



The Coverage and Reception of
the Russian-Ukrainian Conflict



Representing expert sources and voices on the Russian-Ukrainian conflict in English-language opinion-making news outlets

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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/>

Outline



- Framework of war reporting: newsworthiness;
- The expert as source and voice of eliteness and legitimacy in representation of complex issues;
- Reported speech and editorializing;
- Implications for critical language awareness and resilience.


Framework

Concepts and values in reporting




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; Johansson, 2007).
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Newsworthiness




- Discursive approach to **news values**: a framework that allows for analysis of how newsworthiness is construed in textual representation of events: News values are established by language and image in use (Molek-Kozakowska, 2015-2025).
 - Such a discursive perspective allows researchers to systematically examine what values are **emphasized in news stories**, and how language and image are combined to establish events as **more or less** newsworthy (Bednarek and Caple, 2017).
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News values typology (Bednarek and Caple, 2017)

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

The expert: eliteness and legitimacy



- **the expert** embodies [the news value of] eliteness through institutional status, academic achievement, professional competence, cultural recognition, prestige and authority, rather than fame, wealth or power;
 - high premium put on **expertise and competence** in the sourcing of news and opinions, allowing journalists to reduce uncertainty and alienation in crisis situations, such as wars;
 - retaining a **semblance of neutrality** is desirable in order to prevent audiences from dismissing a news outlet as partisan/propaganda in war reporting (Wodak and Meyer, 2015).
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Discourse analysis

Recontextualizing actors and actions



Studying social actors



- **discourse participants** are represented as **social actors** through linguistic and semantic choices and semantic operations (labelling as experts, analysts, specialists)(van Leeuwen, 2008).
 - **their agency** depends on the choice of **predicates** that denote verbal, mental, existential/relational processes, and **modals** with certain epistemic value/stance (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004).
 - through **recontextualization**, journalists may manipulate the representation of social actors and their (verbal) actions (direct/indirect speech; editorializing)
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Reported discourse (1/2)



- *direct quotation* with verbatim representation + neutral reporting verb related to speaking **for the effect of authenticity**
e.g., “The workload’s enormous,” Viktoria Ionova explains...
 - a “*slipping*” reporting clause with direct quote(s) incorporated into main clause **for the effect of representing stance or gist**
e.g., Sipher said the leak of classified information is “despicable”...
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Reported discourse (2/2)

- *indirect speech/discourse with a reporting clause* that may involve changing the pronouns and deictics + tense back-shifting **for the effect of building a narrative structure and engagement**
e.g., Glen Grant advised Ukraine on its military reform...
- *free indirect discourse* with/without signaling of the source of represented information **for the effect of generalization, attitudinal meaning and interpretation**
e.g., According to recent reports...

Study design

Research questions and data



Representing experts

- 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 war?;
- how do journalists incorporate and interpret (or **editorialize** on) expert opinions with reporting verbs and contextualizing phrases?

(Vandelanotte, 2009; Dancygier, 2019 on viewpoint hierarchy)

Data: CORECON EN subcorpus



	“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

Protocol



- CORECON-EN that consists of 30,413,973 tokens was built through *World News API* <https://worldnewsapi.com/docs/>
- Python script was built to extract 40-word long concordances of the lemmas of expressions: “expert”, “specialist” and “analyst” from the corpus, producing 4768 concordance lines;
- NER (Named Entity Recognition) analysis was conducted with a Python script employing spaCy to extract the named entities present in the concordances

(Honnibal, M., Montani, I., Van Landeghem, S., & Boyd, A. 2020)



Results



Specialists' (n=499) professional areas

security, defence, military, recon, weapons (19%); IT, computers, systems (12.5%); nuclear (10%); international relations, policy, economic (10%); intelligence, data (8%); government (6.5%); digital, media (5%); market, finance, investment (5%); health, cancer, nutrition, kidney, eye, neonatal, rehab (5%); aviation, maritime (2.5%); logistics, acquisition (2.5%); information, communication, education (2%); recruiting, training (2%); insurance (1.5%); mental health, psychology, fitness (1.5%); search, forensic (1%); martial arts (1%); brand, reputation management (1%); other (4%).

Attributes (analysts n=2145)

- **area:** (1) military, (2) politics, law and policy, (3) economics and research;
- **geographical/ethnic attribute:** “U.K.-educated,” “Russian,” “Dutch,” “Kyiv-based,” “Middle East”;
- **organization:** “NATO,” “CIA,” “Open Source Intelligence (OSINT)”
- **modifier:** “senior” (n=116), “former” (n=88), “lead(ing)” (n=68), “independent” (n=48), “chief” (n=26), “principal” (n=9), “veteran” (n=8), “chartered” (n=6), “prominent” (n=5), “executive” (n=4), “respected” (n=3),
- **surname:** English/Germanic (54%), Slavic (22.5%), Asian (10%), European (6.5%), Middle Eastern (6%).

Experts' (n=2115) eliteness

- **credibility** markers: academic titles, affiliation, authorship, recognized standing in the academic community, work at/consultancy to high prestige organizations, international agencies or governments;
- **diversity**: half of English (Germanic) surnames; 5% of female experts; Russian sources outnumbering Ukrainian sources 4 to 1;
- **status** role labels: profesor, research fellow, advisor, chief, head, senior, leading, independent;

e.g., Cohen, now *a senior expert* at the Argonne National Laboratory as well as an *adjunct professor* at Georgetown University's Center for Security Studies (Newsweek)

Recontextualization



- expert voices represented **neutrally** and faithfully to the wording of the original statements: “say” 45%, “tell” 28%, “according to” 9%, “speak” 3%, “tweet/post” 3%.
- **epistemic/emotional stance** expressed in 1% of reporting verbs (believe, doubt, endorse, confirm, condemn, urge caution, praise, criticize), or through narrative and emotion incorporation:

e.g. The *most chilling* comment came from security specialist Dr. Steve Fetter: “Worst of all, Russia’s thinly veiled threats to use nuclear weapons remind the world about escalation” (Irish Times)

Language awareness



Responsible journalistic practices

- develop a transparent sourcing policy: look who's talking!
- reflect on expert diversity and the scope of points of view in the broad range of areas;
- explain the source's credentials without overemphasizing their eliteness;
- limit the number of unidentifiable, nameless sources;
- limit the reliance on selected expert(s), organization(s), area(s) of expertise only because they are available;
- watch how opinions may become distorted in free indirect discourse;
- avoid using expert opinions to underpin a preconceived idea;
- avoid simplifying, make the best of expert diversity.

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