"Now there is a real effort to make sure people are adhering to orders they are supposed to be adhering to."

Attitude construction through war journalism

Stanca Măda and Răzvan Săftoiu
Transilvania University of Brașov, Romania

It is widely regarded that war journalism is centred on the dichotomy good/evil, with "good" being (almost always) on the author's side, who promotes a type of discourse that readers should adhere to. In this paper, we put forward an examination of events in various conflict areas (Afghanistan, Iran, Syria, Senegal, and Dagestan) in order to identify and analyse linguistic strategies employed by journalists in order to construct attitudes. We refer to such strategies as: stance-taking patterns, source identification, use of military jargon, and inculcation of a politically-correct way of thinking. In order to carry out this analysis, we selected ten articles from representative American daily newspapers reporting on conflictive events. The data were gathered starting from the idea of simultaneity of opinions and of events. This feature allows our analysis to focus on recurrent patterns in the articles.

Keywords: war journalism, attitude construction, linguistic strategies, stance-taking

1. Introduction

For more than two decades, there has been growing interest in the study of *media discourse* in all its forms, ranging from televised and radio news programmes to printed and online media. Each decade had its stories which were presented on the front page of the newspapers and news bulletins around the world, but there has been a shift in focus after the fall of the Berlin Wall towards the "transition countries", i.e. newly-formed republics from what used to be Yugoslavia, then the Middle East and closer to the present days, Greece and Turkey.

Lang
ISSN

BDD-A25564 © 2014 John Benjamins
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:52:19 UTC)

Within the broad research area of *media discourse*, one may distinguish a particular type of discourse, *war journalism*, whose particular focus is to cover armed conflicts around the world. This type of journalism has been under close scrutiny since it seems to have a powerful effect on the audience, making it adhere to the points of view presented in the articles — either in favour or against the war. Thus, war journalism plays a powerful role in increasing or decreasing tensions, and in presenting positively or negatively the parties involved in the conflict. In other words, is it *war journalism* or *peace journalism*? In our opinion, it is a matter of interpretation, opinion and stance-taking. In their articles, authors do not simply write words, but they shape attitudes, make representations of 'the other', present and (sometimes) adopt (only) a particular point of view.

We put forward an examination of current events in hot conflict areas in the world as they appear in prestige press of the USA in order to identify and analyse linguistic strategies employed by war journalists to construct attitudes. Starting from the features of media communication in general, and war journalism in particular, we address the issue of journalists' role in forming opinions about major conflicts worldwide, in a manner that appears strategically manipulative.

Media live by the size and composition of their audiences (Bell 1991). Six out of seven characteristics of mass communication focus on the audience (McQuail 1969, 7): large audience as compared to other communication situations, public accessibility to the news content, heterogeneity of the audience, simultaneous contact with widely separated individuals, one directional flow and impersonality of mass communication. Mass audience is a creation of modern society which allows connections between people from various cultural, social and geographical backgrounds — audience members can be anywhere in places where technology, physical conditions and social customs permit. Apart from the disjunction of place between the communicator and the audience, there is also a disjunction of time, which makes room (especially in the written media) for interpretation and analysis of events in a subjective manner. Although feedback is not absent from the mass communication process, there are few cases when the audience member is on equal terms with the communicators. Isolation from the audience is a characteristic of mass communicators (Bell 1991). Yet, the more *mass* the medium is, the greater the isolation of the communicator. However, the mechanisms of influencing the opinion of large audiences and of constructing attitudes function irrespective of the separation between the two communicative instances or between the members of the mass audience.

In recent years, war journalism has become a very popular genre among journalists and researchers in the field of media studies, partly due to the recent conflicts worldwide. Sober descriptions of the rules of engagement in war journalism and its moral implications (Allan and Zelizer 2004), historical approaches

BDD-A25564 © 2014 John Benjamins
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:52:19 UTC)

linked to civil war journalism (Risley 2012, Sachsman, Rushing and Morris 2008), peace-making perspectives (Keeble, Tulloch and Zollmann 2010), the role of the information war and its journalistic practices (Tumber and Webster 2006), and testimonies of some of the best frontline correspondents, much of them being placed in appropriate historical contexts, along with detailed academic analysis of Afghan conflicts (Keeble and Mair 2010) are just a few of the issues discussed in the literature.

The present paper embraces a linguistic approach, in an attempt to explain the strategies employed by American war journalists in order to build and enforce a certain attitude in their audience regarding the conflicts in which the USA are involved. After presenting the theoretical and methodological frameworks of the study, we move on to analyse some linguistic strategies for attitude construction such as stance-taking, source identification, and the use of military and journalistic jargons.

2. Theoretical and methodological frameworks

2.1 A linguistic framework

The general linguistic framework of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) appears as indispensible when discussing attitude-construction and inculcation of politically correct way of thinking. Within this framework, the concepts of ideology and power, as well as how language is involved in processes of social change are explained (Fairclough 1989, 1992) and addressed to with "a focus on dominance relations by elite groups and institutions as they are being enacted, legitimated or otherwise reproduced by text and talk" (van Dijk 1993, 249).

Van Dijk (2006) put forward a socio-cognitive approach in order to study the production and reproduction of stereotypes in newspaper headlines, more specifically to analyse how minorities are presented and perceived. Based on a syntactic and semantic analysis of newspaper headlines, Wodak and Busch (2004, 113) drew the conclusion that the others are typically depicted as "perpetrators and agents, as anonymous and criminal, whereas the police and victims are passivized and presented as suffering".

In their articles, war journalists do not simply put words together in order to present facts from the conflict area, but their linguistic *actions* require a *reaction* from the audience. It has become clear that war stories do not just communicate a meaning, but they are meant to accomplish something: convince the audience of a belief, legitimise actions or even get someone to do something or act in a particular manner. Such aspects may be discussed by employing the theoretical model of

BDD-A25564 © 2014 John Benjamins
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:52:19 UTC)

legitimisation, which was defined as a "methodological dialogue between cognitive, pragmatic and lexical dimensions of discourse" (Cap 2008, x). Legitimisation was first discussed by Brown and Levinson (1987) as one of the various positive politeness strategies, which is employed to explain certain past, present or future actions, which further mitigate a potential threatening act. Cap takes the notion of legitimisation further and defines it as "a linguistic enactment of the speaker's right to be obeyed" (2005, 12). In other words, legitimisation gives authority to the speaker (in our analysis, to the war journalist) and "provides rationale for listing reasons to be obeyed" (Cap 2005, 13).

The discussion of the interplay between various linguistic strategies employed by journalists in order to make the audience adhere to a certain point of view uses lexicology and semantics to analyse the elements of military and journalistic jargons which appear in our data.

2.2 Methodological issues

The methodological issues presented here focus mainly on the description of data, since the analytical approaches in the paper are specific to each of the theoretical frameworks mentioned above.

The data used for the present study comprise ten texts belonging to a particular genre of media literature: war journalism.[1] The reasons for choosing such texts are mainly linked to their cognitive and affective components, meant to construct attitudes and to create emotional reactions when being read. At the same time, journalistic texts describing war are based on facts and real-life events, an aspect which is believed to contribute to the development of authentic emotions. What is more, texts belonging to war journalism make use of quality information and may offer interesting insights of the strategies involving the management of information in times of conflict. Moreover, the manipulation of information on behalf of the journalists leads to decisions being made, that can further influence individuals and nations.

The war stories selected for the present article were issued in the USA, in the same period of time (between August and September 2012), which allows for a simultaneity of opinions and events. In our analysis, we employed a two-fold approach: (i) a comparative analysis of the same event presented in four differ-

1. See the source texts, noted AFG1, AFG2, AFG3, AFG4, AFG5, SYR1, SYR2, LIB, IRA, RUS, in the references section of the paper.

BDD-A25564 © 2014 John Benjamins
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:52:19 UTC)

ent newspapers from a unitary perspective[2] in order to determine similar attitudes and reaction from the audience, and (ii) a discussion on articles presenting simultaneous conflicting events, taking place in various places on Earth, from different perspectives, and having different expectations regarding attitude construction.

The choice of American newspapers was justified by the development of war journalism as a genre among media professionals and researchers on the one hand, and by the strong implication of the USA in military conflicts and missions worldwide, on the other hand.

3. Linguistic strategies for attitude construction

As stated in Section 1, journalists write war stories with a double purpose: to present facts and to create emotions. In their articles, journalists seem to play the role of a ventriloquist who gives voice, at the same time, to the authorities (when giving figures, describing actions with specific military jargon) and to his/ her own point of view (when selecting semantically positive or negative words in order to describe the results of a military action). In other words, the war journalist *takes a stance*, adopts a certain position to the events (s)he presents, either by getting involved in the message or by completely staying aside from the story.

3.1 Stance-taking

Stance-taking describes the complex activities accomplished through language, from evaluation of the world and the interlocutors, to the expression of emotions, beliefs and desires, claiming or disavowing authority, or even creation of alignment or disalignment with others. Stance-taking has also been discussed as part of persuasion in political communication (Vasilescu 2010, 371), the speaker (i.e. the politician) projecting self into discourse in order to construct a competent, trustworthy, powerful professional identity. In this section, we adopt the following working definition of stance-taking: "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 dimension of the socio-cultural field" (Du Bois 2007, 163).

When describing stance-taking by assertion, Du Bois (2007, 141) distinguishes between objective, subjective and intersubjective stance and elaborates the "stance triangle", a tri-act which contains the *first evaluating subject*, the *second*

2. For the present paper, we used electronic versions of the following newspapers: *The New York Times* – NYT, *The Washington Post* – WP, *The Washington Times* – WT, *Los Angeles Times* – LAT.

BDD-A25564 © 2014 John Benjamins
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:52:19 UTC)

evaluating subject and the shared *object of evaluation*. Within the triangle, there are three stance-taking activities: evaluation, positioning and alignment. When an individual *evaluates* an object it means (s)he orients to it and characterizes it as having some specific quality or value, that may be affective or epistemic; when an individual *positions* towards an object, (s)he invokes socio-cultural values with respect to the object, and when an individual *aligns* with an object it means (s)he adopts, directly or indirectly, a point of view between two stances and, implicitly, between two stance takers.

War journalists play an important role in creating expectations and making readers adhere to a particular point of view. In other words, they are social actors whose stance matters and may make a difference when it comes to discussing about war or peace journalism. Let us consider the following excerpts from AFG1:

(1) "The training of our partner forces has been paused while we go through this revetting," said a spokesman for American Special Operations. […] "It may take a month or two," the spokesman said, adding that "this has been done as a precautionary measure. We are still very confident in our vetting procedure."

The journalist quotes a representative of the authorities (*a spokesman for American Special Operations*) in order to give authority to his article, thus orienting his readership towards what is going on in Afghanistan. The journalist is nothing but a messenger of the military official discourse. Thus, the position of the journalist towards the message is an objective one since he does not project self into his text, but merely records facts and events. It is at this point when objectivity stops and the journalist 'mocks' dialogue with his readership in order to explain in plain language what is going on:

(2) The Afghan Local Police program is a relatively new program that has sent American Special Operations forces into more rural areas to train Afghan recruits who are not part of the main Afghan army or police. These police forces, while comparatively small in number, are regarded as an important stopgap to secure remote corners of Afghanistan as international troops withdraw.

The journalist becomes the 'translator' of the official discourse, and he uses words and phrases that show involvement in the actual message: *a **relatively** new program*, ***comparatively small** in number*, *an **important** stopgap **to secure** remote corners of Afghanistan*. Under the guise of a dialogue with his readership, meant to explain the military jargon (e.g. *vetting*), the journalist projects self in discourse and the text becomes subjective. In other words, the reader is presented a stance object — the vetting procedure (i.e. training Afghan recruits to fight together with

BDD-A25564 © 2014 John Benjamins
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:52:19 UTC)

the Americans), and two evaluating subjects — the army official (quoted by the journalist) and the journalist himself. The actual procedure is presented objectively, but its role for the further development of the conflict is presented subjectively: what the Americans are doing is important, because it is done in order to secure the boundaries of Afghanistan. It is the latter message that the journalist is trying to convey and, throughout the article, his aim will be to make the audience adhere to this point of view.

The following excerpt comes from the same article: "American Special Operations forces have suffered devastating attacks in recent weeks by Afghans close to them." The involvement of the journalist is obvious in the lexical choices he made: have *suffered devastating attacks*, Afghans *close* to them. The choice of the evaluative adjective *devastating* suggests extreme destruction and may make readers get emotionally involved in the story, thus adhering more easily to the point of view that Americans make sacrifices and fight for a just cause, while being wrongfully attacked by people they want to train. The author does not appear to take the side of any of the parties involved in the conflict; on the contrary, he uses the adverb *close* in order to emphasize the good relationships between the two nations leaving the readers make the inference: one usually does not become aggressive with the persons he is getting on well.

When discussing objective, subjective and intersubjective stance, Vasilescu (2010: 369) puts forward six strategies for projecting self into the discourse, depending on the type of information the speaker/ author wants to present regarding the propositional content or/ and the interlocutor: *personal identity, assessment, commitment, degree of (non-)affiliation, emotions, responsibility*. When the author takes a subjective stance and gets involved in the actual text, one of his aims seems to be that of creating common ground with the audience. Claiming common ground indicates that the author (the war journalist) and the addressee (the readers) share information, thoughts and emotions, as well as specific wants, including goals and values. Cap (2008, 49–50) considers that common ground is based on "a construction of a mental frame shared by the speaker and the addressee" which is related to "enactment of [the speaker's] credibility, imposition of common discourse goals or attracting the addressee to a particular course of action".

In war journalism, the author tries to attract readers to a particular course of action as well, that of self-discovering and (eventually) adopting the message behind the actual words. To put it differently, the use of particular linguistic strategies and lexical choices accomplishes *social* and *rhetorical* actions.

Example (3) is the first section from AFG1, when the author draws the attention of the audience towards an event going on in Afghanistan: Americans have stopped the training procedures for the Afghan Local Police.

BDD-A25564 © 2014 John Benjamins
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:52:19 UTC)

(3) The training of Afghan Local Police and special operations forces has been put on hold while their American trainers conduct stricter vetting to try to root out any infiltrators or new recruits who could pose risks to the coalition troops working with them.

The journalist does not stop at simply recording the facts (*The training* […] *has been put on hold*), but he gets involved in the message by choosing semantically marked verbs (try *to root out*) and modals (*could* pose risks) just to leave it to the reader to draw the conclusion. The second part of the discourse (American trainers […] *try to root out* any infiltrators or new recruits who *could pose risks* to *the coalition troops working with them*) is an indirect blame on the Afghan trainees who should be eliminated because they could turn against the Americans who are teaching them defence courses. Although not explicitly, the journalist suggests the reader to make the following inference: ***we*** (Americans) are fighting for a ***good*** cause (justice, peace, welfare of a community) as opposed to a ***bad*** cause (injustice, war, dissociation). *Good* and *bad* are evaluative adjectives that become *attitudinal objects*[3] and get their meaning in a particular *context*, in a certain *community* of speakers and at a certain *time*. Thus, what is *good* from the journalist's point of view may be *bad* from the reader's point of view; what is *good* at a certain moment may easily become *bad* in the next moment. In the articles chosen for this paper, ***goodness*** is constructed by an overt use of positive words that refer to Americans: *confident*, *correct*, *make effort*, *Western mentors*.

Throughout the articles, journalists strive to convince their audience that the presence of the American troops in Afghanistan is beneficial for Afghans with whom they have shared a military partnership and have established good relationships since the beginning of the conflict. There are short narratives inserted in articles which focus on everyday joint activities meant to reach a common goal, such as establishing joint commissions, procedures and criteria. This is how one of the journalists (AFG2) describes the situation in Afghanistan:

(4) The slogan for the U.S. — Afghan military partnership, printed on billboards and in pamphlets, is "Shohna ba Shohna" — shoulder to shoulder. NATO leaders say they have no plans to distance themselves from their partners. But inevitably, aspects of the relationship are being called into question.

3. Osgood, Suci, and Tannenbaum (1957) proposed one of the most influential instruments, which was based on the semantic differential of the meaning that people give to a word or concept. This procedure allows people to reveal an attitude by rating a concept on a scale of verbal opposites, such as *good* and *bad* with several blank spaces in between the poles. The midpoint in the blank spaces can be an indicator of neutrality. The instrument reveals the particular dimensions that people use to qualify their experience, the types of concepts that are regarded as similar or different in meaning, and the intensity of meaning given to a particular concept.

BDD-A25564 © 2014 John Benjamins
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:52:19 UTC)

The relationship between Americans and Afghans is described as a "military partnership", which leads to the idea that the two parties have agreed on certain rights and obligations in order to fulfil a contract. A partnership involves agreement and cooperation, but the events depicted in the war stories present a different situation: one of the parties, i.e. Afghans, has breached the partnership and Americans are forced to reconsider its terms out of security reasons. In other words, Americans will have to find a solution to the problem in a peaceful manner.

If we analyse to what extent the war journalist takes responsibility in a story, we will say that (s)he moves along a continuum whose main constituents are low, moderate and high. In example (4) above, the author displayed intersubjective stance and a low degree of responsibility since he recorded voices from outside the text (he quoted an authority, namely *a spokesman for American Special Operations*).

When quotations from official army representatives are not available, the war journalist may use vague language thus avoiding involvement in the text.

(5) Opposition fighters in Syria said early Saturday that they had captured an air defense base in the eastern province of Deir el-Zour, taking at least 16 soldiers captive and seizing weapons and ammunition in what appeared to be part of a broader rebel offensive against Syrian military installations in several parts of the country.

In this fragment, the author describes a particular situation in Syria (capturing of an air defense base), suggesting the event was part of a larger military action that may be attributed to rebels: *what **appeared to be part of** a broader rebel offensive*. Throughout the article (SYR1), the author does not take a definite stance, mitigating his actual choice of words:

(6) Last week, rebel commanders *claimed to have destroyed* several helicopters during attacks on two separate military airports in the northern Idlib Province. […] One video, uploaded on Friday, *appeared to show* a man holding a complete system. […] One of the dead soldiers is covered in *what looks like ash*.

In the excerpts above, the messages are left on the audience to be decoded. Thus, readers come to realize that rebels have actually destroyed helicopters, that in the video there appears a man holding antiaircraft missiles, and that one of the victims was covered in ash. This is yet another strategy used by war journalists in order to make their audience reach the conclusions the author actually intended to write but never expressed them as such. Drawing a conclusion on your own may be a rewarding activity and may make audience adopt more easily a point of view without even realizing they were led to it. Thus, the war journalist is disguised as

BDD-A25564 © 2014 John Benjamins
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:52:19 UTC)

a messenger who simply transmits bits of information which are "glazed" with vague language, leaving room for the author to deny responsibility.

3.2 Source identification

As discussed in the previous section, journalists may choose to project responsibility in a low, moderate or high degree. This shows how engaged authors are in stance-taking activities and it becomes particularly evident when relating to the sources of information: they *share* the same point of view with the source, they are *committed* to the respective point of view up to a certain degree or they make *generalizations* and avoid taking responsibility by using vague language.

When in a conflict situation, one may find information either from locals (by hearsay) or from officials (by spokespersons). When it comes to positioning oneself to the source of information, the journalist may give it a *definite description* — most often the military rank (brigade general, marine general, major, colonel) followed by the name (full name/ surname), or an *indefinite description* — invoking categories (a spokesman, NATO official(s), an army captain). No matter the type, descriptions are used in order to give authority to the text and to create authenticity. It is quite common to use both types of descriptions in a war story, as shown in the following excerpt from AFG1:

(7) "The training is definitely still going on for the regular A.N.A. and A.N.P.," said *Maj. Steve Neta of the Canadian Air Force*, *a spokesman for the NATO training mission* in Afghanistan.

By means of the definite description, the source of information is identified by military rank (*Major*), full name (*Steve Neta*) and affiliation (*the Canadian Air Force*), while the additional indefinite description (*a spokesman for the NATO training mission*) gives further details about the person. Indefinite descriptions do not have the same function when used independently, as in the example below:

(8) "The training of our partner forces has been paused while we go through this revetting," said *a spokesman for American Special Operations*. The spokesman, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said the suspension affects only Afghan Local Police and Afghan special operations and commando forces.

The journalist quoted "a spokesman", invoking thus a specific category. Referring in discourse by means of categories originates from the work of Sacks (1974) which was extended by other researchers (Psathas 1999, Pomerantz and Mandelbaum 2005, Schegloff 2007). Membership categorisation analysis (MCA) starts from the premise there are classifications that may be used to describe persons and their

BDD-A25564 © 2014 John Benjamins
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:52:19 UTC)

associated activities: worker, brother, mother, friend etc. Employing such social categories (or labels) helps people organise themselves into specific groups that reflect their identities (Zimmerman 2007, 72). Sacks considered that people use membership categories because they apply two rules: *the economy rule* (using a single membership category in order to describe a member of some population) and *the consistency rule* (once a first member of a given population has been categorized, that category may be further used to categorize other members of the population). By explicitly referring to the category of *spokespersons*, the journalist considers that his audience "will draw on their understanding of the activities, motives, rights, responsibilities, and/ or competencies associated with incumbents of the category" (Pomerantz and Mandelbaum 2005, 152). In other words, the author talked to an official and obtained valuable information. Moreover, this action is relevant for understanding how the author relates to his source of information: since the person gave sensitive information to the author, he wants to remain anonymous. Apart from protecting the source, using indefinite descriptions helps the author focus more on ***what*** is said rather than on ***who*** said it.

3.3 The interplay between military and journalistic jargons

In a similar manner with other journalistic texts (news reports, editorials), war news stories are built based on macrorules and news schemata. The discourse is structured around one or more topics which can be grasped by the reader with the help of three macrorules: (1) delition of information, (2) generalization, and (3) construction. At the same time, the news schemata build the syntax of news stories, having as formal categories: the Headline, the Lead (or the Summary), the Background, several Events (or Episodes), the Attribution, the Setting, the Consequences or the Follow-up (van Dijk 1996, 155–185).

In the beginning of the story, journalists concentrate the basic facts which give orientation to a story: *who*, *what*, *when* and *where*, preserving the *how* or the *why* for the rest of the news story. One cannot separate news *form* and news *content*. The informative content of a journalistic text is always enhanced by a professional form. The values of news drive the way in which news is presented. News actors and events are evaluated by the audience in terms of *negativity*, *recency*, *proximity*, *meaningfulness and relevance*, *consonance and personalization*, *unambiguity*, *unexpectedness*, *superlativeness*, *eliteness*, *attribution*, and *facticity* (Bell 1991). In the case of war stories in our data, negativity does not appear to be the key factor in evaluating newsworthiness. Nor is unexpectedeness, recency or proximity, due to the topic and the distance in time and space between the event and its journalistic record. In war news stories, there is more emphasis on facticity, eliteness and attribution to create value.

BDD-A25564 © 2014 John Benjamins
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:52:19 UTC)

Facticity describes the degree to which a story contains the kinds of facts and figures on which hard news thrives: locations (*Kabul, Afghanistan* — AFG1, AFG2, AFG4; *Beirut, Lebanon* — SYR; *Moscow* — RUS; *Dakar, Senegal* — MAL; *in the Syrian town of Azaz, on the outskirts of Aleppo* — SYR2; *Beirut* — SYR2), names (see the discussion on elitness below), and numbers (*more than 350,000 Afghan National Army soldiers and Afghan National Police members; at least 15 Americans or other international coalition troops have been killed in just the past month; at least 45 Western military troops; 1000 new Afghan Local Police recruits; there are 25,000 Afghan soldiers and more than 4,000 Afghan national policemen in training; existing force of more than 16,000; On Aug. 17, two American Special Forces members were killed* — all these numbers appear in AFG1 alone).

Elitness of the news actors contribute to impress the audience and create newsworthiness. The names used throughout the analysed articles represent political leaders and diplomats (a), administrative personnel (b), spokespersons for various institutions and communities (c), and, most frequently, military force (d).

a. *President Vladimir V. Putin* (RUS)
President Hamid Karzai (AFG4 and AFG5)
Afghan President Hamid Karzai (AFG3)
President Obama (IRA)
Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu (IRA)
U.S. Ambassador Daniel Shapiro in Jerusalem (IRA)
New Syria representative for the United Nations and Arab League (…), Lakhdar Brahimi, a veteran Algerian diplomat (SYR1)

b. *Neyamatullah Khan, chief of the Musa Qala district* (AFG5)
Daouda Maiga, who used to run a state development program in Kidal, a region of nearly 70,000 people before the Islamist takeover emptied it (MAL)
Fabrizio Foshini of the Afghan Analysts Network (AFG4)
Valiulla Yakupov, the top Muslim official in charge of education in Kazan, the capital city of Tatarstan (RUS)

c. *Patrick McCormick, a spokesman for the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)* (SYR2)
Daoud Ahmadi, a spokesman for the Helmand provincial government (AFG5)
Noman Hatefi, a spokesman for the Afghan army corps in eastern Afghanistan (AFG5)
Mr. Graybeal, the NATO spokesman (AFG3)
The spokesman, who goes by the nom de guerre Zain al Deen al Demashki (SYR2)
Shamsullah Sahrahi, a tribal elder (AFG4)
Sheik Said Afandi, a Sufi scholar and spiritual leader of Muslims in Dagestan (RUS)

BDD-A25564 © 2014 John Benjamins
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:52:19 UTC)

d. *Defense Ministry* (AFG5 and AFG3)
The vice chief of Australia's defense force, Mark Binskin (AFG2)
Defense Secretary Leon E. Panetta (AFG4)
Army Gen. Martin E. Dempsey, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (IRA)
Maj. Steve Neta of the Canadian Air Force (AFG1)
The senior commander for Special Operations forces in Afghanistan (AFG2)
Maj. Gen. Tony Thomas, who oversees Special Operation forces in Afghanistan (AFG2)
Army Lt. Gen. Michael Flynn, who now directs the Pentagon's Defense Intelligence Agency (AFG3)
Marine Gen. John Allen, the top NATO commander in Afghanistan (AFG3)
Brig. Gen. Gunter Katz, a spokesman for NATO's International Security Assistance Force (AFG4)
Col. Mohammad Akbar Stanikzai, an intelligence officer at the Afghan army's recruitment headquarters in Kabul (AFG4)

All these people act not only as news actors, but also as sources of information. Besides being well-known persons in the respective field (politics, military), they give credibility and attribution to the news story, increasing its chances and worthiness. Journalists operate with this information at different levels, using various techniques: *reproduction* of source material, *selection*, and *deletion* in dealing with input texts offered by news agencies, spokespeople, or other sources. At the same time, they employ *summarizing*, *generalization*, *particularization*, *translating*, and *restyling* (van Dijk 1996, Bell 1991).

One of the most effective strategies of creating attitude is reflected in the use of jargon. War journalists make use of military jargon in order to gain the trust of their audience in the accuracy of the information and sources. In war journalism, military language is used to describe and give character to news stories, while certain violent expressions not only that they are not avoided, but they are carefully constructed to reflect journalists' attitude towards the conflicts and to create emotional impression on their audience.

In the data, we have encountered numerous examples of common military language that is used to describe:

- places: *air defense base, an air force site* — RUS; *high-security zone, military facilities* — SYR2; *field* — AFG3; *combat outposts, induction center* — AFG4.
- operations: *action, the shooting, to counter these attacks, to report suspicious activity, banning, screening criteria and procedures* — AFG1; *capture, solitary confinement* — SYR1; *operational tempo* — AFG3; *withdrawal of combat troops* — AFG5; *assaults* — AFG4.

BDD-A25564 © 2014 John Benjamins
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:52:19 UTC)

- services: *army, police* — AFG1; *suicide bombing* — RUS; *occupation, a military coup, takeover, retaking* — MAL; *opposition, defend, investigations, operations* — AFG2;
- actors:
  - military forces of various levels: *recruits, special operation forces, soldiers, counterparts, troops, commando forces, counterintelligence teams, coalition commanders* — AFG1; *officers, policemen* — AFG2; *patrol, army corps* — AFG5; *militia, rank, brigade* — AFG3; *field units, echelons, undercover intelligence officers, battalions* — AFG4.
  - adversary forces: *terrorists, militants, criminals* — RUS; *factions* — MAL; *target* — SYR2; *insurgency* — AFG2; *insurgents* — AFG5; *assailants* — AFG4.
  - prisoners and other victims: *captive, prisoners, detainees, antiaircraft missiles, warplanes and helicopters, arsenals* — SYR1; *victims* — RUS; *casualties* — SYR2; *fatalities* — AFG2; *civilians, losses* — AFG5.
- equipment and weapons: *uniforms* — AFG1; *weapons, ammunition* — SYR1; *explosive belt* — RUS; *machine guns* — SYR2; *loaded weapons* — AFG5; *atomic weapons* — IRA; *intelligence databases* — AFG4.
- other military actions: *training* — AFG1; *security measures, incidents, recruitment process, orders, law enforcement, campaign* — AFG2; *nuclear program, to enforce sanctions* — IRA; *war* — AFG4.

Emphatic emotional expressions are used to vividly describe war actions and consequences:

> ***rash*** *of recent attacks,* ***devastating*** *attacks, so-called insider attacks, infiltrators posing as soldiers, to pose risks* — AFG1; *in what* ***appeared to be*** *part of a broader rebel offensive against Syrian military installations, activist groups, soldiers stand over another body, caked in blood, as someone pokes the dead man's head with a rifle* — SYR1; *even for Dagestan, where violence has become relatively commonplace, it was a* ***shockingly*** *bloody day, militants* ***unleashed havoc*** *in Dagestan, extremists may have recruited the gunman to carry out the attack, was shot to death, survived a car bomb* — RUS; *gained a firm military hold, a* ***brutal*** *application of the Shariah law, including public beatings, amputation and a stoning death, calls for an intervention force, religiously indoctrinated guerrilla fighters* — MAL; *two bombs blasts at a Syrian army base, footage of rubble spattered with blood at the site, along with a battered black sport utility vehicle with blown-out windows, mass killing, dozens of bloody corpses spread out in the basement of a mosque in the area, monitoring the death toll, the massacres* — SYR2; *insider killing incidents, insider threat, they were shot at a close range by a man wearing a Afghan army uniform, corruption* — AFG2; *mass killing, music*

BDD-A25564 © 2014 John Benjamins
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:52:19 UTC)

and dancing triggered the violence, wave of violence, gun battle, the assassin was later gunned down, too — AFG5; *violations of sanctions, explosive confrontation, unilateral strike* — IRA; *in-unit body guards, force protection measures, a heightened state of alert* — AFG3; *a patch of blood, American troops are dying at unprecedented rates, a society where arguments are often settled with a Kalashnikov* — AFG4.

The interplay between specific military language and the emotional language is a genre technique employed by war journalists to construct authenticity. At the same time, the use of 'Milspeak'[4] emphasizes the importance of the reported facts. In some cases, the use of military jargon represents a form of reinforcement of the group identity (for instance, in the case of a former military who has become journalist — IRA). Military slang takes the form of specific acronyms/abbreviations, derivations of the NATO Phonetic Alphabet (*regular A.N.A. and A.N.P.* stand for Afghan National Army and Afghan National Police — AFG1). In real-life communication, military slang is often used to reinforce or reflect in a friendly manner inter-service rivalries, but, in the case of journalistic texts, it is used to create a sense of belonging to a generalized national army force. The audience is seen as part of the military force, if we are to take into consideration the highly specialised language used in both the headlines and the body of the article (see the examples above).

The audience is somehow selected based on the ability to comprehend military jargon. Thus, in a sentence such as the following: '*What is left of the Malian Army, divided by* ***a military coup****, has made no move to dislodge them after five months of occupation, and a talked-about West African regional intervention has yet to coalesce.*' (MAL), an ordinary reader might need to make use of a dictionary to find out that **a military coup** (d'état) describes an organized action by the armed forces of a country meant to overthrow and replace its government.

Specific jargon is usually explained by the author of the article: *'rebels had captured shoulder-fired antiaircraft missiles, known as Manpads, but it was unclear whether some had the components to make them functional.*' (SYR1); '*The military called them green-on-blue attacks, a color-coded reference to Afghan and Western forces. Now the preferred, more encompassing term is "insider threat", stemming from the fact that assailants have included not only uniformed police and soldiers, but also civilian members of the Afghan security apparatus…*' (AFG4).

The use of military jargon in war journalism is very productive and, apart from its stylistic value, it has many strategic aims — to construct writer's attitude towards the events, to give rise to certain emotive reactions of the audience, and

4. This word is often a contraction or an acronym and it describes the specific jargon, whether official or otherwise, of the military culture, usually the US military.

BDD-A25564 © 2014 John Benjamins
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:52:19 UTC)

to educate the audience in the spirit of national pride and commitment to the American military forces.

4. Conclusions

In this article, we have examined how current events in conflict areas around the world are depicted in prestige press of the USA with the purpose of identifying and analysing the linguistic strategies employed by war journalists to construct attitudes and make readers adhere to the point of view that what America is doing in conflict areas is good. We were interested in addressing the role journalists play in forming opinions about major conflicts worldwide, in a manner that appears strategically manipulative. In order to carry out the analyses of the selected texts, we have defined the theoretical model, which is essentially based on stance-taking as it is a public and an inherently dialogic action that covers broader sociocultural contexts and has consequences to the interactants.

It became clear that journalists write war stories not just to present facts, but also to create emotions in their readers. War journalists are 'ventriloquists' who voice the authorities and their own point of view, adopting a certain position to the events presented, either by getting involved in the message or by completely staying aside from the story. The author's personal identity is not very visible in the analysed texts — (s)he is more of a giver of facts. Yet, sometimes the author provided information about his/ her emotions concerning the propositional content, evaluating the information in terms of what is good or bad.

In this 'mocking dialogue' with the readers, journalists are trying to convey a point of view, their aim being to make the audience adhere to that particular point of view.

When it comes to positioning themselves to the source of information, war journalists mostly rely on external observers for the sources of information. Either by giving the military rank (brigade general, marine general, major, colonel) followed by the name (full name/ surname), or by invoking categories (a spokesman, NATO official(s), an army captain), the descriptions of the source are used in order to give authority to the text and to create authenticity.

The interplay between military and journalistic jargons in war news stories has demonstrated the linguistic abilities of war journalists in constructing attitude. Having certain strategic aims, the use of military words and expressions contribute to accurately describe the events and determines a selection of the knowledgeable audience. The lexical choices operated by the journalists, especially at the level of the emotional expressions, create stages of implications both from the part of the author, and from the part of the readers.

BDD-A25564 © 2014 John Benjamins
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:52:19 UTC)

References

Allan, Stuart, and Barbie Zelizer (eds). 2004. *Reporting War: Journalism in Wartime*. Oxon, New York: Routledge.

Bell, Allan. 1991. *The Language of News Media*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Brown, Penelope, and Stephen Levinson. 1987. *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Cap, Piotr. 2005. "Language and Legitimization: Developments on the Proximization Model of Political Discourse Analysis". *Lodz Papers in Pragmatics* I: 7–36.

Cap, Piotr. 2008. *Legitimisation in Political Discourse: A Cross-Disciplinary Perspective on the Modern US War Rhetoric*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Du Bois, John W. 2007. "The Stance Triangle". In *Stancetaking in Discourse: Subjectivity, Evaluation, Interaction*, ed. by Robert Englebretson, 139–182. Amsterdam: John Benjamins. DOI: 10.1075/pbns.164.07du

Fairclough, Norman. 1989. *Language and Power*. London: Longman.

Fairclough, Norman. 1992. *Discourse and Social Change*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Keeble, Richard Lance, and John Mair (eds). 2010. *Afghanistan, War and the Media: Deadlines and Frontlines*. Bury St Edmunds: Arima Publishing.

Keeble, Richard Lance, John Tulloch, and Florian Zollmann. 2010. *Peace Journalism, War and Conflict Resolution*. New York: Peter Lang.

McQuail, Dennis. 1969. *Towards a Sociology of Mass Communications. Themes and Issues in Modern Sociology*. London: Collier-Macmillan.

Osgood, Charles Egerton, George John Suci, and Percy Hyman Tannenbaum. 1957. *The Measurement of Meaning*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press.

Pomerantz, Anita, and Jenny Mandelbaum. 2005. "Conversation Analytic Approaches to the Relevance and Uses of Relationship Categories in Interaction." In *Handbook of Language and Social Interaction*, ed. by Kristine L. Fitch, and Robert E. Sanders, 149–171. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Psathas, George. 1999. "Studying the Organization in Action: Membership Categorization and Interaction Analysis." *Human Studies* 22 (2-4): 139–162. DOI: 10.1023/A:1005422932589

Risley, Ford. 2012. *Civil War Journalism. Reflections on the Civil War Era*. Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO.

Sachsman, David B., S. Kittrell Rushing, and Roy Morris Jr. (eds). 2008. *Words at War: The Civil War and American Journalism*. West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press.

Sacks, Harvey. 1974. "On the Analyzability of Stories by Children." In *Ethnomethodology*, ed. by R. Turner, 216–232. Penguin: Harmondsworth.

Schegloff, Emanuel. 2007. "A Tutorial on Membership Categorization". *Journal of Pragmatics* 39: 462–482. DOI: 10.1016/j.pragma.2006.07.007

Tumber, Howard, and Frank Webster. 2006. *Journalists Under Fire: Information War and Journalistic Practices*. London: Sage.

van Dijk, Teun A. 1993. "Principles of Critical Discourse Analysis". *Discourse and Society* 4 (2): 249–283. DOI: 10.1177/0957926593004002006

van Dijk, Teun A. 1996. "News Schemata". In *Studying Writing. Linguistic approaches*, ed. by Sidney Greenbaum, and Catherine R. Cooper, 155–186. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

van Dijk, Teun A. 2006. "Ideology and Discourse Analysis". *Journal of Political Ideologies* 11(2): 115–140.

BDD-A25564 © 2014 John Benjamins
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:52:19 UTC)

Vasilescu, Andra. 2010. "Metastance in the Romanian Parliamentary Discourse: Case Studies", *Revue Roumaine de Linguistique* LV (4): 365–380.
Wodak, Ruth and Brigitta Busch. 2004. "Approaches to Media Texts". In *Handbook of Media Studies*, ed. by John Downing, Denis McQuail, Philip Schlesinger, and Ellen Wartella, 105–123. Thousand Oaks, London, New Delhi: Sage. DOI: 10.4135/9781412976077.n6
Zimmerman, Erica. 2007. "Constructing Korean and Japanese Interculturality in Talk: Ethnic Membership Categorization among Users of Japanese". *Pragmatics* 17 (1): 71–94.

Sources

1. **AFG 1** — *U.S. Halting Program to Train Afghan Recruits*, Graham Bowley and Richard Oppel Jr. (Published: September 2, 2012, *The New York Times*), http://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/02/world/asia/us-halting-program-to-train-afghan-recruits.html?_r=0; accessed on July 9, 2013.
2. **AFG 2** — *Training suspended for new Afghan recruits*, Greg Jaffe and Kevin Sieff (Published: Sunday, September 2, 2012, *The Washington Post*), http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2012-09-01/world/35496637_1_afghan-local-police-afghan-troops-afghan-government; accessed on July 9, 2013.
3. **AFG 3** — *U.S. seeks more scrutiny to stop Afghan insider attacks,* Rowan Scarborough (Published: Sunday, September 2, 2012, *The Washington Times*), http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2012/sep/2/us-military-seeks-more-scrutiny-stop-insider-attac/?page=all; accessed on July 9, 2013.
4. **AFG 4** — *Afghanistan 'insider' attacks pose threat to West's exit strategy*, Laura King (Published: August 20, 2012, *Los Angeles Times*) — http://articles.latimes.com/2012/aug/20/world/la-fg-afghanistan-turncoats-212 0820; accessed on July 9, 2013.
5. **AFG 5** — *Taliban beheads 17 Afghan partygoers; 2 NATO troops killed*, Sayed Salahuddin (Published: August 27, 2012, *The Washington Post*) — http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/another-afghan-soldier-attacks-kills-2-nato-troops/2012/08/27/02576fce-f026-11e1-892d-bc92fee603a7_story.html; accessed on July 9, 2013.
6. **RUS** — *More Than a Dozen Die in 2 Attacks in a Russian Republic*, David M. Herszenhorn (Published: August 28, 2012, *The New York Times*) — http://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/29/world/europe/more-than-a-dozen-die-in-attacks-in-a-russian-republic.html; accessed on July 9, 2013.
7. **MAL** — *Islamists Struggle to Run North Mali*, Adam Nossiter (Published: September 1, 2012, *The New York Times*) — http://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/02/world/africa/holding-northern-mali-by-force-islamists-struggle-to-run-it.html?pagewanted=all; accessed on July 9, 2013.
8. **SYR 1** — *Syrian Rebels Say They Have Seized an Air Defense Post and Its Missiles*, Kareem Fahim (Published: September 1, 2012, *The New York Times*), http://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/02/world/middleeast/syria.html; accessed on July 9, 2013.
9. **SYR 2** — *Syrian rebels bomb regime army base, 4 injured*, Babak Dehghanpisheh (Updated: Sunday, September 2, 2012, *The Washington Post*), http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2012-09-02/world/35495456_1_abu-rummaneh-syrian-observatory-free-syrian-army; accessed on July 9, 2013.

BDD-A25564 © 2014 John Benjamins
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:52:19 UTC)

10. **IRA** — *Embassy Row: Fireworks over Iran*, James Morrison (Published: Sunday, September 2, 2012, *The Washington Times*), http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2012/sep/2/embassy-row-fireworks-over-iran/?page=all; accessed on July 9, 2013.

Authors' address

Stanca Măda
Department of Theoretical and Applied Linguistics
Transilvania University of Brașov
Eroilor Blv. 29
Brașov
500100, Romania

stanca.mada@unitbv.ro

Răzvan Săftoiu
Department of Theoretical and Applied Linguistics
Transilvania University of Brașov
Eroilor Blv. 29
Brașov
500100, Romania

razvan.saftoiu@unitbv.ro

About the authors

Stanca Măda is a Senior Lecturer at Transilvania University of Brașov where she teaches a range of courses in applied linguistics and communication from first year to MA level. Her primary research interest is the area of professional communication, and she has published in the areas of constructing identity and workplace culture, managerial communication, the role and functions of communication in workplace meetings, humour, irony and negotiation in various workplace contexts. Most recently her research has tracked the strategies used by journalists in online media communication.

Răzvan Săftoiu is an Associate Professor at *Transilvania* University of Brașov, where he teaches courses in pragmatics, applied linguistics, communication and discourse analysis. He received national and international research grants at the University of Bucharest (2001–2003), State University of New York at Albany (2005–2006), *Transilvania* University of Brașov (2007–2010), published articles and reviews in Romanian and international peer reviewed journals.

BDD-A25564 © 2014 John Benjamins
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:52:19 UTC)