

**A Rhetorical Analysis of Volodymyr Zelenskyy's Wartime Speeches to Western Parliaments**

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The speech of Volodymyr Zelenskyy to Western parliaments during the wartime is a good case study in the modern political speech when the language is used as a persuasion, diplomacy, and strategy of resistance at the same time. Zelenskyy creates moral urgency, appeals to a common historical memory, and places Ukraine in a wider democratic society, which can be studied through a rhetorical analysis of these addresses. Based on the method of political discourse analysis and the methods of corpus assistance, this essay position maintains that the rhetoric of Zelensky has strategically incorporated elements of emotional appeal, intertextual allusion, and ideological framing to shape the national struggle of Ukraine into a transnational democratic agenda.

Political discourse analysis (PDA) offers a methodological framework of the analysis of power, ideology, and persuasion working in language. According to Dunmire (2012), political discourse is not descriptive, but constitutive: it influences the general cognition by putting events, identities, and moral hierarchies into perspective. The speeches by Zelenskyy serve as an example of this dynamic because they delegitimized the war as a defense of global democratic principles and not as a local territorial war. By using repetitively similar lexical options like the word freedom, democracy, and security, he puts Ukraine in the context of a frontline state that safeguards the future of Europe. This rhetorical practice is defined as a critical discourse strategy in the rhetoric of wartime by Zelenskyy: the creation of binary opposition between democratic strengths and authoritarian aggression. Using foregrounding to establish values in common, Zelenskyy increases the political proximity between Ukraine and Western viewers, enticing them to attend to the speech rather than merely expressing sympathy.

One of the key characteristics of these speeches is intertextuality and historical references used by Zelenskyy depending on the audience of the parliament. According to Nedainova (2025), allusion is a discursive practice enhancing unity through evoking collective memory and collective trauma. As an example, speaking to the British Parliament, Zelenskyy remembered the rhetoric of war times, which was linked to Winston Churchill, whereas in Germany or the United States he addressed nationally significant historical events. These references are not fantastic; they entrench the struggle of Ukraine into the history of every country of resistance and sacrifice. Micaela (n.d.) also notes that in the speeches to the European Parliament and national legislatures, Zelenskyy also adjusts his rhetorical appeals to the experiences of the local history, which makes the rhetorical appeal more persuasive. He turns abstract appeals into solidarity calls based on culture through such strategic intertextuality.

Corpus-based discourse analysis also helps to shed more light on the patterns of structures of the rhetoric of Zelenskyy. Goloshchuk and Tomczak-Boczko (n.d.) show that his wartime speeches are based on repetitive constructions, inclusive pronouns, and emotionally-charged lexical clusters in creating collective agency. The use of more than 20 instances of the pronoun *we* and *our* extends the referent well beyond Ukraine, and implicitly includes the Western audiences in a common moral community. This personal inclusion approach strengthens the claim made by Dunmire (2012) about the ideological role of political discourse: the naturalization of certain alignments and duties. In placing the issue of Western parliaments as moral actors in the conflict through a discursive position, the burden of the rhetoric has been redirected by Zelenskyy so that instead of passive observing, it is now active support.

Furthermore, the rhetoric of Zelenskyy is embedded in a larger context of crisis communication and pathos-based imagery (2023) since his speeches can be divided into pathos-

driven images (victims of the war) and the logical reasoning (military and humanitarian aid). Such an equilibrium between emotional and logical appeal adds credibility to keeping the urgency. The rhetorical act of creating Ukraine as a victim and defender enables Zelenskyy not to lose agency and to retain moral authority.

Overall, the speeches by Zelenskyy to Western parliaments during the war reveal that political rhetoric can be used to rally international support using framing, intertextual allusion, and inclusive language. Combining the results of corpus-assisted and political discourse analysis, one will be able to see that these addresses are not only petitions, but also changes of the geopolitical narrative through the redefinition of the war in Ukraine as a democratic cause. Zelenskyy is turning the national crisis into the shared moral duty through a well-balanced language.

## References

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