



UiT The Arctic University of Norway

Grammar in the service of ideological messaging: Putin's speeches 2022-2024

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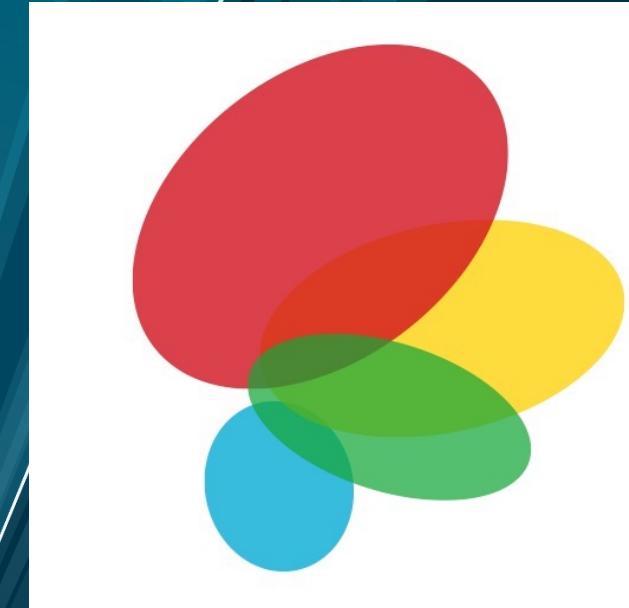
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CLEAR

Cognitive Linguistics: Empirical Approaches to Russian



Threat-Defuser
(Norwegian Research Council)

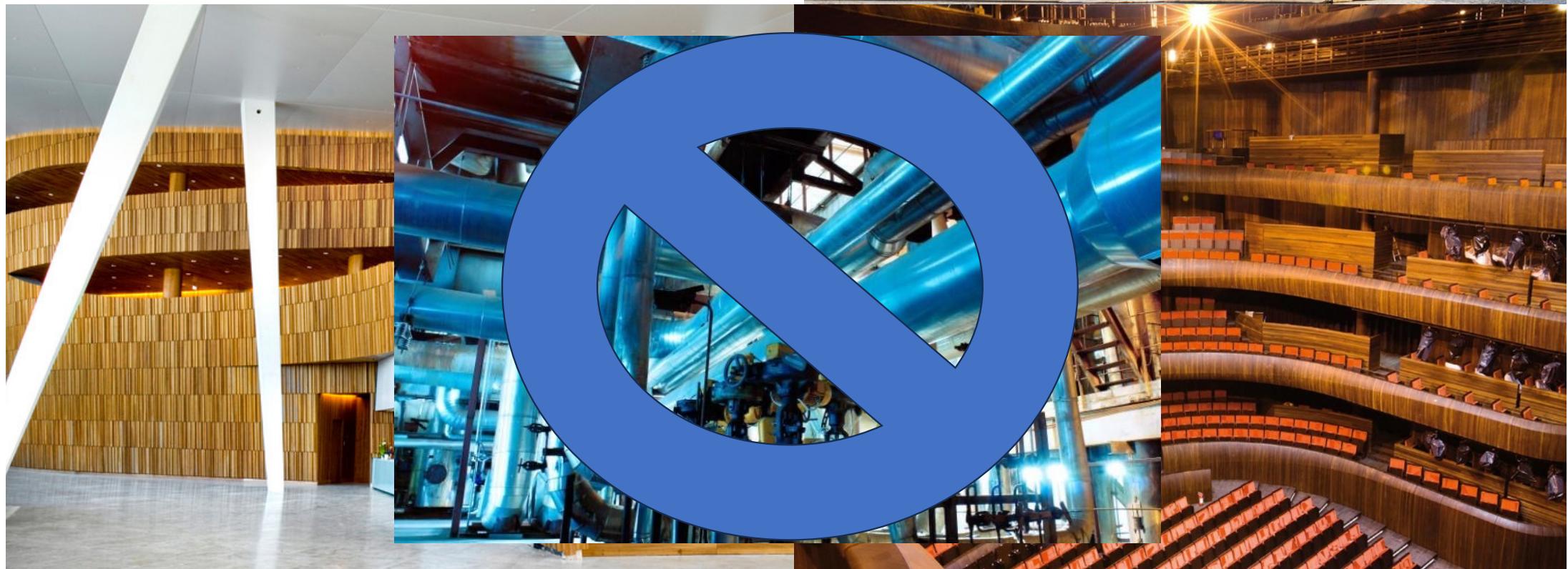
Does grammar mean anything?

- Is grammar mere “plumbing”?
- Or is it more like a sound track?

Perception of architecture



Perception of architecture



Perception of film

Voice

+

Soundtrack

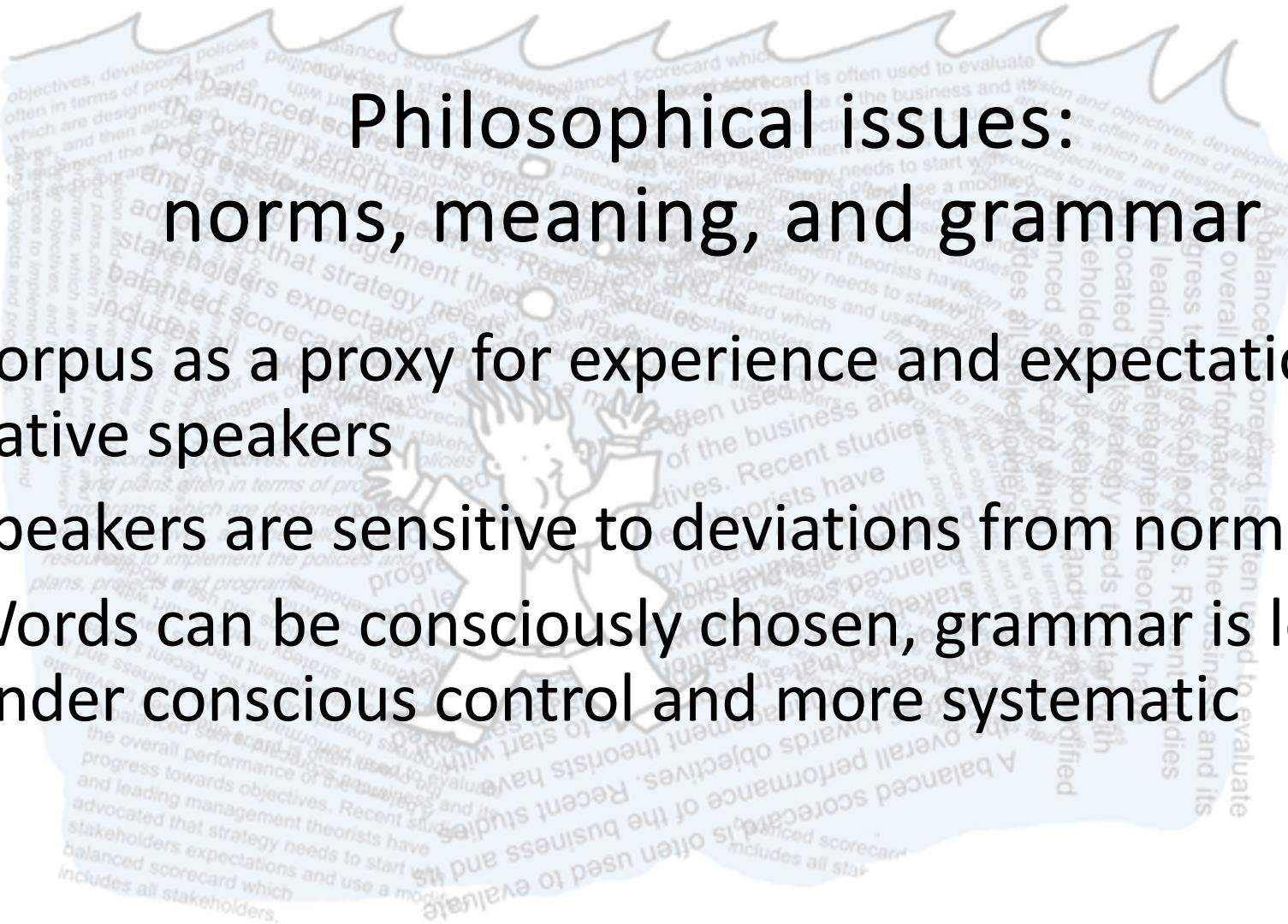


“Background music”
is an important part of the message

Grammar as a drumbeat

- Grammar is obligatory, systematic
- Grammar reveals the conceptual landscape of discourse
- Russian nouns are obligatorily marked with one of six cases
 - Cases bear abstract meanings
- We compare the distribution of case in a target text (Putin's speeches) with a reference corpus (large representative sample showing expected distribution in Russian)
 - **3 words: 'Russia', 'Ukraine', 'NATO'**



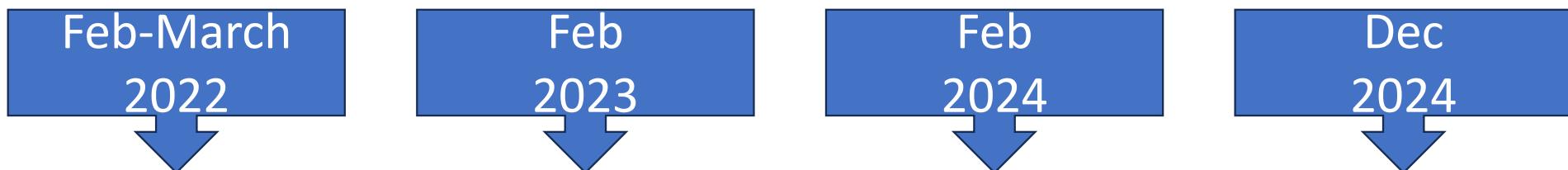


Philosophical issues: norms, meaning, and grammar

- Corpus as a proxy for experience and expectations of native speakers
- Speakers are sensitive to deviations from norms
- Words can be consciously chosen, grammar is less under conscious control and more systematic

Overview

- Keymorph Analysis as an extension of Keyword Analysis
- Meanings of Russian grammatical cases
- Longitudinal study of Putin's use of case



Keyword Analysis >> Keymorph Analysis

- **Keyword** Analysis (cf. Egbert & Biber 2023):
 - focus on the distribution of **words**, identifying as “keywords” those that are unusually frequent in a target text vs. reference corpus
 - widely used in corpus-assisted discourse analysis
 - mostly used with English, which does not mark case on nouns
- **Keymorph** Analysis:
 - takes advantage of grammatical case (expressed by **morphemes**)
 - developed by Fidler & Cvrček (2017, 2018, and Cvrček & Fidler 2019) on the material of Czech
 - ours is the first pilot study/proof-of-concept using Russian data

Meanings of Russian grammatical cases

- Meanings most relevant for analysis of Putin's speeches
 - Nominative (NOM): agent (subject); label
 - Genitive (GEN): agent or patient; possessor; goal
 - Dative (DAT): potential agent, experiencer or competitor (usually human); contours of a space
 - Accusative (ACC): patient (direct object); destination
 - Instrumental (*s* + INS): collaborator
 - Locative (LOC): a place

THE CASE BOOK
for Russian

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Target texts and Reference Corpus

Target texts = Putin's speech

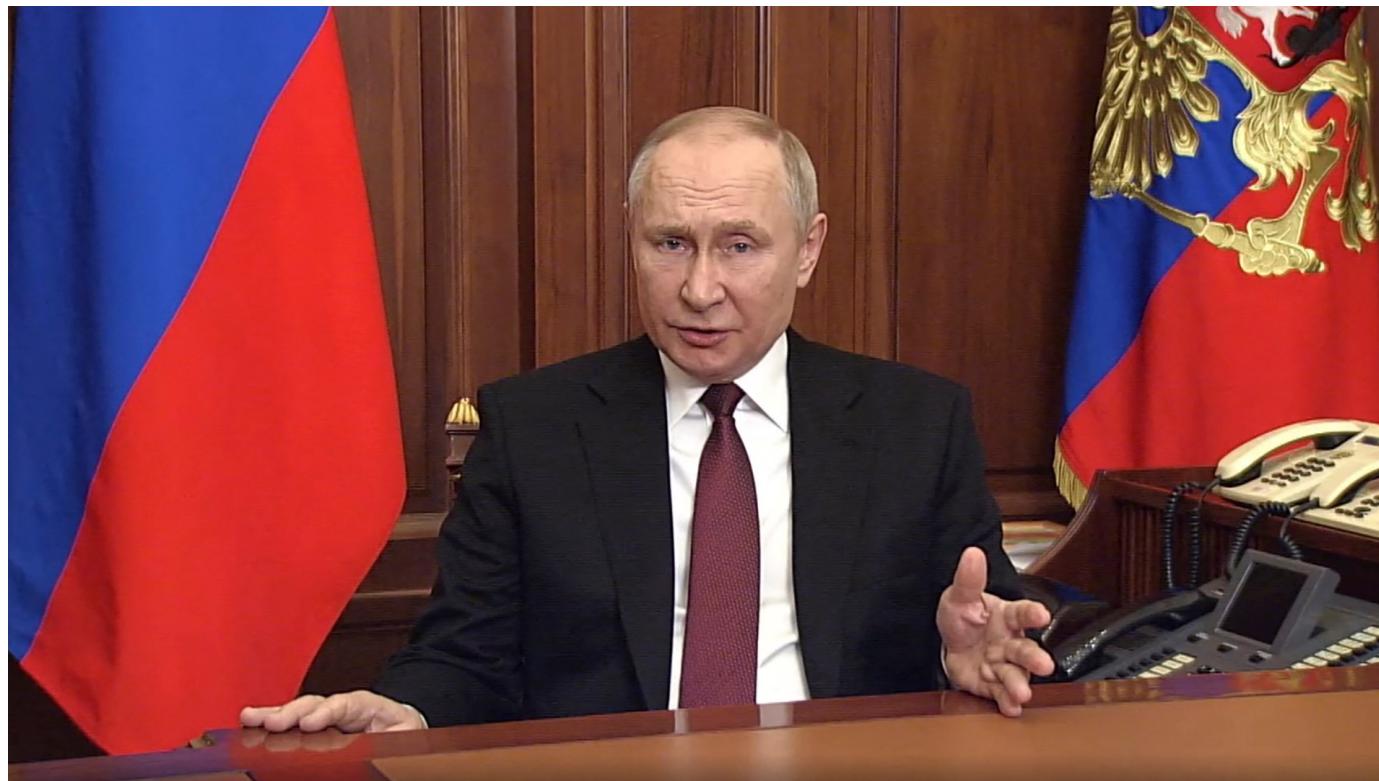
- Feb-Mar 2022: all of Putin's output from 10.02. (joint maneuvers with Belarus) through 02.03.2022 (height of first phase of invasion)
- Feb 2023: Putin's address to the Federal Assembly 21.02.2023
- Feb 2024: Putin's address to the Federal Assembly 29.02.2024
- Dec 2024: Putin's speech at Direct Line / Year-end Summary 19.12.2024

Reference Corpus = Representative sample of Russian norms

- Russian InterCorp (Czech National Corpus www.korpus.cz) 20.1 M tokens

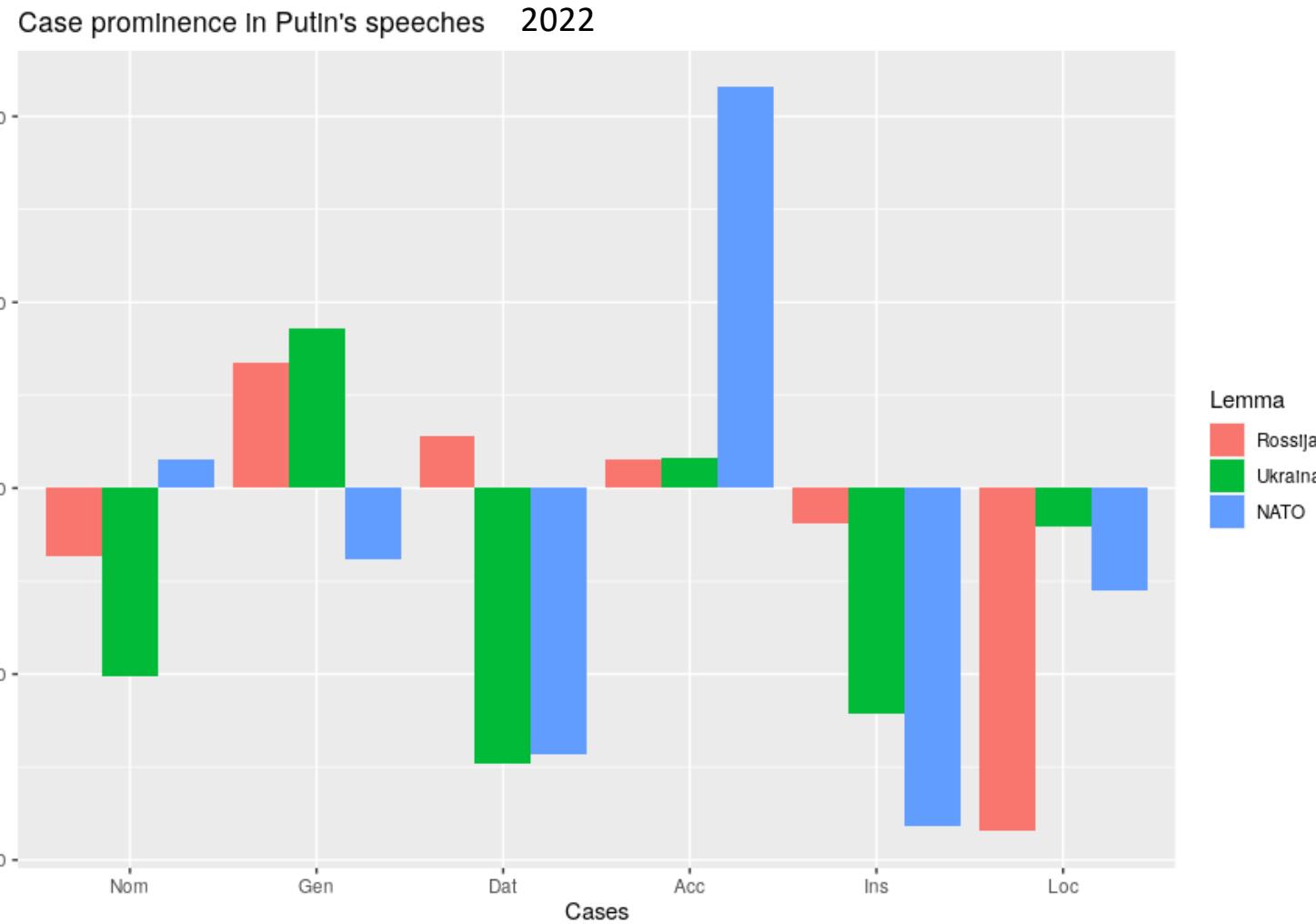
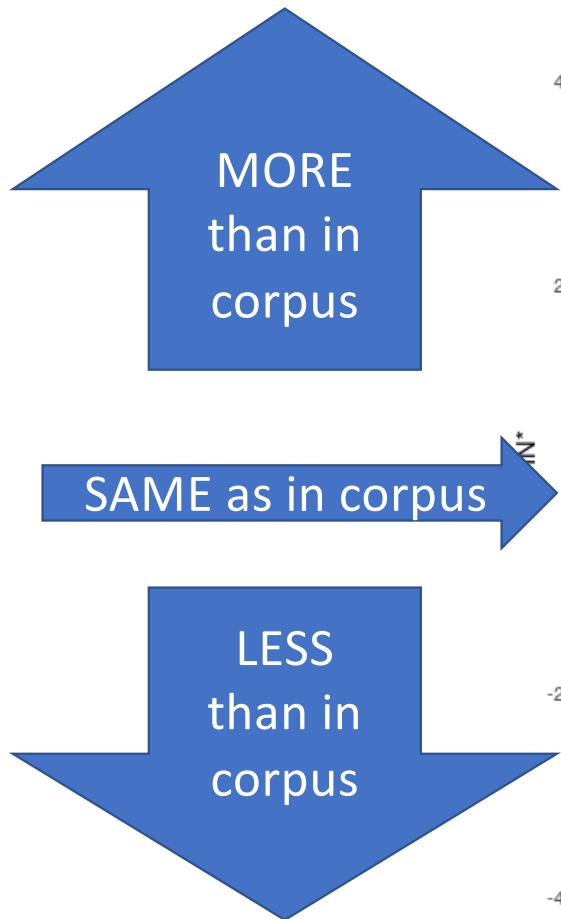
Putin at the time of full-scale invasion

10.02.2022 - 02.03.2022



28,518 words

Comparison with reference corpus



Russia in 2022

- Russia represented as
 - a dynamic agent (NOM)
 - a collaborator (INS)
 - treated unfairly (ACC) and therefore in need of a strong leader
 - humanized, inspires empathy (DAT)

Ukraine in 2022

- Ukraine represented as
 - passive (NOM with stative verbs)
 - manipulated (ACC)
 - dehumanized (little DAT)
 - not a collaborator (little *s* + INS)
 - just a location, a region (*na* + LOC, GEN)



NATO in 2022

- NATO represented as
 - just a label, not an agent (NOM)
 - a threat (GEN)
 - a destination or container (ACC, LOC)
 - not a collaborator, dehumanized (little INS and DAT)



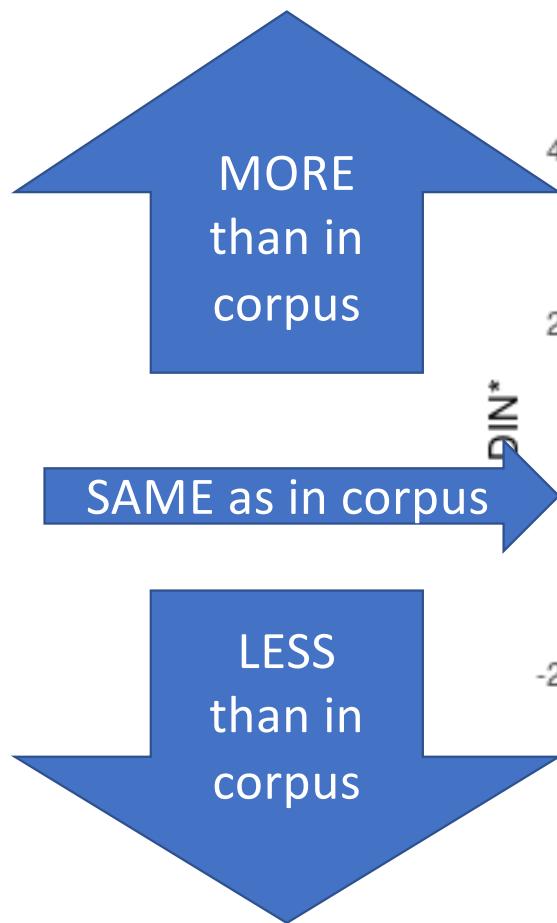
Putin's speech to the Federal Assembly

Feb 21, 2023

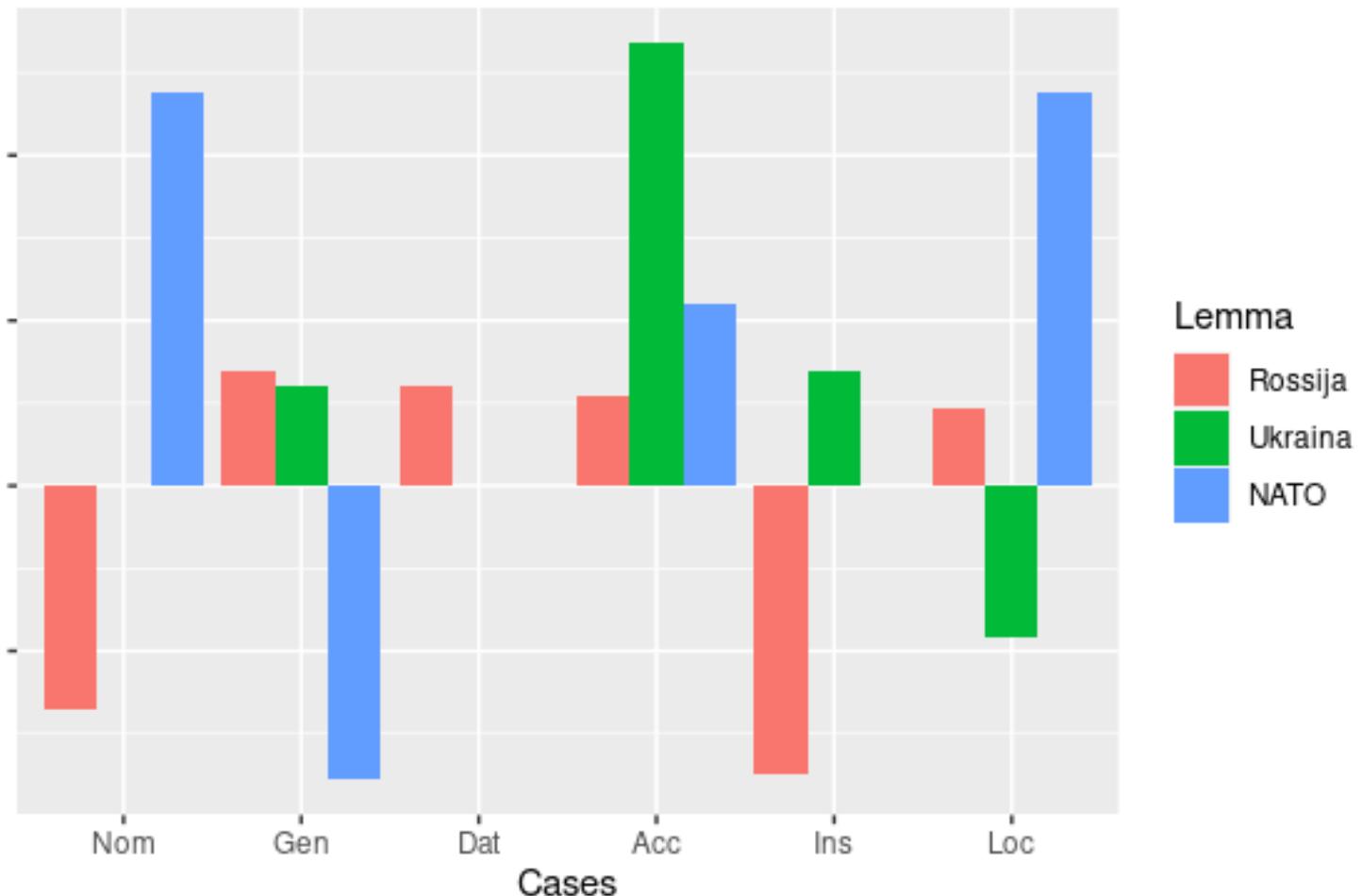


10,538 words

Caveat: some distortion due to much smaller dataset



Case prominence in Putin's speech (Feb 21, 2023)



Russia in 2023

- Russia represented as
 - an agent that helps others, remembers, depends on its citizens, an open country (NOM)
 - a land of great potential and people, unfairly targeted (GEN)
 - united (*s* + INS)
 - being exploited but cannot be defeated, the place to invest (ACC)
 - humanized and victimized, in no need of cooperation with western economies (DAT)
 - a place with a strong economy and values (LOC)

Ukraine in 2023

- Ukraine represented as
 - non-existent as an actor (no NOM)
 - entirely manipulated, the destination of NATO's weapons (ACC, *na*)
 - dehumanized (no DAT)
 - not a collaborator (no s + INS), a name rendered "just for now" (subject to change) (INS)
 - the location of a conflict and a neonazi regime (*na* + LOC)



‘Ukraine’ appears only 12 times in 2023 speech:

Мы не воюем с народом Украины...

‘We are not fighting with the people of **Ukraine (GEN)**...’

А в наше время из Украины они стали делать <<анти-Россию>>.

‘At present they have started to make **Ukraine (GEN)** into an “Anti-Russia”

этот проект ... с одной целью - оторвать эти исторические территории, которые сегодня называются Украиной , от нашей страны.

‘this project ... [has] one goal – to tear away from our country the historical territories that are now called **Ukraine (INS)**’

Запад использует Украину и как таран против России, и как полигон.

‘The West is using **Ukraine (ACC)** both as a battering ram against Russia, and as an artillery range.’

NATO in 2023

- NATO represented as
 - an aggressor, placing weapons on Russia's borders, directly stating that it wishes to defeat Russia, equated with USA and the West (NOM)
 - having expanded to Russia's borders and having representatives who are liars and deceivers (GEN, ACC)
 - the location of multiple nuclear arsenals (LOC)
 - strongly dehumanized (no s + INS, no DAT)

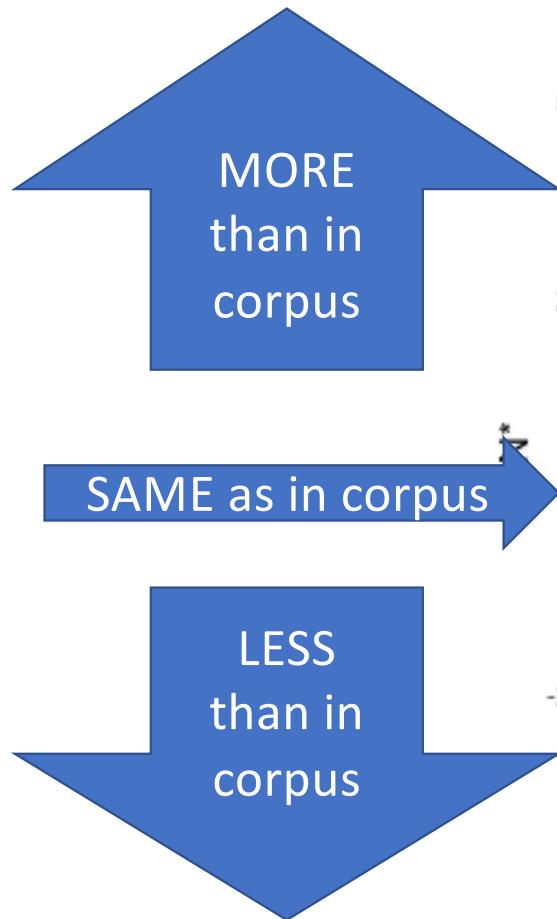


Putin's speech to the Federal Assembly

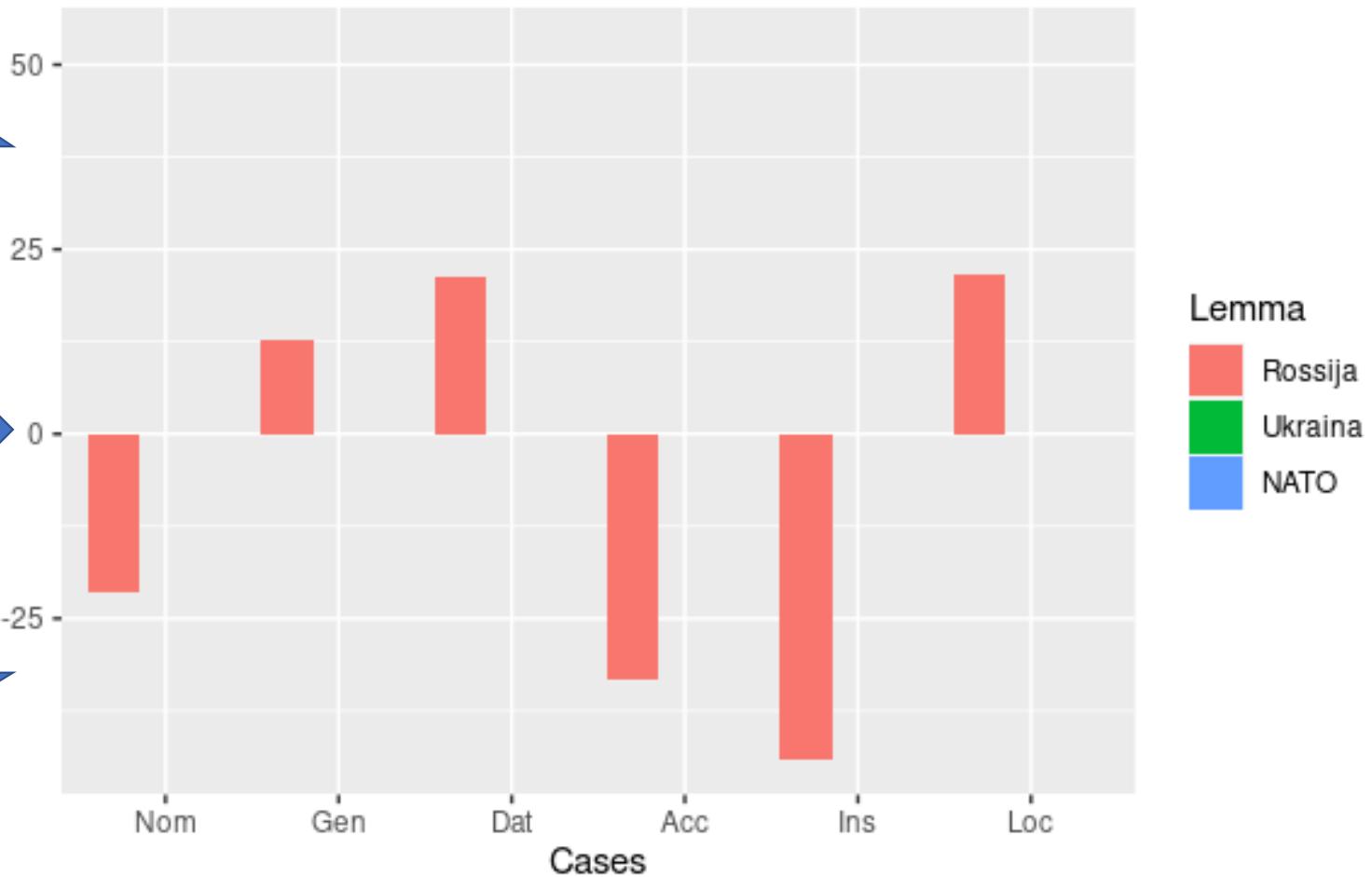
Feb 29, 2024



12,660 words



Case prominence in Putin's speech (Feb 2024)



Speech Feb 2024: Focus is just on Russia

- Russia is in possession of political, economic and scientific achievements, industry, resources

У России давние, хорошие отношения с арабскими государствами.

'Russia (GEN) has long-standing, good relations with the Arab states.'

В прошлом году экономика России росла темпами выше мировой.

'Last year, Russia's (GEN) economy grew at a rate higher than the world's.'

- Things are happening in Russia and all across Russia

В прошлом году в России было построено свыше 110 миллионов квадратных метров жилья.

'Last year, over 110 million square meters of housing were built in Russia (LOC).'

В целом по России за шесть лет благоустроим более 30 тысяч общественных пространств.

'Across Russia (DAT) as a whole, we will improve more than 30 thousand public spaces in six years.'

- Lacking mention of Russia as collaborator

Speech Feb 2024: Focus is just on Russia

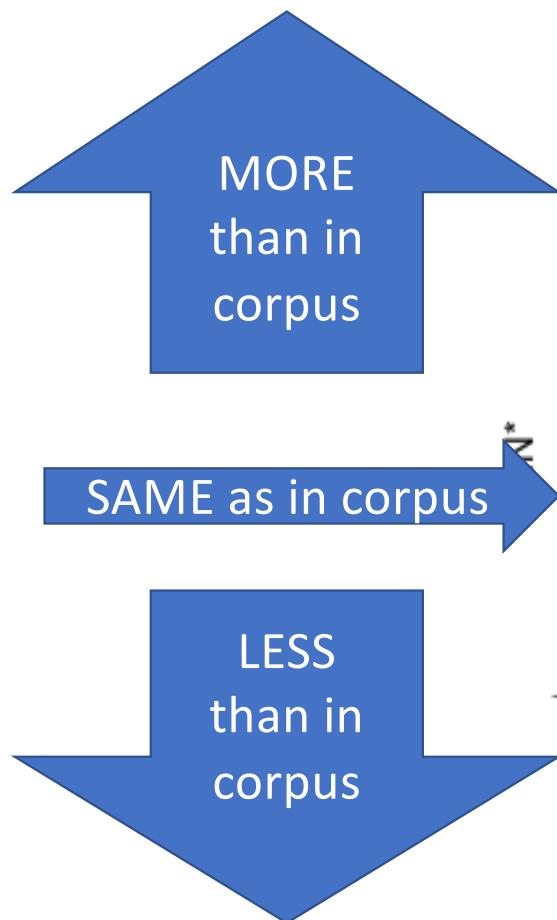
- ‘NATO’ appears only once as a noun (+ once as adjective, below):
 - *угрозы, связанные с очередным расширением NATO на восток*
 - ‘threats associated with further expansion of **NATO** (GEN) to the east’
- ‘Ukraine’ appears only five times, always with preposition *на* ‘on’:
 - 4 times as a mere location of conflicts:
 - *Запад спровоцировал конфликты на Украине*
 - ‘The West has provoked conflicts in **Ukraine** (LOC)’
 - once as a destination
 - *Заговорили о возможности отправки на Украину натовских военных contingents.*
 - ‘There was talk about the possibility of sending NATO military contingents to **Ukraine** (ACC).’

Putin's answers, Direct Line/Year-end Summary

Dec 19, 2024



20,930 words



Case prominence in Prjamaja linija (Dec 2024)



Direct Line/Year-end Summary Dec 2024

- Russia humanized

Я сказал сейчас про то, что отношусь к России, как к своей семье.

*'I just said that I treat **Russia (DAT)** as my family.'*

- Russia rated highly by experts, a desirable destination

Международные финансово-экономические институты поставили Россию на первое место в Европе

*'International financial and economic institutions put **Russia (ACC)** in first place in Europe'*

И мы заинтересованы в привлечении именно высококвалифицированных специалистов в Россию

*'And we are interested in attracting highly qualified specialists to **Russia (ACC)**'*

- Lacking mention of Russia as collaborator

Direct Line/Year-end Summary Dec 2024

- Ukraine is mostly a place

Примерно то же самое сейчас происходит на Украине по линии этого жульничества.

*'About the same thing is now happening in **Ukraine (LOC)** through this scam.'*

- Ukraine is at fault for negative actions

Но это не наша проблема, это Украина перекрыла поставки нашего газа европейским потребителям.

*'But this is not our problem, it is **Ukraine (NOM)** that has cut off the supply of our gas to European consumers.'*

- NATO mentioned only twice, both times: *страны NATO 'countries of **NATO (GEN)**'*

Putin 2022 vs. 2023 vs. 2024: What has changed?

Feb-March 2022	Feb 2023	Feb 2024	Dec 2024
<p>Russia: dynamic collaborator, humanized, victimized</p> <p>Ukraine: manipulated, location</p> <p>NATO: threat, destination for Ukraine</p>	<p>Russia: great potential, humanized, victimized, strong economy & values</p> <p>Ukraine: manipulated, location</p> <p>NATO: expanding threat</p>	<p>Russia: great potential, place where things are happening</p> <p>Ukraine: location</p> <p>NATO: expanding</p>	<p>Russia: highly rated, desirable destination, humanized</p> <p>Ukraine: location, negative actions</p> <p>NATO: group of hostile countries</p>

Over time:

- Russia's role as a collaborator decreases while focus on its assets increases, victimization reduced in Feb 2024
- Ukraine and NATO increasingly marginalized

What else does this buy us?

- Proof-of-concept for Keymorph Analysis applied to Russian data
- Keymorph Analysis complements Keyword Analysis and other traditional methods of discourse analysis
- Analysis of grammatical case reveals roles of social actors in discourse
- Consistent deviation from norms likely has an impact on hearers
- Useful for social science disciplines
- Invites further comparisons (Putin vs. other politicians, etc.)
- Method could be used to analyze other types of manipulative texts

Thank you!

- Threat-Defuser: <https://threat-defuser.org/>
Funded by the Norwegian Research Council

- CLEAR: Cognitive Linguistics: Empirical
Approaches to Russian:
<https://site.uit.no/clear/>

