

CORECON

The Coverage and Reception of
the Russian-Ukrainian Conflict



The coverage of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict through the lens of tabloid headlines (EN & PL)

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Training 26-27 March 2025, University of Valencia



- CORECON: The coverage and reception of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict in Polish, Romanian and English-language media: A **comparative critical discourse** study.
- **Cross-cultural** perspective – given the current geopolitical situation, evolving mediascapes, disinformation and fake news crisis.
- **Recommendations** for journalism training, critical media literacy and resilience.
- **Polish subcorpus** of 1.2 milion words (Feb 2022-June 2024) from mainstream (80%) and social media (20%).
- **Case Study 2** Polish tabloids (F, SE), 2 English-language reference tabloids (M, NYP).

Outline

- Definition of news reporting, **newsworthiness**, sensationalism
- **Tabloid journalism**, professional practices of war coverage;
- **Narrative, transitivity analysis** and **social actor typology**;
- CORECON data, results, interpretations.



News reporting

- “Journalism is the construction and publication of accounts of contemporary events, persons and circumstances, of *public significance* or interest, based on information acquired from reliable sources” (McQuail, 2013: 14)
- “News is [...] constructing *extraordinary* events” (Ekstrom, 2002: 266)
- “Information about current or recent events, happenings or changes taking place outside the immediate purview of the audience and which is considered to be of *likely interest or concern to them*” (Montgomery, 2007: 4)

News values (Bednarek and Caple, 2012, 2017)

External (inherent to the event)	Internal (to the news production)
Negativity	Composition (recognizable storyline)
Timeliness	Co-option (known social actors)
Proximity	Continuity
Prominence	Competition
Consonance	Predictability
Impact	Prefabrication
Novelty	Clarity
Superlativeness	Brevity
Personalization	Colour

Newsworthiness

- Discursive approach to news values: “a framework that allows for analysis of how these are construed in both words and images. From this perspective, news values [...] are **established by language and image in use**. Such a discursive perspective allows researchers to systematically examine how particular **events are construed as newsworthy**, what values are **emphasized in news stories**, and how language and image establish events as more or less newsworthy” (Bednarek & Caple, 2012: 80).
- Headline: **present the content** of the article, **attract audience’s attention** and generate interest in the story (newsworthiness), as well as **indicate the paper’s attitude** towards the issue (Molek-Kozakowska, 2012).

Tabloid journalism

- **offers a human-interest entry to the social world**, filtered through stereotypes, binary oppositions (us vs. them), pre-fabricated evaluations, simple narratives, conservative values (Johansson, 2007);
- **uses language** that is informal, relatable, repetitive, sharp, evaluative (polarity, morality, emotionality) (Molek-Kozakowska, 2012).
- **has controversial implications** for the democratic public sphere: (1) entertainment, sensationalism and focus on "bad news", breeding confusion and cynicism **vs.** (2) access to democratic deliberation, enabling national identification and upholding of morals (Bingham & Conboy, 2015);

War and tabloids?



- How is the complex and alienating issue of international conflict (military, political, social, economic) adapted to tabloid formats (to inform the public and create interest)?
- How is social actor positioning and narrativity realized in tabloid war coverage (to lessen the cognitive burden and sense of alienation)?

Social actors, storylines (1)

- Clauses represent how the world is experienced via the constellation of **participants** involved in **actions** in certain **circumstances** (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004).
- Schematic **narrative** sequences can take various forms (Richardson, 2007):
 - WHO – WHAT – WHEN – WHERE – WHY – HOW (5W&H),
 - HINGE – PROBLEM – SOLUTION,
 - ORIENTATION – COMPLICATION – CRISIS – RESOLUTION.



Social actors, storylines (2)

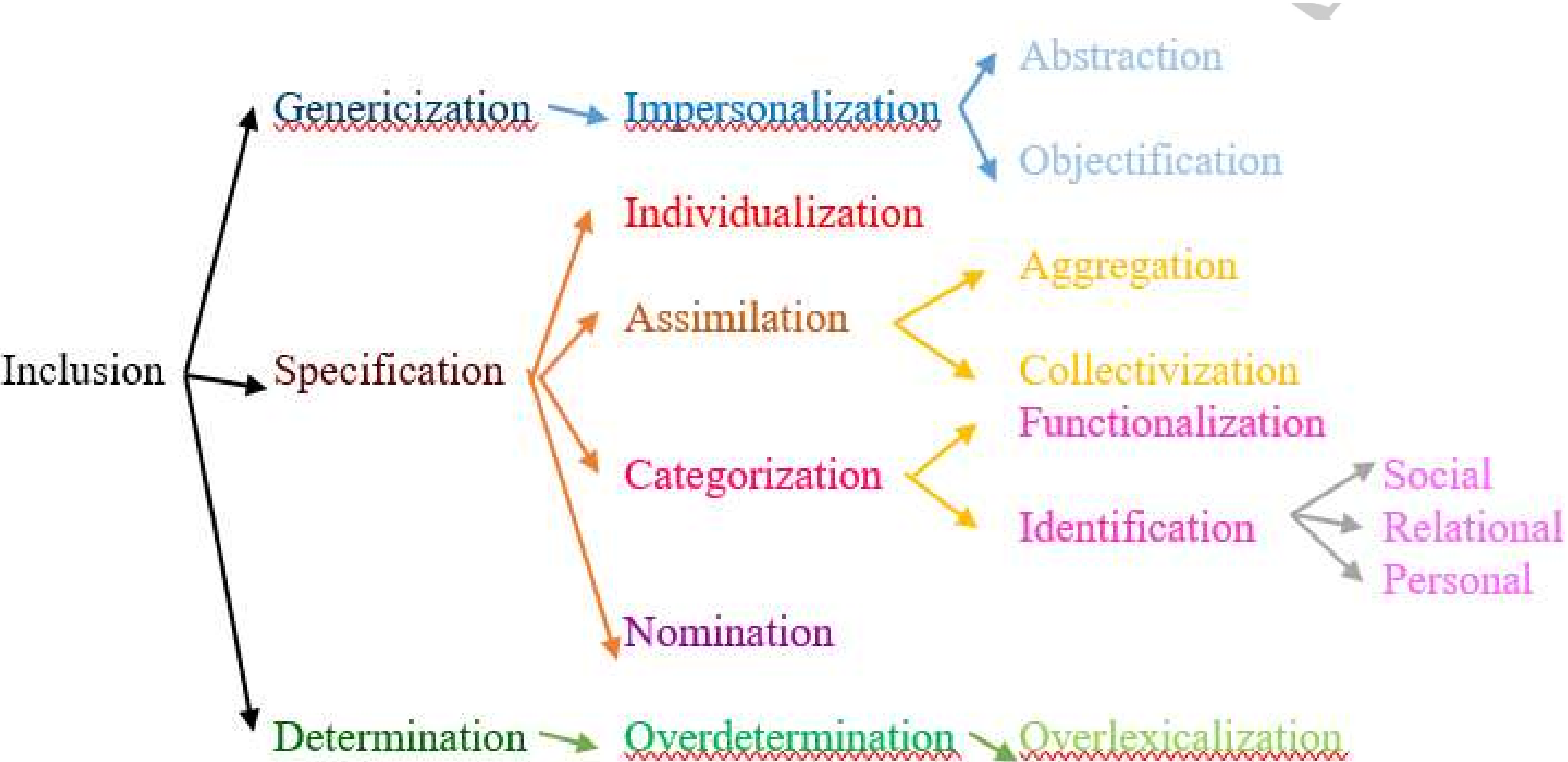


- Subject positioning (semantic sense) of participants depends on the choice of **predicates**, i.e., verbs that denote material, behavioral, verbal, mental, existential, or relational processes (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004).
- Participants can be represented **as social actors** through linguistic and semantic choices (labelling and attributions) and semantic operations, such as genericization or specification, **collectivization or individualization**, functionalization or identification, etc (van Leeuwen, 2008).

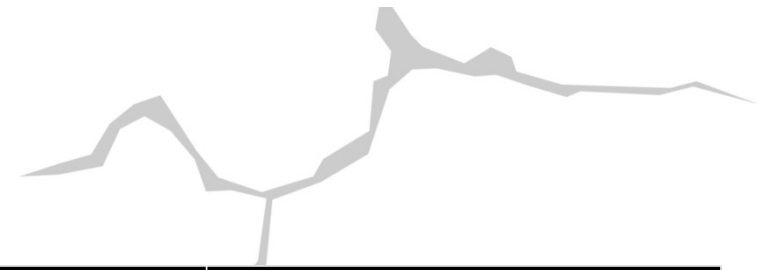
Social actor dimensions operational for CORECON

- **Russian actors** (collective and individual, e.g., Putin);
- **Ukrainian actors** (collective and individual, e.g., Zelensky);
- **Other collective** actors (e.g., nation-states, region/city inhabitants, professional groups, movements);
- **Other individual** actors (e.g., politicians, celebrities, war heroes);
- Political or corporate **organizations** (e.g., NATO)

(Wodak & Meyer, 2015 on reference and attribution)



Data



The Mirror	The New York Post	Fakt	SuperExpress
132 headlines+leads	136 headlines	150 headlines	150 headlines
Average headline 43 words	Average headline 12 words	Average headline 12,5 words	Average headline 11 words
Word size 5,536	Word size 1,547	Word size 1,899	Word size 1,703
132 social actors coded	133 social actors coded	149 social actors coded	143 social actors coded

Examples

- (M) Zelensky WILL get fighter jets as **Western allies** (*collective*) agree to give planes to Ukraine.
- (M) **British traitors** (*functional, relational*) fighting for Vladimir Putin in Ukraine exposed and branded “an absolute disgrace”.
- (M) **Rishi Sunak** (*identified, sayer*) urges world leaders to 'double down' on support for Ukraine. The world must hold Russia to account for war crimes against Ukraine.
- (NYP) **Ukraine civilians** (*generic*) continue to die in Russian strikes as experts warn US aid is needed.
- (NYP) **Heineken, Shell, Carl's Jr.** (*nominated*) dubbed ‘wartime profiteers’ for still operating in Russia despite vowing to leave.
- (NYP) Ukraine accuses **Elon Musk** (*identified, actor*) of ‘committing evil’ by thwarting attack on Russian fleet.

Results EN tabloids (Mirror and New York Post)

- Overrepresentation of **Russian military** (soldiers, colonels, troops, conscripts, Wagner group) as **destructive** actors;
- Overlexicalization of **Ukrainians** (refugees, families, children, civilians), often positioned as **recipients** of attacks/aid, or defenders;
- **Putin** presented as almost **a sole actor** behind the aggression, also through relational processes (Putin's troops) (M);
- **Zelensky** presented in the **sayer** position (pleading, warning, encouraging) (M/NYP);
- Reference to **impersonal international** organizations and media watchdogs (M);
- Foregrounding of the **agency** of **British leaders** in negotiations, British celebrities and sportspeople in pro-Ukraine charity and conversation (M);
- Foregrounding of the **agency** of **American corporations** in sanctions (NYP);
- Reference to **collective** European actors and the aggregated "West" acting in (morally correct) **alliance** (NYP).

Examples

- (F) A secret mission of **Ukrainian soldiers** (*collective*) in Russia ended in a tragedy.
- (F) **Putin** (*individual, actor*) killed a child again. Many victims among adults. A rocket attack on a cultural center near Kyiv.
- (F) War in Ukraine. Children sheltered in a **Polish** hotel (*identified, functional*). Aid needed.

- (SE) **Russia** (*generic*) already has plans how to change names of Polish cities. Warszawa, Kraków, Wrocław top the list!
- (SE) **Putin** (*nominated*) may win in 2024? „The world on fire”.
- (SE) Is there another wave of **Ukrainian refugees** (*collectivized*) coming this year?

Results PL tabloids (Fakt and SuperExpress)

- Overdetermination of **Putin** as the main **destructive** actor, attribution of morally repulsive traits (SE);
- Putin's **regime** presented as an **aggregate** of ruthless generals, corrupt officials and deranged propagandists (SE/F);
- **Overlexicalization** of **Ukrainians in Ukraine and in Poland** as vulnerable **victims** (refugees, children, civilians, inhabitants), but also having **agency** as **defenders, campaigners, attackers** (collocations with drones, diversion) (SE/F)
- **Zelensky** presented in the **aggressive sayer** position (accusing, denouncing) (SE)
- **Agency** of **individual Poles** and **collective Polish communities** as participants in supporting, aiding and fighting for Ukraine (F)
- Reference to **functionally** delimited actors: **Polish business** in the context of rebuilding, **Polish artists** campaigning in solidarity with Ukraine (SE/F)

Tabloids

- **personalize** war coverage through references to actions of leaders Putin/Zelensky/Biden,
- **collectivize** the aggressor (Russians, troops, military) and represent Russians as beholden to the regime (Putin's troops),
- **overlexicalize** Ukrainians as victims, survivors, defenders, attackers...,
- use **generic** children/families to focus attention on brutality,
- use **nomination** for heroes/actors with agency (Ukrainian/Polish/British),
- identify political/corporate actors from own country (+USA & China) (**assimilation**),
- focus on celebrities to draw attention (**functionalization**).



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