



# The case for case in Putin's speeches

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## Abstract

Vladimir V. Putin has banned the use of the word ‘war’ to refer to the conflict in Ukraine. While one’s choice of words is deliberate and conscious, grammatical categories are obligatory and pivotal to signaling the roles notions have in a discourse. Over- and underrepresentation of grammatical cases can be identified by Keymorph Analysis, which measures deviations from corpus norms analogously to Keyword Analysis. This first application of Keymorph Analysis to Russian data compares the use of grammatical case for the nouns meaning ‘Russia’, ‘Ukraine’, and ‘NATO’ in Putin’s speeches in the period leading up to and immediately after the invasion of Ukraine. Our analysis reveals a narrative in which Putin depicts Russia as a dynamic, agentive, foregrounded actor, a reliable partner for collaboration, but also the victim of unfair geopolitical maneuvers. Ukraine, by contrast, is dehumanized as relatively static and backgrounded, often merely a territorial location rather than a state. NATO appears primarily as the label for an untrustworthy organization and a destination for Ukraine.

**Keywords** Russian · grammatical case · Keymorph Analysis · Keyword Analysis · discourse

## 1 Introduction

Grammatical analysis reveals systematic underlying messages in speeches delivered by Vladimir V. Putin during the critical period leading up to and including the invasion of Ukraine. While a speaker can try to hide their intentions behind their choice of words, obligatory grammar leaves less room for manipulation. It is well known that Putin refers to Russia’s

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attack on their neighbor to the southwest as a “special military operation” instead of calling it a “war”, but Putin’s use of grammar pulls back the curtain on the more profound conceptual landscape of discourse, “ways of saying that are also ways of knowing, being and acting in the social world” (Groom, 2019: 314). You can evade an expression that is not in accordance with your political intentions, but you cannot avoid using grammatical categories. It is well known for example that Putin’s use of the Russian language differs from expectations derived from empirical descriptions, especially in his avoidance of the first person singular pronoun *ja* (Levshina, 2022). Our study confirms that Putin’s use of grammatical case likewise deviates from ordinary usage in ways that bolster his political message.

Jakobson (1959: 236) famously stated that “Languages differ essentially in what they *must* convey and not in what they *may* convey”. The Russian language requires all nouns to represent one of six grammatical cases every time they are used. The grammatical cases have meanings that are more general than lexical meanings, but they are meanings nonetheless and these meanings are beyond conscious control. In the use of grammatical cases, we observe persistent patterns that expose implicit viewpoints.

We compare Putin’s portrayal of *Rossija* ‘Russia’, *Ukraina* ‘Ukraine’, and *NATO* ‘NATO’ through the lens of grammatical case against the background of a large corpus of the Russian language. We present a new application of Keymorph Analysis (see Sect. 1.1) to Russian data, facilitating both statistical and in-depth semantic analysis of Putin’s characterization of the three main parties in the ongoing war.

## 1.1 Keymorph Analysis

Keymorph Analysis is an extension of Keyword Analysis. Keyword Analysis (Scott, 1996) was developed as a method to analyze texts and is widely used in corpus-assisted discourse analysis. As its name suggests, Keyword Analysis focuses on the distribution of words, identifying as “keywords” those words that are unusually frequent in a target text against the background of a (usually much larger) reference corpus. The purpose of the reference corpus is to provide a standard of comparison, the distribution of words in a representative sample of the language as a whole. Keywords reveal the “Aboutness” of a text (Scott & Tribble, 2006), and keywords are connected with stylistic features (Culpeper, 2002; Baker et al., 2008; Scott, 2010). Keywords are said to show the average reader’s perception of what is striking (or prominent) in a text when a target text is contrasted with a robust and well-balanced reference corpus that reflects language use of the given time (Fidler & Cvrček, 2015).

Keyword Analysis is predominantly used for analysis of English texts, and thus prioritizes lexical keywords (Baker, 2006), an appropriate strategy given the relative paucity of grammatical morphology in English. This is often complemented by analysis of context (collocations, clusters), which is understandable given the analytical/isolating nature of English, which expresses a number of functions by isolated words, while inflected or agglutinative languages use morphemes to do so. A study by Culpeper (2009: 54–55) based on English stated that focus on grammatical features (in this case, parts of speech) adds little to text analysis, and it is customary to remove English function words, also known as “stopwords”, in the course of analysis. In addition to pronouns and auxiliary verbs, the stopwords include high-frequency prepositions that serve some functions similar to grammatical cases.

The exclusion of grammatical features from text analysis has come into question. From the perspective of English, Groom (2010) proposed that study of closed-class keywords (prepositions, conjunctions etc.) can be – contrary to the mainstream view – helpful in study of specialized academic discourse. Steidlová (2022) has demonstrated the value of probing the distribution of a closed set of function words (as opposed to lexical items) in texts especially in connection to the role phraseology plays in academic discourse.

Looking beyond English, there is even more reason to investigate grammatical features in languages where these features are expressed primarily by inflectional morphemes. Fidler and Cvrček (2017, 2018), and Cvrček and Fidler (2019) have developed Keymorph Analysis on the material of Czech, a highly inflected language, where they have demonstrated the relevance of grammatical features (parts of speech, case, number, person) to discourse analysis, especially in examining the ideological stance of pro-Kremlin vs. mainstream news media.

This study applies Keymorph Analysis to Russian data for the first time and thus tests the viability of this approach in another inflected language. This study focuses more narrowly on Keymorph Analysis with respect to the grammatical cases signaled on just three words used by a single speaker (Putin), in a specific time period (February 10 – March 2, 2022). We highlight the relationship between discourse and grammatical case and show how Keymorph Analysis exposes consistent patterns in how social actors are represented in Putin's speech in contrast to the norms represented in a balanced corpus of the Russian language.

## 1.2 The meanings of the Russian grammatical cases

This section gives a brief overview of the meanings of the Russian grammatical cases as previously described in Janda (1993, 1999, 2000), and Janda and Clancy (2002), and motivated within the theoretical framework of Cognitive Linguistics.

In the Russian language all noun phrases obligatorily express case. Case expression is usually achieved through the use of endings on nouns, adjectives, and pronouns. Some in-declinable nouns (for example acronyms like *NATO* 'NATO') lack such endings, however, case can always be deduced from context. There are six grammatical cases in Russian: Nominative, Genitive, Dative, Accusative, Instrumental, and Locative.<sup>1</sup>

While grammatical case is considered by some to be a syntactic phenomenon and therefore devoid of meaning, the tradition of Cognitive Linguistics recognizes a continuum joining syntactic and semantic (lexical) linguistic expressions. Langacker (2008: 15) describes "the notion that lexicon, morphology, and syntax form a continuum" as fundamental to Cognitive Linguistics. All expressions along this continuum can be motivated by meaning, though the meanings of syntactic expressions are likely to be more schematic than those of lexemes. This unification of syntax and semantics entails that "basic grammatical classes are semantically definable" (Langacker, 2008: 95). The Russian cases represent a system of basic grammatical classes that have been defined semantically, as detailed below. The meanings of the grammatical cases in Russian are often further specified by prepositions, and we take this into account in our analysis in Sect. 4.<sup>2</sup>

Polysemy is pervasive in the meanings of linguistic units. The multiple meanings of a given lexeme or morpheme are organized in a coherent network, often referred to as a radial category, with members that are relatively more central and relatively more peripheral, and the relationships among meanings are frequently motivated by cognitive mechanisms such as metaphor and metonymy (for example Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk, 2007; Janda, 2015). The meanings of the Russian cases recounted here according to prior independent research

<sup>1</sup>It is possible to recognize a Vocative case in Russian with a limited range of nouns (cf. Janda, 2019), but for most nouns the Nominative case is used to express this meaning.

<sup>2</sup>One might ask whether prepositions are more determinative of meaning than grammatical case. While a full theoretical discussion of this question goes beyond the scope of this article, we take case to be more essential in representing grammatical meaning for the following reasons: a) all noun phrases are obligatorily marked for case, but not all noun phrases are accompanied by a preposition; b) the meanings of many prepositions are semantically disambiguated by case (for example *v* + LOC 'in' vs. *v* + ACC 'into'); c) all cases except the locative can occur without prepositions, but no prepositions occur without an accompanying case.

involve relationships among one to four central related meanings, plus metaphorical and metonymical extensions. The central meanings convey simple spatial configurations of landmarks and trajectors. Metaphorical extensions entail mapping of these spatial configurations to other domains (for example the domains of time or purpose). Metonymical extensions entail focus on specific portions or subtypes of configurations. Each case is described in turn here below, and meanings are illustrated with phrases from our data (see description in Sect. 2.1 and Appendix).

**Nominative Case (NOM)** has two central meanings.

**NOMINATIVE: A NAME** serves as the grammatical subject, the agent in active sentences, as in *Rossija.NOM normalizovala svoju budžetnuju politiku* ‘Russia.NOM has normalized its budgetary policy’ (doc#12).

**NOMINATIVE: AN IDENTITY** is a narrower use associated with the titles of entities, as in *rasširenje bloka NATO.NOM* ‘expansion of the NATO.NOM bloc’ (doc#23).

**Genitive case (GEN)** has four central meanings that signal the relationship of a focused entity (a trajector) to something that is backgrounded (a landmark marked with the Genitive). Schematically, the Genitive case signals “a backgrounded item ... that yields focus of attention to something else ... which exists or maneuvers in its proximity” (Janda & Clancy, 2002: 112).

**GENITIVE: A SOURCE** references a point of departure further specified by various prepositions meaning ‘from’, among them *iz, s, ot*, as in *gaz iz Rossii.GEN* ‘gas from Russia.GEN’ (doc#7).

**GENITIVE: A GOAL** refers to a point of attainment, often further specified by prepositions, among them *do* ‘up to, until’, *dlja* and *radi* ‘for’, *protiv* ‘against’, as in *počemu èto tak važno dlja nas, dlja Rossii.GEN* ‘why this is so important for us, for Russia.GEN’ (doc#17). Verbs and adjectives expressing (mostly metaphorical) approach are also associated with this meaning.

**GENITIVE: A WHOLE** references the existence of something as a part of a larger unit or collection. This meaning motivates uses of the Genitive case that translate into ‘of’, as in *veduščie strany NATO.GEN* ‘the leading countries of NATO.GEN’ (doc#23), or expressions of possession in English, as in *novoe rukovodstvo Ukrainy.GEN* ‘the Ukraine’s new leadership.GEN’ (doc#7). When an event is nominalized in Russian it can be associated with its participants in a way analogous to the way that a possessum (a metaphorical part) is associated with a possessor (a metaphorical whole). This is possible both for the agent of an event, as in *razvitie Rossii.GEN* ‘the development of Russia.GEN’ (doc#17) (cf. the event ‘Russia develops’), and for the patient of an event, as in *ispol'zovanie Ukrainy.GEN kak instrumenta protivostojanija s našej stranoj* ‘use of Ukraine.GEN as an instrument of opposition to our country’ (doc#16) (cf. the event ‘someone uses Ukraine as an instrument’).

**GENITIVE: A REFERENCE** locates an item with respect to a landmark in the Genitive case. Many prepositions further specify this meaning, the most common of which is *u* ‘by, at’ associated with possessors, as in *s pojavleniem u Ukrainy.GEN oružija massovogo poraženija* ‘with the appearance of weapons of mass destruction in Ukraine’s.GEN possession’ (doc#17).

Although it might not seem immediately obvious, this meaning can also indicate lack of the Genitive-marked item with verbs, nouns, and adjectives expressing lack, the preposition *bez* ‘without’, as well as in the Genitive of negation, as in *v bližajšie roky Ukraïny.GEN ne budet v NATO* ‘in the foreseeable future Ukraine.GEN will not be in NATO’ (doc#7). For more details on the logic behind this meaning, see Janda and Clancy (2002).

**Dative Case (DAT)** encodes the capacity of an entity to interact with its surroundings, by receiving objects, absorbing experiences, or exerting equal or superior strength. Dative case marking identifies an engaged potential subject for a future action. The entity marked with the Dative case is most typically a human being who can appreciate or suffer due to an event and react to it. The Dative case has three central meanings.

**DATIVE: A RECEIVER** is used primarily to mark the indirect object with verbs meaning ‘give’, as in *Stalin ... peredal Ukraïne.DAT nekotorye zemli* ‘Stalin handed over some lands to Ukraine.DAT’ (doc#17). The concept of giving is very broad, including many verbs that do not have an overt direct object, such as verbs of communication and payment.

**DATIVE: AN EXPERIENCER** is used to express what happens to a Dative-marked entity and is associated with words denoting harm, benefit, belonging to, and needing. The Dative-marked entity is thus a victim or beneficiary of some state or event, as in *pojas družestvennyx Rossii.DAT gosudarstv* ‘zone of states friendly to Russia.DAT’ (doc#17), and *memorandum, kotoryj otkryvaet Ukraïne.DAT i Gruzii dveri v NATO* ‘memorandum that opens the door to NATO for Ukraine.DAT and Georgia’ (doc#16).

**DATIVE: A COMPETITOR** expresses the capacity of the Dative entity as compared to another entity that is either equal or lesser in strength or influence. In the latter case, when the Dative entity is superior in some way, the other entity submits, as *ljudi, iskrenne predannye Rossii.DAT* ‘people sincerely devoted to Russia.DAT’ (doc#21). This meaning is also associated with the prepositions *k* ‘toward’ and *po* ‘along’ which identify a person or entity that exerts influence as in *Narodnye respubliki Donbassa obratilis' k Rossii.DAT s pros'boj o pomošči* ‘the national republics of the Donbas have turned to Russia.DAT with a request for assistance’ (doc#23).

**Accusative Case (ACC)** signals a path toward a destination. The focus can be extended along a whole path, or be narrowed to just the endpoint. There are three corresponding meanings, only two of which appear in our data.

**ACCUSATIVE: A DESTINATION** in the spatial domain indicates a path often further specified by prepositions such as *v* ‘into’, *na* ‘onto’, *za* ‘beyond’, *pod* ‘under’, among others, as in *vstuplenie Ukraïny v NATO.ACC* ‘Ukraine’s entry into NATO.ACC’ (doc#17). Perhaps the most characteristic use of Accusative case is to mark a direct object, which is a metaphorical version of the destination meaning where “the action moves along a path from the agent to the patient” (Janda & Clancy, 2002: 64), as in *ob"javljajut nas, Rossiju.ACC, svoim vragom* ‘declare us, Russia.ACC, their enemy’ (doc#23).

**ACCUSATIVE: A DIMENSION** focuses on the length of a path, measured as distance or size, typically with prepositions such as *skvoz'* ‘through’ and *čerez* ‘across’, as in *my gotovy prodolžit' postavki gaza čerez Ukraïnu.ACC* ‘we are prepared to continue delivery of gas via Ukraine.ACC’ (doc#7).

**Instrumental Case (INS)** expresses “an accessory for something else ... a peripheral attachment for something else” (Janda & Clancy, 2002: 19). This schematic concept is conveyed in four main meanings, three of which are attested in our data.

**INSTRUMENTAL: A MEANS** expresses a conduit for an action, something that makes it possible for an action to take place. The most characteristic use of this meaning, and the only one relevant in our study, is to express the agent in a passive construction, as in *sovremennaja Ukraina celikom i polnost'ju byla sozdana Rossiej.INS* ‘modern Ukraine was completely and thoroughly created by Russia.INS’ (doc#17).

**INSTRUMENTAL: AN ADJUNCT** occurs with the preposition *s* ‘with’ and expresses companionship and mutual relationships, as in *sotrudničestvo s Rossiej.INS* ‘collaboration with Russia.INS’ (doc#7).

**INSTRUMENTAL: A LANDMARK** signifies peripheral locations without contact, further specified by prepositions, only one of which appears in our data, namely *meždu* ‘between’, as in *potencial vzaimodejstvija meždu Rossiej.INS i Kazaxstanom* ‘potential for cooperation between Russia.INS and Kazakhstan’ (doc#1).

**Locative case (LOC)** has only one meaning, **LOCATIVE: A PLACE**, which identifies stative locations either in space or other domains, and is always further specified by prepositions *v* ‘in’, *na* ‘on’, *pri* ‘at’, *o* ‘about’, *po* ‘after’, as in *Xoču, čtoby èto ponjali i v Rossii.LOC, i na Ukraine.LOC* ‘I want them to understand this, both in Russia.LOC and in Ukraine.LOC’ (doc#17). In our data Putin consistently uses the preposition *na* ‘on’ with ‘Ukraine’, defying the preference of Ukrainians to use *v* ‘in’.<sup>3</sup> This deliberate choice of preposition is yoked to the less conscious use of the locative case (explained in more detail in Sect. 4), indicating an attitude toward Ukraine as a mere location or territory rather than a body with agency of its own. This underscores the main theme of our study, that the distribution of grammatical features reveals conceptual tendencies beyond what can be discovered by analysis of lexemes alone.

## 2 Data

Our study compares the distribution of grammatical case across two datasets. The first and focal dataset represents Putin’s speech at a critical time period leading up to and including the invasion of Ukraine. The second dataset is a corpus of contemporary Russian which provides a standard of comparison for measuring trends in Putin’s speech that depart from that standard. We follow the customary use of terms and thus refer to the texts under analysis as the “target texts”, and refer to the corpus representing the Russian language as a whole as the “reference corpus”.

### 2.1 The target texts: Putin’s speeches

The data consists of twenty-nine texts collected from the website kremlin.ru, with a total of 34,720 tokens. A complete list with links to the texts and the number of words in each

<sup>3</sup>Note that the use of prepositions with *Ukraina* ‘Ukraine’ is a “hot topic” in Russian grammar: <http://new.gramota.ru/spravka/buro/hot10/>.

text is found in the [Appendix](#). Significant historical events were used to define the limits of the time period from which the texts were collected, beginning on February 10, 2022 and ending on March 2, 2022. Despite the fact that these temporal boundaries might be perceived as arbitrary, our historical point of reference is the timeline of the Ukraine crisis (2014 – present) published in the Research Briefing of the House of Commons Library based in the UK Parliament (Walker, 2022). On February 10, 2022 Russia launched its “largest military exercise since the Cold War, holding joint maneuvers with Belarus, close to the Belarus/Ukrainian border” (Walker, 2022: 27). The period ends on March 2, 2022 at the height of the first phase of invasion when Russian forces in Ukraine moved “to tighten their siege of key cities, including the capital, Kyiv, and the southern port of Mariupol” (Walker, 2022: 39). This periodization enabled us to focus on the time leading up to the invasion and to cover the first week of invasion. The texts represent transcripts of Putin’s direct speech, with comments and replies from others (officials and journalists) excluded. While it is conceivable that Putin is not the sole author of his speeches, these are the words that he has delivered and these texts contribute to the public image of Russian leadership. In the remainder of this article “Putin’s speech(es)” refers specifically to this selection of texts.

All examples of the nouns *Rossija* ‘Russia’, *Ukraina* ‘Ukraine’, and *NATO* ‘NATO’ along with their contexts have been extracted from the target texts and annotated for both grammatical case and the specific case meanings described in Sect. 1.2. This annotated database is available in our TROLLing post <https://doi.org/10.18710/APDMDZ> (Obukhova, 2022).

## 2.2 The reference corpus: Russian InterCorp

In order to identify trends in distribution of grammatical categories, it is necessary to compare the target texts with a reference corpus. For this purpose, we used the Russian part of the parallel corpus InterCorp, version 13 (Rajnochová et al., 2021; Čermák & Rosen, 2012) with annotation based on the Universal Dependencies (UD) scheme (de Marneffe et al., 2021). The corpus consists of translations to or from Russian with a total size of 20.1 million tokens. This reference corpus is balanced from various sources as follows: 8.6 million from fiction, 6.9 million from movie subtitles, 3.9 million from journalistic texts from Project Syndicate and VoxEurope portals, and 0.6 million from the Bible. This corpus provides a diversified composition representing different registers, and because grammatical case is an extremely widespread phenomenon in Russian, a larger corpus is not needed.

The choice of corpus was motivated by a number of factors. The InterCorp corpus has UD tagging. Crucial to the application of Keymorph Analysis is the use of the same tagging scheme such that the tags for the target text and the reference corpus are directly comparable. By using the InterCorp corpus we were able to ensure that the tagging tools and scheme were identical across the target text and the reference corpus. The diversity of texts in the InterCorp corpus is superior to that found in most web-crawled corpora (such as ruTenTen and Araneum Russicum). Since corpus composition might affect the distribution of grammatical case, use of a diverse corpus that represents multiple registers and genres helps to level out the majority of peculiarities of individual registers and genres. InterCorp was thus the largest diversified corpus available with UD analysis to match the requirements of our study.

## 3 Method: Keymorph Analysis

Keymorph Analysis can be understood as an extension of Keyword Analysis (the identification of keywords) on the level of morphemes or grammatical categories. Both Keyword

Analysis and Keymorph Analysis compare the frequencies in the target texts and reference corpus. The difference is that while Keyword Analysis focuses on the frequencies of words, Keymorph Analysis focuses on the frequencies of grammatical categories. For both types of analysis, we first identify those items that show a statistically significant difference (using a log-likelihood test with significance level set at 0.05), then, in the second step, these items are sorted according to an effect size metric.<sup>4</sup> In former studies we have used as our effect size metric the DIN (difference index), which measures the relevance of the difference simply by comparing the relative frequencies in the target texts and the reference corpus to their sum (Fidler & Cvrček, 2015; Hofland & Johansson, 1982). In order to calculate DIN, the relative frequencies are measured to put all measurements on the same scale:

$$\text{RelFq}(\text{Ttxt}) = \text{AbsFq}(\text{Ttxt}) / \text{N}(\text{Ttxt})^5$$

and

$$\text{RelFq}(\text{RefC}) = \text{AbsFq}(\text{RefC}) / \text{N}(\text{RefC})$$

The relative frequencies are then used to calculate DIN:

$$\text{DIN} = 100 \times [ \text{RelFq}(\text{Ttxt}) - \text{RelFq}(\text{RefC}) ] / [ \text{RelFq}(\text{Ttxt}) + \text{RelFq}(\text{RefC}) ]$$

The values of DIN can range from -100 to 100, where zero represents a situation in which the phenomenon under scrutiny is equally represented in the target and reference corpus (taking into consideration their different overall sizes), whereas the extremes describe either a situation in which the phenomenon is represented in the target text but absent from the reference corpus (100), or the phenomenon is represented in the reference corpus but missing in the target text (-100).

DIN has proved its worth in several analyses focusing on lexical units where it reveals differences in their use and can help identify the most prominent lexemes (keywords). In the current study, however, we want to focus on the morphological characteristics of texts. We are not interested in discovering the difference in the appearance of specific words, since words such as ‘Russia’, ‘Ukraine’, ‘NATO’ etc. will most certainly be overrepresented in Putin’s speeches due to their topic, but rather in the extent to which grammatical categories are used with these words.

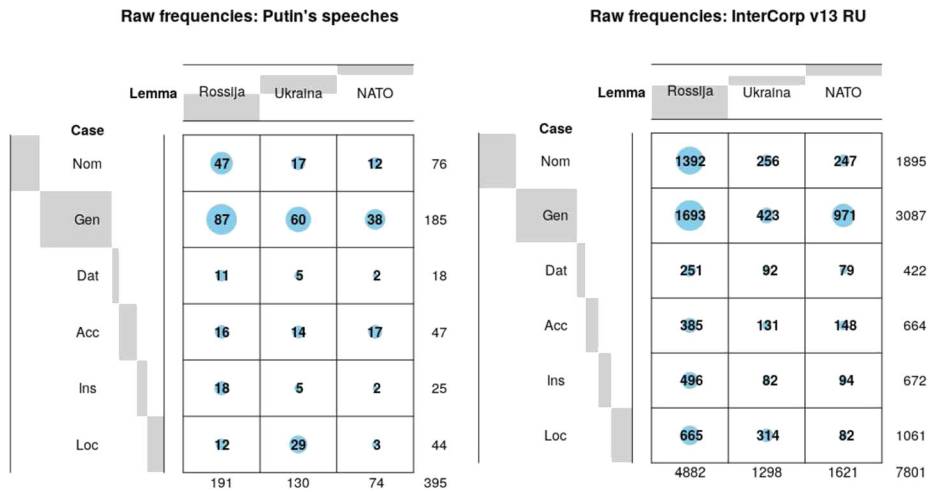
In order to abstract away from the influence of different word frequency levels in our comparison and to focus solely on the use of grammatical categories, we need to use a modified version of DIN, which we refer to as DIN\* (Fidler & Cvrček, 2018).

The only difference between DIN and DIN\* is in the way relative frequencies are calculated. DIN is calculated based on the raw frequency of a phenomenon **relative to all tokens in the corpus** (e.g. ipm or percentages). By contrast, DIN\* uses relative frequencies to represent the proportion of a given inflected wordform **in relation to all occurrences of the lemma** in the target text and reference corpus respectively. With DIN\* we are comparing for

<sup>4</sup>A log-likelihood test assesses the statistical significance of a difference in values. In other words, this test indicates how surprised we should be by the difference if we assume that there should be no difference other than one observed due to random fluctuation. An effect size measures how important a difference is. It is important to have both measures because it is possible for a highly significant difference to be extremely small and therefore unimportant. We are looking for differences that are both significant and important. For more details, please see (Fidler & Cvrček, 2015: 226–231).

<sup>5</sup>RelFq = relative frequency, Ttxt = target text, RefC = reference corpus, AbsFq = absolute frequency, N = total number of tokens.





**Fig. 1** The raw frequencies of grammatical case usage for the nouns *Rossija* ‘Russia’, *Ukraina* ‘Ukraine’, and *NATO* ‘NATO’ in Putin’s speeches 10.02.2022–02.03.2022 are compared with those found in InterCorp. Shaded bands and bubbles in the figure visualize relative differences in frequency distribution

example the percentages of the Dative case of a word “A” in the target text to the percentages of the Dative case of the same word “A” in the reference corpus. Therefore, in order to arrive at DIN\*, the calculations of relative frequencies that are used in the DIN equation above are as follows:

$$\text{RelFq}^*(\text{Ttxt}) = \text{AbsFq}(\text{Ttxt}) / \text{AbsFq}(\text{lemma in Ttxt})$$

and

$$\text{RelFq}^*(\text{RefC}) = \text{AbsFq}(\text{RefC}) / \text{AbsFq}(\text{lemma in RefC})$$

The modified DIN\* thus makes it possible to eliminate the influence of unequal frequencies of words and to focus on the difference in the frequency of a specific grammatical case by simulating a situation where the word is equally frequent in both the target text and the reference corpus.

## 4 Analysis

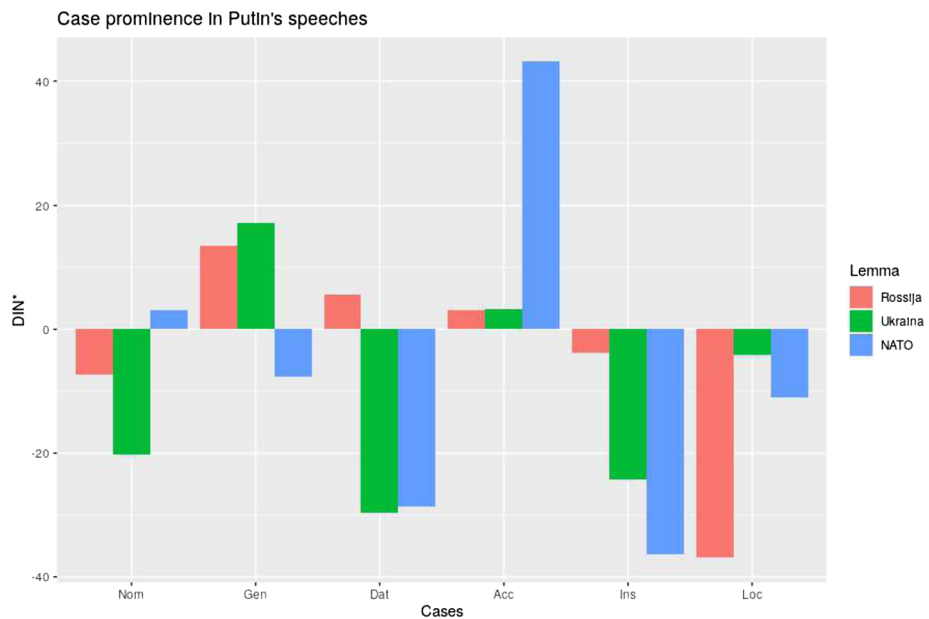
We have identified all instances of *Rossija* ‘Russia’, *Ukraina* ‘Ukraine’, and *NATO* ‘NATO’ both in Putin’s speeches (395 in total) and in the InterCorp corpus (7801 in total).<sup>6</sup> The raw frequencies (counts) for the grammatical cases are presented in Fig. 1. The numbers for Putin’s speeches have been checked manually and further subclassified for all of the grammatical case meanings used in the analysis in Sects. 4.1–4.6.

Table 1 presents the DIN\* values of the use of grammatical case in Putin’s speeches for the nouns *Rossija* ‘Russia’, *Ukraina* ‘Ukraine’, and *NATO* ‘NATO’ as compared to the

<sup>6</sup>While other names for the same concepts such as *Rossiiskaja Federacija* ‘Russian Federation’ and *aljans* ‘alliance’ do appear in Putin’s speeches, they are much less frequent and do not provide enough data to support analysis.

**Table 1** DIN\* values of the use of grammatical case in Putin's speeches for the nouns *Rossija* 'Russia', *Ukraina* 'Ukraine', and *NATO* 'NATO'. Boldfacing represents the most extreme DIN\* value for each case

Case	DIN*( <i>Rossija</i> )	DIN*( <i>Ukraina</i> )	DIN*( <i>NATO</i> )
Nom	-7.352	<b>-20.262</b>	3.112
Gen	13.551	<b>17.227</b>	-7.685
Dat	5.668	<b>-29.648</b>	-28.653
Acc	3.018	3.244	<b>43.120</b>
Ins	-3.757	-24.315	<b>-36.419</b>
Loc	<b>-36.870</b>	-4.050	-11.024

**Fig. 2** Visualization of DIN\* values of the use of grammatical case in Putin's speeches for the words *Rossija* 'Russia', *Ukraina* 'Ukraine', and *NATO* 'NATO'

reference corpus. All three words are attested in all six cases in both the target texts and the reference corpus, and we also observe some strong differences between the target texts and the reference corpus. Recall that positive DIN\* values indicate higher proportion of a given case with a given word than expected based on the reference corpus, whereas negative values indicate lower proportion of a given case with a given word than expected based on the reference corpus. However, even more important for our study than the positive versus negative values are the differences between values across the rows of Table 1. Figure 2 is a visualization of the DIN\* measures. DIN\* values that are close to the zero line in Fig. 2 represent distributions of case usage that conform with the frequencies we expect to find for these three words in the Russian language. DIN\* values that depart strongly from zero indicate deviations from standard norms for Russian native speakers.

We have additionally looked at the number of speeches in which each combination of noun and grammatical case appears as a proxy for dispersion. We do not observe that there

is any single or small set of speeches that would disproportionately influence the analysis. This fact is also reflected by the citations of various speeches in Sects. 4.1–4.6. We have undertaken correspondence analysis of the data in Fig. 1, and the main finding is that ‘Russia’ and ‘Ukraine’ pattern together as opposed to ‘NATO’ in the reference corpus, reflecting the opposition of countries vs. an organization, however in Putin’s speeches the division line falls between ‘Russia’ and ‘Ukraine’.

The data from Putin’s speeches and the code used to produce the figures and supplementary materials (visualizations of correspondence analysis, dispersion values) are publicly available at the TROLLing post for this article: <https://doi.org/10.18710/APDMDZ>.

Putin’s use of case is remarkable in two ways, both in terms of overall deviations from expected values, and in the large differences between how he portrays Russia as opposed to Ukraine and/or NATO. Putin underrepresents both ‘Ukraine’ and ‘NATO’ as engaged potential subjects and partners in the Dative and Instrumental cases, while Russia receives a very different representation closer to the norm. ‘Ukraine’ is also underrepresented in the Nominative case as an agent, a fact we show below to be further corroborated by closer examination of agent vs. patient uses connected with the Genitive case. Putin overuses the Accusative case with ‘NATO’, harping on Ukraine’s supposed entry into the alliance. Use of the Locative case with ‘Russia’ is notably absent in Putin’s speech, a gap that indirectly strengthens the dynamic foregrounding of Russia.

In this section we compare the use of case across the three words in more detail, one case at a time, and with reference to the previously established case meanings presented in Sect. 1.2.

#### 4.1 Nominative case

‘Ukraine’ (DIN\* -20.262) stands out as appearing in the Nominative case much less than either ‘Russia’ (DIN\* -7.352) or ‘NATO’ (DIN\* 3.112). In other words, the DIN\* values suggest that ‘NATO’ might be cast in the sense of NAME and/or in the sense of IDENTITY more than expected, while ‘Ukraine’ is least likely to appear in these uses; ‘Russia’ is underused in these senses but not to the same extent as ‘Ukraine’.

Whereas the NAME meaning stands out as nearly six times more common than identity for ‘Russia’, and NAME is the only meaning used with ‘Ukraine’, for ‘NATO’ we see that IDENTITY is three times more prevalent than NAME. ‘NATO’ in the IDENTITY meaning simply refers to NATO in the title of an organization, bloc, or act, as in *Osnovopolagajuščij akt Rossija – NATO.NOM* ‘NATO–Russia Founding Act.NOM’ (doc#7, doc#13, doc#17). Thus ‘NATO’ is rarely cast in the role of an agentive subject, appearing instead as a mere label and the word is overused in this meaning.

While the NAME meaning prevails for Nominative case for both ‘Russia’ and ‘Ukraine’, the large difference in DIN\* values indicates that Ukraine is depicted as a less empowered entity than Russia. When we compare the contexts, we find that ‘Russia’ is associated with highly agentive predicates, whereas the predicates of ‘Ukraine’ are less agentive. Use of the Nominative case with ‘Russia’ in Putin’s speeches can be considered dynamic according to Hopper and Thompson (1980). This contrasts with static predicates indicating that Ukraine is backgrounded in relation to Russia.

Russia is portrayed as a reliable partner of other countries and as playing a leadership role in geopolitics (1).

- (1) *Posle raspada Sovetskogo Sojuza Rossija.NOM priznala vse novye geopolitičeskie realii i, kak Vy znaete, aktivno rabotaet nad ukrepleniem našego vzaimodejstvija*

so vsemi stranami, nezavisimimi gosudarstvami, vznikšimi na postsovetkom prostanstve (doc#17).

‘After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia.NOM acknowledged all the new geopolitical realities and, as you know, is actively working on strengthening our cooperation with all the countries, independent states that arose in the post-Soviet space.’

Other predicates of ‘Russia’ suggest justification for taking action (2), and the right to do so.

- (2) *Rossija.NOM ne mozet zakryvat' glaza na to, kak Soedinennye Štaty i Severoatlantičeskij al'jans dostatočno vol'no i v svoju pol'zu traktujut ključevye principy ravnoj i nedelimoj bezopasnosti, zafiksirovannye vo mnogix obščeevropskix dokumentax* (doc#7).

‘Russia.NOM cannot ignore how the United States and the North Atlantic Alliance quite freely and to their own advantage interpret the key principles of equal and undivided security codified in many pan-European documents.’

The predicates of ‘Ukraine’ are less agentive, signaling mostly negative attitudes, namely that Ukraine is not a real state (3) and that it will be used as a NATO foothold (4). Note that in (3) the predicate is a stative verb *imet'* ‘possess’, and in (4) the predicate is *služit'* ‘serve’, again suggesting a backgrounded role.

- (3) *Važno ponimat' i to, što Ukraina.NOM, po suti, nikogda ne imela ustojčivoj tradicii svoej podlinnoj gosudarstvennosti* (doc#17).

‘It is also important to understand that Ukraine.NOM essentially never had a persistent tradition for having its own statehood.’

- (4) *V dokumentax NATO naša strana oficial'no prjamo ob"javlena glavnoj ugrozoi evroatlantičeskoj bezopasnosti. I v kačestve peredovogo placdarma dlja takogo udara budet služit' Ukraina.NOM* (doc#17).

‘In NATO documents our country is officially declared to be the main threat to Euro-Atlantic security. And Ukraine.NOM will serve as the primary launching ground for such a strike.’

In sum, the use of Nominative case reveals Russia as a dynamic actor, a state striving for the observance of collective security in Europe, a state that has tried to peacefully resolve the conflict in Ukraine by following the Minsk agreements, and a state that has the right to protect itself in case of threats from outside. The slightly negative DIN\* score, however, suggests that Russia is represented as not an excessively aggressive actor, commensurate with the aforementioned roles of Russia as a peace-maker and self-defender. Russia is foregrounded as an actor, whereas Ukraine is the least agentive, more static and is subject to negative influence. NATO is the only noun that is used slightly more than expected. We can interpret this DIN\* value as emphasizing the use of NATO as a label rather than as a tangible actor. The use of Nominative case is just one piece of the story of portraying referents as agents. The Genitive case also plays a role as we see in the next subsection.

## 4.2 Genitive case

In Putin’s speeches, the Genitive case is overrepresented to a similar degree for ‘Russia’ (DIN\* 13.551) and ‘Ukraine’ (DIN\* 17.227). These uses are most prevalent in nominalizations of events, which then appear not as processes, but as established states with implicit participant roles (where the agent and patient can appear in the same case form). The

Genitive case with 'NATO' (DIN\* -7.685) is underrepresented, identifying the organization exclusively as a source of threat rather than as a negotiating partner (see also 4.5). For all three nouns, the prevailing use is the WHOLE meaning. Below we look more closely at the actual uses in order to differentiate them further in terms of the roles of agent vs. patient. And again, we see that the biggest qualitative differences are between 'NATO' on the one hand, and 'Russia' and 'Ukraine' on the other.

The data for 'NATO' is almost entirely uniform in a focus on the expansion of NATO; a third of the examples are of (*ne*)*rasširenje NATO.GEN* '(non)expansion of NATO.GEN' (doc#7, doc#8, doc#23). Other phrases that conform with this narrative are: *naraščivanija voennoj gruppirovki NATO.GEN na territorii Ukrainy* 'build-up of military alignment of NATO.GEN on the territory of Ukraine' (doc#17), *voennoe prisutstvie NATO.GEN v vostočnom napravlenii* 'military presence of NATO.GEN in an eastward direction' (doc#17), *rasprostranenie voennoj organizacii NATO.GEN na vostok* 'spreading of the military organization of NATO.GEN to the east' (doc#17), *prodviženie NATO.GEN na vostok* 'advance of NATO.GEN to the east' (doc#17). Most of the remaining uses of the WHOLE meaning with 'NATO' signal possession, and these mostly refer to military capacity or members as in *infrastruktura/korabli/dokumenty/aviacija/strany/členy NATO.GEN* 'infrastructure/ships/documents/air force/countries/members of NATO.GEN' (doc#7, doc#13, doc#16, doc#17, doc#23, doc#25). When used in the SOURCE meaning, the Genitive case refers to NATO as the source of communications (or the lack thereof) or wished-for guarantees, and NATO is often conjoined with the USA.

When we compare the data for 'Russia' as opposed to 'Ukraine', the strongest difference is that within the WHOLE meaning, 'Russia' is more than three times more likely to appear as an agent than as a patient in a nominalized event, whereas 'Ukraine' appears as agent and patient in equal numbers.

The narrative of 'Russia' as an agent is quite consistent. Russia is a country that cooperates, collaborates, and participates in multi-country consortia, as expressed in collocations of *vzaimodejstvii* 'mutual cooperation' (doc#19), *sotrudničestvo* 'collaboration' (doc#19), *sozdanii meždunarodnogo konsorciuma s učastiem* 'creation of international consortium with the participation of' (doc#7), *trëxstoronnix dogovorënnostej* 'trilateral agreements' (doc#19), *sojuzničeskix otnošenij* 'relations of alliance' (doc#2, doc#13), *podderžka* 'support' all followed by *Rossii.GEN* 'of Russia.GEN' (doc#2). Russia plays a leadership role in this narrative, as in (5), and is ready to deliver a swift and decisive response (6).

- (5) *Pri ètom prizvyvy Rossii.GEN k vystraivaniju sistemy ravnoj i nedelimoj bezopasnosti, kotoraja by nadëžno zaščičala vse strany, ostajutsja bez otveta* (doc#21).  
'Meanwhile Russia's.GEN appeals for the building of a system of equal and undivided security, which would reliably defend all countries, go unanswered.'
- (6) *Kto by ni pytalsja pomešat' nam, a tem bolee sozdavat' ugrozy dlja našej strany, dlja našego naroda, dolžny znat', čto otvet Rossii.GEN budet nezamedlitel'nym i privedët vas k takim posledstvijam, s kotorymi vy v svoej istorii eščë nikogda ne stalkivalis'* (doc#23).  
'No matter who tries to hinder us, or moreover to pose threats to our country, to our nation, they should know that Russia's.GEN answer will be immediate and will bring upon you consequences such as you have never before in your history encountered.'

'Russia' is also a country that has suffered loss of territory, that is threatened and held back (7), and is forced into confrontation (8).

- (7) *Silovoe sderživanje Rossii vosprinimaetsja nami v kačestve prjamoj i neposredstvennoj ugrozy nacional'noj bezopasnosti...* (doc#7).  
‘The forceful containment of Russia.GEN is perceived by us as a direct and immediate threat to national security....’
- (8) *Ves' xod razvitija sobytij i analiz postupajuščej informacii pokazyvaet, čto stolknovenie Rossii.GEN s ètimi silami neizbežno* (doc#23).  
‘The entire course of development of events and analysis of available information shows that confrontation of Russia.GEN with these forces is inevitable.’

Where ‘Russia’ appears as a patient of a nominalized situation, the narrative of thwarted efforts and victimization continues, with collocations such as *grabež Rossii.GEN* ‘robbing of Russia.GEN’ (doc#17). Remaining uses of the WHOLE meaning with ‘Russia’ highlight possessive relationships, in particular, Russia’s leadership, borders, territory, security, and citizens.

The majority of uses of ‘Russia’ with the GOAL meaning use the preposition *dlja* ‘for’, always to identify a problem or threat for Russia; four of them contain the construction *ugroza dlja Rossii.GEN* ‘threat to Russia.GEN’ (doc#17, doc#23).

Only ‘Russia’ is used in the GOAL meaning of the Genitive with the preposition *protiv* ‘against’, continuing the narrative of threats (9):

- (9) *Po suti, èto ne čto inoe, kak podgotovka k boevym dejstvijam protiv našej strany – protiv Rossii.GEN* (doc#17).  
‘In essence, this is nothing other than a preparation for military actions against our country – against Russia.GEN.’

‘Russia’ appears twice in the SOURCE meaning, both times in connection with energy supplies, in collocations *gaz iz Rossii.GEN* ‘gas from Russia.GEN’ (doc#7) and *postavki ènergonositelej iz Rossii.GEN* ‘energy supplies from Russia.GEN’ (doc#6). Russia is thus positively represented as a country rich in resources, supporting other countries, and deserving of respect.

When ‘Ukraine’ appears as an agent in the WHOLE meaning, it is almost exclusively in the collocations *vstuplenie/poljavlenie Ukrainy.GEN v NATO* ‘entry of Ukraine.GEN into NATO’ (doc#7, doc#17). The one exception is the collocation of ‘Ukraine’, with *učastie* ‘participation’ (doc#7), where Ukraine appears together with Russia and other countries. This theme continues and intensifies when we look at examples of ‘Ukraine’ as a patient. Putin speaks repeatedly of *priem/prinjatie Ukrainy.GEN v NATO* ‘acceptance of Ukraine.GEN into NATO’ (doc#16, doc#18), but also of *ispol'zovanie Ukrainy.GEN kak instrumenta protivostojanija s našej stranoy* ‘use of Ukraine.GEN as an instrument for opposition to our country’ (doc#16), and furthermore promises *my budem stremit'sja k demilitarizacii i denacifikacii Ukrainy.GEN* ‘we will strive for demilitarization and denazification of Ukraine.GEN’ (doc#23).

As a possessor in the WHOLE meaning, there is consistent focus on Ukraine as a location, with eleven repetitions of the collocation *territorija/territorii (soveremnoj/sovetskoj) Ukrainy.GEN* ‘territory/territories of (contemporary/Soviet) Ukraine.GEN’ (doc#17, doc#23), alongside paraphrases such as *sostav Ukrainy.GEN* ‘composition of Ukraine.GEN’ (twice), *vozdušnoe prostranstvo Ukrainy.GEN* ‘airspace of Ukraine.GEN’, *na (jugo-)vostoke Ukrainy.GEN* ‘in the (south-)east part of Ukraine.GEN’, *soxranenija territorial'noj celostnosti Ukrainy.GEN* ‘preservation of the territorial unity of Ukraine.GEN’ (doc#17, doc#18). Taken together, these locational references to Ukraine constitute over 40% of all uses of ‘Ukraine’ in the WHOLE meaning (see also the use of ‘Ukraine’ with the Locative case in 4.6). Other collocations that recur are *suverenitet Ukrainy.GEN* ‘sovereignty of Ukraine.GEN’ (doc#17), *rukovodstvo/rukovoditel' Ukrainy.GEN* ‘leadership/leader of Ukraine.GEN’ (doc#7, doc#16,

doc#18) (here note that Zelensky is never identified by name), *specslužby Ukrainy.GEN* 'security services of Ukraine.GEN' (doc#17, doc#18), and *vooružennye sily Ukrainy.GEN* 'armed forces of Ukraine.GEN' (doc#17, doc#23, doc#24).

In the GOAL meaning, 'Ukraine' appears only three times and always with the preposition *dlja* 'for'. In one of these attestations Putin quotes Kievan strategists planning beneficial conditions for Ukraine. The other two uses are more significant, one stating that it is not impossible for Ukraine to develop nuclear capacity, and the other one constituting an indirect threat to Ukraine (10):

- (10) *My gotovy pokazat' vam, čto značit dlja Ukrainy.GEN nastojaščaja dekomunizacija* (doc#17).  
'We are ready to show you what real decommunization means for Ukraine.GEN.'

'Ukraine' does not appear in the SOURCE meaning in our target texts.

Overall, uses of the Genitive case tell us that Russia, despite past and present threats, is an active, exemplary role model in brokering international alliances. Ukraine is by contrast merely a location and relatively inert, except for its pending entrance into NATO. NATO is single-minded in its drive for expansion and has plenty of firepower to back up that drive. Ukraine needs to be denazified and demilitarized, presumably by Russia. Putin makes abundant use of the Genitive case to obfuscate nuanced interpretation of processes, presenting them instead as facts, reified as "things" (cf. Langacker, 2008: 103–108); such reified situations allow little space for questioning their details (tense, aspect, epistemic modality). NATO plays very little role. The DIN\* score shows that the Genitive case for NATO is underused; this score, together with the qualitative data suggests that NATO has only one dimension, and that NATO is not worth negotiating with (cf. 4.5 on Instrumental case).

### 4.3 Dative case

The Dative case shows a marked difference between 'Russia' (DIN\* 5.668) with an elevated level of use, as opposed to 'Ukraine' (DIN\* -29.648) and 'NATO' (DIN\* -28.653) with very low representation by comparison. Given that the Dative case marks potential subjects with the capacity to act, the relatively copious use of Dative case singles Russia out as the most dynamic of the three entities. Since the prototypical referent of the Dative case is a human being that can experience and react to situations, the suppression of 'Ukraine' and 'NATO' in the Dative case contributes to a narrative that dehumanizes them in comparison with Russia. Furthermore, only 'Russia' appears in the COMPETITOR meaning, further emphasizing Russia's dominant role.

'Russia' is used in the RECEIVER meaning of the Dative case exclusively in this collocation, suggesting that Russia is a legitimate receiver (11):

- (11) *...predostavlenija Rossii.DAT so storony ŠŠA i NATO dolgosročnyx i juridičeski zakreplennyx garantij bezopasnosti...* (doc#13).  
'provision to Russia.DAT from the USA and NATO of long-term legally binding security guarantees.'

The theme of Russia's fairness continues in uses of the EXPERIENCER meaning, where Russia seeks mutual benefits, as in (12).

- (12) *... prodolžаем sotrudničat' s Kazaxstanom po vsem linijam raboty, kotoraja, bezuslovno, idēt na pol'zu kak Rossii.DAT, tak i Kazaxstanu...* (doc#20).  
'...we continue to collaborate with Kazakhstan on all lines of work, which of course benefit both Russia.DAT and Kazakhstan...'

However, the EXPERIENCER meaning also expresses Russia's sense of entitlement as a legitimate recipient of rights to control its surroundings (13).

- (13) *Odnako naše predloženie bylo s poroga otvergnuto: nel'zja, deskat', pozvolit' Rossii.DAT ograničivat' dejatel'nost' NATO* (doc#17).  
 'However our proposal was rejected out of hand: they said, one cannot allow Russia.DAT to limit NATO's activity.'

The COMPETITOR meaning of the Dative case supports three lines of narrative. In one, Russia is the authority to which the leaders of the Donbas turn for support.

- (14) *Narodnye respubliki Donbassa obratilis' k Rossii.DAT s pros'boj o pomošči* (doc#23).  
 'The people's republics of the Donbas have appealed to Russia.DAT with a request for assistance.'

A second narrative line confirms Russia's historical rights to territory acquired three centuries ago (15).

- (15) *Togda že, v XVIII veke, zemli Pričernomor'ja, prisoediněnyje k Rossii.DAT v rezul'tate vojn s Osmanskoj imperiej, polučili nazvanie Novorossija* (doc#17).  
 'At that time, in the 18th century, the Pričernomor'ja lands that were joined to Russia.DAT as a result of the war with the Ottoman empire, received the name of Novorossija [New Russia].'

A third line presents alleged historical and present wrongful encroachments on Russia's territory (16).

- (16) *Otsjuda i učastie ukrainских nacionalistov i neonacistov v bandax terroristov na Severnom Kavkaze, vsě gromče zvučašče territorial'nye pretenzii k Rossii.DAT* (doc#17).  
 'From this comes the participation of Ukrainian nationalists and neo-Nazis in terrorist bands in the northern Caucasus, making ever louder territorial claims against Russia.DAT.'

'Ukraine', by contrast, has a much lower DIN\* and is consistently portrayed as the underserving beneficiary of gifts of territory (17), and favors (18).

- (17) *... v 1954 godu Xruščev začem-to otobral u Rossii Krym i tože podaril ego Ukraine.DAT* (doc#17).  
 '...in 1954 Khrushchev for some reason took Crimea away from Russia and gave it to Ukraine.DAT.'
- (18) *Po ekspertnym ocenkam, kotorye podtverždajutsja prostym podsčëtom cen na naši ènergonositeli, ob"ëmov l'gotnyx kreditov, èkonomičeskix i torgovyx preferencij, kotorye Rossija predostavljala Ukraine.DAT, obščaja vygoda dlja ukrainского bjužžeta na period s 1991 po 2013 god sostavila porjadka 250 milliardov dollarov* (doc#17).  
 'According to expert estimates that are confirmed by a simple accounting of the prices of our energy resources, the volume of concessional loans, economic and trade preferences that Russia provided to Ukraine.DAT, the total financial gain for the Ukrainian budget for the period from 1991 to 2013 comprised approximately 250 billion dollars.'



'NATO', like 'Ukraine', appears only marginally in the Dative case. NATO is depicted as the addressee of Russia's unrequited requests, and as receiving via Ukraine the chance to control Russian airspace (19).

- (19) *Razvėrtıvanie na territorii Ukrainy radiolokacionnyx sredstv razvedki pozvolit NATO.DAT plotno kontrolirovat' vozdušnoe prostranstvo Rossii vplot' do Urala* (doc#17).

'The deployment on the territory of Ukraine of radar surveillance equipment permits NATO.DAT to completely control Russian airspace all the way to the Urals.'

In uses of the Dative case, Russia emerges as a legitimate authority that has wrongfully lost territory and resources to Ukraine, which is supported by NATO in an attempt to develop nuclear weapons and threaten Russian integrity. Russia is furthermore humanized as an entity towards whom the listener should feel empathy.

#### 4.4 Accusative case

There is a sharp divide between 'NATO' (DIN\* 43.120), which is vastly overrepresented in the Accusative case, as opposed to 'Russia' (DIN\* 3.018) and 'Ukraine' (DIN\* 3.244), both of which appear slightly more than expected against the background of the reference corpus.

Sixteen of seventeen uses of 'NATO' in the Accusative case refer to NATO as a destination for the entry of Ukraine and other nations (20), or to NATO as the direct object of expansion (21).

- (20) *Bolee togo, obsuždaetsja vopros o vstuplenii Ukrainy v NATO.ACC* (doc#7).  
'Furthermore, they are discussing the possibility of Ukraine's entry into NATO.ACC.'
- (21) *V ètom rjadu i obeščaniya našej strane ne rasširjat' ni na odin djujm NATO.ACC na vostok* (doc#23).  
'In that connection there is also a promise to our country not to expand NATO.ACC even by a single inch toward the east.'

This single-track story of NATO expansion is noteworthy also for what is missing: there is no indication of interest on Russia's part for interaction with NATO, which is merely a dehumanized destination.

By contrast the story told about 'Russia' in the Accusative case is somewhat more varied. Over half of the examples support a narrative with three oft-repeated themes: about protecting Russia from past and current threats such as terrorists from the Caucasus and Syria and now Ukraine (22), about how Russia has been unjustly painted as an enemy (23), and about how the people of the Donbas are depending on Russia to save them from genocide (24).

- (22) *Vaš podvig – èto veršina v istorii čelovečestva, velikij primer dlja vsej, kto segodnja služit v armii i na flote, na suše, v vozduxe, na more berežėt Rossiju.ACC ot vnešnix ugroz* (doc#21).

'Your achievement – it is the pinnacle of the history of humankind, a great example for everyone who is serving today in the army and the navy, and who on land, in the air, and on the sea protect Russia.ACC from external threats.'

- (23) *Te, kto pretendujut na mirovoe gospodstvo, publično, beznakazanno i, podčerknu, bez vsjakij na to osnovanij ob"javljajut nas, Rossiju.ACC, svoim vragom* (doc#23).  
'Those who claim to be the supreme peacemakers, are publicly, with impunity, and I emphasize, without any justification declaring us, Russia.ACC, to be their enemy.'

- (24) *Neobxodimo bylo nemedlenno prekratit' ètot košmar – genocid v otnošenii proživajuščix tam millionov ljudej, kotorye nadejutsja tol'ko na Rossiju.ACC, nadejutsja tol'ko na nas s vami (doc#23).*  
 ‘It was necessary to immediately end that nightmare, the genocide concerning millions of people living there who are depending only on Russia.ACC, depending only on us.’

Another recurring portrayal is of Russia as a destination for visits from heads of state such as Germany (25) and Brazil and as a friendly ally of the latter.

- (25) *Gospodin Šolc v pervye poseščaet Rossiju.ACC v kačestve glavy germanskogo pravitel'stva (doc#7).*  
 ‘Mr. Scholz is visiting Russia.ACC for the first time as the head of the German government.’

The Accusative case use for ‘Ukraine’ has a slightly higher DIN\* score than for ‘Russia’. The qualitative analysis reveals that the case form is used primarily to indicate that Ukraine is a passive chess piece in geopolitics. One-third of uses of ‘Ukraine’ in the Accusative case depict the country as something that is being manipulated by others (26). Another third of uses describe the inclusion of Ukraine in the expansion of NATO (27).

- (26) *Oni svjazany s zaščitoj samoj Rossii ot tex, kto vzjal Ukraïnu.ACC v založniki i pytaetsja ispol'zovat' eë protiv našej strany i eë naroda (doc#23).*  
 ‘They are united in the defense of Russia from those who have taken Ukraine.ACC hostage and are trying to use it against our country and people.’
- (27) *Vy sčitaete, čto nužno podoždat' i podgotovit' Ukraïnu.ACC k vstupleniju v NATO (doc#16).*  
 ‘You think that it is necessary to wait and prepare Ukraine.ACC to enter into NATO.’

More images of Russia, Ukraine, and NATO emerge from the DIN\* values and the qualitative observations. Uses of the Accusative case continue the drumbeat of the (false) accusation that Ukraine is joining (or being led into) NATO. Russia is a just authority that has unjustly suffered in the past and is under threat today. Ukraine is a puppet of NATO and the west that does not inspire sympathy. The highest in contrast in DIN\* score is between Russia and NATO. DIN\* values point to NATO as an outlier. The unusually high DIN\* score for NATO characterizes NATO as a mere destination, an organization that other states (especially Ukraine) want to join. Similar to the Nominative and Genitive, the Accusative case use indicates NATO is an entity with which there is no room for communication, a point that is also made even more explicit by the use of the Instrumental case.

#### 4.5 Instrumental case

Use of the Instrumental case with ‘Russia’ (DIN\* -3.757) comports well with standard use in Russian, whereas it occurs very seldom in Putin’s speeches with both ‘Ukraine’ (DIN\* -24.315) and ‘NATO’ (DIN\* -36.419). The majority of uses of Instrumental case in the target texts reflect the ADJUNCT meaning, indicating a companion, someone or some entity that one can engage with in a mutual relationship. The disparity between Russia on the one hand and Ukraine and NATO on the other points toward Russia as a deserving partner, as opposed to Ukraine and NATO that are largely missing from this narrative.

‘Russia’ appears prominently in the ADJUNCT meaning, with most examples portraying Russia as a dependable, positive collaborative partner, as in collocations like *sotrudničestvo*

*s Rossiej.INS* ‘collaboration with Russia.INS’ (twice) (doc#7, doc#17), *dialog s Rossiej.INS* ‘dialog with Russia.INS’ (twice) (doc#16, doc#17), (*dobrye*) *otnošenija s Rossiej.INS* ‘good relations with Russia.INS’ (twice) (doc#17), *tesnaja kooperacija s Rossiej.INS* ‘close cooperation with Russia.INS’ (doc#17). In some examples the adjunct meaning expresses an antagonistic relationship initiated by Ukraine (28) or by those who are using Ukraine as an instrument (see example in Sect. 1.2).

(28) *V marte 2021 goda Ukraina prinjala novuju Voennuju strategiju. Ètot dokument praktičeski celikom posvjaščěn protivostojaniju s Rossiej.INS, stavit cel’ju vtjagivanie inostrannyx gosudarstv v konflikt s našej stranoj* (doc#17).

‘In March of 2021, Ukraine undertook a new War strategy. This document is nearly entirely devoted to opposing Russia.INS, its stated goal is to drag foreign states into conflict with our country.’

Use of the LANDMARK meaning of the Instrumental case with ‘Russia’ supports the partnership narrative, with the collocations *vzaimodejstvie meždu Rossiej.INS i Kazaxstanom* ‘cooperation between Russia.INS and Kazakhstan’ (doc#1) and *diplomatičeskie svjazi meždu Rossiej.INS i Azerbajdžanom* ‘diplomatic ties between Russia.INS and Azerbaijan’ (doc#19).

A second line of narrative expressed four times by ‘Russia’ in the ADJUNCT meaning alleges a desire of some inhabitants of Ukraine to be reunited with Russia, as in (29). This reunification narrative eclipses any mention of annexation of territories.

(29) *Oni prišli dobrovol’no i prinjali svoë rešenje vossoedinit’sja s Rossiej.INS* (doc#18).  
‘They came voluntarily and made their decision to be reunited with Russia.INS.’

‘Russia’ appears as a MEANS in the Instrumental case only twice, both of these in a single sentence where Russia serves as the agent in a passive construction, the creator of Ukraine (30).

(30) *Itak, načnu s togo, čto sovremennaja Ukraina celikom i polnost’ju byla sozdana Rossiej, točnee, bol’ševistskoj, kommunističeskoj Rossiej.INS* (doc#17).

‘So, I will start with the fact that contemporary Ukraine was completely and fully created by Russia, more precisely, by Bolshevik and Communist Russia.INS.’

The rare examples of ‘Ukraine’ and ‘NATO’ in the Instrumental case are all instances of the ADJUNCT meaning, and all point to problematic relationships, consistent with the disparity in DIN\* values. Ukraine is failing to make good on its agreements from 1994 and the early 2000s, and Russia, attempting a productive peaceful partnership (31) is being snubbed (32). Lavrov is struggling to make headway in negotiations with NATO, with whom there is a sharp conflict (33).

(31) *I vsěže, nesmotrja na izvestnye problemy, Rossija vseгда sotrudničala s Ukrainoj.INS otkryto, čestno i, povtorju, s uvaženiem k eë interesam, naši svjazi v samyx raznyx oblastjax razvivalis’* (doc#17).

‘And still, despite the well-known problems, Russia always collaborated with Ukraine.INS openly, fairly, and, I repeat, with respect for its interests, our ties in all sorts of spheres were growing.’

(32) *K sožaleniju, posle gosudarstvennogo perevorota na Ukraine takogo urovnja i kačestva vzaimodejstvija s Ukrainoj.INS my ne vidim, ono isčezlo* (doc#20).

‘Unfortunately, after the state coup in Ukraine we have not witnessed the same level and quality of cooperation with Ukraine.INS, it has vanished.’

- (33) *My uže govorum ob ètom publièno mnogo-mnogo raz, sobstvenno govorja, èto javljaetsja predmetom našego ostrogo spora s Vašingtonom i s NATO.INS (doc#16).*  
 ‘We have been speaking publicly about this many, many times, basically this is the topic of our sharp conflict with Washington and with NATO.INS.’

Uses of the Instrumental case paint a picture in which Russia acts in good faith to forge relationships that are undermined by Ukraine and NATO, and citizens of Ukraine wish to join Russia.

#### 4.6 Locative case

Most striking is the relative absence of Locative case with ‘Russia’ (DIN\* -36.870), as compared with ‘Ukraine’ (DIN\* -5.050). Reference to Russia as a place is avoided, but this is not so for Ukraine, which is depicted more like a region or territory than like a state. Looking closer at the use of the Locative case with ‘Russia’ and ‘Ukraine’, we see that Ukraine is more likely to belong to the “setting” in discourse rather than in the foreground of discourse. Ukraine is a place associated with negative situations, such as *sobytiya na Ukraine.LOC* ‘events in Ukraine.LOC’ (doc#17), *gosperevorot na Ukraine.LOC* ‘state coup in Ukraine.LOC’ (doc#17), *ustojèivoj gosudarstvennosti na Ukraine.LOC tak i ne složilos’* ‘no stable statehood has been achieved in Ukraine.LOC’ (doc#17), *nezavisimogo suda na Ukraine.LOC poprostu net* ‘there is simply no independent court in Ukraine.LOC’ (doc#17). Ukraine is also the locus of NATO activities (34). By comparison, the few uses of the Locative case with ‘Russia’ support a positive image of Russia (35).

- (34) *Na Ukraine.LOC razvērnuty učebno-trenirovoènye missii stran NATO (doc#17).*  
 ‘Training missions of NATO countries have been deployed in Ukraine.LOC.’
- (35) *... deputaty parlamenta, kak i v ljuboj strane, v Rossii.LOC orientirujutsja na obščestvennoe mnenie, na mnenie svoix izbiratelej, oni ego tonko èuvstvujut (doc#7).*  
 ‘... the parliamentary deputies, just like in any country, are in Russia.LOC guided by public opinion, the opinion of the voters, they are very sensitive to that.’

When ‘NATO’ appears in the Locative case (DIN\* -11.024), it is as a metaphorical location for partners, especially Ukraine (36).

- (36) *Vy skazali zameèatel'nuju frazu: “Govorjat, èto v bližajšie gody Ukrainy ne budet v NATO.LOC”. Èto znaèit “govorjat”?* (doc#7).  
 ‘You uttered a remarkable phrase: “They say that Ukraine will not be in NATO.LOC in the foreseeable future.” What does “they say” mean?’

Putin’s use and avoidance of the Locative case reveals that he views Ukraine merely as a backgrounded setting, and NATO as a metaphorical place, whereas Russia has a different profile, less compatible with reference to location.

## 5 Conclusion

We present the first Keymorph Analysis of the distribution of Russian grammatical case, with a focus on Putin’s pronouncements using the words meaning ‘Russia’, ‘Ukraine’, and ‘NATO’ in the period immediately surrounding the beginning of the war in Ukraine. Our

two-step procedure begins by quantitatively comparing the distribution of grammatical case in Putin's speeches with frequency expectations based on a corpus. The first step reveals deviations both between Putin's texts and the corpus and among the three words under consideration. In the second step we apply a qualitative analysis of Putin's case usage based on previous descriptions of Russian case semantics in terms of radial categories of related submeanings. The second step yields a detailed portrayal of very different roles for Russia, Ukraine, and NATO.

Discourse analysis of political messages in texts has primarily been conducted based on English material. Due to the largely isolating, analytic nature of English, most effort has been invested in the behavior of words, starting often with Keyword Analysis to compare the distribution of words in a target text with empirical expectations from a corpus and complemented by analyses focusing on keywords' surroundings (collocations, clusters etc.). English signals syntactic relationships mainly through word order and function words, neither of which can be targeted with Keyword Analysis. Study of context can shed some light on these properties but often provides a picture which is too varied to be useful for drawing conclusions. The perspective of a typologically different language that encodes syntax morphologically by means of grammatical case opens up another venue for probing meaningful relationships in a text, namely Keymorph Analysis. While a speaker can largely control their choice of words, Russian grammar obliges a speaker to choose among six grammatical cases every time a noun is used, a choice less available to conscious control. Keymorph Analysis thus gives us access to a level of meaningful organization of texts beyond what is possible with strictly lexically-based analyses. This study confirms that analysis of grammatical case reveals the roles of social actors in discourse.

The DIN\* measure calculates deviations between Putin's use of case with the words 'Russia', 'Ukraine', and 'NATO' and corresponding frequency distributions in a reference corpus while neutralizing the differences in overall frequencies of these lexical items. As a metric of comparison with a reference corpus, the DIN\* gives us an approximate gauge of deviations that would impact the perceptions of Putin's audience. By itself, however, the DIN\* is a coarse quantitative measure that highlights trends worthy of further qualitative investigation, which we carry out from the perspective of pre-existing semantic analysis of the Russian grammatical cases, in accordance with Baker et al.'s (2008) observation of synergy between quantitative and qualitative analyses.

Russian grammatical case provides more than a system of syntactic tags. Each case bears a complex of semantic associations. The Nominative, Dative, and Instrumental cases include meanings that typically indicate agentive human roles. A dynamic social actor that is the subject of a verb appears in the Nominative case. Entities that, like human beings, can experience events and potentially serve as grammatical subjects receive Dative case marking. Among many uses of the Instrumental case, the identification of companions and collaborators has special prominence. Putin uses 'Russia' in the Dative and Instrumental cases much more often than both 'Ukraine' and 'NATO'. This discrepancy persists between 'Russia' and 'Ukraine' in the Nominative case; while 'NATO' is even more used in the Nominative than 'Russia', closer inspection shows these uses concentrated almost exclusively in another use of the Nominative case to point to labels rather than to grammatical subjects. At the other end of the scale of associations with human beings are the Accusative and Locative cases, used primarily to express passive roles such as direct objects, destinations, and locations. 'NATO' is an extreme outlier with excessive use of the Accusative case to mark it as a metaphorical place, a destination for Ukraine and other countries eager to join the alliance. 'Russia' is an outlier in the opposite direction due to its absence with the Locative case, where 'Ukraine'

and ‘NATO’ are much more likely to be identified as places. The Genitive case, often used with events reified into nominalizations, is in itself neutral since it can identify either the agent or the patient. Closer analysis shows that ‘Russia’ is more likely to appear as the agent, whereas ‘Ukraine’ is used more as a patient.

The following story emerges from the combined results of Keymorph Analysis and qualitative analysis of Russian case semantics:

NATO is represented as not worthy to be a partner or negotiator (Instrumental). This is consistent with how NATO is portrayed as a label rather than a tangible social actor in the Nominative. NATO’s role is limited to being a threat (Genitive) and an organization (a “thing” or a “container”) into which states (especially Ukraine) gravitate (Accusative, Locative). With this one-dimensional portrayal NATO is essentially snubbed in Putin’s speeches as an entity not to be taken seriously as a worthy partner or negotiator.

Ukraine is represented as playing a passive role (Nominative with stative verbs), being manipulated (Accusative), dehumanized like NATO compared to Russia (Dative), and not a deserving partner (Instrumental). Ukraine plays a peripheral role in the overall discourse. The prominent use of Genitive and Locative highlight Ukraine as a region. The territorial integrity and sovereignty of a country are expected to be viewed as obvious unless there is interest in challenging them.

As for Russia, combined results from the quantitative and qualitative analysis show that Russia has agency, though this is not overemphasized, evoking the impression of a restrained though strong actor (Nominative). Compared to Ukraine and NATO, Russia is more likely to be perceived as a reasonable partner (Instrumental). Detailed qualitative analysis of Accusative case usage shows that Russia is represented as a “friend” to some nations, deserving to be protected, but also unfairly treated. Russia, unlike Ukraine and NATO, is humanized and worthy of empathy (Dative). The victimhood narrative of Russia is consistent with previous research results from Russia-owned Sputnik News portal in Czech (Fidler & Cvrček, 2018; Cvrček & Fidler, 2019) and with descriptions of Putin’s “strategy for political survival that builds on resentment and blames the other for a perceived national vulnerability” (Sharafutdinova, 2022). Moreover, this points to an implicit narrative: Russia, while deserving respect, is unfairly treated, but in need of a strong leader who will take action.

Putin’s speeches are also characterized by the way the speaker refers to situations, histories, and relations involving Russia and Ukraine. Prominent use of the deverbal noun + Genitive construction leaves little space for questioning the details (including the validity of) situations and leaves the responsible roles of the event participants obfuscated. Together with implicit roles assigned to Russia, Ukraine, and NATO by use of cases this creates ideal conditions for not declaring war while justifying aggression.

If we assume that the reference corpus represents normal linguistic usage, then it is a proxy for the experience and expectations of a native speaker (Taylor, 2012). Consistent deviations from these norms are likely to have some impact on a native speaker, even if this impact is at a subconscious level. Keymorph Analysis gives us an indication of the impact that results from deviations in use of grammatical markers. Keymorph Analysis can thus complement Keyword Analysis and more traditional methods of discourse analysis, and can be applied not only in linguistic studies, but also in history, political science, and other disciplines in the social sciences. In connection with the present study of Putin’s use of case, it would be particularly interesting to look at a larger sample of his speeches and track any changes that have occurred over time, as well as to compare Putin’s linguistic performance to that of other political actors.

## Appendix

	Date	Name of the speech	Words	URL
1.	10.02.2022	Встреча с Президентом Казахстана Касым-Жомартом Токаевым	278	<a href="http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67748">http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67748</a>
2.	10.02.2022	Заявления для прессы по итогам российско-казахстанских переговоров	1,062	<a href="http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67749">http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67749</a>
3.	11.02.2022	Совещание с постоянными членами Совета Безопасности	106	<a href="http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67753">http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67753</a>
4.	14.02.2022	Встреча с главой МИД России Сергеем Лавровым	175	<a href="http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67766">http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67766</a>
5.	14.02.2022	Встреча с Министром Обороны Сергеем Шойгу	46	<a href="http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67767">http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67767</a>
6.	15.02.2022	Переговоры с Федеральным канцлером Германии Олафом Шольцем	384	<a href="http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67772">http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67772</a>
7.	15.02.2022	Пресс-конференция по итогам российско-германских переговоров	2,653	<a href="http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67774">http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67774</a>
8.	16.02.2022	Заявления для прессы по итогам российско-бразильских переговоров	857	<a href="http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67789">http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67789</a>
9.	16.02.2022	Переговоры с Президентом Бразилии Жаиром Болсонаро	120	<a href="http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67778">http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67778</a>
10.	16.02.2022	Расширенное заседание коллегии МЧС	1,046	<a href="http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67790">http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67790</a>
11.	17.02.2022	Расширенное заседание коллегии МВД России	1,726	<a href="http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67795">http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67795</a>
12.	17.02.2022	Совещание по экономическим вопросам	1,452	<a href="http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67797">http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67797</a>
13.	18.02.2022	Пресс-конференция по итогам российско-белорусских переговоров	1,545	<a href="http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67809">http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67809</a>
14.	18.02.2022	Российско-белорусские переговоры	232	<a href="http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67805">http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67805</a>
15.	21.02.2022	Встреча со спортсменами паралимпийской команды России	816	<a href="http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67823">http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67823</a>

	Date	Name of the speech	Words	URL
16.	21.02.2022	Заседание Совета Безопасности	1,888	<a href="http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67825">http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67825</a>
17.	21.02.2022	Обращение Президента Российской Федерации	6,061	<a href="http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67828">http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67828</a>
18.	22.02.2022	Владимир Путин ответил на вопросы журналистов	1,373	<a href="http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67838">http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67838</a>
19.	22.02.2022	Заявления для прессы по итогам российско-азербайджанских переговоров	780	<a href="http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67837">http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67837</a>
20.	22.02.2022	Переговоры с Президентом Азербайджана Ильхамом Алиевым	659	<a href="http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67830">http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67830</a>
21.	23.02.2022	Поздравление по случаю Дня защитника Отечества	574	<a href="http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67839">http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67839</a>
22.	24.02.2022	Встреча с представителями российских деловых кругов	462	<a href="http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67846">http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67846</a>
23.	24.02.2022	Обращение Президента Российской Федерации	3,006	<a href="http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67843">http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67843</a>
24.	25.02.2022	Совещание с постоянными членами Совета Безопасности	245	<a href="http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67851">http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67851</a>
25.	27.02.2022	Встреча с Сергеем Шойгу и Валерием Герасимовым	64	<a href="http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67876">http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67876</a>
26.	27.02.2022	Поздравление военнослужащим и ветеранам Сил специальных операций	234	<a href="http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67871">http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67871</a>
27.	27.02.2022	Президент ознакомился с ходом строительства Национального космического центра в Москве	273	<a href="http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67877">http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67877</a>
28.	28.02.2022	Совещание по экономическим вопросам	57	<a href="http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67879">http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67879</a>
29.	1.03.2022	Встреча с губернатором Санкт-Петербурга Александром Бегловым	344	<a href="http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67882">http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67882</a>

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## Declarations

**Competing Interests** On behalf of all authors, the corresponding author states that there is no conflict of interest.

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