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## **TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY WAR-RELATED DISCOURSE**

Linguistic manipulation in action\*

**Key words** - war discourse, pro-war rhetoric, effective instrument of war rhetoric, discursive tactics, devices of manipulation, manipulation markers, to legitimize violence.

### **Introduction**

War discourse is a specific type of communication maintained and structured through language, serving as a medium of mass interaction. The discourse is purposefully created to construct internal support against an external enemy and encourage direct action against a certain state, country, nation, or ethnic group. Social actors worldwide employ the language of war to shape ideologies that legitimize violence and justify certain political, economic, territorial, or social interests. Any call for war masterfully uses the power of words to achieve the consent of society and the citizens to get involved in war.

Today, it is claimed that postmodern society, thought and ideology do not support humanism, and this claim finds its reflection in closely related notions of power, interest, and language – three concepts referring to war discourse at large. As “governmental and military officials are able to impose their form of discourse as the legitimate one and, thereby, coopt efforts by critics of war”<sup>1</sup>, power plays a crucial role in changing unequal power relations and therefore modifying language and

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\* Հոդվածն ընդունվել է տպագրության 20.10.2023:

1 **Gay W.**, Language of war and peace. “Enciclopedia of Violence, Peace, and Conflict”, vol. 2, 2008, p. 1115.

language functions to maintain interest and influence in modern society<sup>2</sup>; shaping language mechanisms, systems, and means to support war<sup>3</sup>; putting political, economic, and social ideas of interest – prepared, accompanied, influenced, and played by language – into practice<sup>4</sup>; harnessing language and discourse to manufacture public consent for war<sup>5</sup>. Hence, war discourse – pro-war rhetoric and propaganda – are designed to convince societies that war is unavoidable and necessary in certain situations, claiming that a nation or state “strongly committed to the ideal of peace, but simultaneously faced with the reality of war, must believe that the fault for any such disruption of their ideal lies with others”<sup>6</sup>.

R. Reid (1976) argues that war discourse in general and pro-war rhetoric and propaganda in particular are constructed and realized through the skillful linguistic formulation of three appeals: *territorial, ethnocentric, and optimistic*. The success of the first one, i.e. of territorial appeal, depends on the state actor’s or leader’s presentation of discourse as entering into war on the defensive rather than offensive side due to an actual war or threat of invasion. Such appeals, therefore, target society’s “sense of territoriality”<sup>7</sup>. Ethnocentric appeals present “threats to cultural values” and evoke enmity towards the “inferior alien” and its historical and cultural heritage<sup>8</sup>. The message of optimistic appeals aims at persuading societies that, both in the case of entering into war and in the course of war, victory is inevitable<sup>9</sup>.

1. It should be added here that all the appeals, depending on functionally effective discursive elements, powerfully formulated and structured linguistic units, and, of course, linguistic manipulation, are at large the result of pro-war rhetoric and propaganda, territorial, ethnocentric, and optimistic appeals, without which the war discourse would not be able to evoke an in-group sense of identity against the out-group actors and mute dissenting opinions. It is the overarching principle of linguistic manipulation underlying war discourse that will be discussed further in this study. The linguistic data framework has been designed considering the pro-war discourse implications derived from the twenty-first century state actors’ 2023 New Year addresses.

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2 Fairclough N., *Language and Power*. London, “Longman”, 2001.

3 Neustupný J., *Language and Empowerment*. Conference organized by The Malaysian Association of Modern Languages, 2002.

4 Bayram F., *Ideology and Political Discourse: a Critical Discourse Analysis of Erdogan’s Political Speech*. “Annual Review of Education, Communication and Language Aciences” (ARECLS), 2010.

5 Hodges A., *War Discourse*. “The International Encyclopedia of Language and Interaction”, vol. 1, Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2015.

6 Ivie R., *Images of Savagery in American Justifications of War*. “Communication Monographs”, vol. 47, 1980, p. 279.

7 *ibid*, p. 260.

8 *ibid*, p. 267.

9 *ibid*, p. 282.

## 2. Manipulative Discourse in Times of War

In today’s atmosphere of warfare, the biased impact of war leaders’ discourse has increased as direct persuasion is combined with implicit linguistic manipulation to make a stronger impact on audiences. Territorial and ethnocentric pro-war and war rhetoric and propaganda are closely related to the use of language and persuasive manipulation as a medium to legitimize in the eyes of domestic and international audiences the use of deadly force in conducting and waging an armed political conflict. Therefore, persuasive manipulation, especially in times of war, “is an influential instrument of political rhetoric because political discourse is primarily focused on persuading people to take specified political actions or to make crucial political decisions”<sup>10</sup>.

The process of employing discursive tactics commences when the political leader or leaders present war as unavoidable due to out-group suppression, which contradicts in-group interests. The so-called “defensive cause” (the same cause for all parties concerned) is thus fostered through narratives of aggression and threat to national identity, cultural values, territorial integrity, well-being, and security. Securitization, of course, can possibly depend on external factors: “heavily armed neighbors with a history of aggression are more easily construed as threats than are lightly armed, pacifist ones”<sup>11</sup>, and “some protagonists of the political scene are more suitable than others to represent a threat”<sup>12</sup>. However, it is the internal state actors that mostly make decisions, and blaming the externals is not always justified. En route to direct and indirect manipulative ways overstating out-group threats, an unreasonable, inhumane, deceitful, and dishonest image of the enemy is created to justify own violence and emphasize in-group unity and solidarity. Differences with the contending party are overstated to achieve positive in-group vs. negative out-group (good vs. bad) representation. Interestingly enough, this kind of discourse polarization is typical of all parties to war.

Manipulation and manipulative persuasion mainly focus on three traditional pro-war rhetorical formulas, themes, or “topoi”<sup>13</sup>, which blame the enemy and justify reasons for the victimization of the nation:

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10 **Rozina G., Karapetjana I.**, The Use of Language in Political Rhetoric: Linguistic Manipulation. “Dergipark”, Mayıs 2009, Sayı: 2009, p. 113.  
 11 **Buzan B., Waever O. and Wilde De J.**, *Security. A New Framework for Analysis*. London, “Rienner”, 1998, p. 57.  
 12 **Ferrari F.**, Metaphor at work in the analysis of political discourse: investigating a ‘preventive war’ persuasion strategy. “Discourse and Society”, 2016, N 18 (5), 2016, p. 607.  
 13 **Ivie R.**, Images of Savagery in American Justifications of War. “Communication Monographs”, vol. 47, 1980, p. 284.

✓ force vs. freedom: we have to war with the violent opponent for freedom.

✓ irrational vs. rational: we are enlightened and reasonable, while the enemy is unreasonable and animalistic.

✓ aggression vs. defense: we are entering into war to defend ourselves and ensure our security.

Hence, through the use of society-oriented manipulative language – intentional manipulative language in particular, war discourse and linguistic manipulation in times of war aim at

✓ masking the reality of violence;

✓ presenting the adversary as an evil, irrational aggressor, and itself as a freedom-fighter;

✓ justifying war as a security operation.

Linguistic manipulation is communicatively intentional as it is motivated to realize the function of furtively influencing the reader or listener, who cannot perceive the manipulator's covert intention behind skillfully contrived verbal utterances. Language systems operating through verbal manipulation facilitate “distortion of objective reality, offering not only specific designations but also imprecise, blurred, and ambiguous denominations”<sup>14</sup> through “different ways of using language to conceal or reinforce messages”<sup>15</sup>. In other words, manipulative aims are realized through covert, masked linguistic discourse of informational content that impact the reader's or listener's mind, emotions, and imagination, making him/her unable to discern manipulation due to the inability to detect the manipulator's communicative intention.

## 1. Verbal Manipulation in War Leaders' 2023 New Year Addresses

To achieve intended goals, verbal manipulation in socio-political discourse influences the recipient emotionally through different linguistic units, forms, and devices (which we will call “manipulation markers”) such as composition and utterance context, grammatical forms, lexical, semantic and syntactic models, lexical, and syntactic stylistic devices (euphemism, allusion, metaphor, metonymy, paradox; parallelism, repetition, climax, rhetorical question, etc.), grammatical tools (transitivity, active and passive voice, modality, nominalization, etc.), many of which refer to war discourse as well. Adhering to the methodology of Critical Discourse

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14 **Akopova A.**, Linguistic Manipulation: Definition and Types. “International Journal of Cognitive Research in Science, Engineering and Education”, 2013, N 1 (2), p. 79.

15 **Nordlund M.**, Linguistic Manipulation: An Analysis of how Attitudes are Displayed in News Reporting. Sweden: Lulea University of technology, 2003, p. 2.

Analysis that allows to examine the constitutive role that discourse and its elements play in communication and society, and Linguostylistic Analysis that allows to study the role, impact and functions of various linguistic elements realizing their meta-semiotic potentials in conveying the content of discourse, we will try to examine the most typical manipulative strategies and devices to identify the manipulation markers used by four war leaders in their 2023 New Year addresses: President of Russia V. Putin (2022), President of Ukraine V. Zelenskyy (2022), President of Azerbaijan I. Aliiev (2022) and Prime Minister of Armenia N. Pashinyan (2022).

The presidents made their traditional addresses to the nations on the eve of the New Year, on December 31, 2022. The addresses bear the imprint of the past year of war and conflict and express sentiments and key messages for 2023.

First and foremost, numerous *lexical-semantic* units – instruments of manipulative persuasion – are used as manipulation markers (due to their immense stylistic charge, emotional and cultural loading) – to impact the recipients emotionally and provoke their feelings of belonging, security, devotion, faith in victory, and coming peace. At large, these purposefully selected units mask the reality of violence and direct the opinions and attitudes of the audience:

*confidence; peace; military power; high combat readiness; brilliant victory; native lands; historic accomplishment; strength of our state; ancestral lands; the dignity of our nation; homeland; firm commitment; reasonable and just; religious monuments; independent and victorious Azerbaijan.* (Aliiev)

*state accomplishment; an independent, sovereign, prosperous, and secure state; statehood; a sovereign, strong, and secure state; for the sake of the Republic, for the sake of statehood; love; motherland; security and stability; martyrs; resilience; prosperity; exceptional achievement; unprecedented result in history; patriotic; peace, protection; sovereignty and territorial integrity.* (Pashinyan)

*devotion to Motherland; sacred duty; great courage and dignity; Russian history; defenders; Fatherland; sovereign, independent, and secure future; protecting our people; strength and determination; homeland; truth and justice; peace; security, fortitude, endurance, and courage; safety; solidarity and proactive empathy; common cause; traditional family values, energy of kindness, generosity and trust; immense strength and confidence; great and independent; beloved Motherland.* (Putin)

*win; defense; security; our warriors; peace; victory; strength; our children; our people; our country; fighter; invincible; unconquered; heroically; invasion; invaders; force; heroic people; forever free; faithful; invader; invasion; terrorists.* (Zelenskyy)

The function realized by the above manipulation markers is to evoke patriotic sentiments, challenging people and manipulating them into taking new risks in the ongoing war and conflict, into fighting for survival that requires sacrifice – self-sacrifice for the common good at risk of death. Paradoxically, *love* and *peace*, multiply repeated, are signal words and key concepts for manipulation in war discourse as they instill patriotic sentiments in the audience to justify the war. In this respects, the addresses of all four war leaders are not an exception.

As a lexical stylistic device, paradox, particularly the *falsidical paradox*, which cannot serve as a source of a correct conclusion for either contending party, is a typical war discourse manipulation marker. Within the frame of conflicting political interests, this device is mostly used to present (directly or indirectly) harm done by the enemy but not by itself; portray the adversary as an aggressor, destructor, etc., and itself as a victim or defender of the native land, or freedom/peace/justice-fighter. Derogatory vocabulary can also be used to describe the enemy. Interestingly enough, all parties concerned employ linguistic misrepresentation of the other. The overall manipulation lies in justifying war as a security operation.

*I had already mentioned that Armenians destroyed 65 of the 67 mosques during the occupation.* (Aliiev)

*We do not set eyes on others' land, and we expect others not to set eyes on our land either, and with this formula, we are ready to go to peace.* (Pashinyan)

*It was a year that put many things in their place and drew a clear line between **courage and heroism**, on the one hand, and **betrayal and cowardice**, on the other.* (Putin)

*The moral and historical truth is on our side.* (Putin)

The next manipulation marker in state actors' addresses is the lexical stylistic device of *euphemism*, which enables softening the violence of war. In Putin's address, the audience is manipulated into witnessing a (*special*) *military operation* rather than a harsh and blunt war.

In this case, manipulation is intensified by the repetitive usage of the euphemism:

*But our multiethnic nation showed great courage and dignity, as it had in every challenging period in Russian history, and supported the defenders of our Fatherland, our soldiers and officers, and all participants in the **special military operation**, in both word and deed.* (Putin)

*From the bottom of my heart, I wish a very happy New Year to every participant in the **special military operation** and to those who are here next to me now and who are on the frontlines. (Putin).*

*Many thanks to everyone who provides ancillary support for **military operations**. (Putin)*

According to A. Hodges<sup>16</sup>, “euphemisms are ubiquitous when discussing the death and destruction of war.” For example, the masked form of a massively destructive missile attack or bombing raid is *a surgical strike*; unintended civilian deaths caused by such a raid – *collateral damage*, the short naval canon – *Big Bertha*; various types of bombs – *Daisy Cutter*, *Peacekeeper* or *Little Boy*, etc. “Such terms provide a bland way to refer to the weapons and effects of war without acknowledging the destructive realities, helping to absolve the in-group of responsibility for deliberately harming human lives”<sup>17</sup>. Moreover, personifying weapons and dehumanizing people banter imagined lies in public.

It can be asserted that *allusion* serves as a manipulation marker in war discourse due to its indirect/implicit ability of directing the thoughts of the audience by referring to some notions or facts (historical, cultural, socio-political, literary) that contain either positive or negative inferences for one or the other party involved in war.

*We have further secured our **historic victory achieved two years ago on the battlefield** on a political level too. (Aliiev)*

*We are in the **biblical exodus, and we are walking through the desert**, moving from the Land of Nairi to the Republic of Armenia of a very specific shape and size of 29,800 square kilometers. This is a difficult and dangerous, but also inevitable, journey **for the sake of salvation, for the sake of the Republic, and for the sake of statehood**. (Pashinyan)*

*The aggression against the sovereign territory of Armenia from May 2021 to September 13 of 2022 was doubly painful because our **security allies** left us alone, preferring to remain in the status of passive observer or offering active observer status as an alternative. (Pashinyan)*

*For years, Western elites **hypocritically** assured us of their peaceful intentions, including to help resolve the serious conflict in Donbass. But in fact, they encouraged the **neo-Nazis** in every*

16 Hodges A., War Discourse. “The International Encyclopedia of Language and Interaction”, vol. 1, Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2015, p. 3.

17 *ibid*, p. 4.

*possible way, who continued to take military and overtly **terrorist action** against peaceful civilians in the people's republic of Donbass. The West **lied** to us about peace while preparing for **aggression**, and today, they no longer hesitate to openly admit it and to **cynically** use Ukraine and its people as a means to weaken and divide Russia. (Putin)*

*Ukraine did not lose its sons and daughters; they were taken away by **murderers**. Ukrainians did not lose their homes; they were destroyed by terrorists. We did not lose our lands; they were occupied by **invaders**. (Zelenskyy)*

*How our soldiers have been smashing this "**second army of the world**" since the first days. (Zelenskyy)*

By using *historic victory achieved on the battlefield*, Aliev implies the second Karabagh War of 2020. Pashinyan's *biblical exodus* refers to the Israelite deliverance from Egyptian slavery and their wanderings *through the desert*. Armenians, as the Israelites, are making the *journey for the sake of salvation, for the sake of the Republic, and for the sake of statehood*. By *security allies*, leaving the Armenians alone, the Armenian leader implies Russia. Putin's characterization of *neo-Nazis* refers to Ukraine as a state sharing Hitler's Nazi party's racist and nationalist views and policies. In the same utterance, Putin resorts to anti-West rhetoric, derogatively accusing the West (US and EU) of provoking the conflict through inherently connotative words and word combinations (*hypocritically; terrorist action; lied to us; cynically*). In the same vein, the Ukrainian leader implies to Russians as *murderers, terrorists, invaders*, and their army being smashed by Ukrainians as the *second army of the world*.

*Metaphor* occupies a significant role in manipulative war discourse: it impacts the audience by appealing to the imagination to induce false patriotism in societies, conveys "values of toughness and aggression"<sup>18</sup>, creates enemies and adversaries, victories and defeats, winners and losers, and diverts away from collaboration, discussion, and negotiation. Hence, this widely exploited device serves as a good tool for linguistic manipulation to legitimate act of war. In view of this, it should be noted that no understanding of war rhetoric and manipulative war discourse is complete without an adequate understanding of the metaphors employed in the discourse.

*But in the end, love is more and all-powerful, and we will bring our ship, the Republic of Armenia, to a peaceful harbor in the stormy ocean. (Pashinyan)*

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18 Beard A., *The Language of Politics*. London, "Routledge", 2000, p. 21.

*The outgoing year has brought great and dramatic changes to our country and to the world. It was **filled with uncertainty, anxiety, and worry.** (Putin)*

*Russia has been living under sanctions since the events in Crimea in 2014, but this year, **a full-blown sanctions war has been unleashed against us.** (Putin)*

*On February 24, **we began to create our victory. From many bricks – hundreds of other victories.** (Zelensky)*

*We woke up on February 24. Into another life. Being another people. Another Ukrainian. **The first missiles finally destroyed the labyrinth of illusions.** (Zelensky)*

*Invincible Mykolaiv. Heroically withstands all blows. **The city is on a wave that overcomes all storms.** (Zelensky)*

As can be judged from the examples offered, metaphorical language thinly masks war ideology, the violence of war, and war realities (deaths and socio-economic hardships) behind the stylistically and emotionally charged language presented in the metaphorical utterances. Armenia, according to Pashinyan, is the imaginative *ship* that despite war realities, will be brought *to a peaceful harbor in the stormy ocean*. *Uncertainty, anxiety and worry* that Russia and the world are filled with today, according to Putin, are rather *great and dramatic changes* rather than a bloody war, while *sanctions, unleashed* against Russia that at least do not kill people, are regarded as war. For Zelensky, the war is a means of building victory *from many bricks* of past victories, the war that *finally destroyed the labyrinth of illusions* of peace for Ukrainians with *the first missiles* of the Russian army.

Ultimately, all the linguistic devices discussed above provide a potent means for constructing the war reality in line with the political goals of the war leaders. In this way, war discourse as a means of linguistic manipulation in social interaction, portrays warfare and the realities of war as an inevitable and acceptable fact in the lives of nations, states, societies – fully ignoring the verity that “as social animals, humans are more endowed with empathy and compassion than a drive to kill”<sup>19</sup>.

## Conclusion

Today, in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, in the atmosphere of growing warfare, war discourse functions through various devices of linguistic manipulation: manipulative discourse markers and manipulative persuasion to deliberately mislead the audience, imposing on it the desired ideological and patriotic impact.

<sup>19</sup> Hodges A., Discourses of War and Peace. New York, “Oxford University Press”, 2013, p. 4.

Therefore, the analyses envisaged from the perspective of linguistic manipulation show that pro-war rhetoric and propaganda as a form of social interaction reflect issues of territorial, ethnocentric, and optimistic appeals that depend on functionally effective discursive elements, powerfully formulated and structured linguistic units, lexical-semantic and syntactic stylistic devices. The intentional use of manipulative language and manipulation markers aims at masking the reality of violence; presenting the adversary as an aggressor and justifying war as a security operation. Moreover, as an effective instrument of war rhetoric, linguistic manipulation (through covert, masked linguistic elements) legitimizes the stances and actions taken by war leaders. Therefore, the challenge for linguists is to expose linguistic manipulation devices concealing interested sociopolitical positions within the context of war discourse to show that a discourse functioning in the service of war cannot build perceptions of peace.

**Սեդա Ք. Գասպարյան** – գիտական հետաքրքրությունների շրջանակում են լեզվաոճաբանության, լեզվապոետիկայի, ճանաչողական լեզվաբանության խնդիրները, գեղարվեստական տեքստի մեկնաբանման մեթոդաբանության, դիսկուրսի և հատկապես հակահայկական քարոզչական դիսկուրսի քննության հարցերը: Ներկայումս զբաղվում է լեզվական մտաշահարկման խնդիրներով: Հեղինակ է շուրջ 170 աշխատանքների (մենագրություններ, դասագրքեր և ուսումնական ձեռնարկներ, գիտական հոդվածներ, միջազգային գիտաժողովների ամփոփագրեր):

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**Գայանե Հ. Մուրադյան** – գիտական հետաքրքրությունների շրջանակում են լեզվի, ոճի, գործառական ոճագիտության հարցերը: Զբաղվում է հակահայկական քարոզչական դիսկուրսի յուրահատկությունների քննությամբ: Հեղինակ է 1 դասագրքի, 1 մեթոդական ձեռնարկի, 1 բառարանի, 6 մենագրության, 55 գիտական հոդվածի:

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**21-ՐԴ ԴԱՐԻ ՊԱՏԵՐԱԶՄԱԿԱՆ ԴԻՍԿՈՒՐՍԸ**

Լեզվական մտաշահարկումը գործողության մեջ

Սեդա Ք. Գասպարյան  
*Բանասիր. գիյր. դոկտոր*

Գայանե Հ. Մուրադյան  
*Բանասիր. գիյր. դոկտոր*

**Բանալի բառեր** – պատերազմական հռետորաբանության արդյունավետ գործիք, դիսկուրսիվ մարտավարություն, մտաշահարկային հնարներ, մտաշահարկման նշույթներ, օրինականացնել բռնությունը:

Այսօր շատ են այն պնդումները, որ պոստմոդեռն հասարակությունը, միտքը և գաղափարախոսությունը որևէ կերպ չեն աջակցում հումանիզմին, և այս պնդումներն իրենց արտացոլումն են գտնում ուժի, շահի և լեզվի սերտորեն փոխկապակցված հասկացություններում: Սույն հոդվածը միտված է ուսումնասիրելու և ուշադրություն հրավիրելու պատերազմական դիսկուրսում պետական դերակատարների կողմից լայնորեն կիրառվող լեզվական մտաշահարկման դեպքերի վրա, որոնք նպատակ ունեն քողարկելու բռնության իրողությունը և պատերազմի քաղաքականությունը որակելու որպես անվտանգային և պաշտպանական գործողություն:

Քննադատական դիսկուրսի և լեզվառճական վերլուծությունների ընդհանուր սկզբունքների կիրառմամբ փորձ է արվում ուսումնասիրելու որոշակի մտաշահարկային ռազմավարություններ և բացահայտելու չորս առաջնորդների մտաշահարկային մարտավարությունների կիրառման յուրահատկությունները նրանց՝ 2023 թվականի ամանորյա ուղերձների դիսկուրսում: Այդ ուղերձների ուսումնասիրությունն այս առումով չափազանց կարևոր է, քանի որ այն իր նպաստը կրերի պատերազմամետ հռետորաբանությանը հակազդելու գործընթացին:

**ВОЕННЫЙ ДИСКУРС XXI ВЕКА**  
Лингвистическая манипуляция в действии

**Седа К. Гаспарян**

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**Ключевые слова** – военный дискурс, провоенная риторика, эффективный инструмент военной риторики, дискурсивная тактика, манипулятивные приемы, манипулятивные маркеры, узаконить насилие.

Сегодня нередко утверждается, что постмодернистское общество, мысль и идеология не поддерживают гуманизм, и это утверждение отражено в тесно связанных понятиях власти, интереса и языка – трех концептах, относящихся к военному дискурсу в целом. Таким образом, в этой статье исследуется и освещается дискурс войны и манипулирование языком со стороны государственных субъектов, чтобы замаскировать реальность насилия и оправдать политику войны как акт безопасности и защиты.

Посредством применения общих принципов критического дискурс анализа и лингвостилистического анализа в данной статье предпринимается попытка изучить некоторые манипулятивные стратегии и выявить специфику использования манипулятивных тактик политическими лидерами в дискурсе своих новогодних посланий 2023 года. Изучение этих посланий крайне важно в плане противодействия провоенной риторике.

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