

**ISCKMC 2020**  
**International Scientific Congress «KNOWLEDGE, MAN AND CIVILIZATION»**  
**RUSSIAN-POLISH DISCUSSIONS IN THE DUMA IN 1908–1917:**  
**FEATURES OF CROSS-NATIONALIST DISCOURSE**

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**Abstract**

The article analyzes the cross-nationalist discourse in the pre-revolutionary State Duma of Russia. The article examines rhetorical and pragmatic features of parliamentary debates of Russian and Polish nationalists. The cross-nationalist public discourse of 1908–1917 made it possible to update speech activities of Russian and Polish nationalists. The object of research is discursive practices of Russian right radicals. One of the main features of cross-nationalist discourse is the system-forming role of national and historical arguments, since the speakers appealed to contemporary relations between the Russians and the Poles through the prism of history of relations between Russia and Poland and various kinds of ethnic identification-related arguments. As a result of the analysis of speeches of the Duma deputies, it was established that the most important pragmatic strategy for Russian nationalists was building an image of the enemy. The typology of tools for creating an image of the enemy showed the active use of a variety of methods of speech impact on the audience: interpretation of the political position as hatred, attribution of intolerance and fanaticism, attribution of a point of view about the inferiority of Russians, direct accusation of hatred of Russians, threats. Russian nationalists used a communicative strategy to expose a secret conspiracy against Russia and Russian people. It was concluded that cross-nationalist discourse is an agonal discourse of collision in a public institution of power of nationalists promoting different nationalities as the highest value. This is a public political dispute between representatives of opposing nationalist ideologies.

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*Keywords:* Parliamentary rhetoric, parliamentary speech, speech pragmatics, Russian nationalism, Polish nationalism, rhetoric of nationalism



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## 1. Introduction

Extremist discourse and extremist texts have become objects of intensive scientific studies in the past few years. The texts of extremist religious organizations (Balukova & Vesnina, 2013), images used to influence the addressee (Christien, 2016; Mircică, 2014; Zlokazov & Sofronova, 2015), cognitive characteristics and communicative strategies of modern nationalist discourse (Sulfikar, 2007; Voroshilova, 2014), the psychological impact of religious and political extremist texts (Tagiltseva, 2015), genres of contemporary extremist discourse (Babikova & Voroshilova, 2015; Muhammad et al., 2020) have been studied. The collective monograph “Extremist text and destructive personality” (Ermakov, 2014) is of undoubted scientific interest.

The study of Russian nationalist discourse in dynamics, the identification of its constants and dominants, features allow a better understanding of origins and causes of the phenomenon of ethnic intolerance and extremism in Russian society. The study of rhetoric and pragmatics of Russian nationalists in the historical aspect is very important for understanding the speech genesis of Russian nationalism, identifying stable forms, genres, models and other constants of speech activities of representatives of this ideological group.

## 2. Problem Statement

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Russian nationalists were politicians and public figures who defended right-wing radical views. These include members of the Black Hundred organizations – the Union of the Russian People and the Russian People's Union named after Mikhail Archangel, non-systemic radical monarchists-conservatives and moderate rightists who shared the position of the Black Hundreds (e.g., some members of the Duma faction of the Union of October 17). All these people recognized Russian nation as the highest value of society, required protection of the rights of Russian Orthodox Christians, domestic and foreign policies in accordance with Russian interests. All these goals should be solved on a conservative-protective platform relying on the monarch and the state apparatus. In 1907, Russian nationalists became represented in the Second State Duma, and formed a parliamentary majority in the Third Duma. Thus, Russian nationalist rhetoric became institutionalized.

In the Third and Fourth State Dumas, Russian and Polish nationalists were represented. It led to a peculiar phenomenon: for the first time, two nationalisms clashed in a public institution, which provoked mutual attacks, accusations and threats. Russian and Polish radicals interpreted themselves and their ideology in the context of the enemy, choosing specific methods of persuasion and influence for Duma speeches.

The parliamentary debate on national issues, which covered various kinds of proposals for granting special rights to Finland and Poland, is of interest. The Polish issue opens up a special discourse formation in parliament, since the Polish deputies, having formed an active political group, became an influential Duma player, especially in the First and Second Dumas, where votes of the Polish circle decided the fate of several bills. Speeches of Polish deputies of the Third Duma were blocked by the right-wing majority of parliament, especially the Black Hundred radicals. Russian deputies Georgy

Zamyslovsky and Sergei Alekseev became responsible for the opposition to Polish nationalists. The speeches of these deputies became a kind of rhetorical nucleus of the discussion.

### **3. Research Questions**

The object of research is the Duma discourse of a cross-nationalist or interethnic nature. The subject of research is rhetorical and pragmatic tools of persuasion of the Duma audience used by Russian nationalists. The research material is 68 Duma speeches delivered from 1908 to 1911 on the issues of the administrative status, political, economic and social situation in Poland. The speeches were reflected in official reports of the State Duma and analytical publications of political parties. During the research, the following questions were solved.

1. What arguments dominate the system of persuasiveness in cross-nationalist discourse?
2. By what means do discourse agents build an image of the enemy? What communication strategies are in demand?
3. What are the main features of the cross-nationalist institutional discourse in Russia?

### **4. Purpose of the Study**

This article presents results of the study aimed at modelling the system of rhetorical and pragmatic means of Russian nationalists in the parliament of the early 20th century. The segment of the study reflected in the article is aimed at identifying constitutive features of s cross-nationalist discourse.

### **5. Research Methods**

The descriptive method and the method of critical analysis of discourse were used. At the first stage, speeches and events related to the Polish issue were selected from the transcripts of State Duma meetings. The system of argumentation was identified and analyzed. At the next stage, the most important agonal markers of speeches were identified: aggressive communication strategies, means of creating an image of the enemy, ways of appealing to political opponents. Then, the use of pragmatic means was correlated with the conflict (Russian or Polish). The degree of demand for certain rhetorical and pragmatic means was revealed.

### **6. Findings**

Cross-nationalistic discourse is an agonal discourse in a public institution promoting different nationalities as the highest value. This is a public political dispute between representatives of opposing nationalist ideologies, such as Russian and Polish ones. This type of discourse is typical of parliamentary debates. It is characterized by a high degree of agonism, which manifests itself in the following features: the use of arguments to the nation and history, building of an image of the enemy, dominance of communicative strategies of accusation and exposure, binary opposition of nations, the use of stable images that appeal to the emotional sphere of the listener (for example, image of a child).

During the debates with Polish radicals on national issues, the Russian right representatives used traditional methods of persuasion and new pragmatic ones.

### **6.1. Historical arguments**

The historical argument is an argument to well-known facts of national or general history. Deputies in the pre-revolutionary Duma appealed to events from different periods, famous statesmen, and historical documents. Nationalist deputies appealing to the period of Peter the Great, the Troubles, the Great French Revolution and assassination of Alexander II, looked for parallels with modernity, tried to explain and predict the political process of the early 20th century using historical facts. However, the main point of using these arguments is to legitimize and institutionalize radical views through the "appropriation" of great events and personalities, deduce the genesis of Russian nationalism from Russian history (Gromyko, 2017).

In the parliamentary debates on Poland and Finland, appealing to history becomes a key argument, since nationalists tried to view modern interethnic relations through the prism of their formation. In the speeches delivered by the Black Hundreds, both Poland and Finland were interpreted as colonies that received an impetus for economic and cultural development due to the metropolis. Deputies representing the Polish colo created gloomy pictures of the oppression of the Poles and the Catholic Church by the Russian state. However, the attitude towards Poland was much more complicated: colonization developed their own, indigenous culture rather than gave them an alien Russian one.

The negative interpretation of history of Poland at the initial stage of its entry into the Russian Empire and comparison of this interpretation with facts of development within the metropolis can be considered a vivid realization of the historical argument. To prove the positive results of colonization of Poland, the Russian right deputies relied on the authority of economists, financiers, historians, those who were not associated with the official state discourse. In 1908, the rightists considered it unnecessary and unconvincing to appeal to works by D.I. Ilovaisky, and tried to fend off judgments of opponents with their own ideas. A set of persuasive means included the works by the prominent socialist economist Ivan Yanzhul and even the Polish historian Vladislav Studnitsky. In general, the transcripts of parliamentary sessions show that the Russian right deputies used rational arguments based on statistical data and expert opinions as tools to counter emotional speeches of the Polish colo.

### **6.2. National arguments**

The discourse of Russian nationalists contained national arguments as a persuasive set of heterogeneous arguments as appeals to such mental categories as national consciousness, spirit, character, national identity, history of a nation, i.e. various kinds of phenomena associated with ethnic identification. The national argument was included in the core of the persuasive toolbox of discourse agents (Gromyko, 2018). It is known that this argument had several different models in the institutional discussion of the early twentieth century.

In their debate with the Polish Colo, Russian nationalists used the basic model of the nation-sacrifice argumentation, which assumes that the speaker sees the Russian nation as a victim of other nations, etc. The only deviation from this model is a confusion of national and religious issues. The

dichotomy "Orthodox – Catholic" was superimposed on the dichotomy "Russian – Polish", which complicated the debate by expanding the range of problems and the circle of agents of the discourse. Russians and all Orthodox (Belarusians, Ukrainians) were considered to be “victims”, and the official Catholic Church was “aggressors”.

The method of hypothetical exchanges was used. The Russians (Orthodox) were considered aggressors, and the conclusion was made that the Russians would not or could not behave in this way. This technique is one of several ways of building a negative ethnic self-identity, that is, defining Russians as non-Poles, non-Catholics, non-fanatics, non-separatists.

The positive construction of ethnic self-identification of Russian nationalists is presented rather broadly, much broader than in the debates on other problems. This is due to the fact that according to the Black Hundreds, Russians and Poles were opposed by a number of historical characteristics, and this binary was alive, developing, and complementary. For example, in response to Dmowski's accusations of forcible Russification of Poles Alekseev stated that the Russian people never set the goal of making a Russian out of a Pole, and the Russian idea is an idea of greatness of Russia. The pretentious ending of Alekseev's speech delivered on April 29, 1908 is remarkable: “the Russian people will never allow themselves to extinguish the spirit of any national idea, any other people, the Russian people are guided by the principle: live and let other peoples live. But the Russian people, giving everyone the right to be culturally determined, will never, gentlemen, allow people to speak to them in two languages”. In general, the Russian people is described as an ethnic group, tolerant of other peoples, inclined to develop relationships with them, but tough in relation to those who are ungrateful to the Russian state. Such verbal representation was characteristic only for the discussion on the Polish and Finnish issues and did not affect other national (Tatars, Bashkirs, Caucasian peoples) and religious (Muslim) minorities.

### **6.3. An image of the enemy**

The most important pragmatic strategy for the Russian right deputies was to build an image of the enemy within the empire. The "enemy" is attributed to the most aggressive signs, a negative worldview.

In Duma speeches of the right-wing deputies, Poland and the Poles were considered as enemies. The ways of representing an image of the “Polish enemy” are of interest.

1) Interpretation of the political position as hatred of Russia and everything Russian, as a desire to weaken the Russian state. For example, the Octobrist Vasily von Anrep, who did not formally belong to the Black Hundreds, considered the intention of the Polish Colo to abstain from voting on the allocation of funds for primary education in the following way: “You think if it were different [votes of the Polish Colo were not decisive in the Third Duma – SG], we would now receive a refusal in public education in Russia, because their idea is: let the Russian country rot in ignorance. They refused to vote for these 5,500,000 rubles”.

2) Attribution of intolerance and fanaticism to Catholic Poles.

3) Attribution of a point of view about the inferiority of the Russians. The right-wingers in the Duma were collecting a dossier on the Polish circle and all public figures, writers, scientists, journalists who had ever given a derogatory assessment to the Russians. Then, these assessments were summed up, exaggerated and positioned as a consolidated attitude of all Poles to all Russians.

4) Direct accusation of hatred of the Poles towards Russians, which often turned into threats directed at the Polish nation as a whole.

5) A detailed description of violence of the Poles against Russians and Orthodox. It was the most effective way of building an image of the enemy. At the stage of culmination of the debate, each right-wing deputy gave several such examples. As a result, the listener got the impression that the attacks of the Poles on the Russians are systematic.

#### **6.4. Communication strategy of exposure**

One of the most important means of influencing the audience and opponents in the process of the Duma interethnic debate was the communicative strategy of exposure. Revealing pathos is characteristic of Black Hundred deputies, while representatives of the Polish circle chose the pathos of accusation or pity. The strategy of exposure was that the object (the Polish circle, the Poles) was attributed to various kinds of fraud, deliberate inconsistency between words and deeds, words and goals, and the speaker publicly demonstrated this fraud or inconsistency. The strategy provided for the existence of a certain secret, a kind of conspiracy of the Poles against Russia and the Russians, and this conspiracy acquired a sacred meaning, crystallizing in a specific event.

The object of exposure was the leader of the Polish circle Roman Dmowski, the main whistleblower was Sergei Alekseev. As the Russian-Polish nationalist debate developed in the spring and summer of 1908, an upward gradation of exposure was observed.

The next stage of exposure is aggressive quotes from the nationalist and anti-imperial work "Thoughts of a Modern Pole", published by Roman Skrzycki. This treatise was not known in St. Petersburg, so its harsh tone should have surprised the deputies. The audience, according to Alekseev, should have been shocked by the fact that under the pseudonym Roman Skrzycki was hiding none other than Roman Dmowski. A few weeks later, Alekseev cited this work by Dmowski, where the author declared that "in private life, a person will not do falsehood, but as for national relations, he can "beat him down" and he will do so".

### **7. Conclusion**

The cross-nationalist public discourse that existed in the Russian Duma in 1908–1917 made it possible to renew the speech activity of Russian and Polish nationalists. In conditions of agonizing debates on national issues, radical forces revised rhetorical and pragmatic means. The debates with the Polish circle changed the Black Hundreds' perception of persuasiveness of public speaking and became one of the stages in the institutionalization of Russian nationalist rhetoric, its transition from the non-institutional invective to civilized parliamentary forms. Russian radicals, unlike the Polish circle, which based their statements on pathos and metaphors, relied on rational argumentation: statistical summaries, unbiased research, experts not affiliated with the authorities, historical facts.

## Acknowledgments

The research was financially supported by the Russian Foundation for Basic Research within the scientific project No. 20-012-00111 "Russian nationalism in the linguistic aspect: pragmatics, dynamics, expertise".

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