

## Binary opposition ‘us/them’ in British and American media texts about conflicts

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*The article addresses configurations, which embody interaction between the constituents of the axiological opposition “us/them” in the British and American discourse of media. The research objective is to identify the configuration patterns and describe peculiarities of the evaluative interaction of “ours” and “theirs”. The empirical corpus incorporates 1200 English news reports and feature articles, representing the conflict situation and selected from UK and US newspapers. A number of research methods have been applied, among which are discourse analysis, semantic analysis, contextual analysis, comparative analysis, quantitative analysis. The types of conflicts, which are addressed in British and American media texts of different genres, have been identified. Most of the selected media texts cover foreign policy conflicts (80% in British publications and 60% in the American ones). The modern media agenda concentrates on external conflicts in order to divert the attention of the linguocultural community from domestic problems. Different types of ‘evaluators’ were singled out in British and American media texts about conflicts. The interaction between the “us/them” opposition constituents is determined by the ‘evaluator’, who can be a journalist – the author of the article, acting as a narrator/an observer; a character of the article – the author of the quotation containing assessment; or a collective author, i.e. the editorial board, a party, people, community. The configurational models of the axiological interaction of “us” and “them” in British and American media texts on conflict topics have been considered. 8 logically possible patterns of interaction between “ours” and “theirs” as components of the axiological opposition “us/them” were singled out. The most frequent configuration model in the selected media texts of both genres is  $X \rightarrow - Y$ . The  $X_{impl} \rightarrow + Y$  configuration pattern is the least representative in both genres.*

**Keywords:** Conflict, Discourse of Media, Evaluation, Media Text, Opposition

### 1 Introduction

The research is aimed at identifying the configuration patterns and peculiarities of the evaluative interaction of “ours” and “theirs” in the cultural opposition “us/them”. It deals with the ways it is actualised in British and American media texts about conflicts. The dichotomy “us/them” is equivalent to such terms as “us/them”, “self/other”, “own/stranger”, “familiar/alien”. It is considered to be a universal category that is based on the division of the society into two opposite groups: “us” and “them”. The “us/them” opposition is axiological by nature, since it is based on binarity as the principle of the evaluative classification of the world. Binary opposition is a key concept in different fields, among them are philosophy, sociology, psychology, anthropology, cultural studies, political studies, and linguistics. According to M. Rock (2020), “all elements of human culture can only be understood in relation to one another and how they function within a larger system or the overall environment”. In cultural studies, binary oppositions are encountered when exploring the

relationships between different groups of people, for instance: upper-class and lower-class, male and female, or developed and under-developed, and so on.

In the modern scientific paradigm, the opposition “us/them” is studied from the standpoint of different theoretical and methodological approaches and is considered by representatives of various branches of humanities: in psychology (Dixon et al. 2020), in linguistics (Bartmiński 2007; Borowski 2015), in literary studies (Anfilova et al. 2020), journalism (Davies 2007), in sociology (Crisp & Hewstone 2007), in political studies (Flint 2016; Elcheroth & Reicher 2017), within critical discourse analysis (Dijk 2006; Reisigl & Wodak 2005; Wodak 2011), etc. The diversity of approaches is also observed when discussing the status of the opposition “us/them”, which is treated as a category (Matveyeva 2012; Petrochenko 2006; Protasova 2015), a concept (Parshina 2005; Byessonova 2019), an archetype (Sergeeva 2003), a mythologeme (Stoyanova 2018), etc.

Being observed in different types of social relations, the opposition “us/them” is embodied at all levels of language. This opposition is characteristic of each individual culture. It manifests itself in the mentality of individual nations, transforming the characteristics of the description and knowledge of the world by an individual into the characteristics of entire peoples and cultures. The opposition in question is characteristic of global thinking, since, with small variations in verbalization, it is embodied in the language and culture of each nation, proceeding from a person’s basic understanding of the world.

Despite the researchers’ attention to the phenomenon of the cultural opposition “us/them”, the underlying evaluation mechanisms of this dichotomy in British and American media texts in general, and configurational patterns of evaluative interaction between “ours” and “theirs” in particular, have not been disclosed, which makes the present study relevant. A special focus should be made on types of conflicts in British and American media texts of different genres, in which the axiological opposition “us/them” is embodied, as well as on types of ‘evaluators’ and possible configurational models of the axiological interaction of “us” and “them”.

## **2 Interdisciplinary nature of opposition us/them. Problem statement**

The problem of the contradictory nature of the opposition “us/them” aroused a particular interest in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when the problem of the “alien” entered the philosophical discourse. In philosophical studies, the opposition “us/them” is often interpreted as the dichotomy “I/Another”. The application of such neutral concepts in philosophy can be explained by the need to objectify the truth. Turning to the concept of “Another” makes it possible to broader define the framework of the “alien”. In philosophical discourse, the phenomenon “one’s own” is embodied through the phenomenon “alien”. In the opposition “I/Another” “I” and “Another” are regarded as analogous concepts, which can be cognised through each other. “Another” loses the characteristics of alienation and becomes “ours”. From the philosophical point of view, all knowledge of the surrounding world is reduced to the opposition “I/not I, the Other”. “I/Another” correlates with the opposition “my/someone else’s” in the following way: the boundaries of “our own” narrow down and acquire the name “I”, and the boundaries of the “alien” expand and become “everything else”, “the Other”.

In linguistics, the opposition “us/them” is considered to be a semantic, conceptual, linguocultural category, categorical complex, conceptual opposition, etc. (Kishina 2011: 174). The opposition “us/them” is universal due to its epistemological significance,

influencing the actions and behaviour of a person. The concept of “us/them” determines a particular linguistic culture. The linguistic treatment of “ownness” and “foreignness” is closely related to philosophical, mythological, ethnographic views and approaches. All national cultures of the world consist of various ethnocultural (“our own”), foreign cultural (“alien”) and general cultural (international) components. Consequently, the verbalization of the “us/them” phenomenon occurs in connection with the embodiment of intercultural ties and their integration into the host culture, as well as through the perception of one’s “personal” culture.

Being one of the cultural constants, the “us/them” opposition has been significant for millennia. The subject matter of cultural studies concerning the opposition “us/them” is mostly collisions with a foreign culture and language. In cultural studies, the problem of “ownness and foreignness” acquires a special significance, since people cognise other cultures by comparing them with their own. On the one hand, the opposition “us/them” is determined by historical and cultural development of a speaking community. On the other hand, the culture itself is determined by evolution in awareness of this phenomenon. The opposition “us/them” is directly related to the process of identification of any culture (Mead 2015; Fomina 2007). A person’s identity directly affects the formation of his/her ideas about other people, and, consequently, the emergence of a binary opposition “us/them”. A modern person lives in a search for identity and constant interaction with “strangers”, which is explained by developed communication channels, active migration flows, greater accessibility of tourism both geographically and pricewise (Milovanova 2014).

Considerable impact into identity studies has been made by scholars within the framework of positioning theory (Harré et al. 2009; Andreouli 2010). Among others, Bucholtz and Hall’s identity framework (Bucholtz & Hall 2004; Bucholtz & Hall 2005; Bucholtz & Hall 2008) and stance triangle by Du Bois (Du Bois 2007) should be mentioned.

Due to the division of the world into “our” and “alien”, a system of people’s thinking or ethnic worldview is formed. In the same manner, ethnic contradictions arise, which are an obligatory consequence of the collision of the groups “Us” and “Them”. They have a direct impact on people’s perception of other cultures, and the emergence of intercultural stereotypes and attitudes.

The opposition “us/them” is a necessary constituent of the perception of one’s own culture and the cultures of other ethnic groups. The nature of this opposition causes manifestation of this phenomenon in linguistic and cultural environment. “Alien” and “other” are the sources of the evolution of a personality and culture as a whole.

### **3 Semantics of opposition “us/them”**

The conceptual complexity of the opposition under study is due to a certain semantic fuzziness and ambiguity of its key concepts. Let us turn to the meanings of lexemes representing the opposition under study: *self*, *we*, *own*, *familiar* and *other*, *they*, *stranger*, *alien*. The concept “own (us)” is verbalised by the following lexemes: *we*, *self*, *own*, *familiar*. Oxford Dictionaries: English Dictionary, Thesaurus, & grammar help (2021) defines them in the following way: *we* “used to refer to the speaker together with other people regarded in the same category”, *self* “a person’s essential being that distinguishes them from others, especially considered as the object of introspection or reflexive action”, *own* “used with a

possessive to emphasise that someone or something belongs or relates to the person mentioned”, *familiar* “in close friendship; intimate”.

The definition of “alien” causes certain difficulties associated not only with its semantic fuzziness and ambiguity, but also with the actualization in the public linguistic consciousness of such correlated concepts as “other” and “different”. There is an opinion that the semantic characteristics of the cultural categories “foreignness” – “otherness” – “differentness” are based on the same axiological feature with varying degrees of its manifestation. Initially “alien” was considered only a representative of another ethnic group, a bearer of other cultural values (Krasnykh 2003). According to N. Solovyova (2012: 388–389), in the course of the development of social relations, the dichotomy “us/them” began to be rethought through various aspects of human life. At the present stage, the opposition “us/them” can be considered on the basis of the following parameters: kinship and family relations (family, clan), ethnic (nation, people), linguistic (language, dialect), confessional (religion, faith, sect) belonging, behavioral manifestations (belonging to a social group), etc. This opinion is partially reflected in the dictionary interpretations of the concept “alien”. Oxford Dictionaries: English Dictionary, Thesaurus, & grammar help (2021) defines them in the following way: *other* “used to refer to a person or thing that is different or distinct from one already mentioned or known about; further; additional; that which is distinct from, different from, or opposite to something or oneself”, *they* “people in general”, *stranger* “a person who does not know, or is not known in, a particular place or community”, *alien* “belonging to a foreign country; unfamiliar and disturbing or distasteful; supposedly from another world; extraterrestrial”.

The concepts of “us” and “them” are multifaceted – “them”, as opposed to “us”, may be a representative of another nation, race, professing a different faith, adhering to different political views.

It is important to highlight the axiological basis of the opposition in question. The actions of a group of “us” are always considered to be “correct”, “peaceful”, “friendly”. The actions of their opponents are associated with “wrong”, “bad”, “enemy”, which, in turn, reflects the essence of power. The main components of such a social opposition are as follows: the active element (an attacker; a leader of a group of “us”); the object of aggression (a group of “them”, “strangers”, “enemy”, absent (“out of the brackets” of the speech situation) or really present), and the passive element (audience, masses, led by the leader) (Schmitt 1992; Solovyov 2006).

The aforementioned opposition of “us/them” is one of the axiological oppositions, in which “us” is associated with positive assessment and “them” is related to the negative evaluative attitude (see also (Zhdanova 2004: 157–158). Thus, the prototypical pattern of the opposition “us/them” as related to the axiological dichotomy “good/bad” can be embodied as follows: the concept of “us” is associated with a positive evaluative attitude and correlates with the concept of “good”, “them” – is associated with a negative assessment and correlates with the concept of “bad”.

#### **4 Evaluation and conflict in discourse of media**

The discourse of media is highly evaluative. This is due to the fact that, possessing an ideological resource, modern mass media have a direct impact on the consciousness of the individual, public consciousness, form the current public opinion and speech culture. Media

texts that record ongoing events are one of the most accessible sources of information, in which, by conscious selection, the events of the surrounding reality are singled out and can be subjectively interpreted. Despite the fact that modern rules of journalism presuppose the rejection of open propaganda, the assessment finds its expression in the texts of different genres of media discourse. For instance, it manifests itself in the way information, facts and phenomena of reality are selected and classified, in their presentation in line with the necessary publication policy, as well as in the ratio of negative and positive details, in specific linguistic means.

In the modern era of “information wars” and incessant conflicts of varying intensity, the role of the media is greater than ever, since media discourse, in general, and media texts, in particular, describing and evaluating the most relevant events in the life of society, reflect and reveal various value systems of representatives of linguistic cultures. In the media discourse, the axiological nature of the cultural opposition “us/them” is clearly expressed, which is manifested in its conflictogenic potential. The axiological significance of this opposition is due to the fact that the actions of “us” are considered “correct”, “peaceful”, “friendly”, while the actions of their opponents – “them” – are associated with something “wrong”, “bad”.

The problem of conflict is a key one in modern English-language media discourse and is embedded in various aspects of public life. Conflict-related topics are integrated into the conceptual space of media discourse and the linguistic consciousness of the linguocultural community, since the fundamental goal of the media is not only to inform the population, but also to form public opinion, views, beliefs, principles, stereotypes, and speech culture.

There are different approaches to conflict discourse analysis (Elcheroth & Reicher 2017; Reychler 2015), among others, membership categorization analysis and concept of a ‘dialogical network’ (Leudar et al. 2004) is to be mentioned.

We take into consideration several definitions of the notion ‘conflict’. The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary defines it as 1) a fight, a battle, a (prolonged) struggle between opposing forces (lit. & fig.); fighting, strife; the clashing or variance of opposed principles, beliefs, etc.; 2) collision (of physical bodies), dashing together (Trumble et al. 2002). The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English provides the following definitions of ‘conflict’: 1) a state of disagreement or argument between people, groups, countries, etc.; 2) fighting or a war: armed, military, violent; 3) a situation in which you have to choose between two or more opposite needs, influences, etc. (Fox 2003).

There are many classifications of conflicts (Kovalenko et al. 2002; Yusupov 2005; Schmitt 2012; Janicki 2011; Evans et al. 2019; Ulasiuk et al. 2018; Kakavá 2008), each of which is based on a number of criteria and grounds. Among them are reasons for the conflict and its nature; the nature of the contradictions underlying it; political goals; space-time scales, the conflict duration; the means used; features of the doctrines of the participants; civilizational and cultural features; interests of participants; the nature of the conflict dynamics; socio-psychological factors of the conflict (Kudoyar & Khomenko 2012). In this study, a broad approach to the classification of conflict types seems appropriate, among which we distinguish the following: armed, political, economic, religious.

This study employs an approach that takes into account the type of publication (quality press/tabloid) and the genre differentiation of newspaper materials (Dobrosklonskaya 2009; Galperin 2018; Kolesnichenko 2008; Serdali et al. 2016).

## 5 Research questions. Purpose of study.

The aim of the study is to identify the specifics of the axiological interaction of the opposition “us/them” constituents in British and American media texts about conflicts. The analysis is aimed at getting answers to three research questions, namely:

- 1) What types of conflicts are addressed in British and American media texts of different genres?
- 2) What possible types of ‘evaluators’ can be singled out in British and American media texts about conflicts?
- 3) What are the configurational models of the axiological interaction of “us” and “them” in British and American media texts on conflict topics?

## 6 Language corpus description. Research methodology

The empirical corpus is constituted by 688 British and American news reports (Table 1) and 512 British and American feature articles (Table 2). All selected media texts represent situations, which are related to military, political, economic, and religious conflicts.

Table 1: Types of conflicts in British and American news reports: corpus overview

Type of conflict	British media texts		American media texts		Total
	Quality press	Popular press	Quality press	Popular press	
military	160	12	82	15	269
political	95	12	84	53	244
economic	36	4	34	8	82
religious	33	8	44	8	93
Total	324	36	244	84	688

Table 2: Types of conflicts in British and American feature articles: corpus overview

Type of conflict	British media texts		American media texts		Total
	Quality press	Popular press	Quality press	Popular press	
military	70	5	56	8	139
political	100	9	115	14	238
economic	21	5	35	7	68
religious	25	5	30	7	67
Total	216	24	236	36	512

The sources of the selected media texts are British and American quality and popular newspapers. The texts were selected from British quality newspapers (The Guardian, The Daily Telegraph, The Independent, Financial Times) and popular newspapers (Daily Mail, Daily Mirror, Daily Express). The sources of the American newspapers were quality newspapers (The Wall Street Journal, The Washington Post, The New York Times) and popular newspapers (New York Daily News, New York Post, USA Today). This research includes material from media texts covering conflicts from January 2018 to March 2020.

The overall corpus size is 1 084 320 words, including 357 720 words in news reports and 726 600 words in feature articles. The entire texts, in which the opposition “us/them” finds its expression, were subjected to analysis. The analysis procedure was manual and included the following stages: 1) selection of news reports and feature articles corresponding to the theme of conflict; 2) extraction and interpretation of factual, subtextual or implicit, and conceptual information (Galperin 2018; Sermyagina 2007) in order to decode the evaluative meanings that are embedded in the opposition; 3) identification of possible types of ‘evaluators’ and outlining configuration patterns of evaluative interaction of the opposition components.

At the stage of the empirical corpus selection one of the criteria to follow was the correspondence of the media text to the topic of conflict. According to Roget’s Thesaurus (1999), the notion of ‘conflict’ is realised through a number of lexemes: *counteraction*, *discord*, *opposition*, *enmity*, *enemy*, *contention*. Oxford Dictionaries: English Dictionary, Thesaurus, & grammar help (2021) defines these lexical indicators of conflict in the following way: *counteraction* “act against (something) in order to reduce its force or neutralise it”, *discord* “disagreement between people”, *opposition* “resistance or dissent, expressed in action or argument”, *enmity* “a state or feeling of active opposition or hostility”, *enemy* “a person who is actively opposed or hostile to someone or something, a hostile nation or its armed forces, especially in time of war”, *contention* “heated disagreement”. According to Arustamyan (2009), the synonymic set of conflict designations also includes the words *opponents*, *antagonist* ‘an opponent in any kind of contest or conflict’ = *antipathist*, *duelist*, *duellist* ‘1) a person engaged in a duel. 2) a person skilled at dueling’; *fighter*, *feudist* ‘a person who participates in a feud or other conflict’, etc. These lexical units were treated as indicators or markers of the topic of conflict in the media texts selection.

The second stage of the corpus analysis presupposes interpretation of different types of information embedded in the text. According to Galperin (2018: 27–29), there are three types of information, which can be embedded in the text: factual (reports of facts, events, processes), subtextual (implicit information, elicited from the factual one) and conceptual (information associated with the author’s artistic message and with the perception by the reader of cause-and-effect relations). Subtextual and conceptual types of information come to the foreground in determining the evaluative realization of the “us/them” opposition in the selected media texts.

The third stage of the analysis presupposed identification of possible types of ‘evaluators’ and outlining configuration patterns of evaluative interaction of the opposition components. The interaction between constituents of the opposition “us/them” can be represented as a number of configuration models. In order to differentiate between “us” and “them”, it seems logical to rely on the model of the speech act of evaluation by E. Volf (2006). According to E. Volf (2006: 12), speech act of evaluation can be represented by the proposition  $A r B$ , where  $A$  is the subject of evaluation,  $B$  is the object of evaluation,  $r$  is an evaluative predicate. The basis of evaluation, which is “good” or “bad”, serves as a distinguisher between “us” and “them”. Thus, the basis for the realization of the opposition “us/them” in the discourse of media is the act of evaluation and the relationship between the subject (or evaluator) and the object of evaluation.

The main research method was discourse analysis, which allows to establish the relationship between the linguistic and extralinguistic side of the text. The meaning of evaluative utterances in media texts was identified by means of semantic analysis. Transformations of dictionary evaluative meanings in the media texts were considered in the

course of contextual analysis. Comparative analysis was used to establish similarities and differences in the implementation of the category of evaluation in news reports and feature articles in British and American quality and popular press. Frequency of the outlined patterns was identified and comprehensively presented using elements of quantitative analysis.

## **7 Results and discussion**

In the course of the analysis, the types of conflicts, which are addressed in British and American news reports and feature articles in British and American quality and popular press have been identified. As a result of the application of discourse analysis and contextual analysis different types of ‘evaluators’, as well as the configurational models of the axiological interaction of “us” and “them” were singled out in British and American media texts about conflicts. The identified configuration patterns were described in terms of realisation of “ours” and “theirs” evaluative interaction.

### *7.1 Types of conflicts addressed in British and American media texts*

The analysis shows that mostly armed, political, economic, religious types of conflicts are covered by British and American quality and popular press (as illustrated in Tables 1 and 2). Media texts of the news report and feature article genres of British media discourse are more often focused on foreign policy conflicts (80%) than on the domestic conflict agenda (20%). In the American media discourse, 60% deal with foreign policy conflicts and 40% of the analysed media texts address the internal political conflicts.

As far as the genre differentiation is concerned, news reports published in British quality papers are more focused on military conflicts, while news reports in British popular papers are more concerned with both military and political conflicts. American quality papers deal with both political and military conflicts in their news reports, while American popular press more often addresses political conflicts (Table 1). The dominant conflict type covered by feature articles of British and American quality and popular papers is political (Table 2).

### *7.2 ‘Evaluators’ singled out in British and American news reports and feature articles*

The analysis showed that the interaction between the “us/them” opposition constituents is determined by the ‘evaluator’, who can be one of the following:

- 1) a journalist – the author of the article, acting as a narrator/an observer (the so-called implicit subject (Frolova 2016) or implicit evaluator);
- 2) a character of the article – the author of the quotation containing assessment;
- 3) a collective author, i.e. the editorial board, a party, people, community (*many/others think/believe/consider, concerns were raised, there are concerns that, their voters, it is useful/hard/good, the problem is that, the truth is, etc.*).

### *7.3 Configuration models of the opposition “us/them” in British and American media texts of different genres*

Determining the possible configurations of the evaluative interaction of “us” and “them”, it is necessary to take into account the genre peculiarities of media texts, different communicative



functions of news reports and feature articles, different extent, to which the functions of information and impact are realised in them. So, it should be borne in mind, that the main communicative goal of a news report is to inform and present factual information, and the task of a feature article is to influence the addressee, thus the author of a feature article has more opportunities to impose his/her opinion on the reader (Dobrosklonskaya 2008; Galperin 2018), through manipulation in particular (Kozlova 2021; Levitskaya & Fedorov 2020).

It seems reasonable to single out 8 logically possible patterns of interaction between “ours” and “theirs” as components of the axiological opposition “us/them”. The components interaction in these patterns can be expressed by means of interpretation formulae, where “X” is “ours”, which can be both a subject of evaluation ( $X_1$ ) and an object of evaluation ( $X_2$ ), and “Y” is “theirs”, acting both as a subject ( $Y_1$ ) and as an object of evaluation ( $Y_2$ ). The symbol “ $\rightarrow$ ” expresses the relationship between the subject and the object of evaluation. The symbols “+” and “-” express the positive or negative type of evaluation. The logically possible patterns (P) can be represented as follows:

- P. 1: “ours” ( $X_1$ ) evaluates “ours” ( $X_2$ ) positively ( $X_1 \rightarrow + X_2$ )
- P. 2: “ours” ( $X_1$ ) evaluates “ours” ( $X_2$ ) negatively ( $X_1 \rightarrow - X_2$ )
- P. 3: “ours” (X) evaluates “theirs” (Y) positively ( $X \rightarrow + Y$ )
- P. 4: “ours” (X) evaluates “theirs” (Y) negatively ( $X \rightarrow - Y$ )
- P. 5: “theirs” (Y) evaluates “ours” (X) positively ( $Y \rightarrow + X$ )
- P. 6: “theirs” (Y) evaluates “ours” (X) negatively ( $Y \rightarrow - X$ )
- P. 7: “theirs” ( $Y_1$ ) evaluates “theirs” ( $Y_2$ ) positively ( $Y_1 \rightarrow + Y_2$ )
- P. 8: “theirs” ( $Y_1$ ) evaluates “theirs” ( $Y_2$ ) negatively ( $Y_1 \rightarrow - Y_2$ ).

The analysis showed that all the configurations of the opposition “us/them” noted above, except for P. 5:  $Y \rightarrow + X$ , find their expression in British and American media texts on conflict topics.

#### 7.4 Patterns of realization of the opposition “us/them” in British and American news reports

In British and American news reports, the most frequent (55%) configuration is Pattern 4:  $X \rightarrow - Y$ , expressed by the formula “ours” (X) evaluates “theirs” (Y) negatively (Y). The example of the implementation of this pattern is an excerpt from the news report *Why are doctors in the Middle East cosying up to foreign armies?* (The Independent). The media text deals with the activities of doctors from humanitarian organizations providing their services in hot spots, namely, with the way they cooperate with the militants for the sake of profit. Differentiation of the analysed opposition occurs according to the principle of “social institutions”: physicians working in the medical humanitarian organization “Doctors Without Borders” (MSF) act as “friends”, and contract physicians, whose main goal is to earn money, are “outsiders”. Example (1) indicates that Médecins Sans Frontières coordinator, Jonathan Whittal, (X) criticises the work of medical contractors (Y), whom he metaphorically refers to as “stethoscopes for hire”, working against humanitarian principles.

- (1) *Jonathan Whittall of Medecins Sans Frontieres scathingly attacked what he called ‘stethoscopes for hire’, those who operated ‘as contractors driven by profit rather than the principles that guide humanitarian action in conflict’.*

Pattern 6:  $Y \rightarrow - X$ , expressed by the formula “theirs” (Y) evaluates “ours” (X) negatively, is found in 16% of British and American news reports under analysis. This

configuration patten is illustrated by the news report *North Korea calls Pompeo ‘poisonous plant’ for promoting sanctions* (New York Post). It touches upon the reaction of the North Korean Foreign Ministry to threats from the US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo to introduce further sanctions against North Korea in order to get the latter finish denuclearization. In this publication, the division into “us” and “them” is based on the parameter of “regional community”, based on which M. Pompeo is treated as “us”, and representatives of North Korea are considered to be “them”. Thus, the configuration formula  $Y \rightarrow -X$  is implemented in example (2):

- (2) *North Korea’s top diplomat on Friday called Secretary of State Mike Pompeo a “poisonous plant of American diplomacy” for promoting sanctions that could hinder denuclearisation talks with the United States. Since then he’s demanded that Pompeo be replaced with a “more mature” person.*

As it becomes clear from the example mentioned above, the head of the North Korean Foreign Ministry (Y) negatively assesses the US Secretary of State (X), describing him as a “poisonous plant of American diplomacy” and expressing a desire to negotiate with a more mature person (*unlike M. Pompeo*).

Pattern 2: ( $X_1 \rightarrow -X_2$ ), expressed by the formula “ours” ( $X_1$ ) evaluates “ours” ( $X_2$ ) **negatively**, is identified in 7% of news reports under study. An example of the above mentioned model is the news report *Congress to launch sanctions on Turkey as Trump measures deemed ineffective* (The Guardian), which states that the sanctions imposed by US President Donald Trump are not effective enough, while the bill proposed by the US Congress with extended sanctions, backed by both parties, could force Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan to stop a military invasion of northeastern Syria. The opposition “us/them” in this publication is grounded on the regional parameter, based on which Turkey acts as “them”, with the representatives of the United States being treated as “us”. Example (3) illustrates P. 2:  $X_1 \rightarrow -X_2$ :

- (3) *Senator van Hollen called the Trump measures a “pathetic response”, pointing out that steel exports to the US were a fraction of one per cent of Turkey’s total exports.*

Thus, Senator from the US Democratic Party Chris van Hollen ( $X_1$ ) harshly criticises the sanctions previously imposed by D. Trump ( $X_2$ ), calling them “pathetic retaliatory measures”.

Pattern 1:  $X_1 \rightarrow +X_2$ , expressed by the formula “ours” ( $X_1$ ) evaluates “ours” ( $X_2$ ) **positively** ( $X_2$ ), is observed in 5 % of the British and American news reports, which constituted the empirical corpus. In the media text *Russia DEMANDS US pull troops from Syria as Iran issues new threats – ‘Fulfil your PLEDGE’* (Daily Express), which refers to the increasing pressure on America from Russia related to obligations of America to withdraw troops from Syria. The opposition “us/them” is observed here according to the regional parameter, that is, the United States acts as a representative of Western politics and is treated as “us”, and Russia and Iran are considered as “them”, being representatives of the East. In this media text the configuration  $X_1 \rightarrow +X_2$  is expressed in the words of the US President ( $X_1$ ), underlining that USA ( $X_2$ ) won the battle against ISIS and all American soldiers are to return home (see example (4)):

- (4) *Mr Trump said at the time: “We have won against ISIS”. “Our boys, they’re all coming back and they’re coming back now”.*

Pattern 7: ( $Y_1 \rightarrow + Y_2$ ), expressed by the formula **“theirs” (Y<sub>1</sub>) evaluates “theirs” (Y<sub>2</sub>) positively**, can be considered a non-productive one, because it is traced only in 2 % of news reports under study. In the media text *Kurdish forces in Syria launch a powerful counterattack to set up extended battle against Turkey* (The Independent), dealing with the counter-offensive of the Kurdish armed formations during the Olive Branch operation launched by Turkey, subdivision into “us” and “them” is carried out by the regional parameter. Namely, for The Independent, the United States and the Kurds they support are “us”, while Turkish President Recep Erdogan and Russia are “them”. The pattern  $Y_1 \rightarrow + Y_2$  can be found in example (5), where President Erdogan (Y<sub>1</sub>) positively evaluates Russia (Y<sub>2</sub>), calling the Russians his “friends”, whose support he hopes to get during the above mentioned operation.

- (5) *But Mr Erdogan said in a speech in Ankara that Turkey had discussed the Afrin offensive “with our Russian friends, we have an agreement with them”.*

Another peripheral model (1%) is configurational pattern P. 3: ( $X \rightarrow + Y$ ) with the formula **“ours” (X) evaluates “theirs” (Y) positively**. This pattern can be illustrated by the news report *Turkey captures several villages in northern Syria on the third day of offensive against the US-backed Kurdish militia* (Daily Mail). It deals with the ongoing Turkish government offensive in northern Syria and the fighting with the People’s Defense Forces, which Turkey considers “terrorist associations”. Subdivision into “us” and “them” occurs according to the parameter “regional community”, respectively, the Kurds supported by the US are “us”, and Turkey is “them”. The pattern  $X \rightarrow + Y$  is represented in context (6), where the former US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson (X) expresses his support and understanding that the Turkish government (Y) has a legal right to protect its citizens from militant attacks:

- (6) *‘We recognise and fully appreciate Turkey’s legitimate right to protect its own citizens from terrorist elements that may be launching attacks against Turkish citizens on Turkish soil from Syria’.*

Pattern 5: ( $Y \rightarrow + X$ ), expressed by the formula **“theirs” (Y) evaluates “ours” (X) positively** and Pattern 8: ( $Y_1 \rightarrow - Y_2$ ), expressed by the formula **“theirs” (Y<sub>1</sub>) evaluates “theirs” (Y<sub>2</sub>) negatively**, were not found in the selected news reports.

### 7.5 Patterns of realization of the opposition “us/them” in British and American feature articles

The most frequent configuration model (46%) in the selected feature articles is Pattern 4: ( $X \rightarrow - Y$ ) with the formula **“ours” (X) evaluates “theirs” (Y) negatively**. The feature article *Peace more distant than ever in Hong Kong as battle grips universities* (The Guardian) deals with the conflict between protesters in Hong Kong and the authorities of the special administrative region of the PRC, which arose as a reaction to the extradition bill to the mainland of China. The differentiation between “us” and “them” in this publication takes place according to the parameter “social institutions”: protesters who find support among the

politicians of Great Britain and the United States, are “us”, and the Hong Kong authorities are “them”. The configuration model  $X \rightarrow - Y$  is employed in example (7), in which a professor of a Hong Kong university ( $X$ ) negatively evaluates the actions of Carrie Lam, the Head of Hong Kong administration ( $Y$ ), noting that the latter encourages the security forces aggression, thereby refusing to conduct a dialogue with the people.

- (7) *“She has since **toughened up**, giving **unconditional backings to the increasingly aggressive and disproportionate use of force**”, said Kenneth Chan, a professor at Hong Kong Baptist University and former lawmaker. “She has no political solution and is **no longer mentioning her ‘dialogues with the people’**”.*

Pattern 2: ( $X_1 \rightarrow - X_2$ ), expressed by the formula “**ours**” ( $X_1$ ) **evaluates** “**ours**” ( $X_2$ ) **negatively** is observed in 10% of the feature articles, which constitute the empirical corpus. The article *Abandoned by U.S. in Syria, Kurds Find New Ally in American Foe* (The New York Times) focuses on the withdrawal of American troops from northern Syria, which led to the agreement between the US-abandoned Kurdish military units with the Syrian government, which is the sworn enemy of the United States and enjoys the support of Russia. The subdivision into “us” and “them” is conducted according to the parameter “regional community”. Namely, the United States and, up to a certain point, the Kurds they support, are “us”, while the Syrian government and Russia are “them”. Example (8) illustrates the use of the pattern  $X_1 \rightarrow - X_2$ .

- (8) *As the Turkish incursion progresses and Kurdish casualties mount, members of the Syrian Democratic Forces **have grown increasingly angry at the United States**. Some have cast Mr. Trump’s move as a **betrayal**.*

In this case the members of the “Democratic Forces of Syria” ( $X_1$ ) regard the actions of the US President ( $X_2$ ) as a betrayal and are angry at their decision to withdraw troops.

Another configuration pattern found in 10% of the analysed feature articles is Pattern 1: ( $X_1 \rightarrow + X_2$ ), expressed by the formula “**ours**” ( $X_1$ ) **evaluates** “**ours**” ( $X_2$ ) **positively**. The article *British volunteers prepare to battle Turkish military in Syria following Erdogan’s ‘Operation Olive Branch’ offensive, saying it is their ‘duty’ to fight alongside Kurds after helping their struggle against ISIS* (Daily Mail), is about the readiness of British and American volunteers to fight on the side of the Kurdish fighters from the “Democratic Forces of Syria” in the war against the Turks. Differentiation within the framework of the opposition under study occurs according to the regional parameter: Western volunteers and Kurdish troops are “us”, Turkey is “them”. The configuration model  $X_1 \rightarrow + X_2$  is illustrated by example (9):

- (9) *The **‘kindness and comradeship the Kurdish people have shown’** was his **‘motivation to stand against Turkey’** he said as he prepares to take on a sovereign country and a NATO ally.*

In this passage, a British volunteer named Lei ( $X_1$ ) praises the Kurdish people ( $X_2$ ), thereby motivating his participation in the conflict between Turkey and the Kurds.

Pattern 6: ( $Y \rightarrow - X$ ), expressed by the formula “**theirs**” ( $Y$ ) **evaluates** “**ours**” ( $X$ ) **negatively**, is traced in 8% of feature articles under study. The feature article *Fighting*

*Trumpism without dropping names* (The Washington Post) describes the pre-election tour of Senator Elizabeth Warren in the state of Iowa, during which the senator is refraining from direct criticism of the current US President Donald Trump. However, it is emphasised that she criticises the government's policies, which indirectly confirms her disagreement with Trump's actions. The division into "us" and "them" occurs in this publication according to the parameter "social institutions" ("Democrats vs Republicans"), namely, "us" is Elizabeth Warren – the representative of the Democratic Party, which this newspaper sympathises with, and "them" being Donald Trump, expressing the interests of the Republican Party. Configuration pattern  $Y \rightarrow - X$  is illustrated by example (10), where Republican opponents (Y) criticise the release of DNA test results by Senator Warren (X).

- (10) *The claim had drawn criticism from President Trump and other Republicans; after the results were released they continued to criticize her ...*

Pattern 8: ( $Y_1 \rightarrow - Y_2$ ), expressed by the formula "theirs" ( $Y_1$ ) evaluates "theirs" ( $Y_2$ ) negatively, is identified in 8% of the feature articles under study. In the media text *How Gillibrand's 'fearlessness' makes her a formidable 2020 contender* (The Guardian), dedicated to one of the potential candidates for the US presidential election from the Democratic Party, Kirsten Gillibrand, the division into "us" and "them" is carried out according to the parameter "regional community". The author of the article or the implicit evaluator is "us", and American politicians, State Senator Kirsten Gillibrand and US President Donald Trump, are "them". The configuration pattern  $Y_1 \rightarrow - Y_2$  is exemplified by context (11), in which Kirsten Gillibrand ( $Y_1$ ) accuses President Trump ( $Y_2$ ) of sexually harassing 17 women and calls on the latter to resign.

- (11) *She called on the president to resign amid allegations of sexual misconduct by as many as 17 women, and infamously told a crowd of Trump's White House tenure: "Has he kept his promises? No. Fuck no".*

Pattern 7: ( $Y_1 \rightarrow + Y_2$ ), expressed by the formula "theirs" ( $Y_1$ ) evaluates "theirs" ( $Y_2$ ) positively is not productive in feature articles, because it is traced only in 4% of the analysed media texts of this genre. The feature article *Kim-chi and El Trumpo tacos: Singapore feeds pre-summit anticipation* (The Guardian) focuses on how people are preparing and what they expect from the upcoming summit between Kim Jong Un and Donald Trump in Singapore. The oppositional division into "us" and "them" occurs according to the parameter "regional community". The author of the publication is "us", and representatives of North Korea and the United States are "them" as belonging to another regional community. In example (12) the configuration  $Y_1 \rightarrow + Y_2$  is expressed by means of metaphor. A representative of a small business in Singapore ( $Y_1$ ) metaphorically notes that everything in this world revolves around Trump ( $Y_2$ ).

- (12) *"I have to admit that when it comes to which is selling better, it is leaning towards Trump as the favourite at the moment", laughed Ganesh. "That's just the way of the world isn't it, everything leans towards Trump".*

Another peripheral configuration of the interaction between the constituents of the axiological opposition "us/them" is expressed by Pattern 3: ( $X \rightarrow + Y$ ) with the formula

**“ours” (X) evaluates “theirs” (Y) positively** (1%). The feature article *Fact check: Trump says North Korea summit ‘productive’. Was it?* (USA Today) reveals the positive position of Donald Trump and his hopes for progress in the development of relations with North Korea, in general, and in denuclearization, in particular. Subdivision into “us” and “them” is carried out according to the “regional” parameter: the United States acts as “us”, and North Korea is “them”. The configuration pattern  $X \rightarrow + Y$  is illustrated by example (13):

- (13) ... everybody can now feel much safer than the day I took office. There is no longer a Nuclear Threat from North Korea. Meeting with Kim Jong Un was **an interesting and very positive experience**. North Korea **has great potential** for the future!

Here D. Trump (X) emphasises that meeting with Kim Jong-un (Y) is an interesting and positive experience for him.

The least frequent configuration in feature article publications is P. 3:  $(X \rightarrow + Y)$ , expressed by the proposition **“ours” (X) evaluates “theirs” (Y) positively**. Pattern 5:  $(Y \rightarrow + X)$  with the formula **“theirs” (Y) evaluates “ours” (X) positively** was not found in the selected feature articles.

The configurations  $X_1 \rightarrow + X_2$ ,  $X_1 \rightarrow - X_2$ ,  $X \rightarrow + Y$ ,  $X \rightarrow - Y$ ,  $Y \rightarrow - X$ ,  $Y_1 \rightarrow + Y_2$  can be considered inherent to the news reports and feature articles, while the configuration  $Y_1 \rightarrow - Y_2$  is variable, since it is observed only in the feature articles.

In addition, both in the media texts of the news report genre and the feature article genre, there were cases when the author of the publication does not associate himself with any hero of the publication, as with “ours”. Such cases can be represented in the form of the two configuration patterns, which can be considered invariant, since they are found in the media texts of both genres under discussion. Pattern 9:  $X_{impl} \rightarrow + Y$  is expressed by the formula **“implicit ours” ( $X_{impl}$ ) – the author of the publication/implicit evaluator evaluates “theirs” (Y) positively**. An example is the media text *‘The fight of my life’: Elizabeth Warren kicks off 2020 bid in Iowa* (The Guardian), in which the division into “ours” and “theirs” is based on the parameter “regional community”: the author of the article is “ours” being an implicit subject of evaluation, whereas the US Senator Elizabeth Warren is “theirs”. In example (14) the author of the feature article ( $X_{impl}$ ) positively evaluates E. Warren (Y), describing her as a *“progressive star”* for her criticism of large corporations.

- (14) *The Democrat, whose criticism of big banks and corporations has made her a progressive star, was appearing as part of a five-city tour across the crucial state over the weekend. She was also scheduled to stop in Sioux City, Storm Lake, Des Moines and Ankeny.*

Pattern 10:  $X_{impl} \rightarrow - Y$  is expressed by the formula **“implicit ours” ( $X_{impl}$ ) evaluates “theirs” (Y) negatively**. The media text *Will Trump let Russia take the Azov Sea?* (The Washington Post), discusses the so-called Russian aggression in the Sea of Azov. The division into “ours” and “theirs” is carried out according to the “regional” parameter: the USA is “ours”, Russia is “theirs”. Example (15) illustrates the configuration under analysis, since the author of this publication ( $X_{impl}$ ) negatively assesses the actions of Russia (Y), describing them as *“aggressive”* and *“sinister”*.

- (15) *Russia has been intensifying the pressure on Ukraine over the past three to four months in small steps, similar to what we saw in Moscow's creeping aggression against Georgia in the spring and summer of 2008 ... Other Russian actions look ominous in retrospect.*

## 8 Conclusion

British and American media texts about conflicts present a rich ground for the analysis of the axiological opposition “us/them”. As the study has shown, the axiological nature of the linguocultural opposition “us/them” is realised in British and American news reports and feature articles through a number of configuration patterns, which embody interaction between the opposition constituents. Identification of the configuration patterns enabled to outline peculiarities of the evaluative interaction of “ours” and “theirs” within the binary opposition “us/them”.

News reports as well as feature articles of both British and American media discourse are more frequently concerned with foreign policy conflicts than with domestic ones. It is noted that in British media texts, domestic conflicts are covered much less frequently (20%) than in American media discourse (40%). This study confirms the opinion of other researchers (for example, Pocheptsov 2001) that the modern media agenda concentrates on external conflicts in order to divert the attention of the linguocultural community from domestic problems.

The interaction between the “us/them” opposition constituents is determined by the ‘evaluator’, who can be a journalist – the author of the article, acting as a narrator/an observer; a character of the article – the author of the quotation containing assessment; or a collective author, i.e. the editorial board, a party, people, community. The ‘evaluator’ and the object of assessment can be both “ours” and “theirs”. In the media texts of both genres, there were cases, when the author of the publications does not associate himself/herself with any character of the publication, and the axiological nature of the studied opposition is expressed implicitly through the position of the author.

8 logically possible patterns of interaction between “ours” and “theirs” as components of the axiological opposition “us/them” were singled out. All configuration models of interaction between “ours” and “theirs” as components of the axiological opposition “us/them” find expression in the selected empirical corpus consisting of media texts of the news report and feature article genres, except for the  $Y \rightarrow + X$  configuration. In the selected media texts, the configurations  $X_1 \rightarrow + Y_2$ ,  $X_1 \rightarrow - X_2$ ,  $X \rightarrow + Y$ ,  $X \rightarrow - Y$ ,  $Y \rightarrow - X$ ,  $Y_1 \rightarrow + Y_2$  can be considered invariant, i.e. found in both media genres. The configuration model  $Y_1 \rightarrow - Y_2$  is variable, since it is found only in media texts of the feature article genre. The configuration patterns  $X_{impl} \rightarrow + Y$  and  $X_{impl} \rightarrow - Y$  identified in the course of the analysis are also invariant.

The most frequent configuration model in the selected media texts of both genres is  $X \rightarrow - Y$ . The  $X_{impl} \rightarrow + Y$  configuration pattern is the least representative in both genres. The opposition “us/them” is more often expressed in publications of quality newspapers (65% of the media texts, which constituted the empirical corpus). All configuration models, except for  $X \rightarrow + Y$  and  $Y \rightarrow + X$ , are implemented in the selected publications of quality newspapers. It is noted that the configuration patterns  $Y \rightarrow + X$  and  $X_{impl} \rightarrow + \Psi$  do not find expression in the media texts of the popular press selected for analysis.

The most frequent configuration model in the selected media texts of both genres is  $X \rightarrow - Y$ . The  $X_{impl} \rightarrow + Y$  configuration pattern is the least representative in both genres. The opposition “us/them” is more often expressed in publications of quality newspapers.

The suggested approach to the analysis of evaluative meanings in the opposition “us/them” has a potential to become a highly instrumental tool for determining the axiological significance of information in media texts of various genres based on a wide range of parameters. The results obtained are of practical importance in helping those interested in developing their theoretical background concerning the conflict discourse, and category of evaluation as realised in the axiological opposition “us/them”. It can be of a particular interest to researchers engaged in political and media linguistics.

Further research into the axiological realisation of the “us/them” opposition can be expanded in several directions. Possible directions for the study can be related to the extension of genres and topics diversity of media texts for analysis. A special focus can be made on particular types of conflicts. Comparative and contrastive approaches to the study of the phenomenon in question can be fruitful, too, if it is considered in either cognate or non-cognate languages.

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