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Russia and Norway on Svalbard in Russian Media: Morphosyntax and the Construction of Arctic Actors

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Abstract

This study examines how the Russian mainstream newspaper *Rossijskaja Gazeta* represented Russia and Norway in the context of Svalbard during 2022–2025. Svalbard is a Norwegian Arctic Archipelago with a unique legal status that allows other countries, including Russia, to conduct economic activity there. Using Keymorph Analysis, grounded in Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies and Cognitive Linguistics, the study investigates how grammatical case patterns shape portrayals of the two states. The main findings show that both actors are depicted as intentional and proactive: Norway as the sovereign and regulatory authority, and Russia as a legitimate economic actor on the archipelago. Across this discourse, their relationship is often framed as oppositional. Norway appears as a strong, often negatively evaluated force that initiates changes and thus determines outcomes, while Russia is portrayed as a weaker reactive force constrained by Norwegian actions but still attempting to act.

1. Introduction

Svalbard is a Norwegian Arctic Archipelago with a unique legal status that allows other countries, including Russia, to conduct economic activity there. The archipelago occupies a particularly significant position in relations between Norway and Russia, and more broadly between NATO and Russia, since Russia maintains its settlement, Barentsburg, on the archipelago, and since Svalbard lies in close proximity to the Russian Northern Fleet on the Kola Peninsula (Østhagen 2024: 2). Russia's long-standing argument about its special status on Svalbard, which has been used with

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varying intensity to pressure Norwegian authorities, is widely perceived in Norway as an attempt to challenge Norway's sovereignty over the archipelago (Myklebost & Bones 2025). Russia's claims, grounded in its continuous presence on Svalbard and its historical connection to the archipelago, are undoubtedly receiving close attention in light of the escalation of the Russo-Ukrainian conflict in February 2022.

As one of the central actors in this geopolitical constellation, Russia's self-perception and its representations of other actors in the Svalbard context are essential for understanding contemporary security and threat narratives – narratives that are inevitably shaped by and conveyed through language. This study adopts a linguistic perspective grounded in Cognitive Linguistics and Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies (CADS) to examine how Russian media discourse, namely the official daily newspaper *Rossijskaja Gazeta*, constructs Russia and Norway in the context of Svalbard starting from the year of escalation of the Russo-Ukrainian conflict, namely from 2022. The study employs Keymorph Analysis (Fidler & Cvrček 2019; Janda et al. 2023), a method for exploring the semantic roles of morphosyntactic features in discourse. This method demonstrates how grammar can be utilized for a deep understanding of language in political discourse and securitization analyses (Janda et al. forthcoming). Previously Keymorph Analysis was applied to examine the use of voice and case in the language of the Russian news and opinion portal *Sputnik Czech Republic* (Fidler & Cvrček 2018) and the use of parts of speech, case, number, and person in the language of speeches of Czech(oslovac) presidents (Fidler & Cvrček 2019). The method has been extended to Russian-language data through an analysis of case usage in Vladimir Putin's official speeches before and after the escalation of the Russo-Ukrainian conflict in 2022 (Janda et al. 2023; Janda et al. forthcoming).

Keymorph Analysis was also earlier used to examine the coverage of Svalbard, specifically the construction of images of Russia, Norway, and Svalbard, in a range of Russian mainstream and regional media outlets between 2010–2021 in Obukhova (2024). Obukhova's study divided the corpus into four broad periods which was useful for tracing long-term tendencies. However, this approach can neglect short-term linguistic fluctuations that may correspond to key political developments. The present study addresses this limitation by conducting a year-by-year analysis of Russian media discourse on Svalbard after 2021. This finer temporal approach may enable a more detailed account of how Russia's linguistic framing of actors in the Svalbard context evolves in direct response to specific geopolitical events, thereby offering a more dynamic picture of ongoing processes of meaning-making and securitization in Russian political and media language.

The present analysis focuses exclusively on *Rossijskaja Gazeta* (hereafter referred to as *RG*) – the official daily newspaper of the Russian government, which can be regarded as an instrument of policy legitimization and implementation. Widely perceived as a serious and authoritative mainstream outlet, *RG* maintains a strong online presence and

ranks among the ten most-cited newspapers in Russia, providing direct access to officially endorsed views on the Arctic disseminated to Russian society (Moen-Larsen & Gjerde 2023: 2). Adopting a single-outlet approach within this study ensures editorial and ideological consistency and controls for stylistic variation. This design also contributes by offering a complementary perspective on Russia's discursive construction of Svalbard-related actors, in contrast to the comparative analysis across media groups (federal vs. regional outlets) conducted in Obukhova (2024).

The implementation of Keymorph Analysis and the approach to the data used in this study are described in more detail in Section 2. The results of the quantitative analysis and in-depth text study are presented in Section 3. Section 4 discusses the main findings and draws conclusions.

2. Method and data

Keymorph Analysis relates to CADS and is regarded as an extension of Keyword Analysis (Janda et al. 2023: 21). Keyword Analysis reveals keywords – prominent words having significantly higher frequency in one corpus as compared to the frequency of this word in another corpus (Scott 1998: 71). Keymorph Analysis reveals prominent morpho-syntactic features (keymorphs) in a target corpus when compared to a reference corpus. While keywords serve as indicators of the content and style of a text (Scott & Tribble 2006: 55), keymorphs help to understand discourse structure – "the representation of events and participants in discourse, especially the degrees of agency expressed in texts" (Fidler & Cvrček 2018: 199). Grammatical case of nouns is particularly helpful for determining representations of discourse participants since it reveals certain roles of corresponding discursive actors – agents, patients, possessors, locations, etc. (Janda et al. forthcoming).

The Russian language has six grammatical cases, each of them having their own semantic associations. An overview of these associations or meanings relevant to this study is given in Table 1.

Case	**Schematic Meaning**	**Central Meanings**	**Short description**
Nominative (NOM)	Prominent entity	1. Name	Grammatical subject, often agent in active sentences
		2. Identity	Title of entities
Genitive (GEN)	Point of reference	1. Source	Indicated by prepositions *iz, s, ot* ('from')
		2. Goal	Indicated by prepositions *do* 'until', *dlja* 'for', *radi* 'for', *protiv* 'against'
		3. Whole	Something existing as part of a larger unit

Dative (DAT)	Entity with a sphere of influence	1. Receiver	Indirect object of verbs meaning 'give'
		2. Experiencer	Receiver of something in the form of harm, benefit, belonging, etc.
		3. Competitor	Indicated by prepositions *k* 'toward' and *po* 'along', 'on', 'around'
Accusative (ACC)	Target	1. Destination	a) Marks a direct object; or b) Indicated by prepositions *v* 'into', *na* 'onto', *za* 'beyond', *pod* 'under'
		2. Dimension	Indicated by prepositions *skvoz'* 'through', *čerez* 'across'
Instrumental (INS)	Accessory	1. Means	Agent in passive constructions
		2. Adjunct	Indicated by preposition *s* 'with'
		3. Landmark	Indicated by prepositions *nad* 'above, over', *pod* 'under', *pered* 'in front of', *za* 'behind', and *meždu* 'between'
Locative (LOC)	Place	Place	Indicated by prepositions *v* 'in', *na* 'on', *pri* 'at', *o* 'about'

Table 1. Semantic associations of Russian grammatical cases (based on Janda et al. 2023; Janda et al. forthcoming)

In this study, Keymorph Analysis is applied to identify the representations of two discourse participants, namely Russia and Norway. These representations are investigated by examining the saliency of the grammatical cases of the corresponding nouns *Rossija* 'Russia' and *Norvegija* 'Norway'. These particular words were chosen because Russia and Norway appear as important actors associated with Svalbard in Russian media discourse between 2010 and 2021 as demonstrated in Obukhova (2024: 82).

The data for this study was extracted from the data base Integrum (n.d.). The target corpora were extracted using the query *Špicbergen OR Sval'bard*. The form *Špicbergen* is the Russian adaptation of the historical Dutch name *Spitsbergen* traditionally used to refer to the entire Svalbard archipelago. The Norwegian name *Svalbard* also appears occasionally in Russian media pronounced as *Sval'bard*. Including both variants ensured comprehensive coverage of relevant articles.

The study used four corpora of target texts, corresponding to each year after 2021: 2022 (from the beginning of the year), 2023, 2024, and 2025 (until the end of September 2025, the time of writing this article). Since my approach was to focus on texts directly related to Svalbard and avoid those that only mentioned Svalbard in passing, I first conducted keyword analysis to select texts containing *Špicbergen* as a prominent keyword.[1]

[1]The noun *Sval'bard* never appeared as a prominent keyword in any of the four target text corpora.

To obtain a list of keywords, each target subcorpus was compared to the reference corpus – a subcorpus of the Araneum Russicum Russicum Minus (Russia-only Russian) – of the size of almost 39,900,00 words (52,241,600 tokens) (Benko 2014; Benko & Zakharov 2016). The reference corpus, compiled in 2015, contains text downloaded from the web. As in Obukhova (2024), the obtained keywords were sorted out by the following parameters: the statistical significance measured by the p-value of the log-likelihood test, the effect size measured by Difference Index (DIN), and the minimum frequency of a keyword in the target text. The parameters used for sorting out the keywords are the following: log-likelihood test (p-value < 0.05), DIN > 75, the minimum frequency of a keyword in a target text > 1.[2] The keywords selected according to these parameters were regarded as prominent.

The following step was conducting of Keymorph Analysis on the texts containing *Špicbergen* as a prominent keyword. The reference corpus used for this method is the main corpus of the Russian National Corpus (RNC) (n.d.). Since Keymorph Analysis is based on the premises that a reference corpus can be regarded as representing the language "norm", RNC represents a good choice for this task due to its representativeness and accuracy of morphological annotation. The main corpus of RNC represents Russian written texts of various genres from the 18th century to our time. As RNC provides an opportunity for selecting texts of a certain period, I used the periodization of 2010–2021 which matches the periodization of RNC in Obukhova (2024: 84).

Corpus	**Number of words**
Target texts: RG 2022	12,950
Target texts: RG 2023	8,516
Target texts: RG 2024	7,263
Target texts: RG 2025	6,461
Reference corpus: RNC	25,048,968

Table 2. The corpora used for Keymorph Analysis and their size

Keymorph Analysis uses Difference Index (DIN*) which is an effect size metric. To obtain DIN*, one should first calculate relative frequencies for it. The calculation of relative frequencies for DIN* is based on the raw frequency of a given inflected wordform (e.g., of the Dative case of a word A) relative to all occurrences of the correspondent lemma in the corpus (all forms of a word A).[3] Thus, to calculate DIN*, one must first obtain relative frequencies using the following formula:

RelFq*(Ttxt) = AbsFq(Ttxt) / AbsFq(lemma inTtxt)

[2] More details about the calculations are provided in Obukhova (2024: 52–53).

[3] The distribution of the grammatical cases of the nouns *Rossija* and *Norvegija* in raw frequencies in the target texts and reference corpus are provided in Appendix 1 and Appendix 2, respectively.

and

RelFq*(RefC) = AbsFq(RefC) / AbsFq(lemma in RefC)[4]

DIN* is calculated according to the following formula:

DIN* = 100 x [RelFq*(Ttxt) - RelFq*(RefC)] / [RelFq*(Ttxt) + RelFq*(RefC)]

Positive DIN* values (above 0) and negative DIN* values (below 0) can be interpreted as indicating certain deviations from the language "norm" (the reference corpus): overrepresentation or underrepresentation of a use of a particular grammatical case. These deviations can be interpreted as contributing to the formation of certain representations of certain discourse participants marked by corresponding nouns.

3. Analysis

The DIN* values for grammatical case use for the nouns *Rossija* 'Russia' and *Norvegija* 'Norway' examined in this study are presented in Table 3. The extreme DIN* values, both positive and negative, are shown in bold. By extreme DIN* values, I mean those that are 20 and above or -20 and below. The same results are visualized in Figure 1 (Section 3.1) and Figure 2 (Section 3.2) for each noun separately. The DIN* values in Table 3 show both consistent and inconsistent results for both nouns. For example, 'Russia' is consistently found to be extremely underrepresented in the Locative case (DIN* -53.531 in 2022, DIN* -51.802 in 2023, DIN* -42.495 in 2024, DIN* -20.572 in 2025). At the same time, 'Russia' is extremely overrepresented in the Accusative case in 2024 (DIN* 24.771), while underrepresented in the same case in other years (DIN* -33.333 in 2022, DIN* -7.190 in 2023, DIN* -18.841 in 2025). Table 3 also demonstrates gaps in the results caused by the non-use of some cases, especially after 2023. For example, none of the nouns were used in the Dative case in 2024 and 2025. In Sections 3.1 and 3.2, I will show the dynamics of case use for each of the nouns and describe the representations of the corresponding discourse participants caused by the overrepresentations of cases, using examples.

[4] Abbreviations used in the formulas:
RelFq*(Ttxt) = relative frequency of an item (here a grammatical case of a specific noun, e.g., the Dative case of the noun 'Russia') in the target text,
AbsFq(Ttxt) = frequency of the item in the target text,
AbsFq(lemma in Ttxt) = frequency of the specific noun in all grammatical cases in the target text/corpus,
RelFq*(RefC) = relative frequency of an item (here a grammatical case of a specific noun, e.g., the Dative case of the noun 'Russia') in the reference corpus,
AbsFq(Refc) = frequency of the item in the reference corpus,
AbsFq(lemma in Refc) = frequency of the specific noun in all grammatical cases in the reference corpus.

	2022		2023		2024		2025	
Case	DIN* *Rossija*	DIN* *Norvegija*	DIN* *Rossija*	DIN* *Norvegija*	DIN* *Rossija*	DIN* *Norvegija*	DIN* *Rossija*	DIN* *Norvegija*
Nom	**25.964**	-1.633	**42.515**	**-63.279**	**-22.553**	N/A	**31.754**	**-38.333**
Gen	14.754	12.769	8.197	-5.995	**27.200**	18.343	9.901	**31.818**
Dat	17.308	**-57.143**	N/A	**58.294**	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Acc	**-33.333**	**-23.810**	-7.190	17.460	**24.771**	N/A	-18.841	17.460
Ins	**35.556**	**61.026**	10.769	**62.927**	N/A	**73.611**	N/A	N/A
Loc	**-53.531**	**-43.860**	**-51.802**	**-37.815**	**-42.495**	0.806	**-20.572**	**-37.815**

Table 3. DIN* values of grammatical case usage for the nouns* Rossija *and* Norvegija *in the target text corpora

3.1 Russia

Figure 1 (a partial visualization of Table 3) shows that 'Russia' is overrepresented in five cases: Nominative, Genitive, Dative, Accusative, and Instrumental, although the year-by-year distributions within these cases are not necessarily consistent.

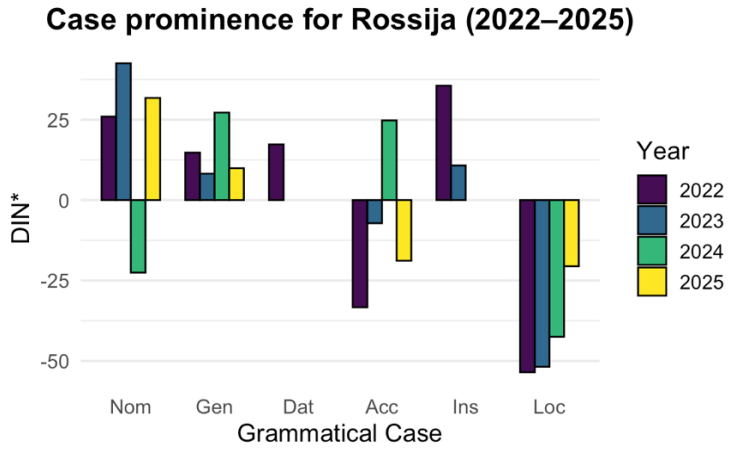


Figure 1. Visualization of prominence of grammatical case for 'Russia', given in DIN* values

'Russia' is very prominently used in the Nominative case in 2022 (DIN* 25.964), 2023 (DIN* 42.515), and 2025 (DIN* 31.754), but not in 2024 (DIN* -22.553). These numbers imply that 'Russia' is almost consistently represented as a prominent entity. In 2022, occurrences of 'Russia' in the NAME meaning of the Nominative case are associated with predicates that vary significantly in agentivity thus assigning various representations to 'Russia'. Agentive predicates in some phrases, e.g., *prizyvaet Norvegiju* 'calls on Norway', and *načala razvivat' Severnyj morskoj put'* 'began developing the Northern Sea Route', construct 'Russia' as an intentional, initiating actor. Weakly agentive predicates in some phrases, e.g., *budet reagirovat' predel'no rešitel'no* 'will react with extreme determination' and *ne priemlet užestočenie Norvegiej raboty rossijskix organizacij* 'does not accept Norway's tightening of regulations on

Russian organizations', position 'Russia' as a responsible participant or responder rather than a driver of events. The modal-lexical predicative in the phrase *možet denonsirovat' dogovor s Norvegiej* 'may denounce the treaty with Norway' presents 'Russia' as a potential or hypothetical agent, capable of initiating a political act, but without assigning actual agency. The majority of the verbs mentioned above are used in the context of dissatisfaction with Norway's policy towards Russian economic activities on Svalbard. In this context, 'Russia' is often portrayed as a constructive and responsible actor. In addition to this image, 'Russia' is also framed as an initiating actor who is subtly morally superior to the passive/reluctant Other (Norway). e.g.:

(1) MID RF: Rossija.NOM prizyvaet Norvegiju k dialogu po rešeniju problem so Špicbergenom [RG, 24.10.2022].
Russian Foreign Ministry: Russia.NOM calls on Norway to engage in dialogue to resolve issues related to Svalbard [RG, 24.10.2022].

In 2023, predicates associated with 'Russia' in the NAME meaning of Nominative case continue to vary in their agentivity. Some constructions, e.g., *imeet pravo na osvoenie resursov arxipelaga* 'has the right to develop the resources of the archipelago' and *zanimaet bolee poloviny mirovoj Arktiki* 'occupies more than half of the world's Arctic', are non-agentive or stative, portraying 'Russia' as a holder of rights or a geographical entity. Others, e.g., *planiruet zapustit' čarternye rejsy na arxipelag* 'plans to launch charter flights to the archipelago' and *vedet xozjajstvennuju dejatel'nost' na arxipelage* 'conducts economic activities on the archipelago', assign 'Russia' clear agentive roles, positioning it as an active and intentional actor in the Svalbard context.

The same line of representations continues in 2024 (through only one example) and 2025. The non-agentive constructions *imeet pravo na osvoenie resursov arxipelaga* 'has the right to develop the resources of the archipelago' (occurring both in 2024 and 2025) and *imeet na arxipelage dva poselka* 'has two settlements on the archipelago' portray 'Russia' as a responsible, legitimate, and serious economic actor in the Svalbard region. The phrase *vrjad li zakroet Barencburg* 'is unlikely to close Barentsburg'[5] with a mitigated agentivity reinforces the image of 'Russia' as a stable and pragmatic economic actor.

The other case in which 'Russia' occurs more frequently than expected is the Genitive (DIN* 14.754 in 2022, DIN* 8.197 in 2023, DIN* 27.200 in 2024, DIN* 9.901 in 2025) which indicates that 'Russia' is consistently described as a point of reference (Figure 1). In 2022, the absolute majority of examples relate to the WHOLE meaning of the Genitive case. 'Russia' often modifies the nouns denoting diplomatic relations: *MID* 'Ministry of Foreign Affairs', *posol'stvo* 'embassy', *genkonsul* 'consul general', and *genkonsul'stvo* 'consulate general', specifying ownership or association, e.g. 'Russia's

[5] This article employs the Scholarly transliteration system for all Russian text examples. However, standard English spelling is used for geographical names and the names of public figures in the main text and English translations.

embassy'. These phrases relate to the context of a dispute between Russian and Norwegian officials over the delivery of supplies to Russian settlements on Svalbard that emerged in June and was resolved in July 2022, e.g.:

(2) [...] posol′stvo Rossii.GEN v Norvegii obratilos′ k vlastjam s pros′boj garantirovat′ vvoz tovarov na ostrov Špicbergen. [RG, Norvegija ne propustila gruzy v rossijskie poselenija na Špicbergene, 28.06.2022].
[...] the Russian.GEN Embassy in Norway has asked authorities to guarantee the import of goods to Spitsbergen Island. [RG, Norway has denied cargo entry to Russian settlements on Svalbard, 28.06.2022].

In 2023, 'Russia' in the Genitive case continues to modify the nouns *konsul* 'consul' and *genkonsul'stvo* 'consulate general'. The context indicates that the Russian Consul General (*General'nyj konsul Rossii*.GEN) on Svalbard Andrei Chemerilo becomes the point of reference, revealing Russia's plans to "launch charter flights to the archipelago". He also states that there are no "reasons for revoking or revising the Svalbard Treaty"[6] and speaks about "working cooperation on all issues with the Governor of Svalbard" thus reinforcing the framing of 'Russia' as a cooperative and stable actor in the region.

In 2024 and 2025, 'Russia' in the Genitive case is combined with various nous relating to various topics. An example from 2024 is the phrase *Minobrnauki Rossii*.GEN 'Ministry of Education and Science of Russia', used in the context of a discussion about Russia's creation of a BRICS research centre on Svalbard. The phrase *ugolok Rossii*.GEN v NATO 'Russia's corner in NATO' from 2025 is a reference to Barentsburg, used by The Economist and quoted in a Russian-language text.

The examples of the WHOLE meaning of the Genitive case, especially from 2022–2024, demonstrate that 'Russia' is construed as the agent of actions performed, e.g., by the Embassy, Consulate General, and Ministry of Education and Science, through metonymic reference. That is, Russia is represented as actively operating on Svalbard via its diplomatic mission and government institution.

Another meaning of the Genitive case, which is rare but persistent, is SOURCE, expressed through the phrase *iz Rosii*.GEN 'from Russia'. If in 2022, 'Russia' is presented as a source of cargo prohibited from further transportation to Svalbard, then in 2023–2025, 'Russia' is a potential source of sea and air flights to the archipelago. The SOURCE meaning thus communicates the connection between Russia and Svalbard and contributes to a persistent directional relationship between them.

'Russia' appears in the Dative case only in 2022 (Figure 1). One of the examples of this prominent appearance relates to the dispute over the delivery of supplies to Russian settlements in 2022:

[6] The Svalbard Treaty of 1920 recognizes the sovereignty of Norway over Svalbard and gives equal rights to more than 40 countries, including Russia, to conduct economic activity there.

(3) My soglasilis′ s tem, čto Špicbergen formal′no otxodit norvežskoj storone, no pri ėtom Norvegija budet sobljudat′ dogovorennost′ o sovmestnom upravlenii ėtoj territoriej i ne budet prepjatstvovat′ Rossii.DAT, kotoraja namerevalas′ takže rabotat′ na Špicbergene. [RG, Ėkspert RISI Ermakov ob″jasnil, možet li Rossija denonsirovat′ dogovor s Norvegiej o morskix prostranstvax, 06.07.2022].
We agreed that Spitsbergen would formally be transferred to Norway, but Norway would abide by the agreement on joint management of this territory and would not interfere with Russia.DAT, which also intended to operate on Svalbard. [RG, RISI[7] expert Ermakov explained whether Russia could denounce the Maritime Treaty with Norway[8], 06.07.2022].

In example (3), 'Russia' is used in the EXPERIENCER meaning of the Dative case and is presented as a victim. 'Russia' is an "experiencer" of harassment from 'Norway', which violates or fails to fulfil its obligation not to "interfere with Russia" on Svalbard. This passive role, combined with the portrayal of 'Russia' as a proactive actor who "intended to operate on Svalbard", reinforces the narrative of it as an unfairly constrained actor entitled to consider legal measures, namely to "denounce the Maritime Treaty".

Another example of the Dative case from 2022 suggests a contrasting image of 'Russia'. In this clause, 'Russia' also has the EXPERIENCER meaning of the Dative case: *na Severnom morskom puti Rossii*.DAT *ne nužny inostrannye voennye korabli* 'Russia does not need foreign warships on the Northern Sea Route'. This construction presents 'Russia' as an entity with complete control over its Arctic territory, independently assessing and deciding what is and is not necessary within this sphere of control.

The use of 'Russia' in the Accusative case is noteworthy in two periods: in 2023, when it is quite close to the "norm" (DIN* -7.190), and in 2024, when it is overrepresented (DIN* 24.771) (Figure 1). The few examples of this case point to contexts other than political, and to which Svalbard is only partially connected. For example, in 2023, 'Russia' is described as a DESTINATION for the influence of the warm waters of the Gulf Stream (*teplyj vozdux perenositsja na Rossiju*.ACC 'warm air is moving towards Russia'). In 2024, 'Russia' is framed as a DESTINATION for foreign artists (e.g., *priletel v Rossiju*.ACC 'arrived in Russia') associated with a Russian artist who previously visited Svalbard.

The last case in which 'Russia' is prominently used is the Instrumental (DIN* 35.556 in 2022 and DIN* 10.769 in 2023) (Figure 1). The occurrences from 2022 contribute to the same narrative of victimization and a capability of initiating a political act earlier revealed through the use of the Dative case (example 3). These are the phrases *dogovor o razgraničenii morskix prostranstv s Rossiej*.INS 'Maritime Delimitation Treaty with

[7] RISI is the abbreviation for The Russian Institute for Strategic Studies.
[8] The Treaty Concerning Maritime Delimitation and Cooperation in the Barents Sea and the Arctic Ocean signed by Norway and Russia in 2010.

Russia' (the ADJUNCT meaning of the Instrumental) and *dogovor meždu Rossiej*.INS *i Norvegiej* 'Treaty between Russia and Norway' (the LANDMARK meaning) representing 'Russia' as a participant in official international agreements. These phrases refer to the Maritime Delimitation Treaty signed between Russia and Norway in 2010, the possibility of denunciation of which is being discussed in this context.

The only occurrence of 'Russia' in the Instrumental case in 2023 is the phrase *otnošenija meždu Norvegiej i Rossiej*.INS 'relations between Norway and Russia' which "the media most often focuses on", despite the fact that "Svalbard is home to a multinational community". In this example, the relationship between Norway and Russia is highlighted as the central axis of local interaction, which contributes to the formation of the image of Russia as a state with a special status on Svalbard in comparison with other national groups.

The consistent underrepresentation of the Locative case (*v Rossii*.LOC 'in Russia') (Figure 1) indicates that 'Russia' is not the central geographic space of the texts. 'Russia' is framed as an active political, institutional, and economic actor rather than a physical location in the Svalbard context.

3.2 Norway

Figure 2 (a partial visualization of Table 3) indicates that 'Norway' is overrepresented in four cases: Genitive, Dative, Accusative, and Instrumental, although some of them display highly variable year-to-year usage. Since the noun sometimes appears close to the "norm" in the Nominative and Locative cases, I will consider them as well.

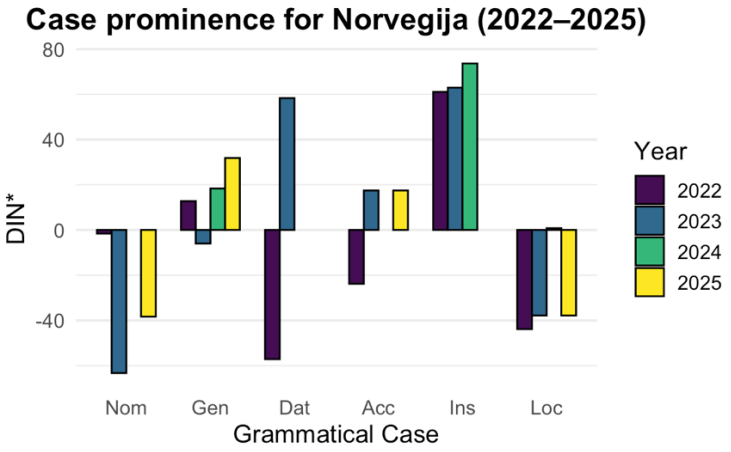


Figure 2. Visualization of prominence of grammatical case for 'Norway', given in DIN* values

'Norway' shows a predominantly negative trend in the use of the Nominative case. However, the noun usage in 2022 is close to the "norm" (DIN* -1.633) and occurs predominantly in phrases containing highly agentive verbs, e.g.: *ne propuskaet gruzy dlja rossijskix šaxterov* 'is refusing to allow cargo for Russian miners', *narušaet*

položenija parižskogo dogovora ‘is violating the provisions of the Paris Treaty’, *otklonila rossijskuju zajavku na propusk gruzov* ‘rejected Russia’s application for cargo transit’, *naraščivaet voennoe prisutstvie na Špicbergene* ‘is increasing its military presence on Svalbard’, *ograničila rossijskim rybooloveckim sudam dostup v porty* ‘restricted access to ports for Russian fishing vessels’, *proverjaet rossijskie gruzy* ‘is checking Russian cargo’. These phrases frame ‘Norway’ as a dominant, sovereign, and regulating authority on Svalbard, exercising power over ‘Russia’. Such representations often appear in the context of the dispute over the supply of goods to Russian settlements.

The use of ‘Norway’ in the Genitive case varies from being near the “norm” (DIN* - 5.995 in 2023) to being overrepresented (DIN* 12.769 in 2022, DIN* 18.343 in 2024, DIN* 31.818 in 2025) (Figure 2). ‘Norway’ is used predominantly in the WHOLE meaning in all years. The context reveals a certain pattern – ‘Norway’ consistently modifies the nouns denoting government institutions, diplomatic actors and political authorities, except for 2024. These noun phrases are often combined with highly agentive predicate constructions such as *otklonili zapros* ‘rejected the request’, *naraščivajut voennoe prisutstvie* ‘increase military presence’, *načali otgovarivat'* ‘began to dissuade’, *predprinimajut dejstvija* ‘take action’. Thus, ‘Norway’ is assigned the role of an active initiator of deliberate and impactful actions through its institutions and political actors. Example (4) illustrates this representation by the phrase *vlasti Norvegii*.GEN ‘Norwegian authorities’ and the verb *užestočili* ‘tightened’ in the context of overall dissatisfaction with Norway’s policy towards Russia expressed in 2022:

(4) [...] vlasti Norvegii.GEN v poslednee vremja suščestvenno užestočili uslovija raboty rossijskix organizacij na arxipelage Špicbergen i v ego vodax. [RG, MID RF: Rossija ne priemlet užestočenie Norvegiej raboty rossijskix organizacij na Špicbergene, 29.12.2022).
[...] Norwegian.GEN authorities have recently significantly tightened the conditions for Russian organizations to operate on the Svalbard archipelago and in its waters. [RG, Russian Foreign Ministry: Russia does not accept Norway’s tightening of the rules for Russian organizations on Svalbard, 29.12.2022).

MID ‘Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ appears several times among the nouns modified by ‘Norway’ in 2023. This noun is used in the context of the opening of charter flights from Russia to Svalbard, which *MID Norvegii*.GEN “agreed to resume”. The same line of presenting ‘Norway’ as a powerful, agentive, and even interventionist actor continues in 2025. It is demonstrated by the phrase *vlasti Norvegii*.GEN ‘Norwegian authorities’ and the predicates in the phrases “began to dissuade tourists from visiting a Russian village [Barentsburg]” and “are taking steps to strengthen their sovereignty over Svalbard”.

The other group of nouns modified by ‘Norway’ in the Genitive case in 2023 contributes to the formation of new representations. These are the deverbal nouns *dobavlenie* ‘addition’, *vključenie* ‘inclusion’, and *vnesenie* ‘insertion, placing into’, e.g.:

(5) […] Vključenie Norvegii.GEN [Rossijej] v spisok nedružestvennyx stran ne otrazilos′ na genkonsul′stve [Rossii v Barencburge] [RG, 23.08.2023].
[…] The inclusion of Norway.GEN in the list of unfriendly states [by Russia][9] did not affect the [Russian] Consulate General [in Barentsburg] [RG, 23.08.2023].

In example (5), 'Norway' modifies the head noun *vključenie* 'inclusion' and is used as a Genitive of Patient. This construction thus represents 'Norway' not as an agent but as an object of Russian bureaucratic action. This contrasts sharply with the pattern revealed earlier where Norway is an active and agentive regulator and policymaker.

The use of 'Norway' in the Genitive case in 2024 is represented by only two examples. In one of them Svalbard is mentioned as *raspoložen na granice Rossii i Norvegii*.GEN 'located on the border between Russia and Norway', which is a factual inaccuracy creating an image of the archipelago as a space equally related to both Russia and Norway.[10] In the other example, it is stated that the Svalbard land *prinadležit gosudarstvennym kompanijam Norvegii*.GEN *i Rossii* 'belongs to state-owned companies in Norway and Russia' without explaining the nuances. This formulation leads to a misleading representation of 'Norway' and 'Russia' as equal landowners on the archipelago.[11]

The overrepresentation of 'Norway' in the Dative case relates to only 2023 (DIN* 58.294) (Figure 2). The context demonstrates a temporary focus on Norway's legal and formal authority over Svalbard. 'Norway' is mentioned as a RECEIVER of sovereignty over Svalbard according to the Svalbard Treaty of 1920 (*dokument 1920 goda predostavil Norvegii*.DAT *suverenitet nad arxipelagom* 'the 1920 document granted Norway sovereignty over the archipelago'). 'Norway' is also used in the EXPERIENCER/possessor meaning of the Dative case in the phrase *arxipelag, podkontrol'nyj Norvegii*.DAT 'the archipelago controlled by Norway'. This phrases frames 'Norway' as the entity to whom the state of control is attributed.

'Norway' is overrepresented in the Accusative case in 2023 (DIN* 17.460) and in 2025 (DIN* 17.460) (Figure 2). Two examples from 2023 show that the noun is used in the metaphorical version of the DESTINATION meaning of the Accusative case representing 'Norway' as a direct object. One of the texts mentions the list of unfriendly countries created by the Russian government in which 'Norway was added' (*vključili Norvegiju*.ACC). The other text outlines Russia's official position on the Svalbard Treaty of 1920. The Treaty is referred to as a document that is and will be the basis for relations between Russia and Norway on Svalbard *pri uslovii vypolnenija ego položenij vsemi storonami dogovora, vključaja Norvegiju*.ACC 'provided all parties to the treaty,

[9] Norway was added to Russia's list of "unfriendly countries" in August 2023 in response to Norway's expulsion of 15 Russian diplomats several months earlier (https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2023/08/03/moscow-adds-norway-to-list-of-unfriendly-states-a82043).
[10] The article containing the cited example does not mention Norwegian sovereignty over Svalbard.
[11] The Norwegian state is the largest landowner on Svalbard, owning 99.5% of the archipelago. Russia owns 0.4% (https://snl.no/Eiendommer_og_grunneiere_på_Svalbard). Norway holds sovereignty over Svalbard, while Russia has treaty-based rights to economic activities and settlements.

including Norway, comply with its provisions'. Thus, in these examples 'Norway' is framed as an object of restrictions, classification, and obligations operated under the agency of Russian government actors.

The only example of 'Norway' in the Accusative case from 2025 also promotes the presentation of Norway as a passive entity through the DIMENSION meaning of the Accusative case. In this example, it is stated that *perelet čerez Norvegiju*.ACC 'flying via Norway' is the only way for Russian tourists to reach Svalbard. Thus, 'Norway', or more precisely, mainland Norway, to avoid factual inaccuracy, is represented simply as a territory and a gateway to Svalbard.

The Instrumental case is the only case in which 'Norway' is consistently extremely overrepresented (DIN* 61.026 in 2022, DIN* 62.927 in 2023, DIN* 73.611 in 2024) except for 2025 when 'Norway' in the Instrumental case does not occur (Figure 2). In 2022, 'Norway' is often used in the MEANS meaning of the Instrumental case as a part of nominalised clauses containing deverbal nouns *narušenie Norvegiej*.INS *svoix meždunarodnyx objazatel'stv* 'Norway's violation of its international obligations', *blokirovka Norvegiej*.INS *postavok prodovol'stvija rossijanam* 'Norway's blocking of food supplies to Russians', and *užestočenie Norvegiej*.INS *raboty rossijskix organizacij na Špicbergene* 'Norway's tightening of restrictions on the work of Russian organizations on Svalbard'. These constructions foreground 'Norway's' agency and frame it as a norm-breaking or restrictive actor.

'Norway' is also often used in the ADJUNCT meaning of the Instrumental case in 2022. The *phrases otnošenija s Norvegiej* 'relations with Norway', *sotrudničestvo s Norvegiej* 'cooperation with Norway', and *dogovor s Norvegiej* 'agreement with Norway' represent 'Norway' as an accessory participant in certain processes. These phrases are used in the context of the dispute over the supply of goods to Russian settlements, which sparked discussions about the status of the 2010 Maritime Delimitation Treaty between Russia and Norway. It is argued in the texts that the Treaty has failed to meet expectations for cooperation between the countries and should be denounced. Thus, this context demonstrates a shift in the discursive role of 'Norway' from a partner to an adversary that hinders effective cooperation in the region.

In 2023, the only two phrases with 'Norway' in the Instrumental case (the LANDMARK and ADJUNCT meanings) assign a more positive, partner-like role to 'Norway'. It is stated that *sotrudničestvo meždu Rossiej i Norvegiej*.INS *prodolžaetsja* 'cooperation between Russia and Norway continues' and that the 1920 Svalbard Treaty *javljaetsja kraeugol'nym kamnem našix [rossijskix] otnošenij s Norvegiej*.INS 'is the cornerstone of our [Russia's] relations with Norway' on Svalbard. These sentences thus position 'Norway' as a counterpart involved together with Russia in cooperation, relations, and treaty-based obligations, rather than as a unilateral or restrictive actor.

The single occurrence of 'Norway' in the Instrumental case in 2024 points to the LANDMARK meaning. The texts refer to a land parcel on Svalbard put up for sale. This

land parcel is described as located *na polputi meždu Norvegiej*.INS *i Severnym poljusom* ‘halfway between Norway and the North Pole’. This phrase positions ‘Norway’ as a geographic reference point, helping to spatially define Svalbard’s position in the Arctic space. Alternatively, this example could be interpreted as a factual inaccuracy that contributes to the construction of Norway as a territory legally unrelated to Svalbard.

The tendency toward extreme underrepresentation of ‘Norway’ in the Locative case (Figure 2) indicates that ‘Norway’ is not framed as a central geographic space in the context of Svalbard. This underrepresentation can also be interpreted as an avoidance of locative references (e.g., that Svalbard is ‘in Norway’) which contributes to the perception of Svalbard as a non-Norwegian territory. However, the appearance of ‘Norway’ in the Locative case within the “norm” in 2024 (DIN* 0.806) is an exception to this general trend. The only example of the Locative case in 2024 is the title of an article reporting on an incident on Svalbard. In the title, the archipelago is directly referred to as a Norwegian territory using the Locative case:

(6) V Norvegii.LOC oštrafovali zabravšegosja na l′dinu k moržu turista [RG, 28.04.2024].
A tourist in Norway.LOC was fined for climbing onto an ice floe to see a walrus [RG, 28.04.2024].

4. Discussion and conclusion

The aim of this study was to examine how the Russian mainstream newspaper *Rossijskaja Gazeta* constructed the Arctic actors, Russia and Norway, in the context of Svalbard during 2022–2025. The study utilised Keymorph Analysis, embedded into CADS and Cognitive Linguistics, to investigate representations of Russia and Norway through the prominence of grammatical cases used with the nouns *Rossija* ‘Russia’ and *Norvegija* ‘Norway’ and the immediate context of these word forms.

The results of the analysis indicate that both Norway and Russia are often assigned discursive roles as intentional and proactive actors operating within the framework determined by their legal status in the region: Norway is the sovereign and regulatory authority, while Russia is the legitimate responsible actor conducting stable economic activity on the archipelago. Across this discourse, Russia and Norway are often construed as oppositional forces. Norway functions as a strong, often negative, active force that initiates changes, that “tightens”, “restricts”, “rejects”, “checks”, “gives consent” and thus determines outcomes while Russia is a weaker reacting force blocked by Norwegian action but attempting to act, for example, by calling for dialogue. This opposition is particularly relevant to the dispute over the delivery of supplies to Russian settlements in 2022. The discourse around Russia is presented as defensive: Russia is a moralist and a norm defender, capable of initiating measures within its own powers hypothetically (to denounce the 2010 Maritime Treaty with Norway in 2022) or of

conducting political acts factually (including Norway into the list of "unfriendly" countries in 2023).

Russia's connection to Svalbard is an integral part of the country's media image. For example, direct transport links in the form of cargo or planned air and sea shipments from Russia to Svalbard are regularly mentioned. At the same time, especially after 2022, Norway's sovereignty over Svalbard is somewhat deemphasized in some texts (while some others explicitly mention it) – the archipelago is presented as a territory alienated from Norway (for example, a description of journey to Svalbard from Russia "via Norway" from 2025), or as a territory in which Norway and Russia are equal landowners (a reference from 2024). Such representations are often founded on factual inaccuracies. It is difficult to determine, however, whether these inaccuracies are the result of journalistic simplification, limited knowledge of Svalbard's legal status, editorial time constraints, or a general rhetorical tendency to portray Svalbard in a joint association with Russia and Norway, as if the archipelago belongs to both states in parallel.

The results of this study are largely consistent with those of a previous study of Svalbard coverage in Russian media from 2010 to 2021 using Keymorph Analysis (Obukhova 2024: 211–212). During that period, Russia and Norway were also presented as dynamic actors operating on Svalbard. The discourse of that time paid attention to the international nature of the 1920 Svalbard Treaty and, at the same time, to Norway's sovereignty over the archipelago. Norway was consistently portrayed as a party that infringes on Russia's rights to an economic presence in the region. In this sense, it can be argued that the general trends in the representation of Russia and Norway on Svalbard before and after 2021 are similar. An interesting detail discovered in this study is a certain tendency to blur focus on Norway's sovereignty, created by factual inaccuracies. Taking this detail into account, as well as the context of Svalbard as a whole, it is appropriate to continue studying Russian media discourse while also incorporating an analysis of Norwegian media coverage of the archipelago.

Appendix A. The distribution of the grammatical cases of the nouns *Rossija* and *Norvegija* (raw frequencies)

Case	2022		2023		2024		2025	
	Rossija	*Norvegija*	*Rossija*	*Norvegija*	*Rossija*	*Norvegija*	*Rossija*	*Norvegija*
Nom	12	20	10	1	2	N/A	5	1
Gen	24	37	12	7	14	2	8	6
Dat	3	1	N/A	3	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Acc	2	4	2	2	3	N/A	1	1
Ins	3	13	1	3	N/A	1	N/A	N/A
Loc	5	8	3	2	3	1	4	1
Overall	49	83	28	18	22	4	18	9

Appendix B. The distribution of the grammatical cases of the nouns *Rossija* and *Norvegija* in the main corpus of RNC in 2010-2021 (raw frequencies)

Russian National Corpus (Main corpus, years 2010–2021; 25,048,968 words)		
Case	*Rossija*	*Norvegija*
Nom	2,970	73
Gen	7,527	101
Dat	896	13
Acc	1,696	23
Ins	605	11
Loc	6,968	72
Overall	20,662	293

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