

How news domestication may blur conflict: Coverage of the 2008 South Ossetia War in Ukraine



Daria Taradai

NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF KYIV-MOHYLA ACADEMY, UKRAINE

ABSTRACT: While media coverage of the 2008 South Ossetia War in Ukraine has been explored a little, the domestication of it has not yet become an object of research. The concept of news domestication is relatively new and underdeveloped in Ukrainian media studies. Previous research of media coverage of the 2008 South Ossetia War was either limited to the period of the war or was devoted only to its press coverage. Current research intends to fill the gap in the study of media discourse in Ukraine and to present an insight in the 2008 South Ossetia War TV coverage and its domestication.

KEYWORDS: international conflicts, domestication of news, television



INTRODUCTION

The 2008 South Ossetia War, which is the subject of this research, was covered extensively by Ukrainian media, although Ukraine was not involved in the conflict as a party. However, both states engaged in this war, namely Russia and Georgia, are close partners of Ukraine. Russia, as Ukraine's neighboring state, has very deep economic and cultural connections to Ukraine, while Georgia and Ukraine share a similar scheme of political development and have generally the same EU ambitions. Moreover, both are considered to be in the zone of traditional (post-Soviet) Russian influence.

The news about the 2008 South Ossetia conflict was frequently mentioned in the context of events in Ukraine or in the context of statements made by Ukrainian politicians. According to the news domestication theory (Cassara, 1993), domesticated international news is covered more often than news without a strong connection to the country of broadcast. The objective of this research is to determine in what way and to what extent the 2008 South Ossetia War was projected onto Ukraine in media. It allows for the drawing of a conclusion regarding whether Ukrainian media managed to work as a socially responsible medium, whose goal is to inform the audience instead of heating the conflict.

POST-COLD WAR FRAMEWORK: IN SEARCH OF A NEW FOCUS

According to Clausen (2004), the widely used term “domestication” was introduced to the studies of news production by Gurevitch and his colleagues in 1991. It was defined as a process of presenting distant events as relevant to a domestic audience and constructing them as compatible with the culture and dominant ideology of the country of broadcast (Gurevitch et al., 1991). Since news domestication is a universal phenomenon, global news is delivered differently in every country (Clausen, 2004).

Lee (2005) defines international news domestication as a logical consequence of globalization and its limitedness: globalization of television news cannot be unlimited as the TV news audience who may not have certain knowledge or cognitive abilities, will have difficulties with understanding the sense of news if it is not put in a domestic context. Therefore, journalists use this mechanism in order to overcome the limitations of globalization: they construct news stories in such a way as to create links of meaning between the stories and the history, culture, politics, society, etc. of the viewers. The instruments of news domestication are cultural markers that reflect meaningful issues for society, which are connected to historical referents, such as the Holocaust for Israelis (Gurevitch et al., 1995). News domestication is the unification of two processes — encoding and decoding. It is about the ways in which news stories are being shaped and tailored to fit in with assumed audience interests, expectations and cognitive framework. Domestication here is a corrective counterbalance in the discussion of media globalization. The audience domesticates the meaning of the stories it watches.

So-called global communicators may find themselves in no-man’s land and may turn out to be incapable of domesticating their products in any meaningful way. As a result, even major media players have realized the need for “cultural sensitivity” and recognized the different cultural preferences within different regions (Sreberny-Mohammadi, 1996).

High demand for domestication was caused not only by the emergence of the concept of glocalization from the one of globalization, but also by the search for a new focus that began in the early 90s in the international news coverage and was caused by geopolitical changes. For a long period of time, coverage of the international news was performed through a prism of a bipolar world system and so-called frame of the Cold War. The end of the Cold War became a turning point in the development of international news. The key question posed after the end of the Cold War was: what are the consequences of the breakdown of this frame for the ways in which media communicate international news (Norris, 1995).

Exploring news content, scholars found out that in the post-Cold War era journalists tend to focus on the country of broadcasting, when in order to attract audience attention media domesticate international news (Cassara, 1993; Hoge, 1993; Heuvel, 1993; Seaton, 1999). Media scholars claim that this factor played an important role for the audience long before the end of the Cold War, but in the 90s it was conceptualized in the theory of news domestication.

News domestication influences both form and content of media messages and in multiple cases such changes of the content may bear potential threats. McLaughlin and Rolston (2004) suggest that domesticated media content may restrain people from asking “bad” or uncomfortable questions about the global world order. A situation when international news coverage is generated mainly by national interests causes conditions under which media do not cover global events unless it involves talking about ourselves (Wasburn, 2002, p. 20 as cited in Janbek, 2008); hence, international news making becomes inherently domestic and may produce a limited social world with rigorous national boundaries.

In a globalized post-Cold War world, journalists try to domesticate foreign news using anchors familiar to the audience (social representations) or clues. Hence, news may potentially become both a source of reliable and understandable information about the world or an instrument of political propaganda.

This assumption can be illustrated by the example of the 2008 South Ossetia War. The conflict was not only one of the most covered international events in Ukraine, but it also caused heated social debates about Ukrainian foreign policy and relationships between key political actors. The 2008 South Ossetia War involved two countries that are Ukraine’s strategic partners: Russia and Georgia. Each strategic partner represents a fundamentally different direction in Ukrainian foreign policy: Russia as orientation to the East and Georgia as orientation to the West and the path to European integration. Since 1991, no other conflict was as close and as symbolic for Ukraine as the 2008 South Ossetia War. Like all other international events, the coverage of this war was domesticated by Ukrainian journalists. The possibility and existence of the above-mentioned dangers and threats caused by news domestication make exploration of the domestication strategies and instruments used by Ukrainian media a relevant and pressing issue.

The coverage of the 2008 South Ossetia War in Ukraine was researched on the example of the most popular TV-channel *Inter*.

TV coverage was chosen as an object for this research, because television is one of the most popular media in Ukraine due to its inexpensive nature and wide distribution. According to the data of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) in 2009 the percentage of households with a TV was about 94.77%, which means that the majority of Ukrainians have access to a television, and TV is still a major source of information for them.

The study includes private and national Ukrainian TV channel with the highest viewing — *Inter*. For the present research evening news programs of the channel were analyzed, since they are the final programs of the day.

The 2008 South Ossetia War lasted from August 8 till August 12, when it was declared as finished by Russia. The period under investigation is longer than the war itself: it covers also one day before the beginning of the war and almost four weeks after August 12, as it was a period of a peace settlement that was discussed actively in Ukraine. Thus, the period under investigation is August 7–September 8, 2008.

For the period under investigation, all evening news programs of the *Inter* TV-Channel were analyzed and all news materials regarding the 2008 South Ossetia War were carefully selected and transcribed. Data was taken from the official website of the channel, online archives, or directly from the archive of the channel. The single criterion for selection of the material was its relevance and correspondence to the topic.

METHODOLOGY

This research is based on the combination of two approaches: quantitative and qualitative. The former provides instrument for analysis of the whole discourse, whereas the latter grants an opportunity to get a deeper insight into the data collected. The first stage of the analysis comprises content analysis of the available data which reveals its general quantitative characteristics, and the second stage is presented in the form of the discourse analysis of the same data aimed at researching techniques and strategies of news domestication.

Content analysis of the data helped sort out general characteristics of the media coverage of the South Ossetia War: overall number of domesticated news, thematic structure of news, and quoted speakers. Use of the content analysis helped receive quantitative indicators serving as reliable data for drawing conclusions regarding the thematic structure of the news programs, as well as for establishing general characteristics of TV news coverage of the 2008 South Ossetia War. The next stage of the research is the discourse analysis of the same news data. The discourse analytical framework used in this work is based on a combination of two approaches to discourse analysis: critical discourse analysis (CDA) developed by Norman Fairclough (2003) and discourse analysis of news developed by Teun Van Dijk (1998). Both approaches are based on the assumption that the use of language is central to the formation of our social environment and investigate language in use or language as a means of social interaction. The results of the discourse analysis have been discussed with the editor of the channel under scrutiny.

Kulyk (2010) claims that the term discourse was attributed to the language in use opposite to understanding of language as a system of signs as a result of social turn in the linguistic research in the late 1960s. News, according to Hartley (1982), is an example of the “language in use.” Analysis of discourse is not limited to “textual” analysis, but also accounts for the relations between structures of text and talk as well as of their social, cultural, and historical contexts. The present research was conducted in light of the social, political and media situation in Ukraine in 2008.

Analysis of the discourse is crucial because our use of language is inextricably bound up with causes and effects which we may not normally be aware of (Fairclough, 1999, p. 54). Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), according to Fairclough, deals with the dual nature of language that is socially shaped and at the same time socially constitutive. The strategic control of knowledge in the news media is exercised through the topics’ selection, and more generally by specific reconstruction

of social and political realities. This process is governed by a system of values and professional ideologies regarding news and its reliability, which serves the interests of various elite, actors, persons, groups, classes, institutions, nations or world regions (Van Dijk, 1998). A critical approach, particularly in linguistics, can prove that independence of press from the government and business is an illusion (Fowler, 1991). However, the reproduction of social order and structure in news is hardly a direct process. Journalists do not always support the opinions or actions of those in power, but they are mostly limited by the editors of privately owned news organizations, and “hence by corporate interests they are hardly at variance with those of the elites in power” (Van Dijk, 1988, p. 155).

Gerbner (1985) suggests that the analysis of mass-produced and distributed media discourse can help discover actual controls and functions. It cannot substitute the study of policies or effects, but it can become a source of hypotheses for further research. Media discourse is “both a record and an instrument of industrial behavior in the cultural field” (Gerbner, 1985, p. 16).

Fowler in his book *Language in the News* (1991) presented instruments for the analysis of how language was used in newspapers to form ideals and beliefs based on an assumption that language is not a neutral but a highly constructive mediator. Despite the fact that he analyzed newspapers, his groundwork is applicable to the analysis of all types of news.

Glasgow University Media Group and University of Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies were among the first to elaborate an alternative model of news practices in which they claim that news is socially constructed (Fowler, 1991, p. 2). Fowler singled out two stages: news selection and news transformation; however, he noted that the distinction between them is not absolute because “an item can only be selected if it can be seen in a certain light of representation and so selection involves an ideological act of interpretation” (Fowler, 1991, p. 19). News is a practice, a discourse which reflects social reality and empirical facts in a non-neutral way (Fowler, 1991; Van Dijk, 1988).

Discourse analysis, nevertheless, is criticized for the element of subjectivity it may include. Cremades (2007) quotes Sheyholislami (2006) who points out that the central question is to what extent a discourse analyst is aware of the way in which an audience perceives media discourse. Discourse analysts are criticized for basing their hypothesis on the assumption that the audience interprets the text in the same way as the researcher. Livingstone (1996) points out that the way in which viewers selectively interpret what they see, depending on their own experiences and sociocultural background is often taken to undermine media effects. However, in case of news domestication, reflection of cultural representations typical for viewers of the explored news data serves to amplify the existing media effects because the idea of domestication is aimed at framing news in such way that it corresponds to the cultural background of the audience and resonates with it.

RESULTS

During the period under investigation, there were 156 pieces of news about the 2008 South Ossetia War on *Inter TV-Channel*. Fifty-six (or about 36%) of them had been domesticated in different ways.

Inter has a relatively small portion of the domesticated news, and it is possible to suggest that journalists of the channel were less willing to domesticate news. This assumption was also partly proved in the interview with Nataliya Gumenyuk, former Head of the International News Department of the channel. She stated that her department had received no direct instruction to domesticate news and underlined that they had always been trying to fight against it: “International news is important in itself.” Ms. Nataliya Gumenyuk also mentioned that there had been no special necessity to domesticate the war which was close enough to Ukraine. “It was the first conflict in the history of Ukraine between the two countries that are so close to Ukraine and so understandable to its audience. The event was so close to Ukraine that we were trying to avoid artificial anchors,” she said. At the same time, in her opinion, there was more domesticated international news in the coverage of the 2008 South Ossetia War than is usual for the news programs of *Inter TV-Channel*.

Figure 1 shows the dynamics of the coverage. The blue line describes general coverage of the 2008 South Ossetia War, and the red line depicts the amount of

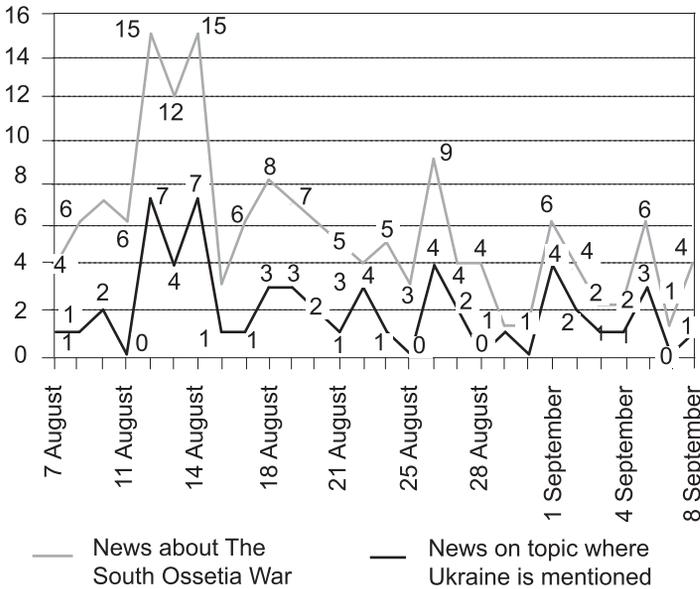


Figure 1. *Inter TV-Channel*: News about the South Ossetia War and amount of domesticated news, 7 August–8 September, 2008

Source: author.

domesticated news broadcast every day. There is a wide gap between the two lines in Figure 1, particularly in the first half of the period under analysis.

In the course of analyzing thematic structure of news, seven topics were identified. Little news was devoted to a single topic; very often it covers several of them. The longer the news story is, the more topics it covers. Frequently, transition from one topic to the other was facilitated by such phrases as “meanwhile” or “at the same time.”

Distribution of topics is presented below:

1. Background information about the conflicts in the region — 2.
2. The grounds for the South Ossetia War — 13.
3. Warfare during the South Ossetia War — 24.
4. Humanitarian activities of all sides — 18.
5. Signing of the truce agreement and its implementation — 27.
6. Aftermath of the War — 44.
7. Reaction to the War — 129, whereas *Ukraine’s reaction to the war* — 56.

The most popular topic in *Inter* TV-Channel news was the reaction to the war. Partly, it can be explained by the fact that the period under investigation includes a relatively long period after the war was announced as finished (August 12–September 8), but in fact less intensive combat actions continued even after August 12, and withdrawal of troops took a long time. So the reaction to the war was more popular than the aftermath of the war and much more popular than the background information about the conflicts in the region that could have explained the origins of the war. Despite a long history of bloody confrontations that could help to elucidate the present situation in the region, background information about the conflict was significantly downplayed. It might even be concluded that while covering the 2008 South Ossetia War it was completely taken out of the agenda.

Fewer than half (43%) of the news stories about the reaction to the war presented response actions within Ukraine (public protests, statements of different groups, authorities etc.). It could reveal either less attention to the domestic reactions and stricter gatekeeping or greater attention to the world response. According to Nataliya Gumenyuk, there were relatively few news stories about the reaction and position of Ukraine because there was a huge stream of the news from the correspondents in the war zone. She suggested that the great attention to the Ukrainian position could have indicated a lack of information from the field, whereas it was not the case on *Inter*. Nataliya Gumenyuk underlined that information from the war zone was more valuable than “the reflections of the Ukrainian side” which was not an active participant or mediator.

The reaction of Ukraine in the news of *Inter* TV-Channel was predominantly presented by the position of the authorities. Nataliya Gumenyuk explained it as a widespread drawback of the coverage: “Politicians and leaders are always in the forefront.” She also called the coverage of any war “elite oriented” and suggested that it would have been better to see more public feedback.

Ukrainian speakers

President Victor Yushchenko and the opposition Party of Regions received almost the same amount of coverage by *Inter*, but the Government and the Prime Minister were covered much less. Larger parties represented in the Parliament were quoted by *Inter* TV-Channel, whereas there were no sound bites of the two smaller parliamentary political forces. Instead, *Inter* quoted two marginal organizations, probably due to their extraordinary and to some extent marginal positions.

Textual analysis

All *Inter* Channel's news that has any pertinence or relation to Ukraine (Ukrainian people, leaders, places, etc.) was analyzed. Several techniques and mechanisms of news domestication were defined and divided into several major groups.

Tskhinvali as Stalingrad: Anchoring in the past

Kulyk (2010) in his research underlines the importance of socially oriented analysis which problematizes the existing situation. He stresses that it is an attempt to prove that the existence of a certain situation or, in case of media, of certain coverage does not have a universal meaning, but rather contributes to certain outcomes or states. In the case of the 2008 South Ossetia War coverage by *Inter* such a lack of a universal meaning can be illustrated by drawing parallels between the situation in South Ossetia and Stalingrad in 1942–43. In the news stories that describe the situation in the capital of South Ossetia a journalist comments: “Old Vasiliy survived in Stalingrad, but was wounded at home” (“Ded Vasiliy utselel pod Stalingradom, no ne utselel v sobstvennom dome”).

It is necessary to mention that the Battle of Stalingrad (17 July 1942–2 February 1943) was a key event of the Second World War or the Great Patriotic War as it was called in the Soviet Union. More than one million people died in the battle that marked the turning of the tide of war in favor of the Soviet Union and its allies. Within the USSR the Soviet victory at Stalingrad was portrayed as salvation of European civilization. Hence, for the people of the post-Soviet region Stalingrad is a very powerful symbol, and this symbol was used to compare the Battle of Tskhinvali with the Battle of Stalingrad. Consequently, Georgian actions should be compared with those of Nazi Germany, so such coverage is pro-Russian: “Tskhinvali has become the second Stalingrad” (“Tskhinvali stal vtorym Stalingradom”).

The usage of this comparison proves the broadcaster's wish to make the audience perceive one side of the conflict as aggressor or occupier (Nazi Germany lost the battle in Stalingrad, and Georgia lost Tskhinvali) and the other as the side trying to protect its freedom in every possible way. It can even be regarded as a way to legitimize Russia's actions. Nataliya Gumenyuk explained such comparison as a consequence of the absence of an editor working together with the journalist of

Inter TV-Channel in Tskhinvali, and hence the absence of an opportunity to edit his stories: they appeared in the news programs as they were sent by the journalist. So, indirectly she agreed that it was a value judgment, but called it unavoidable and natural in the situation when the journalist works in the epicenter of the war. Such an explanation may be valid for errors in numbers, but it can hardly explain the choice of metaphors. The comparison with Stalingrad resulted not from the inability to verify facts but from the internalization of Soviet beliefs, thus, revealing journalistic ideology rather than technology.

There were some more ways of news domestication through anchoring in Ukraine, but with the help of linkage to the Soviet legacy. For example, the threat of a return to the Cold War as a possible punishment for Russia by Western states was emphasized by a journalist, and it is a symbol that is easily understood in post-Soviet Ukraine. There was also an attempt to compare the situation in international relations after the South Ossetia War with the one in the period of the Cold War: “Analysts deem it to be the most critical statement of the American leader about Russia since the end of the Cold War” (“Po mneniju analitikov, eto samoje kritichnoje vyskazyvanije amerikanskogo lidera v adres Rossii so vremen okonchanija kholodnoi vojny”).

Anchoring in the Soviet past helped to create a clear and understandable image for the Ukrainian audience of what was happening in South Ossetia. Nataliya Gumenyuk recognized biased use of the Soviet symbol as a means to evaluate actions of the sides of the war, but explained it by technical difficulties.

War, conflict, events or situation in Georgia

A good example of the choice of wording (Fairclough, 2003) is a description of events that took place in South Ossetia. A word “conflict” is often used to describe the South Ossetia War; however, journalists did not provide any criteria for calling it a conflict, not a war. Such choice of terms can be more favorable for the side that is considered to be an aggressor or the one that has caused more significant destruction. In case of the 2008 South Ossetia War it is Russia.

However, “conflict” is not the only word that was used instead of war. There was a wide range of synonyms: events in Georgia, situation in Georgia, events in the Caucasus, combat actions, situation in the Caucasus, Georgian events, military operation etc. Some of these phrases are euphemisms that downplayed the seriousness and importance of the war.

According to Nataliya Gumenyuk, journalists of *Inter* wanted to avoid “kindling of the situation” and “excessive dramatizing,” and that is why in most cases they did not use the word “war.” She also mentioned that in the first days of the war it was not clear what was going on; however, as the analysis has shown, the tendency to avoid the word “war” existed even in the aftermath of the war.

In the domesticated news about the South Ossetia War it was never called a Russian-Georgian one until the end of August 2008 (a few weeks after the official

end of it). Nataliya Gumenyuk in the interview did not deny that a certain level of pro-Russian orientation could take place because, as she puts it, the editor of the channel supported Russia, and his views could have been reflected in such a way. According to Nataliya Gumenyuk, the editor was insisting that Russia was not “an obvious aggressor.” Nataliya Gumenyuk said that there had been discussions and intentions to name things “as they were,” but she said that the journalists had needed certain time to understand and to assess the situation.

It is notable that at the beginning of the interview Nataliya Gumenyuk used the word “conflict,” whereas later she started using the word “war” more often. Consequently, the strategy of the naming of the South Ossetia War proves that the coverage was pro-Russian, and it may have been encouraged by the top-management of the channel that supported Russia.

Kiev versus Ukraine

Usage of the capital as a metonym in the meaning of the state is a very popular technique in news reporting. Usually it helps to avoid tautology, when there is a country in one sentence, and the capital — in another. This technique was also used by journalists and presenters of *Inter TV-Channel*, but there was one special case of using the metonym Kiev. In the news about the Russian Black Sea Fleet, Kiev was used instead of Ukraine even at the beginning of the news (in such a position there cannot be any risk of tautology), and also in some news there was no mentioning of Ukraine, only that of Kiev, even in sentences where the other side was described as Russia not Moscow: “Russia, following all rules, has already informed Kiev about it.” There are also examples when two successive sentences start with “Kiev,” not “Ukraine.”

This way of using metonym “Kiev” can be found only in the news stories about ships of the Russian Black Sea Fleet in Ukraine, which were strongly criticized by Moscow. Probably presenters and journalists wanted to underline that this unpleasant decision was made by Ukrainian leaders, by politicians, but not by all Ukrainians. Such a position is close to the one announced by Russian leaders, which again makes domesticated news pro-Russian.

Ukraine as an object of Russia’s actions

In the news about the war mentioning Russia and Ukraine, Ukraine would usually be an object of action, whereas Russia — a subject. For example, in the news that concerns Ukraine and Russia on August 9, Ukraine turns into an object of the action (Moscow blames Kiev, “Moskva obviniajet Kiev”).

One more aspect of the pro-Russian coverage of news is the use of the phrase “ships of the Black Sea Fleet” instead of “ships of the Russian Black Sea Fleet.” If a presenter uses it without mentioning the name of the country, it should be probably understood by the audience without any additional information, however, in the Black Sea there are also Ukrainian ships, not only Russian ones. Such coverage proves pro-Russian orientation of the channel.

War important in itself

The journalists of *Inter* TV-Channel did not try to start the news with the connection to Ukraine even if it had existed. As Nataliya Gumenyuk explained, journalists of *Inter* regarded the South Ossetia War as an international event important in itself. For example, in the news about the situation in Abkhazia on August 13, there was information about “a Ukraine’s participation in the war, but it was not mentioned in the presenter’s text as well as at the beginning of the journalist’s story. Instead, it was placed towards the end of the story and may have looked as an attempt to diminish the importance of this information. Hence, the anchor to Ukraine was presented as less important than general information about the war.

Anchoring in the present situation in Ukraine

There were also some news stories where the link to Ukraine was used as a hook. Very often it can be the only mention of Ukraine and the main topic of the news or a story may be rather different. For example, in the story about Georgia’s decision to leave the CIS and its next appeal to other countries to follow its example, Ukraine was mentioned separately from other countries, and it was underlined in the opening of the story.

Another example is the news about the peacekeeping mission of five European leaders where information about the Ukrainian President was at the beginning of the presenter’s text and of the sentence. There was an additional focus on Ukraine at the opening of the journalist’s story. The aim of the whole mission was communicated through the words of the Ukrainian President.

In the majority of news stories about the conflict within the Ukrainian parliamentary coalition, it was often presented as caused by the contradictions concerning Ukraine’s position on the South Ossetia War; however, it was not true. This tendency can be seen, for example, in such a sentence: “MPs were discussing conflict in the Caucasus but as a result “reached” a conflict in the coalition.” (“Deputaty rassmatryvali konflikt na Kavkaze, a v itoge poluchili konflikt v koalicii”).

Ukraine as a possible/victim side of the war

The idea of Ukraine’s participation in the war in some way was always present in the news or mentioned in the sound bites. Such a choice of quotation could lead to the impression that there was a real threat that Ukraine could participate in the conflict. Such a hook probably is a very effective one because it brings the war closer to home. For example, in one story a journalist recited the President’s words about how the conflict affected Ukraine, and these words were proved by the appropriate sound bite where Ukrainian President Victor Yushchenko said that Ukraine was being involved in international conflicts against its own wishes. Possibility of new conflicts in the region, where Ukraine is situated, was the topic usually considered as the most important one raised in President Yushchenko’s statements. On August 14, the news about a Ukrainian ferry started with “Ferry returns from war to

Ukraine” (Parom vozvrashaetsia v ukrainu s vojny). However, the ship definitely did not take part in the war or combat actions. This is a synecdoch that brings the war closer to Ukraine.

In the news that followed information about Russia’s recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia independence there was a message that these republics were not the only “hot spots” in the post-Soviet region, and Transdniestria was mentioned next with an indication that it was very close to Ukraine. However, formally Transdniestria is not a hot spot; there has been no active warfare in the since the 90s, so it can be regarded as an attempt to make the news more resonant and to domesticate it.

The journalists of *Inter* seemed to avoid direct assumptions that Ukraine could have been the next target of Russia, but still they underlined this topic by, for example, choosing appropriate quotations from the speeches of the politicians. Such an approach could reflect own unquestioned views of the journalists.

Frame of Ukraine becoming closer to the West

There is one more way to domesticate news about war: it was done through the frame that the South Ossetia War influenced Ukraine by bringing it closer to the West. For example, by underlining that it was welcomed in NATO and that Ukraine should join the alliance to avoid Georgia’s fate. In one news story there was a clear statement that the contradiction between Georgia and Russia pushed Ukraine closer to Europe. Europe or the West was understood not only as the European Union, but also as the USA and NATO.

CONCLUSION

Inter is considered to be not only one of the most popular TV channels in Ukraine but also one of the richest. Starting from the first day of the war, *Inter* was broadcasting exclusive materials from the war zone. The *Inter* TV-Channel was also the only Ukrainian TV-channel that had its own correspondent in South Ossetia from the first day of the war. Moreover, it has devoted a significant part of its broadcasting time to the South Ossetia War. For the period of one month since the beginning of the conflict, more than 150 news stories on the topic were produced. One third of them were domesticated. As the interview with the former Head of the Department of the International News of *Inter* TV-Channel has shown, journalists regarded the war in itself as a more crucial event than the Ukrainian reaction to it.

Unequal quoting at *Inter* was favorable to the President and opposition Party of Regions, whereas their opponent, Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko and her political bloc received significantly less coverage. Journalists of *Inter* domesticated news about the 2008 South Ossetia War only using positions of the most influential Ukrainian political forces or through the statements of the most outstanding or even radical organizations without covering the whole spectrum of opinions that existed within the Parliament.

Anchoring to the Soviet past by using a comparison between Tskhinvali and Stalingrad and the particular approach to naming mentioned above indicate the pro-Russian position of the channel that pretended to be neutral. Significant attention to the speakers of the pro-Russian and opposition Party of Regions also proves this point. According to Nataliya Gumenyuk, there was an intention to stay neutral, but due to technical limitations, strong external and internal pressure of the pro-Russian top-management it was not always possible. Ukraine in *Inter* coverage was presented as a very close ally and friend of Russia; moreover, in domesticated news on the conflict the role of Russia in the war was weakened by different techniques, probably in order not to spoil the image of it as a Ukrainian ally.

It is true that the coverage of the war creates a lot of ambiguous situations and requires huge human and financial resources in order to provide balanced news, but still it is not impossible. It is also true that *Inter* produced many news stories, but it does not mean that the variety of the images can counterbalance biased coverage. The standard journalistic demand of balance requires balance not only in the news program in general but in each news story separately. So it is a very uncertain question whether the pro-Russian stories from South Ossetia could have been balanced by the stories from Georgia.

Some distortions in the coverage of *Inter* were allowed and were regarded as unavoidable features. Pro-Russian inclination was not only to some extent sanctioned by the Head of the Department of the International News, but also reflected the position of the top-management.

Journalists of *Inter* TV-Channel underlined an anchor to Ukraine in certain news, while in other news it was put at the end of the text. Placing it in the end was typical for the news where such an anchor could have indicated anti-Russian actions of Ukraine. Journalists of the channel also used strategies of the naming that revealed their pro-Russian position: “Russia” versus “Kiev,” “Black Sea Fleet” instead of “Russian Black Sea Fleet.” Such naming as well as avoiding of the phrase “Russian-Georgian war” could be regarded as an additional evidence of the pro-Russian position and reflection of Russian rhetoric.

Pro-Russian orientation of the channel and the attention to the frame of Ukraine being closer to the West could seem contradictory, but to my mind, it reflected the internal situation in the newsroom: on the one hand, there was the top-management that blamed Georgia for the war, and on the other hand, there was an intention of the journalists (at least of the Head of the International News Department) to stay neutral and avoid “dramatizations.”

In the news coverage the South Ossetia War became an amplifier of the split of the Ukrainian society into pro-Russian and pro-Georgian groups, but journalists did not either explain this split, or problematize it. So, such coverage leads to its justification/legitimization. Lack of explanation of different frames used by the journalists is typical for Ukrainian channels. Ukrainian channels do not address

the whole of Ukraine as its audience, but in fact they focus on a narrower group of people that share the same assumptions as the journalists of the channel.

2008, which is the year when the researched events took place, was relatively contributory to the freedom of speech in Ukraine: media were still enjoying the achievements of the Orange revolution that took place in the end of 2004. Consequently, discovered media biases cannot be explained simply by the pressure of the owner (which, however, cannot be excluded), but also more complicated mechanisms were involved. These are self-censorship, developed during the years of violated freedom of speech, long established tradition to be loyal to the Government or the President, excessive inclination to domesticate news and excessive attention to certain groups of politicians with ungrounded ignorance of the other, lack of critical approach to Russia and its relations with Ukraine, simplification, and orientation on the narrow audience. As a result, in case of not fully developed journalistic standards the excessive usage of the mechanisms of news domestication may result in distorted and biased coverage. News domestication not only makes news more understandable, but also reproduces the dominant ideology of the society (or of the owners) (Gurevitch et al., 1991). Ukrainian media were rendering news about the South Ossetia War as comprehensible, appealing and relevant to domestic audience information by constructing the meanings of it in ways that are compatible with the culture and the dominant ideological sets of the parts of the societies they serve.

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