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# The discursive construction of a new reality in Olaf Scholz's *Zeitenwende* speech

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## ABSTRACT

This article applies Bakhtinian dialogism and the idea of centripetal and centrifugal forces in struggle to critical discourse studies to analyse how powerful and marginalised discourses are brought into competition in political language to justify paradigm changes. I analyse German chancellor Olaf Scholz's *Zeitenwende* ('watershed') speech, which he gave as a response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, announcing a radical armament programme and change in foreign policy, paradigm shifts that had previously been unthinkable in German politics. Based on a qualitative analysis using the Appraisal Theory strategies Attitude and Engagement, I identify how Scholz aligns himself with particular powerful discourses, centring some and marginalising others, to construct an existential threat for Germany and a 'watershed' moment, a new situation which casts his policies of armament as without alternative. I use a dialogic approach to analyse how the speech responds to and anticipates past (already-spoken) and future (not-yet-spoken) discourses, to position itself both in terms of the immediate and the historical function of a policy statement. The paper demonstrates the strength of Bakhtinian analysis of how utterances are shaped by past and envisaged future uses of particular discourses and of dialogically contractive and expansive strategies in critical discourse studies.

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## Introduction

Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine, leading German politicians have coincided rhetorically in announcing that this act caused a '*Zeitenwende*': 'The twenty-fourth of February 2022 marks a watershed in the history of our continent. [...] With his attack on Ukraine on Thursday, President Putin has created a new reality', said German chancellor Olaf Scholz in his *Regierungserklärung* on 27 February 2022. 'Russia's war marks the dawn of a new era. It's a watershed moment. Yesterday's certainties are gone. Today, we face a new reality that none of us chose. It is a reality that President Putin has forced upon us', said German foreign minister Annalena Baerbock in her speech at the United

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Nations General Assembly on 1 March 2022. Instead of demanding truce, de-escalation and dialogue, Scholz announced an armament plan that would make Germany the world's third largest military spender. While Germany was never the pacifist country that postwar self-perception myths had entertained (Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2005; Rathbun, 2006), this decision still means a paradigm shift in 'German foreign and security policy [...] that jettisoned 30, even 50 years of policy' (Langenbacher, 2022, p. 1).

The terms *Zeitenwende*, *watershed*, *new reality* and *new era* all imply the absence of human agency. They metaphorically represent government policy shifts as phenomena that have naturally occurred with time. The term *Zeitenwende* in particular contains the noun *Wende* ('turning point'), a grammatical metaphor that construes processes 'as if they were entities' (Halliday & Matthiessen, 1985/2004, p. 637), in this case the process of changing something or turning into a certain direction, indicated by the verb *wenden* ('to turn'). With this metaphorisation, the term *Zeitenwende* hides the agency of seeing or doing things differently now for a certain reason, unlike, for instance, the terms *paradigm shift* or *policy change* would. Instead, they sustain that things just are different now, that we must adapt to new circumstances. The German discourse on the Russian invasion of Ukraine thus constructs a perspective that explicitly relegates 'us' to the passive observer's perspective, to those who now have to react to the forceful loss of 'yesterday's certainties'.

In this paper, I analyse Olaf Scholz's *Zeitenwende* policy statement given on 27 February 2022, investigating which major discourses compete in the speech and how Scholz uses them to present his policies as without alternative. Through an adaptation of Relational Dialectics Theory (Baxter, 2011; Baxter & Montgomery, 1996) and Appraisal Theory (Martin & White, 2005), I analyse how strategies of attitude and engagement are used to centralise particular discourses while marginalising others and opening or closing dialogic space around them. This analysis of how different discourses are brought into competition, seen as centripetal-centrifugal struggle through the lens of Bakhtinian dialogism, gives us a glimpse of how powerful discourses reassert themselves in Scholz's speech. To begin, I describe the genre of policy statements and its communicative functions.

## Theoretical framework

### *Communicative functions of a Regierungserklärung*

A *Regierungserklärung* ('policy statement') is usually given at the beginning of a chancellor's mandate as an inaugural speech, but can be given at any time to initiate a debate (Korte, 2002, pp. 452–453; Stüwe, 2005, p. 21). The term consists of the words *Regierung* ('government') and *Erklärung*, which may mean both 'explanation' and 'declaration'. As such, it is ambiguous by both referring to an explanation of government policy in the sense of an interpretation and justification of it in terms of the situation, and to an official declaration and directive clarification of a given situation (Pörksen, 2003, p. 40). Holly (2017, p. 13) defines a policy statement as geared towards debate.

Policy statements are instruments of leadership of German chancellors and their increasing use over time is part of a mediatised democracy: as a public presentation, such policy statements receive particular attention by the media and thus serve as a visualised personification of government policy (Korte, 2002, p. 453). As they are an instrument of government that is both publicly effective and inwardly coordinative (Müller &

Recknagel, 2019) and meant to cause a debate (Stüwe, 2005, p. 21), policy statements are usually based on a range of sources, scientists, surveys, contemporaries or a range of other voices whose composition are a sign of the personal style of the chancellor (Korte, 2002, pp. 460–461). Studies of this genre in German political discourse studies have concentrated on inaugural policy statements (Barnickel, 2020; Busch & Kaupert, 2018; Stüwe, 2005). Interim policy statements straggle various fields of action, such as the formation of public attitudes, opinions and will, political executive and administration or organisation of international/inter-state relations (Reisigl & Wodak, 2016, p. 29).

Policy statements have an immediate and a historical function. Immediately, a policy statement may be used as a special expression of the chancellor's '*Richtlinienkompetenz*' ('policy-making power') (Stüwe, 2005, pp. 26–43), announcing guidelines and programmes that are to discipline the entire coalition government (Korte, 2002, p. 456). Historically, policy statements are also conceived as documents in which the problematisation (or not) of particular topics and the language used become primary sources for the interpretation of the chancellor's historical role (Korte, 2002, p. 457).

In Bakhtinian dialogism, where speakers enter in a dialogic relationship with 'the alien horizon of the understanding receiver' (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 282) constructing their utterances against the listener's background, the 'listener (real or imagined) shapes the utterance from the outset' (Morson & Emerson, 1990, p. 129). As political speeches are usually addressed to multiple audiences (Kranert, 2017), the discursive power enacted in policy statements should be analysed not only regarding the immediate function and addressees, who are brought into line and whose potential reactions are anticipated, but also regarding the historical function: analyses should show how the speaking politician involves perceived future addressees that may evaluate their role in the discursive construction of historical reality in the future. For this purpose, a dialogic perspective that sees discourses as always being in response to past, present and imagined future addressees is well-suited, as I argue in the next section.

### ***Dialogism and appraisal theory***

Dialogism is a central concept in Bakhtin's work, and he used the term in various senses (Morson & Emerson, 1990, pp. 130–131). In general, he considers all utterances dialogic in the sense that

the living utterance, having taken meaning and shape at a particular historical moment in a socially specific environment, cannot fail to brush up against thousands of living dialogic threads, woven by socio-ideological consciousness around the given object of an utterance; it cannot fail to become an active participant in social dialogue. (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 276)

Utterances are shaped both by past uses of particular discourses as well as by envisaged future uses (Voloshinov, 1929/1973, p. 86), so that 'all discourse is in dialogue with prior discourses on the same subject, as well as with discourses yet to come, whose reactions it foresees and anticipates' (Todorov, 1984, p. x). Discourses that relate to the anticipation of a response are called the not-yet-spoken and discourses that consist of previous utterances about the topic are called the already-spoken (Morson & Emerson, 1990, p. 137). A discourse is here understood as 'a system of meaning—a set of propositions that cohere around a given

object of meaning' (Baxter, 2011, p. 2). In any utterance, discourses are in competition 'when the meanings they advance negate one another in some way' (Baxter, 2011, p. 2).

This understanding of dialogue can be harnessed for discourse studies. Appraisal Theory uses a dialogic perspective to analyse how language 'locate[s] the writer/speaker with respect to the value positions being referenced in the text and with respect to, in Bakhtin's terms, the backdrop of alternative opinions, points of view and value judgements against which all texts operate' (Martin & White, 2005, p. 94). It distinguishes monoglossic talk, which does not recognise alternative positions or voices and assumes taken-for-granted status (Baxter, 2011, p. 127; Martin & White, 2005, p. 99), from heteroglossic talk. Within the category of heteroglossic expressions, on the other hand, an utterance may be more or less dialogic, depending on the degree to which we recognise or hide other voices in our utterance (Morson & Emerson, 1990, p. 146). Utterances can thus be dialogically expansive or contractive. The former type opens dialogic space for alternative positions and voices whereas the latter type closes down the dialogic space by challenging, fending off or restricting the scope of dialogic alternatives (Martin & White, 2005, pp. 102–103), which is referred to as discursive struggle.

To analyse how power is exercised through discursive struggle, Baxter (2011) adopts Bakhtin's concept of centripetal (centralising) and centrifugal (decentralising) forces (Bakhtin, 1981, pp. 270–272). Marginalised discourses are 'easily forgotten or silenced relative to what is centred. The centre is easily legitimated as normative, typical, and natural' and serves as a benchmark against which all else is compared, a position of privilege and power compared to the centrifugal (Baxter, 2011, p. 123). I understand power as a 'process through which consensual social relations are articulated within the context of certain meaning systems' (Mumby & Stohl, 1991, p. 316). Power thus 'resides in the systems of meaning – the discourses – through which social reality as we know it is constructed' (Baxter, 2011, p. 124), not in individuals or social groups. Centripetal discourses are more powerful than centrifugal ones because their systems of meaning are presented as social reality (Baxter, 2011, p. 124). By means of discourses, we exercise power to use language to create reality rather than just reflect it (Girnth, 2015, p. 5), producing 'domains of objects and rituals of truth' (Foucault, 1979, p. 194). An understanding of languages as 'bounded verbal-ideological and social belief systems' (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 288) and discursive struggle thus entails the position that meaning-making always takes place within relations of power and that there is no truth outside of power.

This understanding provides an adequately nuanced approach to discursive struggles and supports a more refined conceptualisation of post-truth as deeply embedded in everyday practices of mediatisation and human existence (Kalpokas, 2019, p. 2). Simplistic views of power and ideology relying on the truth vs lies binary often start by 'presupposing certain conceptions of knowledge and rationality' and thus 'incorporate a peculiarly Western epistemology' (Howe, 1998, p. 14), which can lead to 'a patronising principle that people are ideological dupes from whose eyes the clear-sighted analyst can remove the blindfolds of ideological obfuscation' (Pennycook, 2021, p. 107). Such thinking is behind the EU decision to ban Russian state-owned media, in President Ursula von der Leyen's words, the 'Kremlin's media machine', to stop their 'toxic and harmful disinformation' from 'spread[ing] their lies to justify Putin's war and to sow division in our Union'.<sup>1</sup> The focus on coercive power evident in these words, identified in propagandistic terms such as 'fake news' (Habgood-Coote, 2019) or 'disinformation', often forgets to question

how these terms themselves work as ‘floating signifiers’ (see Farkas & Schou, 2018; Laclau, 2005), used to delegitimise political opponents and construct hegemony.

## Method

The text under analysis is the *Regierungserklärung* (‘policy statement’) given by Olaf Scholz on 27 February 2022, three days after the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The text is drawn from the German government’s website<sup>2</sup>, where translations into English and Russian are also published, which indicates that the speech is secondarily addressed to an international, and specifically Russian-speaking audience. Their dialogical and translation-specific implications are worthy of analysis, but that is beyond the scope of this paper. The English translations of the examples in this paper are the official translations.

My analysis identifies already-spoken and not-yet-spoken discourses in the speech through a thematic analysis, which serves to capture the immediate and historical function of policy statements. These discourses can be manifest or latent; while manifest discourses are explicitly introduced, latent discourses appear as unspoken presuppositions, assumptions that are taken for granted (Baxter, 2011, pp. 158–159). Latent discourses can be identified by asking ‘What does a listener need to know in order to render this textual segment intelligible? What sociocultural and interpersonal discourses need to be invoked to understand what this textual segment means?’ (Baxter, 2011, p. 159). Stances taken and reflected through attitudinal meanings in discourses are usually ‘grounded in an often unstated discursive system of meaning’ (Baxter, 2011, p. 160), so I will draw on Appraisal Theory’s resources of *attitude*, as they can indicate what is regarded as typical or normal and reflect the stance speakers take (Martin & White, 2005, p. 42).

Both already-spoken and not-yet-spoken discourses can be proximal or distal: while proximal ones are spoken by directly involved parties, distal ones are ‘socially circulating ideas’ (Loseke, 2009), utterances circulating in culture at large, spoken ‘by cultural members other than the parties of a given relationship’ (Baxter, 2011, p. 53). This level of the analysis can serve to identify how speakers construct their discourses interweaving historically or culturally laden meanings with current ideologies.

*Attitude* is divided into *affect* (the emotive dimension of meaning; reactions to behaviour), *judgement* (the ethical/moral dimension of meaning; evaluation of behaviour according to some norm) and *appreciation* (the aesthetic dimension of meaning; evaluating a text, a process or a phenomenon) (Martin & White, 2005, pp. 42–44). We can think of these expressions of attitude as ‘institutionalised feelings, which take us out of our everyday common sense world into the uncommon sense worlds of shared community values’ (Martin & White, 2005, p. 45). Thus, judgement implicitly or explicitly invokes some rule or regulation and ‘reworks feelings in the realm of proposals about behaviour’ whereas appreciation expresses evaluation of ‘semiotic and natural phenomena’ and ‘reworks feelings as propositions about the value of things’ (Martin & White, 2005, p. 45). Appreciation and judgement are not separate, but overlapping, with affect expressing a more personal evaluation within both of them (see the illustration in Martin & White, 2005, p. 45).

A brief methodological reflection is in order here. While the identification of manifest discourses is straightforward, that of latent discourses is more complicated as one cannot only rely on the textual data at hand. Instead, one must ‘understand both the culture and the relational history in which a given textual utterance is embedded’ (Baxter, 2011,

p. 159), which necessarily introduces subjectivity and a personal standpoint into the analysis. While analysts can assume a professional distance and reliance on trustworthy sources, there can be no 'objective position'. It is a central contention of Bakhtinian dialogism that we do not only engage in talk *about* discourse, but *with* discourse, and that a form of dialogic understanding always includes evaluation and response (Todorov, 1984, p. 16). In the continuously changing realm of politics, any analyst not only observes political processes, but also shapes them, so that 'decision and standpoint are inseparably bound up together' (Mannheim, 1936, p. 152). As Blommaert has rightly warned, 'the critical analysis of a text/discourse risks being undermined (and ideologically plied) by the uncritical acceptance of 'established' background facts related to the text/discourse [...] neutralis[ing] the socially-constructed nature of scholarly practices' (Blommaert, 1997, p. 70). Individual standpoints or 'researcher bias' thus unavoidably permeate any type of analysis (Gee, 2011, p. 9).

I also analyse how the identified discourses are brought into competition, as centred and marginalised. For this, I will draw on resources of *engagement*, which are ways 'to construe for the text a heteroglossic backdrop of prior utterances, alternative viewpoints and anticipated responses' (Martin & White, 2005, p. 97). Those are either dialogically expansive or contractive (Martin & White, 2005, pp. 97–98). Dialogically contractive resources of engagement are *disclaim* (deny, counter) and *proclaim* (concur, pronounce, endorse); dialogically expansive resources are *entertain* and *attribute* (acknowledge, distance) (Martin & White, 2005, p. 134).

## Analysis

### Introduction to the speech

The speech has seven parts: an introduction, followed by the five 'courses of action' that Scholz proposes, and a final part. Scholz introduces his speech by claiming that the Russian invasion of Ukraine marks a '*Zeitenwende*' ('watershed') in the history of 'our continent'. I will here refer to this as the **watershed** discourse. It is at the level of the proximal not-yet-spoken, as it is the Scholz government's way to justify a range of potentially controversial policies, by the logic that a new era needs to be reacted to in new ways. The discourse is manifestly tied to the actions of Russia through Scholz's analysis of the alleged turning point (example 1), which is introduced by the contractive proclaim '*im Kern geht es um*' ('the issue at the heart of this'), with which Scholz aims to convey absolute certainty.

(1)

Im Kern geht es um die Frage, ob Macht das Recht brechen darf, ob wir es Putin gestatten, die Uhren zurückzudrehen in die Zeit der Großmächte des 19. Jahrhunderts, oder ob wir die Kraft aufbringen, Kriegstreibern wie Putin Grenzen zu setzen.

[‘The issue at the heart of this is whether power is allowed to prevail over the law. Whether we permit Putin to turn back the clock to the nineteenth century and the age of the great powers. Or whether we have it in us to keep warmongers like Putin in check.’]

Scholz then expresses moral indignation about the violation of international law and by drawing an analogy to the Second World War, invokes a personal perspective. In that, this passage follows recommendations by speech writers to start a speech by stating one's



personal attitude, feelings and values on order to make it credible (Pörksen, 2003, p. 35). The discourse of **moral indignation** is at the levels of the distal and proximal not-yet-spoken, as it intends to define the positioning in terms of a moral stance of the German government both for the immediate addressees as well as for future ones in a historical perspective. Moral indignation is manifest through a range of realisations of judgement by social sanction, such as *'kaltblütig einen Angriffskrieg vom Zaun gebrochen'* ('started a war of aggression in cold blood'), *'menschenverachtend'* ('inhumane') or *'die ganze Skrupellosigkeit Putins'* ('Putin's utter lack of scruples'). The personal involvement is expressed through realisations of affect such as *'die schrecklichen Bilder'* ('the terrible images'), *'himmelschreiende Ungerechtigkeit'* ('appalling injustice') and *'furchtbaren Nachrichten'* ('terrible news').

The personal perspective is also evident in the emotive approach to a third discourse, that of **international law**, at the level of the distal already-spoken and manifest for instance in the formulation *'infamer Völkerrechtsbruch'* ('flagrant breach of international law') or the description of the Russian veto, which is its right as a permanent member of the UN Security Council, as a *'Notbremse'* (not translated in the official text; literally 'emergency brake', but also 'professional foul') and the added qualification of *'Was für eine Schande!'* ('What a disgrace!').

There is also a discourse of **personal war experience**, manifest through the expression *'Erzählungen unserer Eltern und Großeltern [ ... ] vom Krieg'* ('our parents' or grandparents' tales of war'), which invokes World War 2 experiences and is thus situated at the level of the distal already-spoken to construct the narrative of something unseen in Europe since that war, using realisations of affect: *'Entsetzen'* ('horror'), *'für die Jüngeren ist es kaum fassbar: Krieg in Europa'* ('for younger people it is almost inconceivable: war in Europe'). Thematically, the same claim is made when Scholz states that Putin is 'demolishing the European security order that had prevailed for almost half a century since the Helsinki Final Act' (*'zertrümmert die europäische Sicherheitsordnung, wie sie seit der Schlussakte von Helsinki fast ein halbes Jahrhundert Bestand hatte'*).

The fifth discourse I identify is the **indivisible security** discourse (example 2). It is manifest through indirect reported speech, which cursorily introduces the safety guarantees that Russia has demanded based on the norm of indivisible security agreed to by OSCE countries in the Helsinki Final Act and again in the Paris Charter of 1990 (Meyer et al., 2015; Sakwa, 2016, pp. 39–41), which Scholz does not mention. Scholz does not refer to indivisible security as an object of OSCE treaties but gives Putin's demand a vague, unclear and personalised character through the formulation *reden von*, thus not just undermining its validity rhetorically but also placing the discourse on the level of the proximal already-spoken rather than the distal already-spoken. This is a dialogic expansion by distancing, followed by the combination of countering and pronouncement *'Tatsächlich aber'* ('in reality, however') to suggest that Putin is untruthful and Scholz knows what the real intention is.

(2)

Präsident Putin redet dabei stets von unteilbarer Sicherheit. Tatsächlich aber will er gerade den Kontinent mit Waffengewalt in altbekannte Einflussphären teilen.

[‘President Putin always talks about indivisible security. But what he really seeks now is to divide the continent into the familiar old spheres of influence through armed force.’]



Dialogic contraction through pronouncement is used to assert that Putin started the war 'for one reason alone' (*'aus einem einzigen Grund'*), which disqualifies the **indivisible security** discourse in favour of a **Putin's war** discourse, at the level of the proximal not-yet-spoken, that casts the invasion as an unprovoked attack on the free world by an individual actor who is 'isolating himself from the entire international community' (*'stellt sich auch ins Abseits der gesamten internationalen Staatengemeinschaft'*) and wants 'to wipe an independent country off the map' (*'ein unabhängiges Land von der Weltkarte tilgen'*).

That discourse is also reflected in the phrase where Scholz anticipates a potential argument that points to the OSCE accords. To exclude such Eurasian partnership arguments, he connects the **indivisible security** discourse with the **watershed** discourse by using a countering construction: he acknowledges that 'yes, in the long term security in Europe cannot be achieved in opposition to Russia' (*'Ja, dauerhaft ist Sicherheit in Europa nicht gegen Russland möglich'*), but counters it by stating that 'for the foreseeable future, Putin is jeopardising this security' (*'Auf absehbare Zeit aber gefährdet Putin diese Sicherheit'*), supported by the pronouncement *'Das muss klar ausgesprochen werden'* ('I say very clearly').

### **First course of action**

The theme of the first course of action Scholz announces is support to Ukraine, which now also includes arms delivery to a conflict zone, an activity that has hitherto been taboo in Germany, at least as an official policy. As Germany thus participates in a war actively and openly, I identify this as the **Germany as a military power** discourse at the level of the proximal not-yet-spoken. Scholz picks up the **watershed** discourse (*'mit dem Überfall auf die Ukraine sind wir in einer neuen Zeit'*, 'with the attack on Ukraine, we have entered a new era'; *'Präsident Putin [hat] mit seinem Überfall auf die Ukraine eine neue Realität geschaffen'*, 'with his attack on Ukraine on Thursday, President Putin has created a new reality') to give credence to the claim that the policy shift in arms delivery to conflict zones is necessary. Disagreement on this is forestalled by presenting it as without alternative, through the dialogically contractive denial *'konnte es keine andere Antwort geben'* ('there could be no other response').

The **Putin's war** discourse reoccurs here as well. Scholz's stated aim is to distinguish the will of the Russian people, assumed to align with the Western free-world viewpoint, from that of its president, thus isolating him. On a more hidden level, it also attempts to simplify the conflict by casting it into a binary good vs evil scheme and thus anticipates potentially complicating views that seek to explain the Russian position historically. The **moral indignation** discourse is latent through a combination of affect (*'verzweifelten Lage'*, 'desperate situation') and judgement, as Scholz asserts that the Ukrainian people do not just protect their homeland, but are also 'fighting for freedom and their democracy. For values that we share with them' (*'Sie kämpfen für Freiheit und ihre Demokratie, für Werte, die wir mit ihnen teilen'*). Scholz thus aligns them with 'us' as democrats and Europeans. By supporting them, 'we' are 'on the right side of history!' (*'auf der richtigen Seite der Geschichte'*), an invocation that is a latent expression of the **personal war experience** discourse and Germany's past on the wrong side of history. The shift in arms delivery policy is thus cast

as morally justified and historically necessary, contrasted as it is to the evil of 'Putin's aggression'. Therefore, the **Germany as a military power** discourse is latent, as it is implied but not openly declared.

The absolute contrast that Scholz establishes between a right and a wrong side of history, here and elsewhere in the speech, is underlined by the use of first-person-plural pronouns and their underspecified meaning potential (Helmbrecht, 2002). A detailed study of this issue for German was conducted by Kranert (2017). Importantly, first-person-plural pronouns are not only used to construct collectivity, but also to disalign the speaker from others through 'a favourable construction of a self-anchored collective, which obtains positive values by juxtaposing it with negatively loaded values of the other-anchored collective' (Fetzer, 2014, p. 349).

### **Second course of action**

The second of Scholz's courses of action is 'to divert Putin from his path of war'. Here, Scholz lists the sanctions against Russia and, using the contractive strategy of counter, concedes that Putin will not change course overnight, but argues that an effect will be seen very soon, reaffirmed by the pronouncement '*ohne irgendwelche Denkverbote*' ('nothing is off the table'). The **Putin's war** discourse is manifest again through the very pronouncement '*Putin, nicht das russische Volk, hat sich für den Krieg entschieden. Deshalb gehört es deutlich ausgesprochen: Dieser Krieg ist Putins Krieg*' ('Putin, not the Russian people, has decided to start this war. And so it must be clearly stated that this war is Putin's war!') as well as the judgement that it is a 'conflict between Putin and the free world' ('*Konflikt zwischen Putin und der freien Welt*'), which establishes a morally compelling and polarising 'with us or against us' situation. The manifestation of that discourse through the dialogically contractive concurrence 'I know how difficult it is for the many people in our country who were born in Ukraine or Russia to bear the current situation' denies any argumentative position between supporting Putin or being part of the free world.

Scholz connects the differentiation between Putin and the Russian people through an appreciation of the discourse of **German reconciliation**, at the level of the distal already-spoken, and manifest in example 3. The connection of these two discourses gives the personal attack on Putin moral justification, implying a historic duty to lead the Russian people into the free world.

(3)

Die Differenzierung ist mir wichtig; denn die Aussöhnung zwischen Deutschen und Russen nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg ist und bleibt ein wichtiges Kapitel unserer gemeinsamen Geschichte.

[It is important to me to specify this. Because reconciliation between Germans and Russians after the Second World War is – and remains – an important chapter of our shared history.]

Finally, I identify a latent **regime change** in Russia discourse, which is at the level of the proximal not-yet-spoken. It can be identified in the judgements that in many Russian cities, people have protested against 'Putin's war', showing 'great courage and true bravery' ('*großen Mut und große Tapferkeit*'), and that 'we' stand with all those in Russia who 'are boldly defying Putin's regime and opposing his war against Ukraine' ('*Putins Machtapparat mutig die Stirn bieten und seinen Krieg in der Ukraine ablehnen*'). Given

the preference for dialogic contraction in Scholz's speech, there is a notable concentration of dialogically expansive strategies applied to this discourse ('we should not forget' the protests, '*Ich bin ganz sicher: Freiheit, Toleranz und Menschenrechte werden sich auch in Russland durchsetzen*', 'I am quite sure that freedom, tolerance and human rights will prevail in Russia, too'). That language, while entertaining possibilities of protests, freedom and human rights, does open the way for arguments that the Russian people agree with Putin and that freedom, tolerance and human rights do not currently prevail in Russia in general.

### **Third course of action**

In the third section, Scholz identifies a major challenge in preventing 'Putin's war' from spilling over into other countries in Europe. There is a discourse of **NATO alliance**, at the level of the proximal already-spoken, manifest through a reference to conversations with allied countries in Eastern Europe and through dialogically contractive pronouncements and judgements to stand 'unconditionally' ('*Ohne Wenn und Aber*') by the collective defence obligation within NATO and 'our resolve' ('*unsere Entschlossenheit*') to defend every square metre of NATO territory: '*Wir meinen das sehr ernst*' ('We are absolutely serious about this'). This is connected to the **Germany as a military power** discourse, which is latently present in the list of recent actions the German army has carried out, appreciatively called 'important' ('*wichtige*') signals. Soldiers are thanked for their 'valuable' ('*wichtigen*') service, accompanied by a contractive pronouncement '*sicher auch in Ihrem Namen*' ('I am sure you agree'), aligning the audience with Scholz's position.

To lead into the fourth course of action, in what is the central utterance of the speech, Scholz addresses the audience again specifically and connects the **Germany as a military power** discourse manifestly to both the **watershed** and **Putin's war** discourse (example 4). As such, he specifically labels the newly announced military politics as necessary and 'standard'.

(4)

Meine Damen und Herren, angesichts der Zeitenwende, die Putins Aggression bedeutet, lautet unser Maßstab: Was für die Sicherung des Friedens in Europa gebraucht wird, das wird getan.

[In view of the watershed that Putin's aggression entails, our standard is this: what is needed to secure peace in Europe will be done.]

### **Fourth course of action**

This is the longest section in the speech. Here, Scholz again connects the previously introduced **watershed** and **Putin's war** discourses to put forth his interpretation of Putin's intentions:

(5)

Wer Putins historisierende Abhandlungen liest, wer seine öffentliche Kriegserklärung an die Ukraine im Fernsehen gesehen hat oder wer wie ich kürzlich persönlich mit ihm stundenlang gesprochen hat, der kann keinen Zweifel mehr haben: Putin will ein russisches Imperium errichten.

[‘Anyone who reads Putin’s historicising essays, who has watched his televised declaration of war on Ukraine, or who has recently – as I have done – held hours of direct talks with him, can no longer have any doubt that Putin wants to build a Russian empire.’]

This claim is supported by a strategy of acknowledgement through negative appreciation of Putin’s voice, as manifested in Scholz’s references to what Putin said and wrote. This voice is then represented through the dialogically contractive pronouncement *‘kann keinen Zweifel mehr haben’* (‘can no longer have any doubt’) as allowing only one conclusion, which is the one Scholz has drawn. The validity of his conclusion is further alleged by the dialogically contractive endorsement *‘Das sehen wir heute in der Ukraine’* (‘We can see that today in Ukraine’), which opens a menacing scenario for a potential tomorrow, and when he makes the judgement *‘schreckt er nicht zurück vor militärischer Gewalt’* (‘has no qualms about using military force’).

Based on this conclusion, Scholz constructs a discourse of **threat to national security**, which is proximal not-yet-spoken and latent. The war in Ukraine, stripped of all its prehistory, is presented as an act of expansionist aggression to start building an empire that may eventually entail Germany. Most basically, this construction projects a distant entity as ‘gradually encroaching on the speaker-addressee territory (both physical and ideological)’ (Cap, 2013, p. 3) in order to legitimise particular military policies.

The threat to national security is constructed, first, through a rhetorical question: *‘Welche Fähigkeiten besitzt Putins Russland, und welche Fähigkeiten brauchen wir, um dieser Bedrohung zu begegnen, heute und in der Zukunft?’* (‘what capabilities does Putin’s Russia possess? And what capabilities do we need to counter this threat – today and in the future?’), which makes clear that Scholz envisages a lasting conflict with (Putin’s) Russia that may entail the (alleged) need for Germany to acquire nuclear arms. Scholz does not answer the question but uses the dialogically contractive pronouncement *‘Klar ist’* (‘it is clear’) to assert that, if one thing is clear, it is that Germany must invest much more in the ‘security of our country’ (*‘Sicherheit unseres Landes’*), in order to protect ‘our freedom and our democracy’ (*‘unsere Freiheit und unsere Demokratie’*).

The second manifestation of the **threat to national security** discourse again picks up the **Germany as a military power** discourse, now and for the first time in the speech manifest in the assertion that a ‘powerful, cutting-edge, progressive’ (*‘leistungsfähige, hochmoderne, fortschrittliche’*) army is ‘quite certainly something that a country of our size and our significance within Europe should be able to achieve’ (*‘ja wohl erreichbar für ein Land unserer Größe und unserer Bedeutung in Europa’*). This part of the speech suggests that the armament programme may be part of a long-term and previously devised strategy.

There is also a manifest **energy policy** discourse that he connects to the discourse of **threat to national security** at the level of the proximal not-yet-spoken, through the contractive strategy of endorse (example 6).

(6)

Eine verantwortungsvolle, vorausschauende Energiepolitik ist [...] entscheidend auch für unsere Sicherheit.

[‘responsible, forward-looking energy policy is [...] also crucial for our security.’]

Finally, there is a latent discourse of **inner-EU discipline**, at the level of the proximal not-yet-spoken, observable in the judgement that preserving the ‘united front’ (‘a rather militaristic translation of the original *Geschlossenheit*’) is an opportunity, and in the dialogically contractive pronouncement of a demand that unity means that member states not simply ask what they can extract in Brussels for their own country, but ask what the best decision for ‘our’ Union is. Scholz connects this discourse to the **watershed** discourse by stating that ‘this watershed [...] affects all of Europe’ (*‘die Zeitenwende [...] trifft ganz Europa’*), suggesting that the new reality German politicians are discursively constructing is envisaged for all of Europe.

### **Fifth course of action**

The fifth and last point Scholz makes is that ‘Putin’s war’ represents a ‘turning point’ (*‘Zäsur’*) for German foreign policy, which again invokes the **watershed** discourse. Compared to the previous courses of action, he is less clear on what future foreign policy will look like, other than that ‘we will not refuse talks with Russia’ (*‘wir werden uns Gesprächen mit Russland nicht verweigern’*). This merely gives a token nod to diplomacy, implying a passive position and making clear that Germany will mainly respond militarily rather than diplomatically. The judgement *‘Alles andere halte ich für unverantwortlich’* (‘Anything else, I believe, would be irresponsible’) entertains potential voices that demand a diplomatic rupture with Russia. Voices that argue that talks with Russia should be sought actively, however, are not envisaged by this statement and thus excluded.

Scholz underlines this hardened stance by saying he wants to avoid being ‘naive’, which he defines as ‘not talking simply for the sake of talking’ (*‘kein Reden um des Redens willen’*). I label this the **shift in Ostpolitik** discourse, at the level of the distal already-spoken. This is because, historically, *Ostpolitik*, led by SPD politicians such as Egon Bahr and Willy Brandt, is a central aspect of his own party’s political approach (Bahr, 2012). The discourse is latent because Scholz does not explicitly refer to any concrete policy or person. Using a dialogically contractive concurrence, he judges that Putin has never been interested in dialogue (example 7). This assertion reasserts the **Putin’s war** discourse, heaps all the blame and responsibility on Putin and shows that Scholz has no faith at all in the effectiveness of dialogue with Russia. The envisaged caesura for German foreign policy, thus, seems to entail, as was stated above, a lasting conflict with Russia.

(7)

Für echten Dialog braucht es die Bereitschaft dazu auf beiden Seiten. Daran mangelt es aufseiten Putins ganz offensichtlich, und das nicht erst in den letzten Tagen und Wochen.

[‘True dialogue requires a willingness to engage—on both sides. That is lacking on Putin’s side, quite clearly—and not just in recent days and weeks.’]

Scholz’s comments on dialogue with Putin can be read as a turn away from Merkel’s pragmatic foreign policy, the Minsk agreements and dialogue with Russia (Rácz, 2022). The new coalition government is expected to take a tougher course in line with US expectations, considering Merkel’s policy ‘naive’. That Scholz himself was not exactly conducive to dialogue in his last meeting with Putin before the invasion is described by the *ntv* journalist Huld (2022).

## Final part

In the final part, there is a discourse of **German unity**, latent and at the level of the distal already-spoken, which is connected to the discourse of **threat to national security**, present in the expression *'das große Glück, das unser Land seit über dreißig Jahren genießt'* ('the great fortune our country has enjoyed for over thirty years') and the entertainment of a hypothetical future that the thirty years of German unity might be a 'historical exception' (*'historische Ausnahme'*). The attack on Ukraine is elevated to an attack 'on the peaceful order in Europe and the world'. To counteract this, Scholz asserts through appreciations, 'we must do everything we can to maintain the cohesion of the European Union, the strength of NATO, to forge even closer relations with our friends, our partners and all those who share our convictions worldwide' (*'müssen wir alles tun für den Zusammenhalt der Europäischen Union, für die Stärke der NATO, für noch engere Beziehungen zu unseren Freunden, Partnern und Gleichgesinnten weltweit'*). This again excludes historically-based explanations and discourses critical with NATO expansion (Sarotte, 2021; Savranskaya & Blanton, 2016), even from Western military advisors such as Kennan (1997), adopts an Atlanticist position on the role of NATO in Europe, and naturalises the view that military alliance membership leads to peace (see Leeds, 2003).

The end of the speech wraps up the central ideas and themes of the speech. There is a latent discourse of **free democracy**, invoked by the appreciation 'we know the strength of free democracies' (*'wir wissen um die Stärke freier Demokratien'*), which 'unites us' (*'Uns eint'*). The **watershed** discourse reoccurs (*'auch in dieser Zeitenwende'*, 'even in this watershed moment'), as does the **Putin's war** discourse through the explicit mention of 'Putin's war'. The final sentence, the announcement that 'we will defend it' (*'wir werden es verteidigen'*), is, given the context, another invocation of the **Germany as a military power** discourse.

In this section, I have analysed Scholz's speech thematically, identifying a range of manifest and latent discourses, summarised in Table 1, ordered by number of occurrences and pervasiveness in the different sections of the speech. Using a range of appraisal strategies, I have shown how Scholz expands or contracts dialogue around those discourses through engagement and how he connects these discourses to position himself and

**Table 1.** Overview of discourses in the speech.

Discourse	Section of the speech							latent/manifest	temporal axis
Putin's war	I	1	2	3	4	5	f	manifest	prox. not-yet
watershed	I	1		3	4	5	f	mainly manifest	prox. not-yet
Germany as a military power		1		3	4		f	latent, then manifest	prox. not-yet
moral indignation	I	1						manifest & latent	dist. already + not-yet
personal war experience	I	1						manifest, then latent	dist. already
NATO alliance				3			f	manifest	prox. already
threat to national security					4		f	latent, then manifest	prox. not-yet
international law	I							manifest	dist. already
indivisible security	I							manifest	prox. already
German reconciliation			2					manifest	dist. already
regime change			2					latent	prox. not-yet
energy policy					4			manifest	prox. not-yet
inner-EU discipline					4			latent	prox. not-yet
shift in <i>Ostpolitik</i>						5		latent	prox. not-yet
German unity							f	latent	dist. already
free democracy							f	manifest	prox. already

justify his future policies. The **watershed** and **Putin's war** discourses occur throughout, showing that Scholz's main points in the speech are that the war in Ukraine is the sole responsibility of Putin and represents a historical caesura for Germany and Europe. The **Germany as a military power** discourse also occurs regularly, initially latent, then manifest, which carefully introduces the main consequence Scholz envisions, that Germany's response to the suggested watershed should be military armament. Discourses of **moral indignation** and personalisation are manifest at the beginning of the speech as is conventional for the genre. Towards the end of the speech, a **threat to national security** discourse is latent at first, at the same time as the **Germany as a military power** discourse becomes manifest, then it becomes manifest, along with the **NATO alliance** discourse, in order to justify the claim that Germany should be a military power again.

The other discourses occur only briefly and are thus given little importance. This includes the issue of **indivisible security** or **German reconciliation** with its past. There is little mention of international law, for instance, showing that Scholz approaches the issue more from the moral, emotive than from a legal, analytical perspective. A moral angle also has the benefit of not being vulnerable to arguments that Germany and NATO have committed violations of international law themselves and are thus hardly in a position to judge (Gray, 2018; Kramer et al., 2005; Mappes-Niediek, 2022). The historical shift away from *Ostpolitik* also receives little attention in this speech. At the end, discourses of German unity and free democracy serve to align people to his aims and underline the importance of the crisis by elevating it into an existential issue. In the following section, I will interpret the interplay of the discourses from a dialogic perspective applying the notions of centripetal and centrifugal struggle.

### The interplay of competing discourses

As outlined above, the way discourses are brought into competition with each other by speakers can be described by the notions of centripetal (dominant) and centrifugal (silenced) discourses, where the former are given a centred position of importance at the expense of the latter. The centripetal discourses are the watershed and Putin's war discourses, which are centred through their sheer frequency of occurrence and through the recourses of engagement used around them, as shown in the analysis. The watershed discourse constructs a new reality that demands a paradigm shift as a response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This invasion is constructed as a historical act of aggression not seen in Europe since the Second World War by invoking moral and historical discourses at the level of the distal already-spoken. Potential counterarguments such as the indivisible security discourse are connected to the Putin's war discourse and placed at the level of the proximal already-spoken, thus delegitimising them as internationally negotiated concepts and relegating them to Putin's personal demands. The main function of the Putin's war discourse is to reduce a highly complex, decades-old conflict to the one act of invasion itself. This pins all blame on Putin, thus absolving the other participants in the conflict of all responsibility, and closes dialogic space around the large history of the conflict in Ukraine (see, e.g. Petro, 2017, 2022; Sakwa, 2016; Tsygankov, 2015).

As these are the centripetal discourses they form the norm against which all other discourses are compared and compete with. That way, Scholz discursively asserts that there is no alternative for Germany to a paradigm shift in military spending and foreign policy.



This Germany as military power discourse is also centripetal, through naturalisation (Baxter, 2011, p. 171; Deetz, 1992): there was 'no other response' than arms delivery, it is 'clear' that we must spend more on defence and NATO 'must' be strong to protect German freedom and democracy in the future, a legitimisation by stoking fear of a hypothetical future (Reyes, 2011).

Dialogic positioning and discursive struggle are always determined by the communicative function of the text (Martin & White, 2005, p. 100), which is especially consequential for the analysis of political discourse. The dominating strategy in Scholz's speech is dialogic contraction. Where Scholz does engage with alternative voices, those represent a tougher stance than his own, for instance those demanding a rupture of dialogue with Russia and those arguing that freedom, tolerance and human rights do not generally exist there. The area of acceptable discursive positions is thus demarcated between Scholz's position and an even more radical position, while voices in favour of continuing diplomacy are no longer foreseen.

Policy statements will tend to be more monoglossic than argumentative texts in order to portray self-assuredness. Scholz's speech concentrates on the immediate function of drawing people around him and getting potential opposition in line to support militarisation, though it does announce little interest in a debate that usually follows a policy statement, and little orientation towards dissent (Holly, 2017, p. 13). As a Western leader of a powerful NATO country, Scholz speaks from a hegemonic position that has the power to shape discourses by defining which actions are made visible as actions or escalations and which are constructed as (necessary) reactions, or what counts as a 'just' or 'humanitarian war'. The notion that we have woken up in a fundamentally different world, which the watershed discourse is constructed around, is a decidedly West-centric and ahistorical perspective that downplays the sad reality of (and responsibilities for) the constant existence of conflicts around the world (Holzinger, 2022). The historical function of this speech will reveal itself fully only in the future. Its deliberately reductive analysis of the conflict is not shared by the majority of historians or diplomats (see above) and thus unlikely to establish Scholz as a visionary statesman. Its main historical aim seems to be to establish the idea of a watershed moment and for Scholz to establish himself as the politician that rose up to the necessities of the moment.

In this paper, I have analysed Olaf Scholz's policy statement, in which he declares a watershed moment sparked by the Russian invasion of Ukraine. My analysis has shown how historical and moral (distal already-spoken) discourses and an envisaged threat to national security (proximal not-yet-spoken) discourse are mobilised to justify Scholz's announced policies and present them as without alternative. This echoes findings from previous research on national emergency speeches (Cap, 2013; Oddo, 2011; Reyes, 2011) or mythopoetic legitimisation (Bennett, 2022).

By combining an operationalisation of Bakhtinian dialogism and the concepts of centripetal and centrifugal struggle with Appraisal Theory, this paper demonstrates how powerful, centred discourses are mobilised in a political speech to exclude marginalised discourses and legitimate a controversial shift in foreign policy and military spending. The strengths of the method are twofold. First, it can capture in a replicable way how distal and proximal already- and not-yet-spoken discourses are mobilised to instrumentalise historical or moralistic meanings for particular purposes, showcasing the interplay of past and envisaged future responses to an utterance. It thus shows the value of a dialogic

conception of text and context. Second, it can describe transparently through linguistic analysis whether discourses are latent or manifest, using concepts from Appraisal Theory. Both these techniques let us analyse the multi-voicedness and multi-addressivity of texts. This is especially useful for the analysis of speeches in terms of their immediate and historical function.

## Notes

1. Available at [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/statement\\_22\\_1441](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/statement_22_1441)
2. <https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/aktuelles/regierungserklaerung-von-bundeskanzler-olaf-scholz-am-27-februar-2022-2008356>

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