



The Coverage and Reception of
the Russian-Ukrainian Conflict



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THE RHETORIC OF HEADLINES IN ROMANIAN AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE MEDIA COVERING THE RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN CONFLICT. INSIGHTS FOR JOURNALISM LITERACY

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STRUCTURE

- **Introduction**
- **Research design – research questions and hypotheses**
- **Data collection and sampling**
- **Analytical framework**
- **Results and discussions**
- **Conclusions**

INTRODUCTION

CORECON Project (<https://grants.ulbsibiu.ro/corecon>)

The present paper is part of the project “The coverage and reception of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict in Polish, Romanian and English-language media: A comparative critical discourse study with recommendations for journalism training”, which aims to apply the eclectic toolkit of Critical Discourse Studies to raise public awareness of the extent, techniques, and implications of media technologies and discourses regarding the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, through academic publications and popularization events.



KEY CONCEPTS

✓ **Coverage of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict in the media**

Different representations in terms of the use of language, imagery, storytelling, and framing can differ dramatically, influencing public opinion and shaping the broader narrative of the conflict.



✓ **Semantic and stylistic approach** – oriented towards the enrichment of linguistic analyses, contributing to a better understanding of how media discourse constructs and manages shared mental models → facilitates a more informed and comprehensive collective social cognition.



✓ **“Headline”** – distinctive, condensed style of writing used in headlines, typically characterized by brief, impactful language (Bell, 1991; Dor, 2003; Borchmann, 2024).



RESEARCH DESIGN



Headlines are analyzed through the lens of the three **metafunctions** of language (Halliday, 2004):

- **Ideational** – headlines condense the news in perspective
- **Interpersonal** – headlines impact the readers, shaping their attitudes regarding the social-political reality
- **Textual** – stylistic features of the language

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES

RQ1: *Which stylistic elements are used in Romanian and English mainstream media headlines to make them attractive to the reader/audience?*

H1: Figures of speech, especially those based on semantics or tropes.

RQ2: *What criteria do journalists use to determine whether a news story will be of interest to the general public or not?*

H2: Area of news coverage, a sensational element, breaking news, VIP, etc.

DATA COLLECTION AND SAMPLING



www.digi24.com; 125 headlines



www.cnn.com; 125 headlines

SELECTION CRITERIA

- ✓ **Relevance of the source** – digital media
- ✓ **Keywords** – *Ucraina/Ukraine*
- ✓ **Timeline** – 24.02.2022–28.02.2024
- ✓ **Frequency and relevance of the news** – first most relevant 5 pieces of news/month

ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

The denotative meaning of a word/construction is complemented with one or more **connotative** meanings, updated according to various factors:

- the extralinguistic context;
- the speaker's emotional state or attitude;
- stylistic variants (fictional, colloquial, journalistic).

RESULTS

Identified tropes:

➤ **SYNECDOCHE**

➤ **METAPHOR**

➤ **HYPERBOLE**

➤ **PERSONIFICATION**



RESULTS

SYNECDOCHE

***Presa occidentală** este restricționată în Rusia pentru că „dezinformează” despre războiul din Ucraina (04.03.2022) / **Western media** restricted in Russia for “misinforming” about war in Ukraine (RO)*

*(...) **Biserica Ortodoxă ucraineană** vrea să-i evacueze pe oameni (22.04.2022) / (...) **The Ukrainian Orthodox Church** wants to evacuate people (RO)*

***Kyiv and Moscow** agree deal to resume Ukraine grain exports from Black Sea ports, UN chief says (22.07.2022) (EN)*

***NATO and Russia** to hold long planned exercises of nuclear forces as tensions over Ukraine remain high (16.10.2022) (EN)*

RESULTS

METAPHOR

*(...) Propaganda rusă spune că e „**foc de artificii**” de ziua lui Medvedev (14.09.2022) / (...) Russian propaganda says it’s “**fireworks**” on Medvedev’s birthday (RO)*

*(...) „**Orașul morții**” ar putea deveni sigur abia peste ani (17.11.2022) / (...) The “**City of Death**” could become safe only years from now (RO)*

*Putin’s **winter of inhumanity** takes Ukraine war and US aid to a new level (01.12.2022) (EN)*

***Dogs of war**: the conflict in Ukraine is displacing pets as well as people (12.03.2022) (EN)*

RESULTS

HYPERBOLE

***Incredibila** poveste a lui Vasile, câinele-soldat care și-a ros singur laba pentru a nu cădea prizonier la ruși (04.02.2023) / The **incredible** story of Vasile, the soldier dog who chewed off his own paw to avoid being captured by the Russians (RO)*

*Russians steal **vast** amounts of Ukrainian grain and equipment, **threatening this year's harvest** (05.05.2022) (EN)*

RESULTS

PERSONIFICATION

*Ucraina își **plânge** eroii. Soldatul executat în pădure, tată și fiu uciși în aceeași tranșee, erou național la 27 de ani mort în luptă (13.03.2023) / Ukraine **mourns** its heroes. Soldier executed in the forest, father and son killed in the same trenches, 27-year-old national hero dead in battle (RO)*

*Europe's warm winter is robbing Putin of a trump card (16.01.2023)
(EN)*

DISCUSSION

ELEMENTS OF HEADLINES' RHETORIC → headlines function not only as informative tools but also as powerful devices that captivate the audience's attention.

- ✓ metaphor
- ✓ hyperbole
- ✓ personification
- ✓ synecdoche

add creativity, engagement, and memorability, making the headline worth of attention and further exploration

Conflict-related news becomes of interest to the public, since an armed conflict has consequences on several levels: territorial-administrative, military, political, economic, social, influencing not only the life of the population of a state, but creating implications at a macro, even global level. In case of a conflict between states, the journalist must know that people are interested in what is happening at the present moment, in their immediate vicinity.

CONCLUSIONS

Headlines have evolved beyond their traditional role as simple news summaries. We argue that **media literacy** is critical, especially for knowing what words and linguistic structures can be used in titles, subtitles, and inter-titles, and what semantic “tricks” could have a lasting impact on the audience.

The figurative language employed in headlines can:

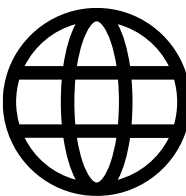
- either enhance understanding → The journalist must know the target audience very well in order to select and apply the appropriate stylistic key.
- or distort the truth → The journalist or the news agency must ensure that they serve to inform rather than manipulate.

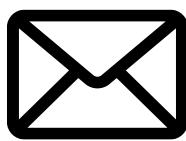
In an age where information is abundant, but attention is scarce, harnessing the power of headlines demands a thoughtful and ethical approach.

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