse Analysis to analyze two key speeches by Russian President Vladimir Putin: his declaration of war against Ukraine and his annual address to the Federal Assembly. Using Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional framework, it examines the linguistic features, rhetorical strategies, and sociocultural contexts of Putin's discourse. The research reveals a shift from a militaristic, defensive tone in the war declaration to a nation-building, resilience-focused narrative in the Federal Assembly speech. The study highlights how Putin's language evolves to influence public opinion and strengthen authority. It also explores themes like historical revisionism, populist rhetoric, and ideological framing, offering new insights into the strategic use of discourse by one of the world's most influential leaders.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis, Fairclough's framework, rhetorical strategies, ideological framing, power dynamics, authoritarian discourse.



1. Introduction

The intersection of language and power in political discourse has long been a subject of interest in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Political leaders employ language strategically to construct narratives, justify actions, and reinforce ideologies. In the case of the Ukraine-Russia conflict, Vladimir Putin's speeches serve as primary instruments for shaping public perception and legitimizing state actions. The language Putin employs in key addresses, such as his speech declaring war against Ukraine and his annual address to the Federal Assembly, reflects not only immediate political objectives but also broader sociopolitical dynamics.

Putin's declaration of war on Ukraine on February 24, 2022, marked a significant geopolitical shift. This speech framed the military operation as a necessity to protect Russian security and sovereignty, invoking historical grievances and moral justifications. Nearly a year later, his annual address to the Federal Assembly in February 2023 provided a retrospective view of the conflict,

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assessing its consequences while reinforcing state ideology. The shifts in his rhetoric between these two speeches are crucial in understanding how political discourse evolves in response to military and geopolitical realities.

By analyzing these discourses, this research aims to investigate how Putin's speeches construct and reinforce power relations, focusing on the specific rhetorical strategies and linguistic features he uses to shape public opinion and legitimize his actions. Furthermore, it examines how the sociocultural context shapes his discourse and how his language choices evolved over a year, revealing his strategic use of discourse. These inquiries contribute to the broader understanding of how political figures manipulate discourse to consolidate authority and influence public perception.

This study applies CDA to scrutinize the linguistic and rhetorical mechanisms employed in these two speeches. Specifically, it addresses the following research questions:

1. How do Vladimir Putin's discourses in the speech declaring war against Ukraine and his annual address to the Federal Assembly establish and reinforce power relations within the context of the Ukraine-Russia conflict and domestic governance, respectively?
2. What specific linguistic features, rhetorical strategies, and narratives are employed in both speeches to influence public opinion and legitimize actions?
3. How does the sociocultural context shape the language and discourse used in both speeches?
4. How has Vladimir Putin's discourse changed, if at all, in his Annual Anniversary Speech to the Russian Federal Assembly one year after declaring war on Ukraine, and what does this reveal about the consistency or divergence in his language and power dynamics?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Critical Discourse Analysis and Political Speech

CDA has been widely used in political discourse studies, offering a systematic approach to understanding how language constructs social and power relations. Norman Fairclough's framework (1989, 1992) is foundational in CDA research, emphasizing the interplay between textual elements, discourse practices, and sociocultural contexts (Fairclough, 1995). CDA allows researchers to deconstruct political narratives, identifying linguistic strategies that reinforce ideological control and public perception (Chilton, 2004).

Political speeches, particularly in authoritarian regimes, serve as instruments of state ideology, shaping collective identity and national consciousness (Wodak, 2020). Previous research has established that leaders often employ discursive strategies such as enemy construction, moral justification, and historical revisionism to frame geopolitical conflicts (Reisigl & Wodak, 2015). Studies have also highlighted the role of propaganda in sustaining

political legitimacy during crises (Bhatia, 2020). By analyzing the linguistic structure of political rhetoric, CDA reveals the mechanisms through which state actors justify military interventions, consolidate power, and manipulate historical narratives (Laclau, 2005).

2.2. Previous Linguistic Studies on Putin's Speeches

Several linguistic studies have examined Putin's discourse, focusing on his use of historical references, moral appeals, and strategic ambiguity. Hutchings & Szostek (2015) analyzed Putin's justification for the annexation of Crimea, identifying his reliance on anti-Western sentiment and historical continuity as persuasive tools. Similarly, Mral (2016) explored Putin's nationalist rhetoric, demonstrating how he invokes past traumas to legitimize contemporary policies.

More recent studies have investigated Putin's speeches in the context of the Ukraine conflict. Razuvaev (2020) identified patterns of discursive manipulation in Putin's rhetoric on Ukraine, noting his use of victimhood narratives and securitization strategies. Oates (2017) explored how Russian state media amplifies Putin's messages, reinforcing ideological alignment with Kremlin policies.

Despite extensive research on Putin's rhetoric, there remains a gap in comparative analyses of his war declaration speech and his later reflections on the conflict. While much has been written about the rhetorical strategies employed in individual speeches, few studies have examined how these strategies evolve over time in response to shifting geopolitical and domestic contexts. This study addresses this gap by providing a comparative discourse analysis of Putin's war declaration and his subsequent Federal Assembly speech. Specifically, it explores how his rhetoric evolves in response to international pressures and economic sanctions, revealing how power dynamics are sustained or adjusted over time. Through this examination, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of the linguistic shifts that occur as the Russian government seeks to consolidate power and maintain its ideological narrative in the face of changing circumstances.

3. Theoretical Framework

This study draws on three complementary frameworks to examine the linguistic and rhetorical strategies in Putin's speeches: Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), Populist Rhetoric Theory (Laclau, 2005), and War Rhetoric and Persuasion (Bhatia, 2020; Reisigl & Wodak, 2015). Each framework offers a distinct perspective, yet together they provide a robust analysis of how power, ideology, and persuasion interact in political discourse. These frameworks are used to deconstruct how Putin's speeches strategically construct and reinforce political legitimacy, national identity, and public support.

3.1. Discourse, Power, and Ideology: Fairclough's CDA Model

Fairclough's three-dimensional CDA model serves as the central framework for this analysis. According to Fairclough (1995), discourse is both a

reflection of and a tool for shaping political realities. Through textual analysis, we can observe how language constructs meaning and reinforces power structures. The discursive practice refers to how discourse is produced, disseminated, and consumed, influencing both political legitimacy and ideological meaning. Finally, sociocultural practice situates the discourse within broader socio-political structures, considering the impact of historical, cultural, and geopolitical contexts.

In the case of Putin's speeches, this model reveals how language, through its specific choice of words, modalities, and rhetorical devices, constructs a narrative that strengthens power relations. Discourse is not neutral; it embeds political ideologies that shape public perception and consolidate state authority (Fairclough, 1989). For instance, Putin's use of language in his war declaration speech constructs Russia's actions as a moral imperative, positioning the country as a victim of Western aggression, thus justifying military intervention. This strategic manipulation of language allows Putin to frame geopolitical conflicts in a way that aligns with the state's goals and bolsters public support.

3.2. Populist and Authoritarian Rhetoric

In addition to CDA, Laclau's (2005) theory of populist discourse provides further insight into how Putin uses language to create a populist divide between "the people" and an external enemy. Populism relies on the notion of us vs. them, where the "people" are portrayed as under threat from an external, often villainous force. This divide is central to understanding Putin's rhetoric, which frequently portrays Russia and its people as defending themselves against the West. According to Laclau, populist discourse emphasizes ideological unity, mobilizing the masses around shared grievances and perceived threats.

Similarly, Wodak (2020) expands on the role of populist rhetoric in authoritarian regimes, discussing how leaders normalize far-right discourse by evoking historical narratives of victimization. In Putin's speeches, we see frequent references to Russia's past, particularly its experiences during World War II and the Cold War, which serve as a foundation for his rhetoric. These historical allusions frame contemporary geopolitical struggles in terms of Russia's historical victimhood, helping to unify the population and justify state actions.

3.3 War Rhetoric and Persuasion

Finally, war rhetoric and persuasion provide the lens through which to analyze the specific linguistic strategies used in Putin's war declaration. Bhatia (2020) identifies key elements of war rhetoric, such as moral appeals, victimhood narratives, and enemy demonization, all of which are present in Putin's speeches. In the war declaration speech, Putin positions Russia as both a victim of Western aggression and a defender of justice. This creates a moral dichotomy where Russia is seen as the protector, while the West is cast as the aggressor.

Reisigl and Wodak (2015) further argue that political actors use war rhetoric to construct ideological legitimacy by manipulating historical narratives

and language. In this context, Putin uses references to historical conflicts and military victories to frame Russia's actions as morally justified. This use of history serves to consolidate power, as it appeals to the collective memory and national pride of the population, reinforcing the legitimacy of the state's actions. Through these rhetorical devices, Putin mobilizes support for military intervention by aligning his rhetoric with deeply ingrained national narratives.

While each of these frameworks provides distinct insights, together they offer a comprehensive understanding of the strategic role of language in political discourse. Fairclough's CDA focuses on the structure and impact of language within political contexts, while Laclau's populist rhetoric highlights how discourse serves to divide and mobilize populations. Finally, war rhetoric theory adds an important dimension by showing how language is used to justify military actions and construct moral narratives. By integrating these frameworks, the study uncovers how Putin's language not only reflects but actively shapes political realities, using historical revisionism, populist appeals, and war justification as tools to sustain and reinforce his power. The synergy between these approaches offers valuable insights into how authoritarian leaders craft discourse to navigate both internal and external challenges, ultimately consolidating power through the strategic use of language.

4. Methodology

4.1. CDA approach

This study employs a qualitative Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach to examine and compare the linguistic, rhetorical, and ideological elements in Putin's war declaration speech and his subsequent Federal Assembly address. The primary data set consists of official transcripts of both speeches, retrieved from verified Russian government sources to ensure authenticity. To ensure a systematic and rigorous analysis, this study applies Norman Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional model, which consists of:

- a. Textual Analysis:** Examining specific linguistic features, including word choice, modality, rhetorical devices, and syntactic structures that construct meaning and reinforce power dynamics.
- b. Discursive Practice:** Investigating how Putin's speeches are produced, disseminated, and interpreted by different audiences, including state-controlled media, opposition groups, and international actors.
- c. Sociocultural Practice:** Situating the discourse within broader historical, ideological, and geopolitical contexts to understand how Putin's language reflects and reinforces national narratives and state power.

The integration of these three dimensions allows for a thorough, multi-layered analysis of Putin's discourse, showing how language is used as a strategic tool to build political legitimacy, gain public support, and shape national identity.

4.2. Data Collection and Selection Criteria

The study focuses on two key speeches:

a. The War Declaration Speech (February 24, 2022):

This speech marks the official launch of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, framing the military action as a necessary response to Western aggression and Ukrainian hostility. It serves as an important example of war rhetoric, justification of military intervention, and enemy construction.

b. The Federal Assembly Address (February 2023):

Delivered nearly a year after the war began, this speech reflects on the ongoing conflict while shifting the focus toward domestic stability, resilience, and national unity. It represents a shift in rhetorical strategy, moving from war justification to economic resilience and nationalistic reinforcement.

The selection of these speeches is based on their significance in shaping public perception, mobilizing support, and justifying state actions. The study also considers secondary sources such as media reports, expert analyses, and public reactions to provide additional contextual understanding. These supplementary materials help to assess how Putin's discourse is received, interpreted, and contested by various stakeholders.

4.3. Analytical Approach

This study applies a structured approach to analyze the linguistic features, thematic content, and intertextuality within both speeches, ensuring a systematic examination of Putin's discourse. The analytical process consists of three key areas that interconnect to reveal how language constructs political narratives and ideological justifications.

The first area, linguistic features and rhetorical strategies, focuses on how specific language choices reinforce authority and legitimacy. The analysis identifies high-modality verbs (e.g., "must," "will," "cannot") that assert control and convey inevitability, making the speaker's statements appear non-negotiable. Additionally, rhetorical devices such as repetition, metaphors, and appeals to nationalism are examined to understand how they reinforce ideological narratives. Furthermore, lexical choices that create enemy images and justify military intervention are analyzed to highlight how Putin constructs threats to strengthen his position.

The second area, thematic and ideological analysis, explores how discourse legitimizes political actions through historical references and selective framing. By examining historical allusions, this study investigates how past events are strategically invoked to reinforce continuity between contemporary policies and national struggles. The us vs. them dichotomy is another crucial aspect, as it fosters internal unity while portraying external threats as existential dangers. Additionally, the analysis traces shifts in tone and framing, illustrating how Putin's discourse transitions from militaristic urgency in his war declaration speech to themes of economic resilience and national stability in his Federal Assembly address.

Finally, intertextuality and media discourse are examined to assess how Putin's rhetoric aligns with previous Russian political narratives. This includes a comparative analysis of his speeches with past Russian state rhetoric, identifying patterns of continuity and change. Furthermore, the study investigates how Russian state-controlled media amplifies and interprets these speeches, shaping public perception domestically. To provide a broader perspective, this research also evaluates international responses and counter-discourses, analyzing how Western governments and international organizations receive, challenge, and repurpose Putin's rhetoric. By integrating these three analytical areas, this study offers a comprehensive examination of how language functions as a tool of power, persuasion, and ideological reinforcement.

4.4. Reliability and Validity

To ensure the rigor of this analysis, the study employs several measures to enhance reliability and validity. First, the researcher cross-references multiple translations of the speeches to prevent misinterpretations and ensure linguistic accuracy. This step is essential in maintaining the integrity of textual analysis, as minor discrepancies in translation could affect the interpretation of key phrases. Additionally, the study incorporates previous linguistic research on Putin's rhetoric (e.g., Hutchings & Szostek, 2015; Oates, 2017; Wodak, 2020) to position its findings within a broader academic discourse, reinforcing the credibility of its conclusions.

Furthermore, an iterative coding process is applied to systematically categorize textual elements and themes, ensuring consistency and transparency in interpretation. This structured approach allows for a detailed examination of linguistic patterns across different contexts. Additionally, the study adopts a comparative analysis over time, focusing on two speeches delivered a year apart. This longitudinal perspective highlights how rhetorical strategies evolve in response to shifting political, economic, and geopolitical realities. By considering these dynamic changes, the study ensures that its findings reflect broader trends rather than isolated discursive instances.

Overall, this methodological approach offers a nuanced and systematic understanding of Putin's rhetorical strategies, power constructions, and ideological frameworks. It provides valuable insights into how political discourse adapts to geopolitical shifts while continuing to shape public perception and national identity.

5. Analysis

5.1. Linguistic Features and Rhetorical Strategies

5.1.1 War Declaration Speech

Putin's speech declaring war against Ukraine is marked by several key linguistic features and rhetorical strategies that frame the invasion as a necessary defensive action:

a. High-Modality Verbs

One of the most prominent features is the use of high-modality verbs, which reinforce a sense of urgency and inevitability. Statements such as “*We must act decisively*” and “*We have been left no other option*” project an image of firm leadership, leaving little room for negotiation. By employing strong modal verbs, Putin presents military intervention as not just justified but unavoidable, positioning Russia as having no alternative but to act.

b. Us vs. Them Dichotomy

Another defining characteristic of the speech is the stark us vs. them dichotomy, which serves to construct clear divisions between Russia and its adversaries. Throughout the address, Putin frames the West, NATO, and Ukraine’s leadership as aggressors, while portraying Russia as a victim of external threats. Phrases like “*they deceived us*” and “*NATO’s war machine is advancing*” reinforce this polarization, suggesting that Russia has been continuously provoked and must now respond in self-defense. This rhetorical strategy not only justifies military action but also strengthens national solidarity by creating a common external enemy.

c. Historical Justification

Closely tied to the previous dichotomy is the use of historical justification, where Putin draws on Russia’s past to legitimize the invasion. He references the collapse of the Soviet Union, accuses NATO of an expansionist agenda, and compares the current situation to previous Western military interventions. By asserting that “*Russia has always been a great power, defending its interests,*” he taps into nationalist sentiments, positioning the invasion as a continuation of Russia’s historical struggle for sovereignty. These historical allusions create a sense of continuity, implying that the current conflict is merely another chapter in Russia’s long-standing fight to protect its territorial and political integrity.

d. Moral Legitimization

Beyond historical references, moral legitimization plays a crucial role in the speech, as Putin casts Russia’s actions as ethically justified and necessary for the protection of its people. He accuses the Ukrainian government of committing “*genocide against the people of Donbas*” and asserts that Russia has a humanitarian duty to intervene. By framing military action as a moral imperative, he appeals to both domestic and international audiences, reinforcing the idea that Russia is not the aggressor but rather a guardian of vulnerable populations. This aligns with long-standing Russian narratives that depict intervention as an effort to protect ethnic Russians and Russian speakers abroad.

e. Appeal to Fear

Finally, an appeal to fear is strategically embedded in the speech to gain public support and reinforce the urgency of action. Putin warns of severe consequences should Russia fail to act, using phrases like “*a matter of life and death*” and “*our very existence is at stake.*” These emotionally charged

statements are designed to instill a sense of imminent danger, persuading the audience that military intervention is essential for national survival. By emphasizing existential threats, Putin strengthens the argument that war is not a choice but a necessity, ensuring that his audience perceives the invasion as an act of defense rather than aggression.

Through the combination of these rhetorical strategies—high-modality verbs, binary opposition, historical references, moral appeals, and fear tactics—Putin constructs a narrative that legitimizes military action while positioning Russia as both a victim and a protector. The interplay of these linguistic elements underscores the strategic use of language in shaping public perception and justifying war.

5.1.2 Annual Address to the Federal Assembly

In contrast to the war declaration speech, Putin's annual address to the Federal Assembly adopts a markedly different rhetorical tone and strategic focus, shifting away from urgent militaristic language toward themes of national unity, resilience, and economic stability. Rather than framing Russia as a nation under immediate threat, this speech presents it as a country capable of overcoming external pressures through internal strength and self-sufficiency.

a. Nation-Building Rhetoric

A central theme of the speech is nation-building rhetoric, which seeks to foster unity and encourage public support for government initiatives. Putin calls on Russian citizens to stand together in strengthening the nation, emphasizing collective resilience. By stating that Russia must focus on "*strengthening our country from within*," he redirects the audience's attention toward internal development rather than external conflict. The emphasis on economic self-sufficiency further reinforces this idea, positioning national solidarity as essential to Russia's long-term success.

b. Economic and Social Development

This inward focus is further evident in the speech's emphasis on economic and social development, a sharp contrast to the predominantly defensive tone of the war declaration. Putin highlights key domestic achievements, particularly Russia's economic resilience in the face of Western sanctions. By asserting that "*our economy has withstood the storm, and we are emerging stronger than ever*," he reassures the public that the nation is thriving despite international isolation. The rhetoric of economic endurance and progress serves to bolster confidence in the government's ability to navigate geopolitical challenges while maintaining internal stability.

c. Cautious Framing of the War

In addition to shifting the focus to domestic affairs, Putin also adopts a cautious framing of the war, toning down the aggressive rhetoric that characterized his earlier speech. While the war declaration speech depicted the invasion as an urgent necessity, this address is more measured, emphasizing

Russia's ability to withstand external pressures rather than actively promoting military aggression. The conflict is presented as something that Russia is managing effectively, rather than an ongoing crisis requiring continuous justification. This adjustment in tone suggests an effort to reassure the public while maintaining control over the narrative surrounding the war's impact.

d. Appeal to Tradition and National Identity

Another key rhetorical strategy in the speech is the appeal to tradition and national identity, which reinforces a sense of historical continuity and patriotic duty. Putin draws on Russian cultural and historical narratives, reminding the audience that *"our forefathers defended this land, and we will do the same."* By invoking the past, he establishes a direct connection between previous national struggles and contemporary challenges, framing the present moment as part of a long-standing pattern of Russian perseverance. This appeal to historical identity strengthens national pride and legitimizes current policies by aligning them with past victories and sacrifices.

Taken together, these rhetorical elements—nation-building appeals, economic optimism, a more measured approach to the war, and invocations of Russian tradition—signal a strategic shift in Putin's discourse. Rather than emphasizing immediate conflict and existential threats, this speech reassures the public, promotes internal stability, and fosters a sense of resilience. By presenting Russia as a nation that is not only surviving but thriving despite external pressures, Putin crafts a narrative that seeks to unify the country while maintaining confidence in the state's long-term vision.

5.2. Textual Analysis and Persuasive Impact

A comparative analysis of both speeches reveals strategic shifts in discourse, reflecting an adaptation of rhetorical strategies to suit evolving political and societal needs. One of the most noticeable changes is the transition from militaristic to diplomatic language. The war declaration speech is highly confrontational and urgent, relying on imperative statements and warnings to justify immediate military action. It conveys a sense of inevitability, presenting Russia's involvement in the war as the only available course. In contrast, the annual address adopts a more composed and measured tone, shifting the focus from confrontation to resilience and governance. Rather than emphasizing existential threats, Putin presents Russia as a nation that has endured external pressures and emerged stronger, reinforcing a message of stability and national endurance.

Another key rhetorical adjustment is the manipulation of historical narratives, which serve different purposes in each speech. In the war declaration, history is selectively employed to frame NATO and the West as long-standing threats, portraying Russia's actions as a necessary continuation of its historical struggle for sovereignty. By evoking past betrayals and perceived Western expansionism, Putin seeks to instill a sense of urgency and justification for

military intervention. However, in the annual address, historical references take on a different function. Instead of emphasizing conflict, history is used to strengthen national unity and inspire economic and social stability. By invoking Russia's resilience throughout history, Putin reassures the public that the country has always overcome adversity, positioning current challenges as just another chapter in a long legacy of perseverance.

Additionally, the contrast in target audiences highlights the strategic adaptation of Putin's rhetoric. The war declaration speech is directed primarily at nationalists and military supporters, aiming to mobilize the public for immediate action. The language is urgent, invoking patriotism and a collective duty to defend Russia against external enemies. In contrast, the annual address is tailored for a broader domestic audience, including civilians, businesses, and policymakers. Instead of rallying the population for war, the focus shifts toward national resilience and economic sustainability, reassuring citizens that the government remains in control despite geopolitical and economic pressures. This shift in audience engagement demonstrates how Putin recalibrates his discourse, moving from an immediate wartime appeal to a long-term vision of national endurance.

Taken together, these rhetorical shifts—from militaristic urgency to diplomatic reassurance, from historical justification of war to historical reinforcement of resilience, and from nationalist mobilization to domestic stabilization—illustrate how language is strategically employed to adapt to changing circumstances. Through these adjustments, Putin ensures that his discourse continues to serve its central function: maintaining public support, consolidating state power, and shaping Russia's national identity in alignment with its political and military objectives.

5.3. Sociocultural Context and Intertextual References

Both speeches are deeply embedded in Russia's socio-political landscape, drawing upon historical narratives, economic justifications, and evolving rhetorical strategies to sustain political legitimacy. One of the most prominent elements is the influence of Soviet-era rhetoric, which manifests through echoes of Cold War narratives. In both speeches, Putin portrays the West as an ideological and military adversary, reinforcing a long-standing narrative of external aggression against Russia. By drawing parallels between NATO's actions and historical Western interventions, he constructs a sense of continuity between past and present geopolitical conflicts, thereby justifying Russia's stance as a necessary and defensive one.

Closely tied to this Cold War rhetoric is the response to Western sanctions and opposition, which plays a central role in the annual address. Unlike the war declaration speech, which focuses on immediate military action, the later speech reframes economic hardships as an inevitable consequence of resistance against external threats. Phrases such as *"we will overcome these obstacles as we always*

have” subtly shift the responsibility for economic challenges away from the Russian government and onto the West. This rhetorical move not only minimizes domestic accountability but also strengthens the idea that economic struggles are a shared national sacrifice rather than policy failures.

Additionally, the shift in discourse from direct confrontation to long-term resilience reflects an attempt to manage both international and domestic pressures. The war declaration speech is designed to justify immediate military action, invoking urgency and moral righteousness. However, as the conflict continues, the annual address recalibrates the message, preparing the public for prolonged conflict and economic isolation. Instead of emphasizing aggression, the speech reassures citizens that Russia is enduring, adapting, and even thriving despite external adversities. This gradual evolution in discourse underscores the government’s effort to maintain control over public perception while ensuring continued support for its policies.

By employing these linguistic and rhetorical strategies, Putin crafts a shifting narrative that transitions from justifying war to fostering national unity and resilience. The evolution of his discourse over the course of a year illustrates how political leaders use language as a tool to consolidate power, adapt to changing geopolitical realities, and shape public sentiment. Through this strategic discourse, Putin not only defends Russia’s actions on the global stage but also reinforces domestic solidarity, ensuring that both the war effort and the government’s broader objectives remain widely supported.

6. Discussion

The findings of this study align with and expand upon previous research on Putin’s rhetoric and political discourse. Scholars such as Hutchings & Szostek (2015) and Mral (2016) have previously noted Putin’s reliance on historical revisionism and nationalist discourse to justify political and military actions. This study reaffirms these conclusions, demonstrating that in his war declaration speech, Putin employs a historical grievance narrative, evoking past conflicts such as NATO’s bombing of Yugoslavia and the collapse of the Soviet Union to justify Russia’s present actions.

Furthermore, Fairclough’s (1995) concept of discourse as a tool of ideological construction is evident in both speeches. The war declaration relies on discursive strategies of fear and moral legitimacy, reinforcing Russia’s identity as a protector against Western aggression. This aligns with previous findings by Razuvaev (2020), who identified similar patterns in Putin’s rhetoric concerning Ukraine, where he frames the conflict as an existential threat to Russia’s sovereignty.

This study also highlights an evolution in Putin’s rhetorical strategy, shifting from an aggressive, war-justifying discourse to one focused on nation-building and economic resilience in the Federal Assembly speech. This is

consistent with the findings of Oates (2017), who noted that Russian political rhetoric often adapts to shifting geopolitical circumstances. Putin's emphasis on economic survival and self-sufficiency in the second speech reflects a pragmatic rhetorical adjustment aimed at maintaining domestic support in the face of international isolation and sanctions.

The findings further support the argument made by Reisigl & Wodak (2015) regarding how political leaders employ linguistic strategies to construct ideological narratives. Putin's use of inclusive pronouns like "we" in the Federal Assembly speech serves to unify the Russian people under a shared struggle, shifting from militaristic justification to economic and social stabilization. This rhetorical shift underscores the strategic flexibility in political discourse, where language is adapted to suit changing political objectives.

Finally, this study contributes to discussions on intertextuality in political discourse (van Dijk, 2006). Putin's references to Western military interventions, Soviet history, and anti-Russian conspiracies illustrate how political narratives draw upon pre-existing cultural and historical frameworks to enhance legitimacy. These findings reinforce the claim that Putin's rhetoric is deeply embedded in Russian historical memory and is used strategically to frame contemporary issues within a familiar ideological structure.

7. Conclusion

This study has provided a comprehensive critical discourse analysis of two of Vladimir Putin's key speeches: his war declaration against Ukraine and his annual address to the Federal Assembly. By applying Fairclough's CDA framework, this research has demonstrated how linguistic features, rhetorical strategies, and sociocultural references shape Putin's discourse to construct power relations and ideological narratives.

The key findings of this study highlight the strategic evolution of Putin's rhetoric over time. In the war declaration speech, he employs aggressive, militaristic language, high-modality verbs, and historical grievances to justify military action. He frames the West as an existential threat and portrays Russia as a defender of sovereignty, appealing to fear and nationalism. In contrast, the annual address shifts towards a more measured and pragmatic discourse, emphasizing economic resilience, social stability, and national unity. This transition reflects a strategic adaptation to changing political and economic circumstances, aligning with previous research on political discourse strategies in authoritarian regimes.

Furthermore, this study reinforces the importance of historical narratives and intertextual references in Putin's rhetoric. His speeches draw upon Soviet-era discourse, anti-Western sentiment, and moral legitimization to create a coherent ideological framework. By selectively invoking history, Putin crafts a narrative

that positions Russia as both a victim of Western aggression and a resilient power capable of overcoming adversity.

These findings contribute to the broader field of political discourse analysis by demonstrating how language is employed not only to justify political actions but also to maintain public support and manage shifting geopolitical challenges. The study underscores the adaptability of political rhetoric and the central role of discourse in shaping national identity and public perception.

Future research should explore how these rhetorical strategies evolve further as the Ukraine conflict continues, as well as how domestic and international audiences interpret Putin's discourse. Additionally, a comparative study of other world leaders' speeches in similar geopolitical crises could provide further insights into the role of language in international relations and conflict justification.

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