Representing the Russian-Ukrainian military conflict in the media: Editorial practices, discourse patterns and implications for journalism training

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- CORECON: The **co**verage and **re**ception of the Russian-Ukrainian **co**nflict in Polish, Romanian and English-language media: A comparative critical discourse study.
- **Polish/Romanian subcorpora** 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/
- Over 30 studies published/prepared 2024-2026 with **cross-cultural** perspective, given the evolving geopolitical situation, disinformation crisis.
- **Recommendations** for journalism training, critical media literacy and resilience.

Europe

Norwegian Sea

North Sea

Baltic Sea

North Atlantic Ocean

Black Sea

English Channel

ICELAND
Reykjavik

IRELAND
Dublin

UNITED KINGDOM

DENMARK

GERMANY
Berlin

BELGIUM

LUXEMBOURG

FRANCE

POLAND
Warsaw

BELARUS

ESTONIA

MONACO

ITALY

SPAIN

PORTUGAL

SLOVAKIA

HUNGARY
Budapest

CROATIA

BOSNIA HERZEGOVINA

SERBIA

MONTENEGRO

MACEDONIA

GREECE

BULGARIA
Sofia

ROMANIA

MOLDOVA
Chisinau

Bucharest

TURKEY

RQ in CORECON

- Which **terms** are used to represent conflict and war coverage?
- Which **narrative** and **editorializing** patterns can be traced?
- Which **historical references** tend to be invoked?
- How is the war presented depending on the **proximity** to the conflict (Eastern Europe vs. US/UK)?
- How is the coverage adapted to contemporary **news formats** (tabloid, online, visual, social media)?

Outline

- Study 1: Social actor analysis (PL/EN)

- Study 2: Expert source and voice representation (EN)

- Study 3: Editorial recontextualization (PL)

- Extensions and implications for language awareness in journalism training

Social actor analysis

Molek-Kozakowska, Katarzyna. 2025. "Social Actors and Storylines in the Coverage of Russian-Ukrainian War in English and Polish-language Tabloids." *Journalism Studies* 27(1): 63–83. https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2025.2567889

Defining social actors

- **Participants** can be represented **as social actors** through
  - linguistic choices, e.g., naming, attribution;
  - semantic operations, e.g., collectivization or individualization, assimilation or functionalization, etc. (van Leeuwen, 2008).

- **Agency** of participants depends on the choice of **verbs** that denote material, behavioral, verbal, mental, existential, or relational processes (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004).

Major groups of social actors in the corpus

- **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)

Data (EN/PL tabloids)

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/Trump),
- 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 with agency,
- focus on celebrities to draw attention (functionalization) (Johansson, 2007).

Representing expert voices

Molek-Kozakowska, Katarzyna. In print. "Meet the Experts on the War in Ukraine. Language and Style in Representing Sources and their Voices in Opinion-making News Outlets." *English Text Construction.*

Expert sources and voices

- How do sources get introduced as **credible professionals,** having **opinions that are newsworthy**?
- How **diverse** are sources invited to opine about the war?
- How do journalists incorporate or **editorialize** on expert opinions with reporting verbs and contextualizing phrases? (Richardson, 2007)

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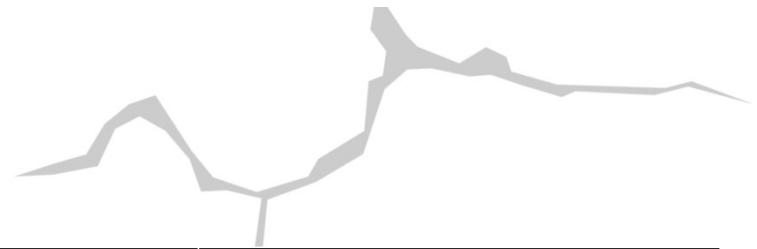
	"expert" n=2115	"specialist" n=499	"analyst" n=2145
BBC (UK)	222	71	178
Euronews (EUR)	149	47	183
Independent (UK)	673	209	704
Irish Times (IRL)	162	79	135
National Post (CA)	96	10	74
Newsweek (US)	813	83	871

Results of study of EN expert discourse

- areas: (1) military, (2) politics, law and policy, (3) economics and research;
- creatng credibility (professional titles, affiliation, recognized standing in the academic community and authorship, work at high prestige organizations, international agencies or governments);
- high status role labels (*leading, 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 original wording (*say* 45%; *tell* 28%, *according to* 9%, *speak* 3%, *tweet/post* 3%), emotional stance 1% (*believe, doubt, endorse, confirm, condemn, urge caution, praise, criticize*).

Editorial recontextualization

Molek-Kozakowska, K., Dragomir, I. 2025. Demystifying, delegitimizing, debunking: Discursive editorial strategies of neutralizing the rationales for Russia's Intervention in Ukraine. *Media, War & Conflict*
https://doi.org/10.1177/17506352251314876

Recontextualization

- Editors present information as a **particular representation of events** in tune with their outlet's ideology/editorial line, format, audience design, etc. (Wodak and Meyer, 2015).
- Recontextualization may involve **rhetorical maneuvers**:
  - deletions,
  - additions
  - substitutions,
  - rearrangements (van Leeuwen, 2008).
- **How do editors neutralize Russian claims and rationales for invasion?**

Data (PL)

Kremlin	special operation	NATO (+ security)
„Kreml"	„operacja specjalna" or „specjalna operacja"	„NATO" (+ „bezpieczeństwo")
753	139	1162
AI-supported thematic modeling	linguistic devices of distancing (manual, typological analysis)	rhetorical analysis (interpretative on downsized corpus)

Demystifying Russia's security concerns

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

(2) Russia claims to be a "victim of NATO expansion eastward," while recent history shows that it is Russia that has been an attacker;

(3) Russia expects to be guaranteed by the US that the states around it are a "neutral sphere", that it has a "buffer zone,"implying the countries in its neighbourhood are not sovereign;

(4) Putin uses the "NATO as enemy" schema to consolidate his authoritarian power.

Debunking Russia's claims

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

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

(3) Russia uses disinformation 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

in journalism training and resilience against disinformation

Other findings and implications
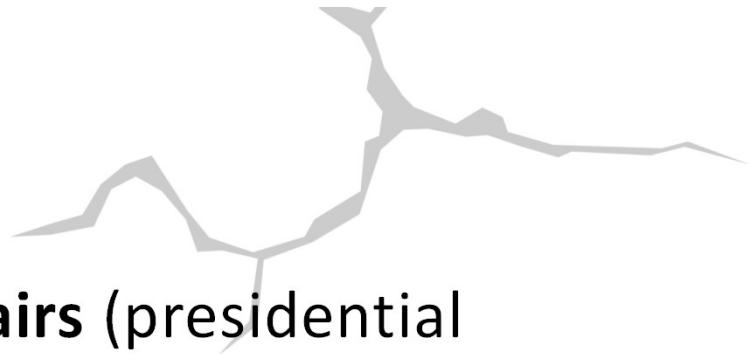
- **How is the war coverage used in domestic affairs** (presidential elections, migration policy, security strategy)?

- **What do AI-powered chatbots say about the war?**

ChatGPT-4 skews the representation of a political issue depending on the information it is fed about the user: (1) a **militarist**, (2) a **pacifist**, or (3) a **disengaged** user.

- **How is resilience against disinformation about the war to be built** (through interventions)?

References
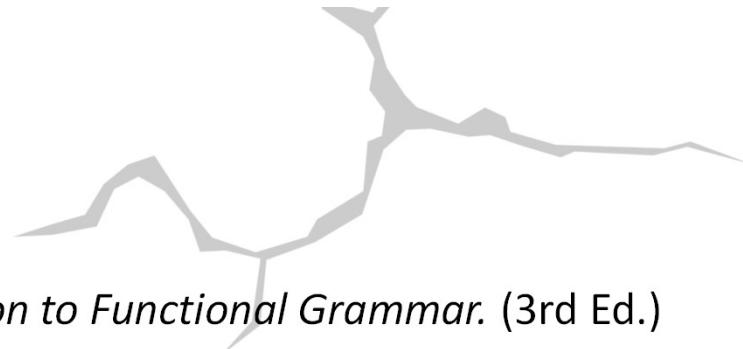
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