A Brief Analysis of the Role of Multimodality via AI in the News Coverage of the Russian-Ukrainian Conflict in the Romanian Mainstream Media

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The 3rd International Conference of Digital Linguistics

DATE: 26-27.06.2025

Outline

❖ multimodality in the journalistic discourse within news coverage of military conflicts;

❖ the role of images accompanying the journalistic discourse in the news about the Russian-Ukrainian conflict in the Romanian mainstream media;

❖ the purpose of the use of images by analyzing comparatively the same image from three perspectives: with the text of the news, without the written text of the news and through the analysis of other images that appear in news with similar content.

Data

Libertatea- https://www.libertatea.ro/

271 news

February 2022 ⟹ February 2024

LIBER TATEA

Methodology

❖ Comparative analysis

❖ MCDA (Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis)

❖ Content Analysis

Methodology (MCDA)

"While multimodality has now developed into an academic field in its own right, it is only more recently that we start to find multimodal work in critical discourse studies (CDS) journals."
(Machin, D. 2016, 322)

"It is for these reasons that when dealing with something like a photograph, the emphasis in the first place for MCDA should be on the social: **Why is this photograph being deployed? How is it already discursively shaped and governed by practices of representational use? Is it claiming to represent the nature of a war? Is it claiming to be artistic? Is it claiming to be educational?** If we look for the codes, with no clear sense of what the image claims to be doing as regards a concrete social issue, then we can fall into pointless description". (Machin, D. 2016, 331)

Methodology (MCDA)

"We can also put this in a different way. In MCDA, like CDA, it is important to show how discourses seek to control and shape social practices in the interests of dominant ideology".

(Machin, D. 2016, 331)

"For MCDA, I have suggested that we must favour an approach which better locates the sign both as motivated and as having form, but also which roots it in ideology and how this shapes the way the world appears to us – what Foucault realised about discourse and power".

(Machin, D. 2016, 332)

"Analysing the use of a photograph means having a greater **sociological imagination** in order to understand the wide discourses and institutional processes and dynamics of hegemony that shape the choice to use them. It is through this sociological imagination that we bring the social to MCDA and at the same time allow MCDA to offer something clearly unique and exciting".

(Machin, D. 2016, 332)

Methodology

"Content Analysis consists of counting instances that are found within the research data which can be of any kind: textual, verbal, visual or sound and from a variety of sources. In simple terms, in the case of newspaper texts, for example, we can use content analysis to establish the numbers of kinds of persons represented, if they were not represented, what they are depicted as doing, etc. We can also identify less concrete issues such as kinds of evaluations, whether positive or negative". (Bouvier, G. 2014, 287)

Multimodality in the journalistic discourse

"**Strategic narrative** is the story furthering an official political strategy via the construction of "a shared meaning of the past, present and future of international politics to shape the behaviour of domestic and international actors". (Miskimmon et al., 2013, p. 2; Miskimmon et al., 2017, p. 6).

"A characteristic trait of the modern news media is their interaction with the readers that typically exists in the form of the readers' comments to the political narrative, and the 'likes' to these comments". (Zhabotynska, S.A. 2024, 98)

"In a multimodal narrative, different modes are not inherently the main or subsidiary (verbal/visual/audial); their salience is contextual. In most telegram posts, the verbal mode (headline and text) dominates; in other cases, the visual mode does". (Shevchenko, I., 2022, 71)

The role of images accompanying the journalistic discourse

"Today's online news are typically disseminated in a multimodal form, including various presentation modalities such as text, image, audio, and video. Recent developments in multimodal machine learning now make it possible to capture basic "descriptive" relations between modalities – such as correspondences between words and phrases, on the one hand, and corresponding visual depictions of the verbally expressed information on the other". (Cheema, Gullal & Hakimov, Sherzod & Müller-Budack, Eric & Otto, Christian & Bateman, John & Ewerth, Ralph., 2023, 1)

The three main categories are centered around the idea of an image as an illustration, and how this illustration relates to the surrounding text. (Ibid., p. 4) Their categories are:

(1) **Minimal**: illustration expressing little relation to the text;

(2) Close: illustration expressing a close (highly related) relation to the text; and

(3) **Transcendental**: illustration that is closely related, but also going beyond the text.

(Marsh and White 2003)

How news media make sense of A.I?

"In short, A.I. is an umbrella term for automated digital systems that classify, recommend, and make

decisions via algorithms based on data with the ability to learn from that data".

(Nguyen, Dennis & Hekman, Erik., 2022, 439)

"News media play a key role in the making of the meaning of A.I. technology on a societal scale and

they are proactive forces in the discursive construction of perceived benefits and risks (Lupton 2013)

associated with the technology". (Ibid., p.439)

The purpose of the use of images

- without the written text of the news
- with the written text of the news
- the analysis of other images that appear in news with similar content

ChatGPT

271 news ➡ 11 news about children *(child, children, pupils, boy(s),girl(s)*

Multimodal analysis of children's representations of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict

Russian children

- pawns for the propaganda

Ukrainian children

- victims
- students
- refugees

Multimodal analysis of children's representations of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict

News about the Ukrainian children

- The bodies of girls as young as 14, naked and hanging from trees in Ukraine. "I didn't believe the atrocities. Then I saw photos"
- Timisoara refugees who managed to set up a school for Ukrainian pupils. '"We came here as refugees, but we stayed because my parents found something interesting in the city"'
- Ukrainian psychologist who counsels autistic refugee children for free: 'If I sit and cry, how can I help other people?'

News about Russian children

- A mother from Russia gave her son a haircut in the shape of the letter Z, the symbol of Putin's offensive in Ukraine
- The Russian priest who advised women to have more children so they wouldn't be afraid to send them off to war has died on the Ukrainian frontline
- Dressed in military clothes, children in a kindergarten in northern Russia make parcels for Russian soldiers in Ukraine: 'It's a noble mission'

Multimodal analysis of children's representations of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict

https://www.libertatea.ro/stiri/imbracati-in-haine-militare-copiii-dintr-o-gradinita-din-nordul-rusiei-fac-pachete-pentru-soldatii-rusi-din-ucraina-4353308/attachment/4353316

Analysing the image without text

Children: Several children are present, some dressed in green military uniforms and others in ordinary clothes.

Activity: The children appear to be involved in an activity of sorting or packing products (food, tinned food, toys).
Boxes and symbols:There are several cardboard boxes on which are pasted papers with symbols, including the letter "**Z**" - a symbol associated in recent years with support for Russian military action in Ukraine.

Key Comment: Military uniforms on young children - an unusual and controversial item, especially in an educational context.
Political/military symbols - the appearance of the letter "Z" may suggest a political or military message, raising questions about propaganda among children.
General context - this appears to be an organised activity in a pre-school setting, but the nature of the activity (combining children's play with military symbolism) is ethically and pedagogically questionable.

Interpretation: The image can be seen as a form of military propaganda aimed at children, using symbols associated with a current armed conflict. It is a sensitive image that raises serious questions about the use of children in such contexts.

Analysing the image with the written text

The image serves as a direct illustration of the article's content, showing children in military uniforms preparing parcels for Russian soldiers involved in the conflict in Ukraine. It visually reflects the statements in the text, emphasising children's involvement in activities with military and patriotic connotations.

Implications and context
The association between image and text emphasises how military and nationalistic symbols are being introduced into the Russian educational environment from a very young age. This practice can be interpreted as a form of propaganda aimed at cultivating a sense of patriotism and support for the country's military actions.

The article and the associated image provide an insight into how the Russian authorities use educational institutions to promote certain values and ideologies, which may raise questions about the ethics of involving children in such activities.

News with related images

News with related images

1. ”Children from a kindergarten in Russia dressed in military uniform and made to throw grenades at enemy tanks VIDEO”
2. ”Schoolchildren dressed as soldiers at an event organised by the Russian Embassy in Bern: 'Participation was voluntary'”
3. ”Russian kindergarten children parade and throw paper grenades at pictures of "enemy" tanks”
4. ”The militarisation of childhood: Russia's education system moves closer to making soldiers out of pupils”
5. ”Children dressed as tanks and aeroplanes with the "Z" symbol”

Results

- Artificial intelligence is an useful tool that can be used to analyse the role that multimodality plays in the configuration of military conflicts;
- in this analysis, no single resource (audio, video, text) is dominant and images are used to reinforce the statements in the news;
- the emphasis is on accentuation ("providing 'visuality' of the entity described in the main text") (Shevchenko, I., 2022, 67)

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