Reporting on the War in Ukraine: Linguistic Patterns of Newsworthiness, Narrativity and Social Actor Representation

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- 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 dynamic geopolitical situation, evolving mediascapes, disinformation crisis.
- **Recommendations** for journalism training, critical media literacy and resilience.
- **Polish/Romanian subcorpus** of approx. 1.2 million tokens (Feb 2022-June 2024) from mainstream (80%) and social media (20%).
- **English subcorpus** (30 million tokens) https://worldnewsapi.com/docs/

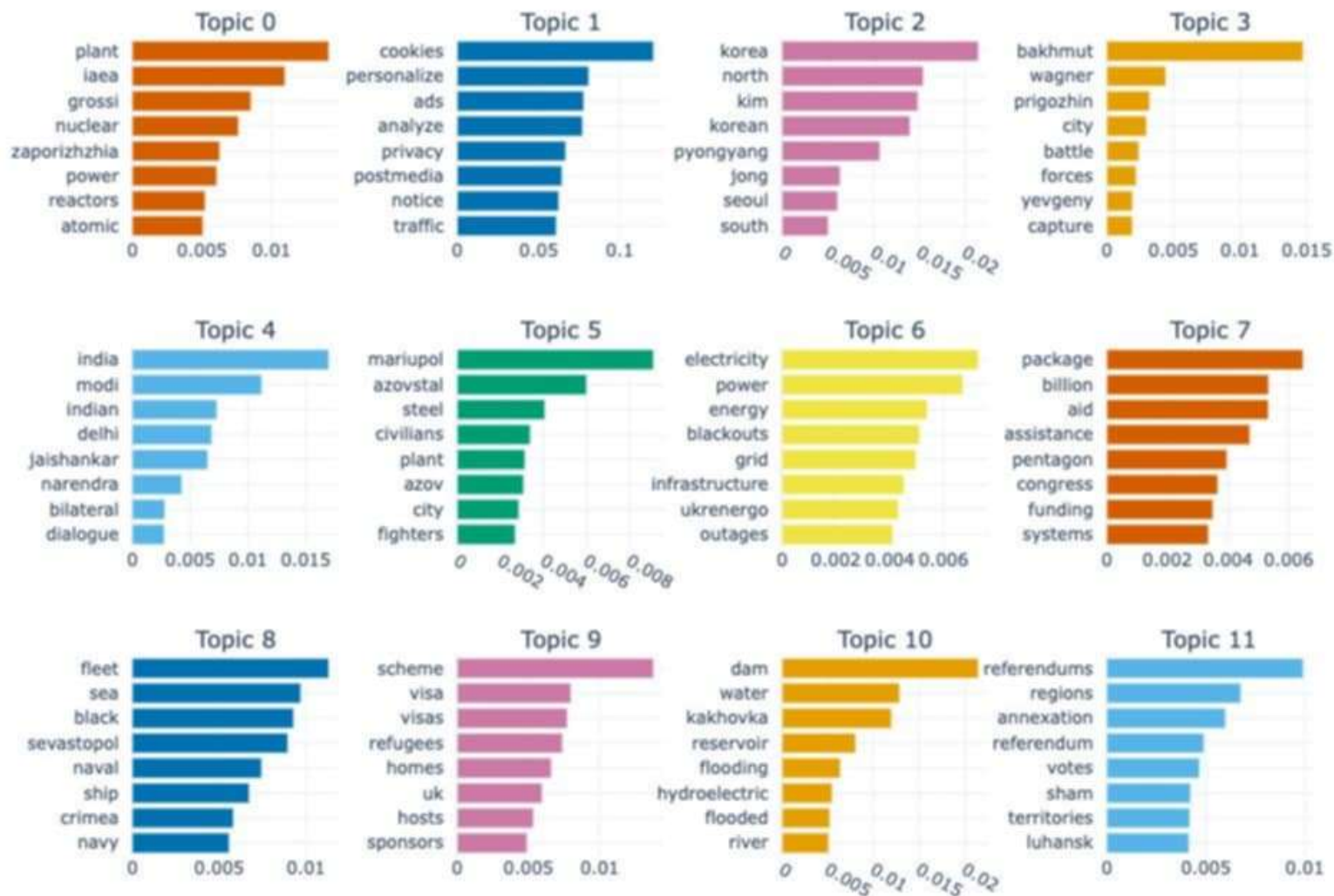# AI in qualitative research

Selected examples of AI uses in CORECON

Atlas.ti and ChatGPT

- Pyton scripts for data cleaning and extraction;
- Automatic and intentional coding, identification of code relations/groups, topic modeling;
- Summarizing clusters of texts/guided thematic analysis;
- Conversational AI: generating tentative reserch questions;
- Identifying examples, verifying intuitions;
- Preliminary sentiment/tone analysis, rhetorical analysis;
- Finding similarities across languages.

Topic Word Scores

Topic 0
- plant
- iaea
- grossi
- nuclear
- zaporizhzhia
- power
- reactors
- atomic

(axis: 0, 0.005, 0.01)

Topic 1
- cookies
- personalize
- ads
- analyze
- privacy
- postmedia
- notice
- traffic

(axis: 0, 0.05, 0.1)

Topic 2
- korea
- north
- kim
- korean
- pyongyang
- jong
- seoul
- south

(axis: 0, 0.005, 0.01, 0.015, 0.02)

Topic 3
- bakhmut
- wagner
- prigozhin
- city
- battle
- forces
- yevgeny
- capture

(axis: 0, 0.005, 0.01, 0.015)

Topic 4
- india
- modi
- indian
- delhi
- jaishankar
- narendra
- bilateral
- dialogue

(axis: 0, 0.005, 0.01, 0.015)

Topic 5
- mariupol
- azovstal
- steel
- civilians
- plant
- azov
- city
- fighters

(axis: 0, 0.002, 0.004, 0.006, 0.008)

Topic 6
- electricity
- power
- energy
- blackouts
- grid
- infrastructure
- ukrenergo
- outages

(axis: 0, 0.002, 0.004, 0.006)

Topic 7
- package
- billion
- aid
- assistance
- pentagon
- congress
- funding
- systems

(axis: 0, 0.002, 0.004, 0.006)

Topic 8
- fleet
- sea
- black
- sevastopol
- naval
- ship
- crimea
- navy

(axis: 0, 0.005, 0.01)

Topic 9
- scheme
- visa
- visas
- refugees
- homes
- uk
- hosts
- sponsors

(axis: 0, 0.005, 0.01)

Topic 10
- dam
- water
- kakhovka
- reservoir
- flooding
- hydroelectric
- flooded
- river

(axis: 0, 0.005, 0.01, 0.015, 0.02)

Topic 11
- referendums
- regions
- annexation
- referendum
- votes
- sham
- territories
- luhansk

(axis: 0, 0.005, 0.01)

Outline

- Framework of reporting: newsworthiness of war coverage

- Social actor analysis: expert voice representation

- Narrative analysis: recontextualization/legitimization

- Implications for critical language awareness and resilience

Framework

Key definitions and examples of RQ in CORECON

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).

- "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**" (Montgomery, 2007: 4).

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).

Tabloid (and social media) journalism

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

RQ in war reporting (CORECON)

- How is the issue of international conflict (political, social, economic) adapted to contemporary news formats/conventions?
- Which lexical choices and discursive strategies tend to be salient?
- Which social actors get prominence in war coverage?
- Who is represented (and quoted) as an expert on the war?
- Which narrative patterns/archs can be traced?
- How is war presented depending on proximity to the conflict?
- How do editors (de)legitimize political actors/actions?

Social actor analysis

Case study 1 & 2

Defining/studying social actors

- 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).
- **Agency** (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).

Social actor dimensions in CORECON

- **Russian actors** (collective and individual, e.g., Putin);
- **Ukrainian actors** (collective and individual, e.g., Zelensky);
- **Other collective** actors (e.g., nations/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

Results of study of PL and EN tabloids

- personalize war coverage through references to the 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).

Representing experts (eliteness)

- how do sources get introduced as **credible professionals** (e.g. when they are labelled as "analysts" or "specialists")?;
- how do sources get presented as having **opinions that are newsworthy** (e.g. when they are referred as "experts")?;
- how **diverse** are sources invited to opine about the various aspects of war?;
- how do journalists incorporate and interpret (or **editorialize** on) expert opinions with reporting verbs and contextualizing phrases they apply?

(Haarman & Lombardo 2009; Vandelanotte 2009; Dancygier 2019 on reported discourse and viewpoint hierarchy)

Data
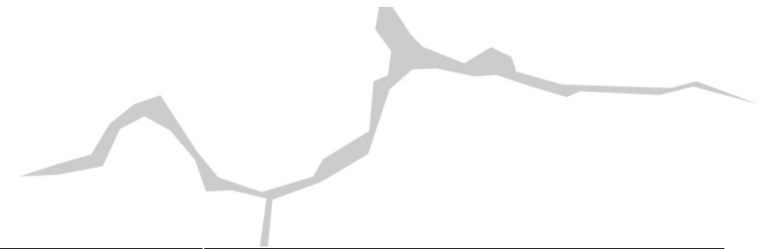
	"expert" n=2115	"specialist" n=499	"analyst" n=2145
BBC (UK)	222	71	178
Euronews (EUR)	149	47	183
Independent (UK)	673	209	704
Irish Times (IRL)	162	79	135
National Post (CA)	96	10	74
Newsweek (US)	813	83	871

Results of study of EN expert discourse

- areas: (1) military, (2) politics, law and policy, (3) economics and research;
- creatng credibility (academic titles, affiliation, authorship, recognized standing in the academic community, work at/consultancy to high prestige organizations, international agencies or governments);
- high status role labels (advisor, senior, chief, head);
- diversity: 5% of female experts; 54 % of English (Germanic) surnames; Russian sources outnumbered the Ukrainian sources 4 to 1;
- expert voices represented "faithfully" to the wording of the original statements (say 45%; tell 28%, according to 9%, speak 3%, tweet/post 3%), epistemic/emotional stance 1% (believe, doubt, endorse, conform, vs. condemn, urge caution, praise, criticize).

Narrative analysis

Case study 3

Recontextualization

Clauses represent how events are experienced via the constellation of **participants** involved in **actions** in certain **circumstances** (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). Schematic **narrative** sequences:

- WHO – WHAT – WHEN – WHERE – WHY – HOW (5W&H),
- ORIENTATION – COMPLICATION – CRISIS – RESOLUTION.

Editors/journalists present sourced information as a **particular representation of social practices** (in tune with ideology/editorial line). Recontextualization may involve **rhetorical maneuvers**, as well as semantic **deletions, additions** (e.g., repetitions, reactions), **substitutions or rearrangements** (van Leeuwen, 2008).

Data

Kremlin	special operation	NATO
„Kreml"	„operacja specjalna" or „specjalna operacja"	„NATO" or „sojusz"
753	139	1162
thematic modeling and analysis with ChatGPT (supported, verified)	linguistic distancing devices (manual, typological coding)	collocation downsizing, rhetorical analysis (interpretative)

PL editors: Demystifying Russia's security concerns

(1) how Russia uses cold-war rhetoric of the west as enemy "taking Ukraine hostage", "in a violent takeover of Ukraine" even though there used to be numerous partnerships between Ukraine and "western" countries;

(2) how Russia/Kremlin regime is obsessed about the west conspiring to attack it under any pretext, "long-time obsessions", "alleged threat from NATO";

(3) how Putin is using the "NATO as enemy" schema to consolidate his authoritarian power.

Delegitimizing Russia's security entitlements

(1) how Russia expects to be guaranteed that the states around it are a "neutral sphere", that it has a "buffer zone" in case of being attacked, while recent history shows that it is Russia that has been an attacker;

(2) how Russia is claiming to be a "victim of NATO expansion eastward," and that it is entitled to "security guarantees" from US/Europe from decades ago, as if the countries in its neighbourhood were not entitled to sovereign decisions;

(3) how the Kremlin is propagating a "myth of western treachery" (reference to Hitler, post cold-war guarantees that NATO will not expand) especially when contrasted with the myth of Russian WWII heroism.

Debunking Russia's security objectives

(1) how Russia falsely claims that its aim is to protect Russian speaking citizens of Ukraine and that Russian troops and administration is welcomed in the regions of Donbas and Crimea ("rigged referendum").

(2) how Russia is blaming Ukraine and its western allies for starting the war and refusing to negotiate peace ("Russia says the west rejected stabilization efforts").

(3) how disinformation efforts are undertaken to drive a wedge between Ukraine and Poland by claiming that military aid is "not in Poland's interests" and that "helping Ukraine prolongs the war."

Language awareness and resilience

Case study 4

What does ChatGPT say about the war?

- Adaptation of an experiment (Volk et al. 2024) with qualitative comparative **content and stylistic analysis** of textual data.

- Setting up **three user profiles** and prompting ChatGPT-4 to answer to **three related questions** on (1) the motivations for the Ukraine war, (2) the responsibility for the war, and (3) the preferred post-war scenarios.

- RQ1: Does ChatGPT-4 skew the representation of a political issue depending on the information it is fed about the user via a profile?

- RQ2: What are the differences in responses if the chatbot "believes" the user is (1) a **militarist** accepting the hegemony of a stronger state, (2) a **pacifist** favoring a diplomatic solution to political conflict, or (3) **disengaged**.

Results of the comparative analysis

- **Variation** in length of the responses, level of detail, organization into sections, order of factors enumerated, presence of conclusion;
- Different degrees of **splitting the blame** between (1) Russia and Putin, (2) Western Nations and NATO, (3) Ukrainian Governments, (4) Separatist Movements in Eastern Ukraine, and IN ONE CASE (5) International Mismanagement.
- Different post-war scenarios **ranked**: from full troop withdrawal to negotiated peace settlement [with] territorial compromise; Ukraine's NATO membership off the table, justice and accountability ranked high/mid/low.

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