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# Evaluative language in Romanian and US regional newspapers – A comparative approach

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*The paper analyses the way in which evaluative language in used in two regional newspapers – a US and a Romanian one. It starts from two articles that cover a similar topic, namely the mining disasters that took place in the two areas, and studies the way in which the disaster and the people responsible for it are presented. The analytical framework for the analysis is based on Martin and White's definition of appraisal in terms of attitude, engagement and graduation and the analysis focuses on the similarities and differences between the two articles in terms of evaluation and its linguistic realizations.*

Key-words: *newspapers, evaluation, attitude, engagement, graduation*

## 1. Introduction

The paper aims to investigate the way in which two mining disasters are presented in two regional newspapers – a Romanian and a US one. In the US newspaper the article was published four years after the mining disaster of Upper Big Branch, Raleigh County, West Virginia, USA while in the Romanian one the article appeared three years after the mining disaster that took place in Petrila, Valea Jiului, Romania. The analysis focuses on the evaluative language used by the two journalists the aim being to identify similarities and differences in terms of the way in which the disaster and the people responsible for it are presented.

The paper is divided into two parts - a theoretical one, which presents the functions of newspapers, the evaluative components of the language and their linguistic realization, and a practical part, which analyses the articles by applying the three components of evaluation.

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## 2. Theoretical framework

### 2.1. Functions of newspapers

Newspapers use language to represent the world; they inform, reinforce beliefs, provide social consensus and enable their readers to understand their lives and positions in the world; newspapers both construct and convey commonly held values, expose something that is considered wrong, argue in favour of a person or a situation, and persuade their readers of the justness of the adopted position.

Richardson (2007) states that newspapers represent social realities and reproduce them while Caldas-Coulthard (2003) claims that news recontextualizes events, being a cultural construct that encodes values. The journalists' subjectivity is reflected in their selection of the material, the frame in which it is presented, and the values upheld, values that are shared between the journalists and the target readership (Bednarek 2005). In opinion articles in particular, the evaluative language fulfils a variety of functions – it makes the article newsworthy, constructs relations between the newspaper and the readers, organizes the text and conveys the journalist's opinion (Bednarek 2005), (Biber et al. 1999, 1966).

### 2.2. Stance

Biber and Finegan (1989) explain stance as the overt expression of the author's or speaker's attitudes, feelings, judgments or commitments concerning the message. The two authors focus on the adverbials used to express it and they identify six classes: honestly adverbials (expressing manner of speaking), generally adverbials (expressing approximation or generalization), surely adverbials (expressing conviction or certainty), actually adverbials (expressing certainty, more specifically emphasis), maybe adverbials (expressing possibility, likelihood, hedging), amazingly adverbials (expressing attitude towards the content irrespective of the message).

Robert Englebretson (2007) defines moral stance as referring to the author's/speaker's beliefs, attitudes and values, and analyses stance as further divided into evaluation (value judgments, assessments and attitudes), affect (personal feelings) and epistemicity (commitment); stance reflects "physical, evaluative, personal and moral dimensions" (Englebretson 2007, 12), categories which cannot be always clearly distinguished.

Stance, according to Du Bois, "assigns value to objects of interest, positions social actors with respect to those objects, calibrates alignment between stancetakers and invokes presupposed systems of sociocultural value"

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(Du Bois 2007, 139). Du Bois introduces the concepts of positioning, alignment and evaluation. Positioning is defined as "the act of situating a social actor with respect to responsibility for stance and for invoking sociocultural value"; it can be affective or epistemic and it answers the question "what is the speaker positioning himself about" (Du Bois 2007, 143). Alignment indicates the relation between the speakers in terms of their attitude towards the topic under debate and is defined as "the act of calibrating the relationship between two stances, and by implication between two stancetakers" (du Bois 2007, 144). It answers the questions "what is the speaker agreeing about and who are they agreeing with" (Du Bois 2007, 145). Finally, evaluation reflects the position adopted by the speaker/writer towards the object assessed: "evaluation can be defined as the process whereby a stancetaker orients to an object of stance and characterizes it as having some specific quality or value" (Du Bois 2007, 143). It answers the question what is the value/quality of the object. Du Bois illustrates these three subtypes of stance as follows: evaluation (e.g. *that's horrible*), positioning (e.g. *I'm glad*) and alignment (e.g. *I agree*) (Du Bois 2007, 144). He continues by stating that stances are difficult to interpret separately, suggesting that stances should be analyzed as including several positions simultaneously (Du Bois 2007, 145) and concludes that stances should be best considered in context since "evaluation, positioning and alignment …are simply different aspects of a single stance act" (Du Bois 2007, 163)

Du Bois's definition of stance is considered to be the most complete: "Stance is a public act by a social actor, achieved dialogically through overt communicative means, of simultaneously evaluating objects, positioning subjects (self and others) and aligning with other subjects, with respect to any salient demonstration of the sociocultural field" (Du Bois 2007, 163).

Martin and White (2005) analyse evaluation from a semantic perspective and define appraisal as reflecting "the person whose feelings are expressed, the nature of these feelings, their strength and their covert or overt expression" (Martin and White 2005, 30).

Summarizing the definitions provided above, they all refer to the author's feelings/attitude/position related to the object under discussion and they differ in respect to the emphasis placed on the elements that are expressed: personal or public values, relationships between authors and their audience, affectivity or epistemicity, agreement or disagreement; some linguists also consider the source of the attitude, while others comment on the intensity.

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### 2.3. Martin and White's subclassification

As presented above, stance has been subclassified in various ways. Like the definitions given to stance, these subclassifcations also display many similarities. For instance, Joanne Scheibman (2007) describes stance as having three dimensions: orientation (relation between sender, text, and recipient), attitude (epistemic, deontic, and affective) and generality (or reference and quantification). Du Bois (2007) analyses stance as including positioning, alignment and evaluation. For the analysis of the two newspaper articles in this paper Martin and White's classification (2005) is used. According to these two authors, appraisal covers three major classes: attitude, engagement, and graduation, which are presented below in more detail.

**Attitude** is related to the writer's "feelings, … emotional reactions, judgments of behavior and evaluation of things" (Martin and White 2005, 35). Attitude is either inscribed in the text or invoked and it is usually realized by core vocabulary (verbs, adjectives, adverbs) (Martin and White 2005). Swearing, as well as expletives, euphemisms and interjections are all instances of non-gradable lexis which are means of construing attitude. There are three subareas of attitude, namely affect (related to emotional reactions), judgment (related to assessing behaviour by resorting to moral standards), and appreciation (related to the values of things, natural and phenomena).

**Affect** is defined as "concerned with registering positive and negative feelings", judgment deals with the evaluation of behaviour while appreciation is concerned with semiotic and natural phenomena and value of things. Each writer adopts a particular stance, which is closer oriented to one of the three subareas. Attitudes can be graded and they can be described as qualities (e.g. *a sad captain, the captain was sad, the captain left sadly*), processes (e.g. *he missed them, the fight upset him, the man wept*) or comments (e.g. *sadly, he had to go*) (Martin and White 2005, 43).

Affect expresses feelings which can be: positive or negative (e.g. *happy/sad*), permanent or temporary (e.g. *wept vs. disliked*), directed at some specific triggering element or not (e.g. *he disliked leaving/the captain was sad*), graded or not (low - e.g. *disliked*, median - e.g. *hated*, high- e.g. *detested*), related to a wish or an emotion (e.g. *I'd like vs. I like it*), related to intention or reaction to an unreal stimulus (realis- e.g. *dislike*d versus irealis - e.g. *feared*).

**Judgement** is defined as "the region of meaning construing our attitudes to people and the way they behave, their character, how they measure up" (Martin and White 2005, 52). Judgment can be further subdivided into social esteem social and social sanction. Linguistically, judgment is expressed in terms of usuality (e.g.

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*often)*, probability (e.g. *maybe, could*), obligation (e.g. *should, to be supposed to*), readiness (e.g. *keen*) (Martin and White 2005, 54).

**Appreciation**, the third sub-domain of attitude, is related to assessing things, performances, and natural phenomena. It covers three areas: reaction to things (e.g. *they may please us*), the composition or the structure of the things (e.g. *balance and complexity*), and the valuation (e.g. *innovative, authentic, timely*) (Martin and White 2005, 56).

The two authors emphasise the strong connection between appreciation and affect, which can nevertheless be distinguished as judgments of behaviour and evaluation of things (Martin and White 2005, 58).

Comparing this classification to the classifications suggested by other authors, similarities can be identified: for instance, Hunston and Thomas (2000) differentiate between opinions about entities (which would correspond to Martin and White's affect) and opinions about propositions (which are similar to Martin and White's appreciation), while Englebretson's moral stance is very similar to Martin and White's social judgment.

**Engagement** is the position adopted by the authors themselves "with respect to… the other voices and alternative positions construed as being in play in the current communicative context"(Martin and White 2005, 96) or as the author's construing for "the text of a heteroglossic backdrop of prior utterances, alternative view points and anticipated responses" (Martin and White 2005, 97).

Engagement refers both to the way in which authors relate to their audiences and also to the authors' reactions to what other readers/listeners have said about the particular topic (Martin and White 2005, 92). Thus, attitude can be taken for granted by both the author and the readers, or contentious, in which case the author has to persuade the audience of their correctness (Martin and White 2005). Linguistically, it is expressed by means of subordination, modality, polarity, concession and adverbials (Martin and White2005). Martin and White divide engagement into two areas – monoglossic, where the only voice heard is that of the author and heteroglossic, when other points of view are brought into the text (Martin and White 2005).

Starting from the concept of solidarity, defined as the way in which the authors align their readers within the variety of points of views, Martin and White (2005) identify four subcategories of engagement: disclaim, proclaim, entertain, and attribute. Disclaim indicates that the author rejects a certain position and it is linguistically realized by means of negation and concession; proclaim presents the author's position as the best out of a variety of reasons, thus ruling out other position and it is linguistically conveyed by means of adverbials of the type

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*naturally, of course, admittedly, the truth of the matter*, etc. Entertain indicates that the authors' position is one of the many possible ones, and it is linguistically expressed by means of adverbials such as *apparently, perhaps, maybe* or verbs such as *to seem*. Finally, attribute indicates that other points of views are presented and it is linguistically conveyed by verbs such as *he said that, he claims that, it is rumoured,* etc. (Martin and White, 2005).

Dialogistic texts can be further subdivided into dialogically expensive (which accept other positions) and dialogically contractive (which challenge or restrict other positions) (Martin and White 2005, 102); both types are linguistically conveyed by means of reported speech (e.g. *show* or *demonstrate* for contractive and *claim* for expanding and distancing) (Martin and White 2005, 103). Disalignment with the quoted position is sometimes presented in an implicit way, suggesting a set of common values between the author and the audience.

Fairclough (1995) analyses dialogism using the term *voices* and he considers that whose voice is heard in the text and the way the voice is heard are both very important. The other voices brought into the text can be referred to in a variety of ways: "the represented discourse is integrated into the representing discourse, summarized rather than quoted, using indirect speech in many cases" (Fairclough 1995, 82). Thus, the words of the people quoted in the article can be rendered as such (direct speech), presented as a summary or an interpretation, with the reporting verb playing an important part and influencing the readers' or listeners' attitude.

**Graduation**, the third area of evaluation, is the means by which the authors intensify or diminish the force of their utterances. Graduation applies both to attitude and engagement and is expressed along a scale moving from high positivity to high negativity. By means of graduation the writer indicates the intensity of their evaluation and brings the reader over to their position (Martin and White 2005).

There are two graduation axes – scalability or force (defined as grading in terms of intensity or amount – e.g. *a lot, very*) and prototypicality or focus (defined as the extent to which a phenomena matches an exemplary instance – e.g. *a true friend, a genuine friend*) (Martin and White 2005, 136). From a lexical point of view, intensification can be achieved by means of repetition, either of the same lexical item (e.g. *it's hot hot hot*), a combination of close semantic items e.g. (*the most immature, disgraceful and misleading address*) (Martin and White 2005, 144) or by means of metaphor (e.g. *He came out like a jack in a box*) (Martin and White 2005, 147). Focus, the second graduation axis can be sharp or soft – the former being usually associated with positive evaluation, the latter with negative one.

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Whereas engagement is related to adopting a position to the topic presented, graduation refers to the stancetaker's degree of involvement (Martin and White 2005)

Bednarek (2005, 211) emphasizes that words which have a neutral connotation in the dictionary do not carry automatically positive or negative connotations, their value being highly context-dependent.

## 3. Data analysis

This part of the paper analyses two articles which were published in two regional newspapers, a Romanian and a US one, both dealing with a similar topic – the mining disasters that happened a few years ago. The aim of the analysis is to identify similarities and differences in terms of the way in which the mining accidents and the people in charge of the mines at the time are presented. In the US, 29 miners were killed in the Upper Big Branch mine, in April 2010 and in Romania, 13 miners were killed as the result of two methane explosions in the Petrila mine, in November 2008.The analysis follows Martin and White's approach and identifies linguistic ways of expressing attitude, engagement and graduation.

### 3.1. Article presentation

The US article is entitled *Hang down Your Head and Cry – Big Branch Disaster: Four Years Later Blankenship Says Company Made Scapegoat*. It is written by Bob Weaver and it was uploaded on April, 7th 2014 on the site of Hur Herald, a West Virginia regional newspaper; the article commemorates four years since the mining disaster. The Romanian article is entitled *Vinovat pentru explozia de la Petrila, salvator in subteran* [Guilty for the Petrila Explosion Rescuer in the Pit], it is written by Marius Mitrache and was uploaded on September 22nd, 2011 on the site of *Gazeta Văii Jiului* (The Jiu Valley Gazette); the article commemorates 3 years since the disaster.

### 3.2. Article structure

Bob Weaver presents the temporal sequence of the legal developments before and after the disaster: five years before the explosion safety violations had been noticed and fines were paid by the Massey Energy mining company. The company hired legal teams to deal with the citations. The Mine Safety and Health Administration and well as the United Mine Workers had repeatedly drawn

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attention to the danger the miners were exposed to. After the explosion in the mine, Alpha Natural Resources bought it from Massey Energy and a year later the new owners promised to close the mine. At the time of the publication of the article, that is four years after the explosion, Don Blankenship, the former Massey Energy CEO is not criminally prosecuted and tries to express his position by means of a documentary he had produced.

The Romanian journalist also uses a narrative approach; the article begins with the mentioning of the former manager of the Petrila mining Company, Adrian Necula, who was initially sentenced to 7 years and 6 months of imprisonment after the mining accident. Next the current situation is presented, namely a team of rescuers who are trying to put out a fire in the exploitation area of the mine, a fire caused by the self ignition of the coal. If the team does not succeed to put out the fire in three digging cycles, then the coal extraction in that part has to be stopped. The last part of the article presents again the former manager, who is a member in the rescue team and is fighting the fire alongside the miners who were part of the rescue team at the time of the disaster.

So, both journalists use a narrative structure but in a different manner: Bob Weaver provides figures and names and leave the facts to speak for themselves, while Marius Mitrache combines the narrative approach with explanations and descriptions of the situation, presenting the causes of the accident and the regulations related to the mine operation.

Thus, from the very beginning, two different positions can be identified - the US journalist accuses the mine owners and supports his position with facts and figures; the Romanian journalist describes the current rescuing operation, provides technical explanations and generally presents the former manager in an ambiguous manner as both the responsible for the explosion and a saviour, as he is trying to put out the fire.

### 3.3. Evaluative language used

#### *3.3.1. Attitude – affect*

In the US article the main feelings conveyed are revolt and sadness, both high. These feelings are expressed in the headline “Hang down Your Head and Cry”[2], a feeling triggered by the Big Branch Disaster.

[2] Hang Down Your Head and Cry is a well-known song in North Carolina about the murder of Laura Foster and the man who was sentenced to death for it.

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The feelings are strong and indicate the journalist's reaction to the disaster as well as to the way in which it was managed. Some of the words used are: *tragedy*, *safety and environmental violations*, *cat-and-mouse games played by the regulators with Mountain State extractors* (Weaver 2014). In the Romanian article, affect is less present, the feeling conveyed being mainly worry with median intensity: "locul în care a izbucnit focul este unicul front din mina Petrila de unde se mai extrage cărbune acum*"* [The place where the fire broke out is the only one in the Petrila mine from where coal is still extracted] (Mitrache 2011). The headline also indicates an ambiguous attitude towards the former manager, where the feelings are sadness combined with admiration.

### *3.3.2. Attitude - judgement*

In both articles the type of judgement is social sanction. In the US article the intensity is high and is expressed by means of irony and adjectives. Irony is achieved by contrasting the feelings of the victim's families with the attitude adopted by the officials, who describe the disaster as an 'act of god': "Like most disasters in West Virginia, the company called it an accident or just another 'act of god'", this indicating that the people in charge of safety refuse to assume responsibility for it. There is also an ironic contrast between the politicians who are wailing about the tragedy and the victims and their families. "For those victims and their families, after the wailing of politicians about the tragedy and the protestations of over- regulation, we can only 'hang down our head and cry'. "Another instance of bitter irony, indicating again social sanction, is the way in which King Coal is described: "It stole everything it hadn't bothered to buy, lands deeds, private homes, and ultimately, the souls of its men and women".

The adjectives used also indicate social sanction: "flagrant safety violations", "egregious crime", while the representatives of the authorities are called *coal outfits*, which denies their human character.

The American journalist describes two parties – the authorities (bringing together owners, regulators, politicians, lawyers) and miners, whose judgment is passed.

In the Romanian article the headline itself denotes a dual attitude towards the person responsible for the mining disaster - it is a combination of social esteem - rescuer - and social sanction - he is guilty of the explosion in Petrila: "[v]inovat pentru explozia de la Petrila, salvator în subteran" [Guilty for the explosion in Petrila, rescuer in the pit].

The efforts of the rescue team are evaluated in terms of social esteem too, namely capacity and tenacity: "de câteva zile, salvatorii de la Petrila şi Salvamin se

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chinuiesc să stingă un foc care a apărut în subteran în zona de exploatare" [For several days the rescuers from Petrila and Salvamin have been struggling to put out a fire that broke out in the pit in the exploitation area.]

In the US article the feelings are of revolt, contempt and disgust towards the authority, while in the Romanian one the feeling conveyed is sadness; the Romanian journalist's the position is closer to that of the officials, whose point of view is presented in an objective way, appraising being less marked.

*3.3.3. Engagement*

Both articles are heteroglossic, as other points of view are brought into the text; however, the sources are slightly different.

In the US article the sources quoted are: the former CEO, a senator, the trade union leader, a bereaved mother and a novelist. In most cases the politicians and officials are quoted indirectly, while the people sharing the same opinion as the journalist are quoted directly. Two points of views are mainly brought under focus – the official one (the names of the officials are not usually given e.g. *Massey Energy, MSAH report*, *coal outfits and their political allies*), which conveys lack of humanity. In all the cases where the authorities are quoted the position is that of disclaim. Linguistically impersonal constructions are used, for instance *it was called*: "Like most mining disaster is it was called an accident or just another 'act of god'". When the views of the opposite side are presented, the people's names and relations to the victims are provided: "Shereen Adkins, who lost her son in the disaster", Denise Giardina, author of the book Storming Heaven. Thus the journalist implies that he shares the same attitude as his readers. The journalist brings in another voice, this time referring to the famous case of Tom Dooley that was the source of a famous song: the hit *Hand down your head and cry*.

So, in terms of engagement two opposite positions are presented. The US journalist sides with the miners and their families, a position which he takes for granted. The article is heteroglossic, the main tendencies being disclaim and proclaim and dialogically contractive as the journalist imposes his own stance, aligning with the victims and disaligning with the official voices.

The Romanian article is also heteroglossic as several sources are quoted but the position expressed is contradictory. The safety inspectors are indirectly quoted, as in the US article: "Potrivit inspectorilor cu securitatea în muncă dacă în decursul a trei cicluri de săpare salvatorii nu reuşesc să oprească arderea şi nu elimină jarul, exploatarea cărbunelui în acel front va trebui să fie oprită" [According to mine safety inspectors, if during three digging cycles the rescuers do not succeed in

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putting the fire out and do not eliminate the embers, the coal exploitation in that sector will have to be stopped]. However, the other official source is directly quoted; the source is Constantin Jujan, the genenal manager of the Petroșani National Hard Coal Company who confirms the presence of the former manager in the rescue team: "Este un program la care se lucrează cu salvatori de la Petrila şi de la SALVAMIN, Aurelian Necula este în componenţa echipelor de salvare de la Salvamin"[It is a program which involves rescuers from Petrila and SALVAMIN, Aurelian Necula is a member of the rescue teams from SALVAMIN].

So, both articles display hetroglossic engagement, with more external voices in the Romanian one. The US article adopts a dialogical position with two variants – disclaim – for the authorities voices and endorse – for the common people. The US journalist engages his audience to adopt his own position, displaying a contractive attitude for the official position and an expansive position for the perspective he empathises with. Overall, Bob Weaver resorts to a dialogically contractive position, as all the other voices are presented in such a way as to support his stance The Romanian article is a dialogically expensive text, as several points of view are presented and none endorsed. Mitrache brings into the article several voices, whom he neither rejects nor supports. This lends the text a contradictory character as the former manager can be perceived both as a guilty person and a rescuer.

*3.3.4.Graduation*

The analysis of the graduation means also indicates similarities and differences.

In the *Hur Herald* article, the type of graduation used is a combination of prototypicality (*the accident is a clear example of what mining disasters mean*) and scalar/ force, which is both intensified (*highest contestation rate*) and quantified (*enough evidence*), the prototypical type of graduation predominating.

Bob Weaver intensifies his appraisal by several linguistic means: adjectives (e.g. flagrant safety violations, critical safety violations, the highest contestation rate), adverbs ( e.g. regulators long playing cat-and-mouse games with Mountain State extractors), degrees of comparison (e.g. Massey Energy… had the highest contestation rate of any coal mine), and repetition of similar semantic items ( e.g. the mining companies have stolen everything – land deeds, private homes, and ultimately the souls of its men and women) or repetition of numbers, pointing to the high number of safety violations and high penalties the company was to pay (e.g. penalties: $1.89 million, $10,8 million, 16,600 unresolved appeals, $209 million criminal liabilities, 1,422 citations). All the graduation devices in the US article are upscaled, which indicates once again the journalist's strong position.

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In the *Valea Jiului Gazette*, the graduation is of a scalar/force kind and the means of expressing quantification are less diverse: very few adjectives (e.g. the area that the rescue team is struggling to put out – is the "only" one that is exploited – which points to the importance of the rescuing operation), and adverbs(e.g. *de câteva zile, salvatorii de la Petrila şi Salvamin se chinuiesc să stingă un foc* [for several days the rescuers in Petrila and Salvamin have been struggling to put out the fire…])

So, while the US article uses a wide range of linguistic means to strengthen the author's position, the Romanian one resorts to very few ones to describe the efforts of the rescue team and the importance of their action.

## 4. Conclusions

Both articles deal with the same topic, namely the presentation of the mining disaster and the current situation of the people responsible for major mining accident; overall, the US article is highly critical of the authorities and the way they have dealt with the situation, while the Romanian one adopts a position closer to the official one. In terms of agency, the journalists' attitudes are different. Bob Weaver points to the King Coal as the main agent of the mining disaster, which would include officials (politicians, and judges) and company managers. Petrache adopts an ambiguous attitude, implying that the person responsible for the accident is the former manager of the company, who is also presented as a saviour.

In terms of appraisal, the US article conveys disgust, revolt and contempt for the authorities, while the Romanian one adopts an ambivalent attitude towards the guilty person, whose situation is presented as complex.

In terms of judgment, the US article includes both social esteem and social sanction, while the Romanian one is more focused on social esteem. In the US article the judgment is more direct and stronger, as indicated by the graduation, while the Romanian journalist resorts to attributed judgment.

Both articles have a heteroglossic type of engagement, the difference being that the US article presents the official attitude in an ironical way, openly siding with the miners. The Romanian article provides quotes from several official sources and tends to adopt a more objective attitude. The Romanian journalist's voice is more backgrounded, while the US authorial voice is more foregrounded.

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Graduation is used in both articles as the journalists use intensification to describe the mining disaster; the US article includes both prototypicality and force and resorts to a wider range of linguistic means to achieve intensification (adjectives, adverbials, repetition, strong words), while in the Romanian fewer such intensification means can be noticed.

The main reason for these differences is the fact that the US article is an opinion one, which provides comment on the mining disaster after four years and critically presents the way in which the officials have managed it while the Romanian one is a combination between news and comment, which accounts for the sometimes ambivalent attitude of the journalist.

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