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Constructing reality through language. Russia in the Western Arctic discourse

Abstract

The Arctic has often been viewed as a region insulated from broader global conflicts, a concept known as ‘Arctic exceptionalism’. However, Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 has challenged this notion, leading to growing tensions and increased militarisation. This study uses a poststructuralist framework to analyse the Arctic strategies published by Western Arctic states between 2006 and 2024, treating these strategies as key speech acts that construct political meaning. Discourse analysis, facilitated by AntConc software, examines how Western Arctic states frame Russia and how these narratives have evolved.

The findings reveal a shift from portraying Russia as a cooperative partner to an increasingly militarised and expansionist actor. This shift reflects contrasting approaches – Western states focus on multilateralism and international law, while Russia emphasises sovereignty and military power. The poststructuralist approach highlights how discourse actively constructs Arctic political realities, influencing power dynamics and regional stability.

Future Arctic governance depends on resolving broader political tensions, but meaningful re-engagement with Russia remains uncertain. Sustaining multilateralism and adherence to international law will be crucial to counter destabilising narratives and support a cooperative and peaceful Arctic.

Keywords: Arctic, West, Russia, hegemonic discourse, Arctic strategies

Introduction

The Arctic has long been perceived as a region insulated from broader global conflicts, a concept often referred to as ‘Arctic exceptionalism’. This belief has shaped international relations in the Arctic, particularly between Western Arctic states

and Russia, through institutions like the Arctic Council. Historically, the Arctic was viewed as a zone of cooperation, prioritising environmental protection and sustainable development over political tensions. However, Russia's changing role – from a cooperative partner to an increasingly assertive agent – has shifted this dynamic. Key events, such as the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, have eroded the notion of alleged Arctic exceptionalism, challenging assumptions that the region could remain detached from broader political conflicts.

The increasing militarisation in the Russian Arctic has prompted a reassessment of regional stability. While existing research has focused on the empirical aspects of Arctic relations – such as military actions and economic activities – there is a significant gap in analysing how discourse shapes these dynamics. Specifically, the ways in which Western Arctic states construct and present the image of Russia in their strategic narratives remains underexplored. Addressing this gap is crucial for understanding the implications for the Arctic governance and future cooperation, especially given Russia's aggressive actions and their impact on regional collaboration.

This study employs a poststructuralist theoretical framework to analyse the discourse on Russia in the Arctic. Poststructuralism, which emphasises the constructed nature of social realities, provides a lens for understanding how language shapes political dynamics. Influenced by Michel Foucault's concept of 'power-knowledge' and Jacques Derrida's deconstruction, this approach views the Arctic strategies as key speech acts that construct political meaning. These documents articulate state interests and identities, shaping the perception of Russia's role in the Arctic. By examining the language used in these strategies, the study reveals how Western Arctic states create and sustain particular narratives about Russia, reflecting and reinforcing power relations.

The research analyses the Arctic strategies published by Western Arctic states – namely the USA, Canada, Denmark, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, and Finland – between 2006 and 2024. These strategies serve as primary speech acts shaping Arctic discourse. Using AntConc software for discourse analysis, the study focuses on identifying key terms and collocates associated with Russia. This approach reveals the evolution of Russia's portrayal, from a cooperative regional player to an increasingly militarised and potentially expansionist agent. Understanding this evolving narrative is essential for comprehending the challenges and opportunities in the Arctic international relations amid ongoing political shifts.

Theory and methods

The methodological approach of this study is grounded in four key pillars. The first is poststructuralism, which provides the theoretical framework underpinning the research. This is followed by the region-building approach and discourse analysis, which form the core methods employed in the study. The final pillar is the application of AntConc software, a critical tool for conducting the discourse analysis.

Poststructuralism serves as the foundational theoretical framework for this study, particularly concerning its ontological and epistemological stances. Ontologically, poststructuralism rejects the notion of a fixed, objective reality, arguing instead that social realities are constructed through language and discourse. Epistemologically, it aligns with hermeneutics, emphasising the interpretative nature of knowledge. This approach stems from a critique of rationality and the search for objective truth, deeply influenced by the works of Nietzsche and Heidegger¹. Poststructuralism's relationship with postmodernism further complicates its classification, as both are concerned with deconstructing established narratives and exposing the fluidity of meanings within discourse.²

In this context, Michel Foucault's concept of 'power-knowledge' becomes central³. Foucault posits that knowledge is always intertwined with power structures, and through his genealogical method, he examines how discourses shape and are shaped by these dynamics⁴. Jacques Derrida's theory of deconstruction complements this by challenging the stability of meaning within language, advocating for a critical analysis that reveals the multiplicity and instability of meanings⁵. These perspectives are particularly relevant in analysing the Arctic discourse, where region-building narratives are continuously constructed and reconstructed through language⁶.

The region-building approach, as articulated by Iver Neumann, is a significant methodological framework within area studies, a subdiscipline of international relations. It aligns with the broader trends in new regionalism, offering a critical

¹ F. Nietzsche, *The genealogy of morals*, New York 1887; M. Heidegger, *Being and time*, Oxford 1962; cf. L. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*, New York 1922.

² J.-F. Lyotard, *The postmodern condition. A report on knowledge*, Minneapolis 1984.

³ M. Foucault, *The archaeology of knowledge*, London–New York 1969.

⁴ M. Foucault, *Nietzsche, genealogy, history*, [in:] *Language, counter-memory, practice. Selected essays and interviews*, ed. D.F. Bouchard, Ithaca 1977.

⁵ J. Derrida, *Writing and difference*, Chicago 1967; T. van Dijk, *Critical discourse analysis*, [in:] *The handbook of discourse analysis*, eds. H. Hamilton, D. Schiffrin, D. Tannen, Oxford 2015.

⁶ R. Ashley, *The geopolitics of geopolitical space. Toward a critical social theory of international politics*, „Alternatives. Global, local, political" 1987, vol. 12, issue 4; J. Der Derian, *On diplomacy. A genealogy of western estrangement*, Oxford 1987; cf. J. Der Derian, M. Shapiro, *International/intertextual relations. Postmodern readings of world politics*, Lexington 1989.

perspective on how regions are conceptualised and maintained within discourse. Central to this approach is the notion that regions are not pre-existing geographical objects but are instead 'imagined objects' constructed through social and political processes⁷. Inspired by Benedict Anderson's concept of 'imagined communities', Neumann argues that regions, like nations, are discursively constructed by 'region-builders' who imbue them with specific meanings and identities⁸. These region-builders, through their narratives and actions, anchor the concept of a region in time and space, creating a shared sense of belonging among its members.

Neumann's approach challenges the conventional understanding of regions as static objects. Instead, it posits that the existence of a region is contingent upon the continuous reinforcement of its identity through discourse. The region-building approach asks critical questions about the origins of a region's conception and the intentions behind its perpetuation. It also interrogates the criteria used to define what is considered 'natural' within a regional context, revealing the power dynamics at play in these definitions⁹. Thus, regions are seen as dynamic constructs, subject to redefinition and contestation, with dominant narratives often emerging as hegemonic forces that shape the region's identity and influence regional international relations.

Discourse analysis is a vital method in this study, based on the premise that reality is discursively constructed. As Phillips and Hardy argue, social reality is produced and made meaningful through discourse, which shapes social interactions¹⁰. In this context, discourse is not merely language but the interaction and context that form reality. For example, Arctic strategies issued by states are discursive acts that construct the Arctic as a geopolitical space, positioning these states as discursive region-builders.

A key technique within discourse analysis is predicate analysis, which examines how subjects are characterised through language. Predicates define subjects by connecting verbs and adjectives to nouns, thereby shaping the discourse. This method reveals how various discourses intersect and diverge, offering insights into how different agents frame discourse¹¹.

Furthermore, discourse analysis identifies hegemonic discourses – the dominant narratives that shape social reality. By analysing these discourses, researchers

⁷ I. Neumann, *A region-building approach to Northern Europe*, „Review of International Studies” 1994, vol. 20, issue 1.

⁸ B. Anderson, *Imagined communities. Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*, London–New York 2006.

⁹ I. Neumann, *A region-building approach*, [in:] *Theories of new regionalism*, eds. F. Söderbaum, T. Shaw, London 2003.

¹⁰ N. Phillips, C. Hardy, *Discourse analysis. Investigating processes of social construction*, Thousand Oaks 2002.

¹¹ J. Milliken, *The study of discourse in international relations. A critique of research and methods*, „European Journal of International Relations” 1999, vol. 5, issue 2.

uncover the power relations within them and how they maintain or challenge the *status quo*¹².

AntConc serves as the primary research tool in this study, facilitating a robust corpus analysis by integrating both qualitative and quantitative methods. As a text analysis software, AntConc automates the results of discourse analysis, enhancing the precision and reliability of the study by mitigating potential errors that may arise from manual data handling¹³. The software's interdisciplinary nature bridges the gap between linguistics and discourse analysis, making it particularly valuable for this research on Arctic strategies.

AntConc operates by analysing two types of text files: the main corpus, which comprises the documents under study, and the reference corpus, which represents a standardised form of the language¹⁴. This allows the software to evaluate word frequencies and locations within the text, generating key insights such as keywords – terms that appear significantly more often in the main corpus compared to the reference corpus.

Moreover, AntConc allows for advanced text analysis through categories such as collocates, clusters, and *n*-grams. These tools enable a deeper exploration of how words are used in context, with collocates revealing the words frequently appearing near a given term, often highlighting predicates¹⁵. *N*-grams identify the most common word sequences in the corpus, offering a quantitative complement to the qualitative predicate analysis. This combined approach enhances the analytical depth and accuracy of the study, providing critical insights into the discourse.

Arctic discourse and critical juncture

The Arctic region's political landscape before February 2022 was shaped by a complex interplay of postcolonial history, environmental cooperation, and the evolving dynamics between the West and Russia. During the Cold War, the Arctic was a strategic frontier marked by military presence and political tension between the United States and the Soviet Union. However, with the Cold War's conclusion, new opportunities for cooperation emerged, particularly in environmental

¹² R. de Beaugrande, *The story of discourse analysis*, [in:] *Discourse as structure and process. Discourse studies. A multidisciplinary introduction*, ed. T. van Dijk, London 1997; S. Titscher et al., *Methods of text and discourse analysis. In search of meaning*, London 2000.

¹³ L. Anthony, *Antconc Version 4.3.1* [29 VII 2024], <http://www.laurenceanthony.net/software> (30 IX 2024).

¹⁴ *Ibidem*.

¹⁵ G. Lyse, G. Andersen, *Collocations and statistical analysis of n-grams. Multiword expressions in newspaper text*, „Studies in Corpus Linguistics” 2012, vol. 49.

protection. This shift was exemplified by the 1973 Agreement on the Conservation of Polar Bears, which marked the beginning of international efforts to safeguard the Arctic's fragile ecosystem¹⁶.

In the post-Cold War era, the establishment of the Arctic Council in 1996 represented a pivotal development in regional governance¹⁷. Although not a formal international organisation, the Arctic Council provided a forum for dialogue among Arctic states, including Russia¹⁸. Its focus on issues such as environmental protection aligned with the broader international context, which favoured cooperation. However, the Arctic Council deliberately excluded discussions on hard security, leaving significant areas of political tension unresolved¹⁹. Consequently, cooperation between the West and Russia remained complex and often contentious.

For example, the publication of the Arctic Climate Impact Assessment and Russia's 2007 symbolic planting of a flag on the North Pole seabed attracted significant media attention, resulting in what has been described as a 'media frenzy'²⁰. These events underscored the region's growing strategic importance, driven by environmental reports and political developments. The enduring complexities in West-Russia relations set the stage for the challenges that would emerge in the following years.

The annexation of Crimea in 2014 tested the concept of Arctic exceptionalism – the belief that the Arctic could remain insulated from broader political conflicts. Despite heightened tensions, little initially changed in the Arctic cooperation, with the Arctic Council continuing its work²¹. However, Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 marked a true critical juncture for regional international relations. Increased militarisation became evident, with Western states

¹⁶ *Agreement on the Conservation of Polar Bears*, [in:] *International wildlife law. An analysis of international treaties concerned with the conservation of wildlife*, ed. S. Lyster, Cambridge 1985, pp. 407-410.

¹⁷ *Declaration on the Establishment of the Arctic Council. Joint Communiqué of the Governments of the Arctic Countries on the Establishment of the Arctic Council. Ottawa, Canada. September 19, 1996*, <https://oarchive.arctic-council.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/bdc15f51-fb91-4e0d-9037-3e8618e7b98f/content> (30 IX 2024).

¹⁸ E.C.H. Keskitalo, *Negotiating the Arctic. The construction of an international region*, London–New York 2004, p. 154.

¹⁹ W. Greaves, D. Pomerants, 'Soft securitization'. *Unconventional security issues and the Arctic Council*, „Politik” 2017, vol. 20, issue 3, p. 31.

²⁰ C. Symon et al., *Arctic Climate Impact Assessment*, Cambridge 2005; BBC News, *Russia plants flag under N Pole* [2 VIII 2007], <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/6927395.stm> (30 IX 2024); T. Koivurova, *Limits and possibilities of the Arctic Council in a rapidly changing scene of Arctic governance*, „Polar Record” 2010, vol. 46, issue 2.

²¹ M. Byers, *Crises and international cooperation. An Arctic case study*, „International Relations” 2017, vol. 31, issue 4.

expressing concerns about Russia's potential revisionism and expansionist aims, especially as attacks on Ukraine have been partially launched from the Arctic, such as bombers from Olenya air base²².

The Arctic Council paused its activities involving Russia, and the Barents Euro–Arctic Council ceased functioning in its prior format, signalling a breakdown in regional cooperation. Sweden and Finland's decision to join NATO further altered the security dynamics of the Arctic, reflecting an intensified response to perceived threats from its eastern neighbour. Sanctions imposed on Russia also had a significant impact on its Arctic economic projects, constraining investment and technological support²³.

In response, Russia pivoted towards increased cooperation with non–Arctic states, notably China, and possibly other BRICS members, seeking alternative partners for Arctic development²⁴. This shift underscores the changing landscape of the Arctic international relations amid escalating political tensions.

Russia's narrative on the Arctic is heavily influenced by its unique demographic and economic presence in the region. Half of the Arctic's population, around 2 million people, resides in Russia, and half of the Arctic's landmass falls within Russian territory. Moreover, Russia generates 70% of the regional gross product of the Arctic, largely due to oil and natural gas extraction, which also contributes around 15% of Russia's gross domestic product²⁵. This underlines the crucial importance of the Arctic to this state, both economically and strategically²⁶.

The Russian government frames the Arctic as central to its national interests, focusing on its potential for economic exploitation and military power projection. Following a period of stagnation in the 1990s, the region regained its strategic status in Russian political discourse. This is reflected in the Northern Sea Route development project, intended as a key maritime corridor, albeit still marginal

²² S. Brown, *HUR provides answers over Olenya drone attack*, „Kyiv Post”, 1 VIII 2024, <https://www.kyivpost.com/post/36690> (30 IX 2024).

²³ S. Paukkunen, J. Black, *Arctic cooperation with Russia. At what price?*, „International Affairs” 2024, volume/issue iiae226; S. Andreeva, *Science at stake – Russia and the Arctic Council*, „Arctic Review on Law and Politics” 2023, vol. 14, pp. 112–131.

²⁴ S.V. Rottem, G. Heggelund, *China on the Arctic Council. Another venue for Sino–Russian cooperation?*, [in:] *China–Russia relations in the Arctic. Friends in the cold?*, eds. I. Stensdal, G. Heggelund, Cham 2024, pp. 81–102.

²⁵ *Arctic Human Development Report. Regional processes and global linkages*, eds. J.N. Larsen, G. Fondahl, Copenhagen 2014, pp. 53–55; *The Economy of the North – ECONOR 2020*, eds. S. Glomsrod, G. Duhaime, I. Aslaksen, Oslo 2021, pp. 16–19, 23–29.

²⁶ D.H. Claes, A. Moe, *Arctic offshore petroleum. Resources and political fundamentals*, [in:] *Arctic Governance. Volume 2: Energy, living marine resources and shipping*, eds. I.F. Soltvedt, S.V. Rottem, G. Hønneland, London–New York 2018, pp. 9–25; N.K. Kharlampyeva, *The transnational Arctic and Russia*, [in:] *Energy security and geopolitics in the Arctic*, ed. H. Peimani, Singapore 2013, pp. 110–112.

in global shipping due to difficult ice conditions²⁷. Climate change, which is reducing the Arctic sea ice, has been depicted as an opportunity to expand shipping activities along the route, thereby strengthening state's position in global trade.

This state presents its increased military presence in the Arctic as defensive, a response to what it perceives as NATO's encroachment, while consolidating its Arctic policy under foreign, energy, military, and maritime doctrines. Simultaneously, Russia portrays the actions of Western Arctic states as provocative, positioning itself as a guardian of regional stability amid growing political tensions²⁸.

The Arctic strategies are pivotal to understanding the discourse on Russia, as they represent the most important speech acts within Arctic discourse. The nature of a strategy lies in its character as a concrete political document – an expression of will, an idea, but also a clearly articulated plan for achieving specific goals²⁹. When formulated by an Arctic state, these strategies become key speech acts, contributing significantly to the construction of regional reality. They are embedded in a broader process of region-building, reflecting the interplay between domestic policy and international relations³⁰.

In the Arctic context, these strategies are not limited to specific sectors but address the region comprehensively. The internal dimension relates to public policies within each state, while the external dimension portrays the Arctic as an international region, fostering a shared identity and mutual interests among Arctic states. Thus, the Arctic strategies help define the structure of international relations and articulate the factors driving change in the region³¹.

By analysing Western Arctic strategies, including both current and past documents (as listed; see Table 1), it is evident that these speech acts contribute to a hegemonic discourse, shaping the political core of the Arctic³². The performative

²⁷ NSR *Shipping Traffic – Transit Voyages in 2020*, Center for High North Logistics, Northern Sea Route Information Office, <https://arctic-lio.com/nsr-shipping-traffic-transit-voyages-in-2020/> (30 IX 2024).

²⁸ A. Nae, *Russian strategic narratives on the Arctic region. Embedded in strategic documents and narrated by RT and Sputnik*, „The Polar Journal” 2022, vol. 12, issue 2, pp. 363-383; N. Moen-Larsen, K.L. Gjerde, *Changing or frozen narratives? The Arctic in Russian media and expert commentary, 2021-2022*, „Norwegian Institute of International Affairs. Research Paper” 2023, issue 2, 30 XI 2023, https://www.nupi.no/content/pdf_preview/27848/file/NUPI_research_paper_2_2023_MoenLarsenGjerde.pdf (30 IX 2024).

²⁹ A.V. Busch, *Tall tales from the High North. Contested discourses of the Arctic as a political space*, „Geopolitics” 2021, vol. 26, issue 3.

³⁰ A.J.K. Bailes, L. Heininen, *Strategy papers on the Arctic or High North. A comparative study and analysis*, Reykjavík 2012, p. 18.

³¹ L. Heininen et al., *Arctic policies and strategies. Analysis, synthesis, and trends*, Laxenburg 2020, p. 22.

³² I.B. Neumann, *A region-building approach to Northern Europe*, „Review of International Studies” 1994, issue 20, p. 54.

nature of these strategies underscores their crucial role in both constructing and reflecting the evolving political realities of the region³³.

Table 1. List of analysed documents

State	Document's title	Year of publication
USA	Arctic region policy	2009
	National strategy for the Arctic region	2013
	National strategy for the Arctic region	2022
Canada	Canada's northern strategy. Our North, our heritage, our future	2009
	Statement on Canada's Arctic foreign policy	2010
	Canada's Arctic and Northern policy framework	2019
Denmark	Strategy for the Arctic 2011-2020	2011
Iceland	Iceland's Arctic policy	2011
	Iceland's policy on matters concerning the Arctic region	2021
Norway	The Norwegian government's High North strategy	2006
	New building blocks in the North. The next step in the government's High North strategy	2009
	The High North. Visions and strategies	2011
	Norway's Arctic policy	2014
	Norway's Arctic strategy	2017
	The Norwegian Government's Arctic Policy	2020
Sweden	Strategy for the Arctic region	2011
	Sweden's strategy for the Arctic region	2020
Finland	Finland's strategy for the Arctic region	2010
	Strategy for the Arctic region	2013
	Finland's strategy for Arctic policy	2020

Source: Author's own work.

Russia is what they make of it

The discourse analysis of Western Arctic strategies, using AntConc, sought to reveal how Russia is framed in these documents. The analysed strategies, published in English, underscore their international scope and allow for a consistent comparative analysis. All 20 documents from 2006 to 2024 were converted

³³ E. Wilson Rowe, *Arctic unity, Arctic difference. Mapping the reach of northern discourses*, „Polar Record” 2007, vol. 43, issue 1, p. 3.

to .txt format to be compatible with the AntConc software³⁴. This method enables a deeper understanding of the linguistic context in which ‘Russia’ is situated

³⁴ *Directive on Arctic Region Policy*, National Security Presidential Directive/NSPD66 Homeland Security Presidential Directive/ HSPD-25 [9 I 2009], <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/PPP-2008-book2/pdf/PPP-2008-book2-doc-pg1545.pdf> (30 IX 2024); The White House, *National strategy for the Arctic region* [10 V 2013], https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/docs/nat_arctic_strategy.pdf (30 IX 2024); The White House, *National strategy for the Arctic region* [X 2022], <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/National-Strategy-for-the-Arctic-Region.pdf> (30 IX 2024); Government of Canada, *Canada’s northern strategy. Our North, our heritage, our future* [2009], <https://publications.gc.ca/site/eng/9.674653/publication.html> (30 IX 2024); Government of Canada, *Statement on Canada’s Arctic foreign policy. Exercising sovereignty and promoting Canada’s northern strategy abroad* [20 VIII 2010], https://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/assets/pdfs/canada_arctic_foreign_policy-eng.pdf (30 IX 2024); Government of Canada, *Canada’s Arctic and northern policy framework* [10 IX 2019], <https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1560523306861/1560523330587>, (30 IX 2024); Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, Government of Greenland, Government of the Faroes, *Kingdom of Denmark. Strategy for the Arctic 2011-2020* [VIII 2011], <https://um.dk/en/-/media/websites/umen/foreign-policy/the-artic/arctic-strategy.ashx> (30 IX 2024); Alþingi, *A parliamentary resolution on Iceland’s Arctic policy. Approved by Alþingi at the 139th legislative session* [28 III 2011], <https://www.government.is/media/utanrikisraduneyti-media/media/nordurlandaskrifstofa/A-Parliamentary-Resolution-on-ICE-Arctic-Policy-approved-by-Althingi.pdf> (30 IX 2024); Government of Iceland, *Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Iceland’s policy on matters concerning the Arctic region. Parliamentary Resolution 25/151, 151st Legislative Assembly 2020-2021, Item 750* [19 V 2021], https://www.government.is/library/01-Ministries/Ministry-for-Foreign-Affairs/PDF-skjol/Arctic%20Policy_WEB.pdf (30 IX 2024); Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *The Norwegian government’s High North strategy* [31 III 2006], <https://www.regjeringen.no/globalassets/upload/ud/vedlegg/strategien.pdf> (30 IX 2024); Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *New building blocks in the North. The next step in the government’s High North strategy* [12 III 2009], https://www.regjeringen.no/globalassets/upload/ud/vedlegg/nordomradene/new_building_blocks_in_the_north.pdf (30 IX 2024); Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *The High North. Visions and strategies* [18 XI 2011], https://www.regjeringen.no/globalassets/upload/ud/vedlegg/nordomradene/ud_nordomrodene_innmat_en_web.pdf (30 IX 2024); Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Norway’s Arctic policy* [10 XI 2014], https://www.regjeringen.no/globalassets/departementene/ud/vedlegg/nord/nordkloden_en.pdf (30 IX 2024); Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Norway’s Arctic strategy* [6 VII 2017], <https://www.regjeringen.no/contentassets/fad46f0404e14b2a9b551ca7359c1000/arctic-strategy.pdf> (30 IX 2024); Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *The Norwegian Government’s Arctic policy* [I 2020], https://www.regjeringen.no/globalassets/departementene/ud/vedlegg/nord/arctic_strategy.pdf, (30 IX 2024); Government and the Government Offices of Sweden, *Strategy for the Arctic region* [2011], <https://www.government.se/contentassets/85de9103bbbe4373b55eddd7f71608da/swedens-strategy-for-the-arctic-region/> (30 IX 2024); Government and the Government Offices of Sweden, *Sweden’s strategy for the Arctic region* [2020], <https://www.government.se/contentassets/85de9103bbbe4373b55eddd7f71608da/swedens-strategy-for-the-arctic-region-2020.pdf> (30 IX 2024); Prime Minister’s of Finland Office Publications, *Finland’s strategy for the Arctic region* [VIII 2010], https://arcticportal.org/images/stories/pdf/J0810_Finlands.pdf (30 IX 2024); Prime Minister’s of Finland Office Publications, *Strategy for the Arctic region*, 16/2013 [23 VIII 2013], https://valtioneuvosto.fi/documents/10616/1093242/J1613_Finland’s+Strateg

within these documents, revealing underlying patterns in the articulation of political narratives. Such analysis not only highlights dominant themes but also underscores the strategic framing choices employed by Western Arctic states in their discourse. The category ‘collocates’ was selected to examine words frequently associated with ‘Russia’, offering insights into how Western Arctic states construct their narratives about Russia³⁵.

The analysis used the search query ‘russia*’ to include all forms derived from the word ‘Russia’. Additionally, the ‘sort by likelihood’ option was selected to rank these collocates. This approach, now a standard in the field, provides more intuitive results by prioritising words that are statistically less likely to appear with ‘Russia’ by chance when compared to a reference corpus. Essentially, this means that these showed collocates associated with ‘Russia’ are particularly significant and unique within these 20 strategies and are not likely to be used with ‘Russia’ in general language. This helps to isolate the distinctive discourse used by Western Arctic states concerning Russia.

The results, presented in Figure 1, show the collocates linked with ‘Russia’ revealing shared themes about Russian activities in the Arctic. Norway contributed 6 of 20 documents, which has led to an overrepresentation of Norwegian perspectives, as illustrated in Figure 1, where ‘Norway’ and ‘Norwegian’ prominently appear. The analysis also indicated that coastal Arctic states, given their direct engagement with the Arctic Ocean, have produced more strategies on average, reflecting their greater regional stake.

These findings demonstrate that Arctic strategies are key speech acts in the Arctic discourse, and their analysis highlights the dynamics between Western Arctic states and Russia, capturing both strategic concerns and cooperation. The ranking by likelihood of collocates has provided an in–depth view of how unique words associated with Russia reflect broader political themes and distinct narratives within the Arctic region.

The analysis of collocates reveals an evolution in how Russia is portrayed in Western Arctic strategies. Initially, Russia was framed as a cooperative partner, evident from frequent collocates like ‘cooperate’, ‘joint’, and ‘bilateral’. These terms suggest an early emphasis on shared governance and collaboration in the Arctic. However, the appearance of ‘Ukraine’ as a significant collocate marks a critical shift, demonstrating the diminishing notion of the Arctic exceptionalism. Russia’s actions in Ukraine have highlighted that the Arctic is not isolated but intricately connected to broader political tensions.

y+for+the+Arctic+Region.pdf (30 IX 2024); Publications of the Finnish Government, *Finland’s strategy for Arctic policy* [2021], https://library.arcticportal.org/2813/1/Finlands_Strategy_for_Arctic_Policy.pdf (30 IX 2024).

³⁵ G.I. Lyse, G. Andersen, *Collocations and statistical analysis of n–grams. Multiword expressions in newspaper text*, „Studies in Corpus Linguistics” 2012, issue 49, pp. 79–110.

Figure 1. Wordcloud of collocates of ‘Russia’ in Western Arctic strategies



Source: generated by the AntConc software. L. Anthony, *Antconc Version 4.3.1* [29 VII 2024], <http://www.laurenceanthony.net/software> (30 IX 2024).

Security concerns have become more prominent, as suggested by collocates such as ‘nuclear’, ‘border’, and ‘northwestern’. This indicates a shift in perception, with Russia evolving from a collaborative neighbour to a strategic threat. The emphasis on ‘EEZ’ (exclusive economic zone), ‘territory’, ‘delimitation’ and ‘commission’ reflects growing concerns over Russia’s assertive actions to reinforce its sovereignty, which are increasingly viewed as threats to regional stability.

As mentioned before, the frequent appearance of terms like ‘Norway’ and ‘Norwegian’ highlights the overrepresentation of Norwegian perspectives, often framing Russia in relation to shared borders and emerging security challenges. Overall, the discourse has shifted from cooperation to viewing Russia as a militarised and potentially expansionist agent, with the Arctic relations increasingly shaped by its actions beyond the region.

The discourse analysis reveals significant differences between how Russia and Western Arctic states frame their roles in the Arctic. Western states emphasise cooperation, collective governance, and adherence to international law, particularly UNCLOS, to maintain stability. In contrast, Russia stresses sovereignty and asserts itself as the key Arctic region-builder due to its vast territory and economic interests. This divergence became more pronounced following the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, which undermined the notion of the Arctic exceptionalism and increased concerns about regional militarisation³⁶.

³⁶ A. Cunningham, *Shifting ice. How the Russian invasion of Ukraine has changed Arctic circle governance and the Arctic Council’s path forward*, The Arctic Institute [14 V 2024], <https://>

Western states have aimed to integrate Russia into multilateral cooperation, as seen since the 1991 AEPS, to maintain a stable status quo³⁷. However, Russia's centralised Arctic policy, its authoritarian system, and its readiness to use military power differentiate it sharply from its Western counterparts, who operate within democratic structures and collaborate through NATO or the EU.

Russia frames its militarisation as defensive, a response to perceived NATO threats, while Western states see these actions as indicative of expansionist ambitions reminiscent of its past aggressions in Georgia and Ukraine. Economically, Russia prioritises resource extraction, often sidelining environmental concerns, whereas Western states emphasise sustainable development and indigenous rights.

Russia's partnership with China, particularly post-sanctions, also contrasts with the Western narrative, which seeks to limit non-Arctic agents' influence³⁸. These differences in discourse – sovereignty versus cooperation, militarisation versus stability – highlight contrasting visions for the Arctic's future.

The most significant factors that could alter the current pause in international cooperation between Russia and Western Arctic states are a change in Russian authorities and the end of the war in Ukraine. However, the likelihood of such changes appears limited, especially given the ongoing atrocities committed by Russia in Ukraine, including civilian killings and mass brutality. These actions have severely eroded trust, making any swift return to cooperation unlikely. Even if there were a change in leadership or political reform, Western Arctic states would remain sceptical of Russia's intentions given its history of aggression and disregard for international norms³⁹.

The conclusion of the conflict in Ukraine could potentially ease political tensions, but the damage caused by Russia's brutal actions will not be easily forgotten or forgiven. Western states are likely to demand clear, verifiable changes in Russia's behaviour, including a significant reduction in militarisation and a demonstrated commitment to peace, as prerequisites for resuming meaningful Arctic cooperation.

www.thearcticinstitute.org/shifting-ice-russian-invasion-ukraine-arctic-circle-governance-arctic-councils-path-forward/ (30 IX 2024).

³⁷ M.R. Olesen, *Cooperation or conflict in the Arctic. A literature review*, „DIIS Working Paper” 2014, issue 8, pp. 14-16; E.C.H. Keskitalo, *International region-building. Development of the Arctic as an international region*, „Cooperation and Conflict” 2007, vol. 42, issue 2.

³⁸ C. Wall, N. Wegge, *The Russian Arctic threat. Consequences of the Ukraine war*, „CSIS Briefs” [January] 2023, https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/2023-01/230125_Wall_RussianArcticThreat_0.pdf?VersionId=e8h73TdoUjdJO3Y4nOTc4v5YRmpoZad (30 IX 2024).

³⁹ P.S. Hilde, F. Ohnishi, M. Petersson, *Cold winds in the north. Three perspectives on the impact of Russia's war in Ukraine on security and international relations in the Arctic*, „Polar Science” 2024, vol. 41.

While most cooperation is paused, limited activities in environmental monitoring and scientific research continue, which might serve as small, cautious steps towards rebuilding trust⁴⁰. However, broader engagement will remain conditional on Russia's demonstrated willingness to adhere to peaceful norms – something that, given its current posture, seems far from likely.

Multilateral frameworks like the Arctic Council could eventually reintegrate Russia, but only if it fundamentally changes its confrontational approach and commits to international standards of conduct. This remains highly uncertain, especially as Russia continues to pivot towards alliances with non-Arctic agents like China. Sustainable development and indigenous rights could offer limited starting points for re-engagement, but without significant changes, broader reintegration into Arctic governance is improbable given Russia's recent actions and their devastating impact on regional and global stability.

Conclusions

This study revealed a clear evolution in how Western Arctic states portray Russia, transitioning from a cooperative partner to a militarised and potentially expansionist agent. The discourse analysis of the Arctic strategies shows that while Russia's narrative emphasises sovereignty and resource control, Western Arctic states focus on cooperation, multilateralism, and adherence to international law. These contrasting narratives have shaped the shifting dynamics in Arctic relations, especially following the full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

The poststructuralist framework was essential in understanding how the Arctic strategies function as speech acts that construct political meaning. Drawing from Foucault's concept of 'power-knowledge' and Derrida's deconstruction, the study demonstrated that discourse is not merely reflective but actively constitutes political reality in the Arctic. By framing Russia in specific ways, Western Arctic states contribute to the construction of regional perceptions, influencing power dynamics and regional stability. The region-building approach highlighted that the Arctic is an 'imagined community' and these strategies play a crucial role in constructing and maintaining its identity, reflecting both internal and international priorities.

The findings suggest that the future of the Arctic governance will depend significantly on resolving broader political tensions. The diminished notion of the Arctic exceptionalism, coupled with growing concerns over Russia's assertive

⁴⁰ G. Fouche, G. Dickie, *West, Russia manage limited cooperation in Arctic despite chill in ties*, Reuters [14 V 2024], <https://www.reuters.com/world/west-russia-manage-limited-cooperation-arctic-despite-chill-ties-2024-05-14/> (30 IX 2024).

behaviour, underlines the need for policymakers to focus on promoting sustainable development and collective security. Maintaining multilateralism and inclusive cooperation is crucial to counterbalance narratives that promote militarisation and exclusion, thereby sustaining regional stability.

This study is not without limitations. The analysis focused exclusively on English-language Arctic strategies, meaning some nuances present in native-language documents may have been overlooked. Additionally, the study primarily examined Western narratives; future research should incorporate an in-depth analysis of Russia's internal discourse on the Arctic for a more balanced perspective. Expanding the analysis to include non-Arctic states and indigenous communities could also provide a fuller understanding of evolving Arctic narratives and possibilities for more inclusive governance.

The use of the poststructuralist framework, combined with discourse and region-building analyses, proved effective in highlighting the power of language in shaping international relations in the Arctic. Discourse not only describes but also constructs reality, influencing the Arctic's future as a zone of either cooperation or conflict. Ensuring that the Arctic strategies emphasise multilateralism, sustainability, and adherence to international law will be key to countering destabilising narratives, ultimately supporting a cooperative and peaceful Arctic amid ongoing political challenges.

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Abstrakt

Wojciech Szczerbowicz

Konstruowanie rzeczywistości poprzez język. Rosja w zachodnim dyskursie arktycznym

Arktyka była często postrzegana jako region wyizolowany od większych globalnych konfliktów, co określano mianem „Arctic exceptionalism”. Jednak pełnoskalowa agresja Rosji na Ukrainę w 2022 r. podważyła to założenie, prowadząc do rosnących napięć i militaryzacji. Niniejszy artykuł wykorzystuje ramy poststrukturalistyczne do analizy strategii arktycznych, publikowanych przez państwa zachodnioarktyczne w latach 2006-2024, traktując te strategie jako kluczowe akty mowy, konstruujące znaczenie polityczne regionu. Analiza dyskursu, wspomaganą oprogramowaniem AntConc, bada, w jaki sposób państwa zachodnioarktyczne przedstawiają Rosję oraz jak te narracje ewoluowały.

Wyniki ukazują zmianę, od przedstawiania Rosji jako partnera przy współpracy do coraz bardziej zmilitaryzowanego i ekspansjonistycznego podmiotu. Zmiana ta odzwierciedla kontrastujące podejścia – państwa zachodnie koncentrują się na multilateralizmie i prawie międzynarodowym, podczas gdy Rosja kładzie nacisk na suwerenność i siłę militarną. Podejście poststrukturalistyczne podkreśla, jak dyskurs aktywnie konstruuje rzeczywistość międzynarodową Arktyki, wpływając na dynamikę władzy i stabilność regionalną.

Przyszłe zarządzanie regionem zależy od rozwiązania szerszych napięć politycznych, ale ponowne włączenie Rosji do współpracy pozostaje niepewne. Utrzymanie multilateralizmu i poszanowanie prawa międzynarodowego będzie kluczowe dla przeciwdziałania destabilizującym narracjom i wspierania współpracy oraz pokoju w Arktyce.

Słowa kluczowe: Arktyka, Zachód, Rosja, dyskurs hegemoniczny, strategie arktyczne

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