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DEGREES OF BELONGING TO EUROPE IN PARLIAMENTARY DISCOURSE: A COMPARATIVE CORPUS-ASSISTED STUDY

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The contribution examines the co-occurrence of lexemes referring to Europe with Ukrainian and English personal and possessive pronouns, as well as the country names for Ukraine and the UK. The aim is to identify and compare discursive patterns of belonging to Europe in parliamentary discourse, considering speakers' gender and party affiliation in the context of the latest crises and geopolitical shifts. Data are drawn from the uniformly encoded and annotated ParlaMint corpora of parliamentary proceedings (v. 4.0) in the unicameral Verkhovna Rada and the bicameral British Parliament, covering sittings from 2012-2023 and 2015-2022 respectively. The methodology combines corpus linguistics, MD CADS, and cognitive linguistics in terms of image schemas and conceptual metaphor. The findings show a sharp decline in references to the EU in ParlaMint-GB after Brexit and a consistent preference for *Європа* 'Europe' over the EU in ParlaMint-UA. In ParlaMint-UA, Europe is commonly conceived as an enclosed space with Ukraine either in it or moving toward it. In ParlaMint-GB, the UK is more often located in Europe than outside of it, although references to Europe as a negative or positive destination are rare after Brexit.

Keywords: comparable parliamentary corpora, Ukraine, the UK, concept of Europe, MD CADS

1 INTRODUCTION

The question of what it means to belong to Europe reemerges in public discourse in times of crises. Answers vary significantly depending on the following key factors: what is implied by Europe, how belonging is understood, what the speakers' vantage point (national or international, political, ideological, etc.) and communicative aims are. The word *Europe* is highly polysemous and the complexity of the concept of EUROPE has been evolving over time (Heinemann et al., 2022, pp. 7-11). In contemporary public discourse produced by EU political actors, the ambiguity of *Europe* has been aggravated by: 1) a deliberate convergence between Europe as a broadly understood geographical, historical or cultural space and the EU as a political organization with a set of institutions (Krzyzanowski, 2010, pp. 91-94); 2) conceptualizations of EUROPE as either a single imaginary space with rather fuzzy boundaries or as a sum of individual countries located on the continent irrespective

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of their membership in the EU; 3) multiple regional divisions habitually loaded with complex connotations, which may include the east-west divide, with eastern Europe marked more commonly than western Europe, central Europe, or continental Europe (e.g., see Williams et al., 2012, pp. 68-80).

The discursive construction of belonging to any of these 'Europes' inevitably involves considerations of inclusion and exclusion, which are traditionally expressed as the binary distinction between Us and Them and employed into identity building (Wodak et al., 2009, p. 35). However, recently it has been pointed out that this well-established dichotomy stemming from social identity theory fails to capture fuzzy areas of belonging to Europe located between Us and Them (Le, 2021, p. 206), which embrace such countries as the UK and Ukraine. Importantly, considerations of belonging to Europe and the extent of this belonging are dynamic and subject to change. They are influenced by the attitudes of individual or collective actors, which may evolve over time. These attitudes are affected by shifts in the geopolitical landscape and can be challenged by various crises.

National parliamentary settings are particularly well suited for exploring the recurrent discursive construction of belonging to Europe over time due to the representative nature of parliaments, their ideological diversity, rootedness in national contexts and openness to the public. Political discourse scholars have been increasingly interested in corpora of parliamentary proceedings as a data source (see Fišer and Lenardič, 2018, for an overview). However, until now there has been a dearth of cross-linguistic and cross-cultural research drawing on parliamentary corpora (Truan & Romary, 2021). Moreover, the Ukrainian parliamentary data have been put in the spotlight of the international research community only recently due to the release of the first full-text corpus of parliamentary proceedings from the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine (Kryvenko & Kopp, 2023), along with the comparable corpus of proceedings in the UK Parliament as well as multiple other parliaments under the ParlaMint project (Erjavec et al., 2024). The availability of comparable and interoperable linguistic corpora is a prerequisite for addressing the problem of elaborating qualitative and "quantitative factors that can be used to measure and demonstrate different levels of belonging" (Williams et al., 2012, p. 56) to EUROPE from cross-linguistic and cross-cultural perspectives.

The major research questions are:

1) Have references to Europe changed over time in Ukrainian and British parliamentary discourse amidst recent crises and geopolitical shifts (Russia's war

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against Ukraine, Covid-19 pandemic, Brexit, and the granting of candidate status for EU membership to Ukraine)?

2) How do different political actors in Ukrainian and British parliamentary settings discursively construct their countries' relatedness to Europe?

2 DATA AND METHODS

Methodologically, the research reported here combines corpus linguistics, (critical) discourse studies within the framework of MD CADS (Marchi, 2018; Partington et al., 2013; Räikkönen, 2023), and insights from cognitive linguistics including spatial semantics in terms of image schemas (Croft & Cruse, 2004) as well as conceptual metaphor theory in its application to an analysis of the political debate on Europe and European identity (Musolff, 2001; Schäffner, 1996; Zhabotynska, 2018). This study utilizes distant and close readings of concordance lines or larger fragments of the transcripts, when necessary. The NoSketch Engine concordancer was used to interrogate ParlaMint-GB and ParlaMint-UA v. 4.0.

To address the research questions posed above the following steps were taken. First, the relative frequencies of the proper names *Europe* and *Європа* 'Europe' in English and Ukrainian were compared to the relative frequencies of the proper names *the European Union, the EU, Європейський Союз* 'European Union', *ЄС* 'EU', and the clipped compound *Євросоюз* '(lit.) *Eurounion' in the built-in sub-corpora splitting the data into the reference period (until 30 January 2020), the period marking the formal declaration of the public health emergency for Covid-19 as well as the withdrawal of the UK from the EU (from 31 January 2020), and the period after the beginning of Russia's full-scale war of aggression against Ukraine (from 24 February 2022 onwards) in ParlaMint-GB and ParlaMint-UA. Second, to retrieve contexts potentially relevant for further analysis, the corpora were queried for concordance lines containing the co-occurrence of the first-person plural personal and possessive pronouns (the lemmas *we* and *our* in English and the lemmas *ми* 'we' and *наш* 'our' in Ukrainian) or the country names *(Great) Britain, the UK, the United Kingdom* and *Україна* 'Ukraine' with the proper names *Europe* and *Європа* 'Europe' in a span of nine words to the left and right. The retrieved results were filtered to remove named entities containing the word *Europe* or *Європа* 'Europe' respectively (e.g. *Council of Europe, Horizon Europe*) and saved as separate sub-corpora preserving the temporal distinctions described above. Third, the metadata including the speakers' gender and party affiliation were compared across the sub-corpora and the corpora. Fourth, the filtered results were manually analyzed with respect to the discursively constructed

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spatial relation of the nations under study to Europe according to the following model: position in Europe, destination to Europe, destination (away) from Europe, and position out of Europe. This working model loosely stems from (Quirk et al. 1985, p. 674).

3 RESULTS AND BRIEF DISCUSSION

Figure 1 illustrates three notable findings: a sharp decline in the aggregated references to the European Union in ParlaMint-GB between 2015 and 2023, a consistent preference for *Європа* 'Europe' over the aggregated proper names of the European Union in ParlaMint-UA throughout the observed period, and an increase in references to *Europe* during Russia's large-scale aggression compared to the Covid-19 pandemic in both corpora.

Figure 1: Comparison between relative frequencies (pmt) of the proper names for Europe and the European Union in English and Ukrainian across the sub-corpora of ParlaMint-GB and ParlaMint-UA.[1]
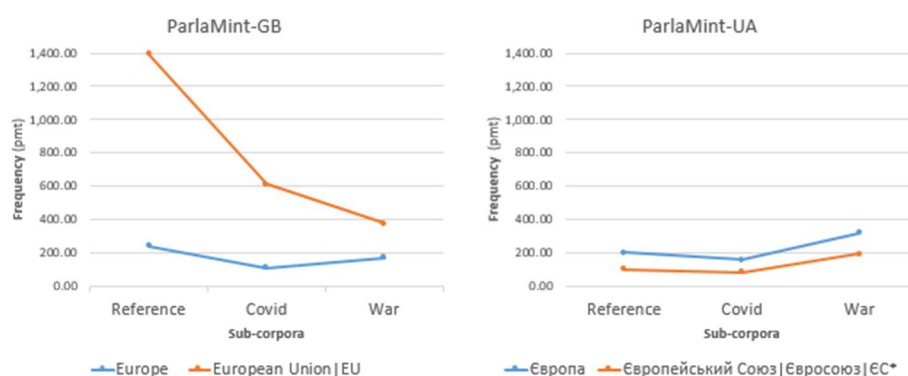
As seen in Figure 2, the proportion between relative frequencies of the country names *(Great) Britain | the UK | the United Kingdom* on the one hand and *we | our* on the other hand stayed relatively unchanged across the sub-corpora of ParlaMint-GB, while the proportion between relative frequencies of *Україна* 'Ukraine' and *ми* 'we' | *наш* 'our' slightly shifted in the Covid sub-corpus of ParlaMint-UA. Also, although personal and possessive pronouns co-occur with

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[1] Instances of the homonymous abbreviation "ЄС", which stands for "Європейська солідарність" 'European Solidarity' – the name of a parliamentary party and its corresponding faction during the 9th term of the Rada – were excluded from the data.

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Europe and *Європа* 'Europe' much more readily in both corpora, the country names are less common in this context in ParlaMint-GB.

Figure 2: Comparison between the proportions of relative frequencies (pmt) in the sub-corpora of personal and possessive pronouns in aggregate vs. the proper names for the UK and Ukraine.
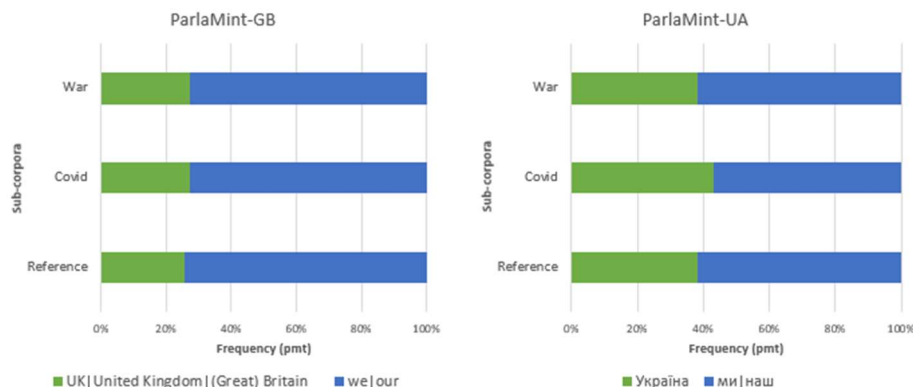

Figure 3 compares the relative text type frequency of the pronoun / country name co-occurrences with *Europe* and *Європа* 'Europe' in the sub-corpora by gender. 100% means that the result in the text type is as frequent as in the whole corpus and deviations from this value point to a higher or lower frequency in the text type compared to the entire corpus. A higher frequency of females talking about Europe in the analyzed contexts in the Covid sub-corpus of ParlaMint-UA can be explained by an increase in the number of female MPs in the Rada from 9.6% during the 7th term to 20.9% during the 9th term, which started in August 2019. However, neither Ukraine nor the UK held general elections after the beginning of Russia's large-scale invasion, so the gender balance among the MPs has not changed since then. Further analysis revealed that about one-third of the female speakers who mentioned Ukraine in relation to Europe in the war sub-corpus were foreign guest politicians who spoke in the Rada, *inter alia*, about Ukraine's place in Europe and steps towards its further European integration. The availability of these data provide an opportunity to take a closer look at parliamentary practices of positioning Self and positioning the Other, known as reflexive and interactive positioning (Ilie, 2010). However, this research avenue exceeds the scope of this contribution.

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Figure 3: Relative text type frequency of the pronoun / country name co-occurrences with *Europe* and *Європа* 'Europe' by gender.
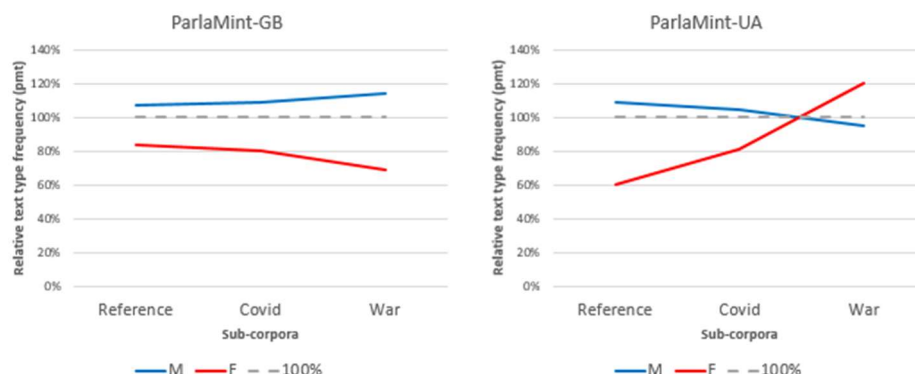
The application of the working model based on the semantics of spatial prepositions, which are frequently used with the word *Europe* in various languages (e.g., see Williams et al., 2012, pp.61-62 on 'prepositional' Europe) and motivated primarily by the perceptual schemas of containment (CONTAINER) and scale (PATH) (cf. Langacker's (2008, p. 33) conceptual archetypes), enabled the identification of all four envisioned types in both corpora. Commonly for ParlaMint-UA, Europe was conceived as an enclosed space with Ukraine / us in it or on our way to it (cf. goal-oriented collocates of the NP European integration in the Ukrainian parliamentary discourse in Kryvenko, 2018). In ParlaMint-GB, the UK / we were localized in Europe more frequently than out of it, although Europe as a negative or positive destination was used relatively rarely after Brexit. Also, the distinction between the image schema of containment (CONTAINER) and the image schema of unity/multiplicity (PART-WHOLE) was made, where applicable, to differentiate between Europe conceived as a single enclosed space and Europe conceived as a sum of countries or regions, as in (1) and (2).

(1) We work among the longest hours **in Europe**, and we very often retire later than people **in other European countries**.

(2) Мир завжди пануватиме **в** нашому **регіоні**, **в** нашій **Європі** …

'Peace will always prevail **in** our **region**, **in** our **Europe** …'

Further close reading of the concordance lines suggested that the collective actors in the British parliament commonly conceive of the UK as belonging or not belonging to Europe, while the collective actors in the Ukrainian parliament commonly construct Ukraine as already belonging to Europe or becoming Europe. The positioning of Ukraine as not belonging to Europe is marginal in the data; however, not being European enough due to particular policies or practices is an established pattern of criticism among the political opponents. In the British

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parliament, attitudes to Europe are not clearly divided along political lines between the two major parties, the Conservatives and Labour (Räikkönen, 2023, p. 153); however, the Europhile sentiment of the Scottish National Party is evident. The recurrently constructed UK identities in relation to Europe include a leader, an outlier, a partner, a neighbour, a friend, or a competitor (cf. the UK's roles in the EU suggested by Riihimäki, 2019, p. 418). Expressions of Ukraine's identities related to Europe are often motivated by metaphor: a shield, a breadbasket, a traveller, a student, or a family member (cf. Yavorska & Bohomolov, 2010, pp. 51-80).

4 ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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STOPNJE PRIPADNOSTI EVROPI V PARLAMENTARNEM DISKURZU: PRIMERJALNA KORPUSNA ŠTUDIJA

Prispevek preučuje sočasno pojavljanje leksemov, ki se nanašajo na Evropo, z ukrajinskimi in angleškimi osebnimi ter svojilnimi zaimki, kakor tudi z imeni držav za Ukrajino in Združeno kraljestvo. Cilj je identificirati in primerjati diskurzivne vzorce pripadnosti Evropi v parlamentarnem diskurzu, pri čemer se upoštevajo spol in strankarska pripadnost govorcev v kontekstu zadnjih kriz in geopolitičnih premikov. Podatki so pridobljeni iz enotno kodiranih in označenih korpusov parlamentarnih razprav ParlaMint (v. 4.0) v enodomni Verhovni radi in dvodomnem britanskem parlamentu, ki pokrivajo seje od 2012-2023 oziroma 2015-2022. Metodologija združuje korpusno jezikoslovje, MD CADS in kognitivno jezikoslovje. Ugotovitve kažejo na močan upad omemb EU v ParlaMint-GB po Brexitu in dosledno prednost izraza *Європа* 'Evropa' pred omembami EU v ParlaMint-UA. V ParlaMint-UA je Evropa pogosto dojeta kot posoda, v kateri je Ukrajina ali se vanjo pomika. V ParlaMint-GB je Združeno kraljestvo pogosteje locirano znotraj Evrope kot zunaj nje, čeprav so omembe Evrope kot negativne ali pozitivne destinacije po Brexitu redke.

Keywords: primerljivi parlamentarni korpusi, Ukrajina, Združeno kraljestvo, koncept Evrope, MD CADS