The 2015 Refugee Movements in Slovak Press Discourse.
A Topos Analysis

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Abstract

In the article, the discourse on the 2015 refugee movements in Europe is thematized using examples from Slovak press communication. In the context of the argumentative level the question is posed as to what concepts it is that guide and steer thinking about the refugees of a linguistic collective. In this paper, a theoretical framework of argumentation and topos analysis is elaborated, and the complex topical pattern of pro and contra discourse is created.

Keywords: refugee discourse, topoi, argumentation, corpus, discourse analysis.

Introduction

Until the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic in 2020 and, in particular, the armed conflict in Ukraine, the so-called refugee crisis was considered to be a problem that triggered a controversial public debate in most EU countries. For the wider audience this discourse became visible on the linguistic surface in the form of political buzzwords among other things, which – regardless of the respective language – indicated an increasing discourse dynamic. Thus, it is no surprise that this so-called refugee or migration discourse quickly developed into an interesting object of research in linguistics, especially in the context of discourse linguistics and political linguistics (cf. Becker 2015, Weidacher 2019, Jakosz 2020). In this context contrastive discourse analysis should be emphasized (cf. Smailagić, Mell 2017). By comparing discourses it is possible to reveal phenomena that can provide information about complex and deeply anchored structures of the respective language and cultural community, which fundamentally determine the thinking of a collective about various phenomena of extralingual reality.

   This question is particularly relevant when language is used in the field of politics as an instrument for steering of behavior and influence activity of

the masses (Grünert 1974: 323). As such, it means is primarily attributed an informative-persuasive function in this field (cf. Grünert 1984: 33ff.). Indeed, political communication is characterised as an area in which the struggle for positions in the sense of a confrontation of verbally realised personal pretensions is argumentatively consolidated or refuted. In this context, argumentations are to be regarded as rational means by which "something collectively questionable is transformed into something collectively valid" (Klein 1985: 222)[1]. The identification of these unspoken components of communication is the task of the so-called argumentation analysis. Their discourse-analytical direction will be discussed further. In contrast to the classical argumentation analysis, which is primarily interested in individual texts, aiming the uncovering of the so-called topoi, which are to be understood as a kind of global argumentation pattern (cf. Niehr 2017: 166).

Argumentation and topoi in political communication

The topos concept is based on Aristotle's concept of enthymemic argumentation. Enthymem is understood as a shortened and generalized argumentation procedure, which is adapted to the practical communication needs of everyday speech (Prechtl, Burkard 2015: 138). In enthymemic argumentation a controversial statement is made plausible with the help of an argument; from the argument the conclusion is inferred with the help of certain conclusion procedures. Characteristic of enthymemes are their reduction and their strong connection to common language.

In the context of discourse linguistics topoi are understood as recurring patterns of argumentation. These establish relations that are crucial for the construction of realities (Landwehr 2009: 14), having their source in "habitual ways of thinking and prevailing collective beliefs" (Römer 2018: 122). Argumentation and topos analysis are therefore considered to be particularly relevant, especially because "they can connect aspects that need by no means to be regarded as necessarily connected" (Landwehr 2009: 119). Topoi are characterized by a strong context-boundness, which serves to secure their plausibility potential.

Against this background, political communication is understood as a communication in which political actors, by using certain language patterns in their statements (i.e., the topoi), aim the enforcement of those basic

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[1] Citations from non-english sources are translated by the author

linguistic functions that are expressed in the language of politics (cf. Grünert 1984: 33ff.).

The complex topical pattern

The concept of complex topical pattern was introduced by Klein (cf. Klein 2015: 77-99). The goal of his concept is to include higher-order schemata in topos analysis to consider topoi as schemata for individual steps of argumentation. Klein assumes that in the respective discourse the individual topoi always form a network with other topoi that achieve a similar argumentative goal. The positioning as well as the political acting of the participants thus can be concluded from the bundle of topical arguments.

Klein distinguishes between a core set and an extension set in his concept. In relation to discourse-linguistically oriented research it is of particular importance. It allows the argumentative deep structure of discourses and those patterns of thought to be revealed that form the basis of the examined discourse in the respective linguistic and cultural community.

Methodological approach

The so-called DIMEAN model (cf. Warnke, Spitzmüller 2008: 3–54) was used to create the methodological apparatus for the empirical analyses. It is a comprehensive inventory of research dimensions that has been established in Germanistic discourse linguistics for years. Three levels are distinguished here: the intratextual, the actor, and the transtextual level. The transtextual level stands out as the one where the connections between the individual discourse dimensions – the vocabulary and the individual statements of the actors – constitute the actual discourse and make it possible to trace the basic discourse semantic figures as well as the topoi.

In the following empirical part partial results are presented from a research project focused on the exploration of the so-called refugee discourse using the example of German, Slovakian and Hungarian press communication. For the purposes of the empirical analysis of Slovak press discourse the newspaper Sme was chosen. It is a product of the so-called serious press, which has been published nationally in Slovakia for decades. Candidates for inclusion in the corpus were filtered out by using the search words *utečenec* and *migrant* (eng.: *refugee* and *migrant*) in the electronic archive of the selected newspaper. Only the texts with a minimum length of

300 characters were taken into account; the investigation period is limited to the period between 1st Jan. 2015 and 31st Dec. 2015. Corpus analyses were performed using the Discourse Network Analyzer tool[2]. This allows a qualitative discourse analysis by coding the statements of the actors while specifying different characteristics (affiliation, category and agreement or disagreement). Coding was performed repeatedly in several phases and then checked by a control group to ensure the plausibility of the results.

Actors' statements can be grouped around specific themes, which can be considered as manifestations of concepts (example: The reception of refugees does not mean a threat to the culture/religion/etc.). The tool allows the positioning of the respective actor in relation to so-called concepts by indicating agreement or disagreement. Based on the actors' statements, concepts were developed which were subsequently combined into so-called topical categories on the basis of the mental structures operating in the background. The concrete and specific categories were formulated as abstractly as possible (cf. Wengeler 2003: 273) so that they can be used in the analysis of argument fields – for example using the same topoi for pro and contra arguments.

Topoi in the Slovak refugee discourse

Based on the analysis of the corpus 12 topoi were distinguished. Based on this, it was possible to establish that the Slovak discourse in the examined period was dominated by the topoi of solidarity, security and misuse. In a system of pro and con topoi, it looks like this:
- Pros: solidarity, collaboration, benefit;
- Cons: security, misuse, crime, danger, burden.

The topoi law, responsibility, and reality are evaluated here as neutral since they can be used in both pro and con arguments. The solidarity topos and the danger topos are discussed in more detail below.

The solidarity topos

The solidarity topos shows overlaps especially with the humanity topos. This is defined by Wengeler (2003: 310) as follows:

Because a decision/action or its consequences are in accordance with/oppose human rights or are required/are to be rejected for humanitarian

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[2] https://github.com/leifeld/dna/releases

considerations, the decision/action is to be supported/rejected or to be carried out/not to be carried out.

Against this background, the solidarity topos can be formulated as follows: Because a member of a collective cannot master a problem of transnational character on his own, the solution requires the joint action of the whole collective.

In Slovak discourse the solidarity and humanity topoi are primarily associated with former State President Andrej Kiska. He was known for his philanthropic spirit even before his political career as an entrepreneur. In this spirit, he also held the office of President of the Slovak Republic, which was clearly expressed in the context of the so-called refugee crisis.

In his statements, *solidarity*, *aid*, *humanity* and *support* are recurring words:

(1) *Prezident Andrej Kiska si myslí, že utečencom, ktorým ide doma o život a potrebujú pomoc, by Slovensko malo prejaviť solidaritu.* [President Andrej Kiska believes that Slovakia should show solidarity with refugees who are in a life-threatening situation in their homeland and need help] (SME0094)

(2) *Máme morálnu povinnosť im pomôcť.* [We have a moral obligation to help them] (SME0025)

However, while solidarity was used in the pro-discourse to argue for unconditional refugee aid, a contra-discourse was established in the Slovak political scene, where solidarity in combination with the topoi burden and responsibility was communicated as a rejectable and negative attitude. This can be seen in the statements of the former Prime Minister Róbert Fico, see example 3:

(3) *"Musíme byť maximálne opatrní, aby sme neohrozili Slovensko, ale musíme prejaviť mieru solidarity, avšak na dobrovoľnej báze. Aby sme si sami mohli rozhodnúť, ako pomôžeme. Nepovažujem za správne, aby nám niekto diktoval, že si musíme migrantov zobrať", uzavrel Fico.* ["We must be as careful as possible not to endanger Slovakia, we must show a certain degree of solidarity, but on a voluntary basis. So we can decide for ourselves how we want to help. I don't think it's right for someone to tell us that we have to take in the migrants," Fico concluded] (SME0013)

Kiska and Fico were therefore not regarded as simple participants in the discourse, but rather as central actors - so-called voices. In his concept of voice, Blommaert uses it to refer to the ability of speakers to make their different interactional roles to be heard in a discourse:

In general, as the ways in which people manage to make themselves understood or fail to do so. [..] It is, in other words, the capacity to accomplish desired functions through language. More accurately, it is the

capacity to create favourable conditions for a desired uptake (Blommaert 2005: 68).

A conflict arose between the two actors that fundamentally shaped the entire Slovak refugee discourse. This consisted primarily in the different interpretation of solidarity in the context of the European Union. While both rejected the planned quota system as an unsuitable solution to the so-called refugee crisis, Kiska's communication placed emphasis on the country's obligations stemming from EU membership. Accordingly, the essence of the pro-discourse is summarized on the basis of its statements as follows (Ex. 4 and 5):

(4) *Pomoc utečencom je podľa prezidenta prejavom základnej ľudskosti a solidarity. Diskusia na Slovensku sa však podľa neho obmedzila na otázku, prečo máme pomáhať iným ľuďom, keď nemáme vyriešené vlastné problémy. Zároveň zdôraznil, že diskusia o utečencoch sa nesmie zúžiť na to, či prijať povinné kvóty alebo nie.* [According to the President, refugee aid is an expression of basic humanity and solidarity. However, the debate in Slovakia is limited to the question of why we should help other people when we have not yet solved our own problems. At the same time he underlined that the refugee debate should not be narrowed to the question of whether or not to accept binding quotas] (SME0120).

(5) *Podľa prezidenta Kisku od starých krajín Európskej únie očakávame, že nám pomôžu, ale keď prvýkrát nastane situácia, že tieto krajiny potrebujú pomoc, zdráhame sa: "Nezačnú si... myslieť, že pre nás slúžia iba ako taký bankomat? Obávam sa, aby sa kvôli tomu Európa nezačala zasa deliť na tú západnú a východnú."* ["According to President Kiska we will expect the old EU countries to help us, but if now when the opposite situation first arises where these countries need our help, we are reluctant. Won't they start... to think that they are just ATMs for us? I fear that this could split Europe again into West and East."] (SME0300)

Example 4 refers to a lack of discussion by noting that any debate about possible refugee aid came down to a yes or no to the refugee quota. In example 5, the Europe topos appears at the same time; in that the president calls for responsible behavior in Slovak politics in order to show Europe that EU membership does not mean accepting subsidies.

The danger topos

Wengeler (2003: 306) defines the danger topos as follows: Because a political action/decision has certain dangerous consequences, it should not be carried out/is to be rejected.

This topos rarely occurs in isolation in the respective discourse; rather it appears in combination with other topoi, such as burden or solidarity.

In the context of the Slovak refugee discourse the danger topos stands out as a constituting element of the contra-discourse. Together with security, fear and burden, a web of topoi was formed that did not simply shape the public debate on refugees in 2015, but especially the election campaign of the governing parties for the parliamentary elections in March 2016. On a lexical level these topoi are expressed in compressed form in words such as danger, terrorism, and crime.

(6) *"Na území Slovenska sa môžu dostať ľudia napojení na medzinárodnú kriminalitu, ale aj terorizmus."* ["Persons connected with international crime, but also with terrorism, could enter Slovakia."] (SME0008)

(7) *Preto podľa neho hrozí, že medzi utečencami príde do Európy vlna ľudí, ktorí neprichádzajú za prácou alebo lepším životom, ale preto, lebo budú šíriť terorizmus.* [Therefore, in his opinion, there is a danger that among the refugees there are people who come to Europe not for work or a better life, but to spread terrorism] (SME0011)

Repeated invocation of the danger topos was characteristic of government communications during the observed period. Although millions of refugees were repeatedly mentioned, even President Kiska openly commented that he had not been provided with any official documents, analyses or reports that would plausibly confirm these claims:

(8) *"Pokiaľ som informovaný, neexistuje žiadny takýto oficiálny štátny dokument, analýzy alebo správy, ktoré by toto potvrdzovali," povedal Kiska.* ["As far as I know, there is no official state document, analysis or report that would prove this," Kiska said] (SME0119)

Against this background it was assumed that in the Slovak debate on refugees the danger topos appears primarily in the contra-discourse, with the aim of stirring up public fear of an (unknown) enemy. Thus, elements of a populist strategy can be readily identified in this targeted government communication. This includes, on the one hand, the construction of scapegoats (the West; the EU), and on the other hand, a drastic reduction of complexity (distinguishing between good guys and bad guys; equating migrants with criminals and terrorists). This dichotomous perception of reality (Us and Them) and the arbitrariness in the use of terms such as *refugee*, *migrant* or *foreigner* serve primarily to deter, whereby the anonymization of the masses has rather replaced the actual and real problem with an imaginary danger.

Basic topoi

Tab. 1 shows the complex topical pattern of Slovak pro-discourse. This is primarily marked by the former state president Andrej Kiska, who openly spoke out in favour of unconditional support for the refugees in his communication. Nevertheless, this discourse string cannot be clearly described as a pro-discourse. Indeed, on the key issue of the Slovak refugee debate – on the planned mandatory refugee quotas - both the former state president, Andrej Kiska, and the former PM, Róbert Fico, were in agreement, considering this form of solidarity for Slovakia an unacceptable solution. From the president's argumentation however, the preference for a kind of Europe topos emerged. Against this background the following conclusion could be derived here from the complex topical pattern: Slovakia must fulfill its duties in the EU and help refugees, which it is capable of doing.

Table 1: The complex topical pattern of the Slovak pro-discourse[3]

Topos	Description
Data topos	Hundreds of thousands of refugees crowd into Europe
Cause topos*	War in Syria, poverty and persecution, Welcome Culture in Germany
Consequence topos*	Possible integration into society, enrichment of culture
Valuation topos	Humanitarian disaster
Principle topos	Humanity, common European values, international obligations of Slovakia
Final topos	At the state level: Integration; at EU level: Rejection of a mandatory refugee quota
Ability topos*	Slovakia is capable of helping refugees

Tab. 2 lists the complex topical pattern of the Slovak contra discourse. While the need for humanity and solidarity is also recognized here, priority is given to principles such as security, integrity, self-reliance, culture and religion. Accordingly, the emphasis in the consequence topos is on the (perceived) fears of the population, supported by valuation topos (threat to the security of the country). The above argumentation results in the final topos that it is unacceptable for Slovakia to introduce a quota system as a form of

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[3] An asterisk (*) marks the topoi of the extension set.

mandatory solidarity within the European Union. From this, the conclusion is drawn that Slovakia must file a lawsuit against the refugee quotas. The Prime Minister even gave personal guarantees (Ex. 9):

(9) *V exponovanom čase, keď si bol istý, že ho počuje najviac ľudí, opakovane vyhlasoval: "Pokiaľ budem predsedom vlády, tak žiadny migrant na základe povinnej kvóty na Slovensko nepríde."* [At an exposed moment, when he was sure that most people would hear him, he repeatedly stated: "As long as I am prime minister, no migrants will come to Slovakia under a mandatory quota."] (SME0226)

Table 2: The complex topical pattern of the Slovak contra-discourse

Topos	Description
Data topos	Hundreds of thousands of refugees crowd into Europe
Cause topos*	War in Syria, poverty and persecution, Welcome Culture in Germany
Consequence topos*	An uncontrolled flow of many millions of migrants is to be expected
Valuation topos	Threat to Christian culture and religion or to the integrity and security of the country
Principle topos	Protection of the security and integrity, language, culture and religion of Slovakia; preservation of the country's independence
Final topos	Rejection of a mandatory refugee quota
Ability topos*	We are able to show our strength to the EU

Conclusion

In Slovak discourse the conflict between the pro and contra discourse is evident at the highest level. President Kiska and the representatives of the civil society sector and the churches are primarily in favour of actual refugee aid. In the government's communication, on the other hand, the responsibility of Western countries for the so-called refugee crisis is emphasized and the solidarity topos appears only on the level of symbolic gestures. It should be noted that even the opposition parties spoke out in principle against the government but not explicitly in favour of refugee aid. This behavior can be justified by the fact that Slovakia was neither a destination country nor a transit country in the context of refugee movements in 2015. The opposition was therefore quasi forced into a

waiting position in order to avoid a possible loss of votes through possible concrete refugee aid in the already polarised society.

From the field of argumentation, it can be seen that the so-called refugee crisis of 2015 and migration in general – similar to other European countries – initiated a controversial debate in Slovakia as well. The reason for this lies on the one hand, in the different world experiences, thought patterns and world views of Slovak society, and on the other hand in the fact that the country was confronted with such a problem for the first time in the course of its existence. As the examples given here also demonstrate, the so-called refugee problem quickly developed into a phenomenon that generated easily communicable and useful political capital over an extended period. Against this background the discourse examined here continues to stand out as a research object that, because of its multidimensionality (cf. Czachur, Opilowski and Smykala 2022), can always yield new and highly interesting results about the political communication of the respective country. This potential is particularly relevant from a contrastive point of view and opens the way for further research in this direction.

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