

## 1 Corpus-Assisted Multimodal Discourse Analysis and the Newsworthiness of National Day Reporting

### 1.1 Introduction

Corpus-based discourse analysts are becoming increasingly interested in the incorporation of non-linguistic data, for example, through corpus-assisted multimodal discourse analysis, or ‘CAMDA’ (Bednarek & Caple, 2014: 151). CAMDA is concerned with combining corpus linguistic techniques for language analysis with discourse analysis of other semiotic modes. This is especially relevant for corpus data that are inherently multimodal, such as news items, which often contain photographs. If corpus-based discourse analysis of such multimodal texts is limited to analysis of language, this analysis may not provide a full picture of the meanings made in these texts (Caple, 2018a). This Element therefore uses CAMDA to study news texts, examining both news language and news photography. Another area of current interest in corpus-assisted discourse studies consists of attempts to move beyond analysis of a single language (most often, English) to use corpus techniques in cross-linguistic studies (see further Section 1.3.2). In this Element, we therefore use CAMDA to study both Chinese and English news texts.

The particular lens through which we approach our data is that of *news values* – a concept that originates from outside linguistics (see Caple, 2018b) but that has more recently started to play a bigger role in the linguistic analysis of the news media. Using case studies of news from China and Australia, this Element thus presents a cross-linguistic comparison of news values and newsworthiness in national day reporting. Newsworthiness concerns the worth of an event to be reported as news, as constructed via a set of established news values (such as Negativity, Proximity, Eliteness, Unexpectedness, etc.). We examine how these *news values* are discursively constructed through language and photography in our datasets. A new framework, discursive news values analysis (DNVA), has recently been developed to systematically examine how news values are constructed through such semiotic resources. However, a comprehensive analysis of news values necessitates close discourse analysis of full texts, which is not always possible. The question, then, is, how can corpus linguistic analysis contribute to discursive news values analysis? This Element therefore also illustrates how a non-linguistic concept, such as news values, can be approached from a linguistic perspective, and how we might apply corpus linguistic techniques in its analysis. It also takes up the call to apply and test DNVA on news stories published in different languages and in different cultural contexts (Bednarek & Caple, 2017: 237). In order to keep other variables under control, we have chosen to investigate a similar event across two countries: the ‘National Day’ of China, celebrated

annually on 1 October, and the ‘National Day’ of Australia, celebrated annually on 26 January.

The National Day of the People’s Republic of China is a public holiday celebrating the national day. It is described as a day of patriotism and national celebration and includes government-organised fireworks displays, concerts and sporting and cultural events; public spaces are decorated in festive themes and portraits of revered leaders, such as Mao Zedong, are displayed in public squares (Public Holidays Global, 2019). Important ceremonial features of the national day commemorations include the laying of wreaths at the Monument to the People’s Heroes in Tian’anmen Square and national flag raising ceremonies that take place all over the country. While the national day falls on 1 October, the whole week is given over to its celebration, with workers receiving paid holidays and the opportunity to make long-distance family visits. The week is known as the Golden Week (黄金周/ *huangjinzhou*). In every fifth and tenth year, the celebrations are much larger and include military parades, and the national day in 2019 saw the celebration of seventy years of the foundation of the People’s Republic of China. However, we deliberately focused on two ordinary years: 2015 and 2016.

The national day public holiday in Australia is officially known as Australia Day. The Australia Day Council (2018) defines it as a ‘day to reflect on what it means to be Australian, to celebrate contemporary Australia and to acknowledge our history’. However, the date – 26 January – chosen to celebrate the national day falls on a very controversial date in the history of this nation. This is the date, in 1788, that the First Fleet of British ships landed on the shores of the country now known as Australia. To many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people it marks the invasion of their lands and the beginnings of the oppression of First Nations peoples, and many therefore regard it ‘as a day of sorrow and mourning’ (Australia Day Council, 2018). Indeed, a ‘Day of Mourning’ was first proclaimed by Aboriginal activists on 26 January 1938, coinciding with the 150th anniversary of the British arrival (AIATSIS, 2018). Recent years have seen an increase in discussion about how to acknowledge this history, including a ‘change the date’ campaign.<sup>1</sup> As a result of such activism, there are a number of alternative labels in use for the national day, including *Invasion Day* and *Survival Day*. Eades (2006: 154) uses the term *lexical*

<sup>1</sup> There is a diversity of views and opinions towards the national day and the campaign to change the date in Australia. For example, some want the date changed, some want it to remain the same, some call for a new national holiday, some may even be unaware of the debate. Those who do not want the date changed may have different reasons, including that changing the date is meaningless without changing the nation (Trindall 2019). For a few different answers from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to the question ‘What do you do on 26 January?’, see University of Sydney (2018).

*struggle* to refer to the ‘struggle over labels, descriptions, or lexical items’ in the legal system (i.e. how events, issues, acts etc. are referred to). But such lexical struggles can also be observed in society at large, as in the case of the different labels for the Australian national day. Such a lexical struggle is also indicative of a *discursive struggle* in society (i.e. a struggle between discourses that compete with each other to define aspects of the social world).<sup>2</sup> This makes Australia a particularly interesting site for a case study.

Why did we decide to focus on the reporting of national days? First, national days are interesting because they differ from most other news events in that they recur on a yearly basis and are covered by newspapers each year (ben-Aaron, 2003). Second, most countries have national days, which enables cross-cultural comparison. Third, national days are closely tied to the history of a nation and the discursive construction of national identity. As ben-Aaron (2003: 77) notes, national holidays are a manifestation of ‘applied nationalism’, and their coverage by newspapers may ‘have a political subtext, such as mobilising for war, promoting a policy or platform, or reconstituting the nation in minority inclusive or exclusive terms’. Such public holidays are therefore important in relation to what Anderson (1991) calls the ‘imagining’ of nations. On the one hand, the celebration of national days itself is aimed at producing national community and cohesion. On the other hand, media discourse about national days is also important for the discursive construction of national identity, unity and the promotion of patriotism (Ting, 2017). It comes as no surprise that news reporting about the national day in the United States (Independence Day) respects both the positive and the negative face of the nation, by ‘praising it, identifying with it . . . and acting in its interests’ and by ‘avoiding conflict with it’ (ben-Aaron, 2003: 98). Historically, such holiday news falls on the ‘expected, consonant, positive side of the news value scales’ (ben-Aaron, 2003: 98–9). In other words, we might assume that the news value of Negativity plays little or no role in such coverage. In the Chinese data, we hypothesise that this will be even more true given the role of media censorship and the importance of

<sup>2</sup> The notion of *discursive struggle* is often linked to Laclau and Mouffe’s (1985) discourse theory (e.g. Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, Carpentier, 2018). In this theory,

[d]ifferent discourses – each of them representing particular ways of talking about and understanding the social world – are engaged in a constant struggle with one other to achieve hegemony, that is, to fix the meanings of language in their own way. Hegemony, then, can provisionally be understood as the dominance of one particular perspective. (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002: 6–7)

However, the term *discursive struggle* is in general widely used in discourse studies. The earliest use in English that we have been able to identify comes from Belsey (1984: 29), who uses the term *discursive struggle* in a paper that draws on Foucault, Derrida, and Marx to emphasise the politics and plurality of meaning.

Positivity (see Section 1.2.2). Since it is commonly assumed that the news media maintain dominant or hegemonic perspectives and that government and other elites are much more visible than minorities, we would also expect such positive reporting in the Australian news media. In both countries, we would furthermore expect that the reporting of national days is used as an opportunity for the promotion of national unity and cohesion. At the same time, because of the differences in Chinese and Australian news media landscapes, political systems, historical contexts and cultural attitudes towards national identity and nationalism, we also expect to see differences, which are perhaps less easy to predict.<sup>3</sup> Our respective analyses are presented in Sections 2 and 3 of this Element. In this introductory section we first present an overview of the concept of news values, including discursive news values analysis, and then describe our data and approach – cross-linguistic CAMDA.

## 1.2 News Values

As mentioned, the concept of news values originates from outside linguistics. It has been widely drawn upon in journalism studies, where it has also been hotly debated. With some exceptions (e.g. Bell, 1991, Bednarek, 2006, Cotter, 2010), the concept has not figured prominently in linguistics, although this is now changing. Bednarek and Caple (2017) review news values at length and we do not want to repeat this here. Rather, we will use this section to introduce our own approach to news values. Readers interested in the justifications for this approach and how it differs from others are advised to consult this earlier work.

It is important to emphasise that we restrict the term *news values* to ‘news-worthiness values’ that relate to reported news events or news actors. We exclude other aspects such as moral–ethical values (e.g. truth, impartiality, honesty), commercial values (e.g. speed, access via multiple platforms), news writing objectives (general news writing goals such as clarity of expression, brevity, etc.), and other factors that play important roles in the news process (e.g. content mix, space constraints, the availability of a reporter, material or sources, audience analytics, news cycles, etc.). Additionally, when we talk about an event’s potential news value, we mean a value that is socioculturally assigned, rather than ‘natural’ or ‘inherent’ in the event. We use the term *event* as a cover term for both semiotic and material events, that is, issues and happenings, including elements or aspects

<sup>3</sup> We further acknowledge that contestation of ‘National Days’ can stem from the very nature of the event being commemorated: National Days can be Independence Days (e.g. USA, Singapore), or Foundation Days (e.g. China, France), or “Discovery” Days (e.g. Australia). Therefore, the difference between the Chinese and the Australian reporting is not just a matter of national culture, but a difference in the nature of what is being celebrated.

of these. For example, when we talk about how events are constructed as newsworthy, this includes the event's news actors or its location.

### 1.2.1 Definition

Our approach to news values recognises that there are different dimensions to news values. This means that newsworthiness can be approached from various perspectives: an event in its material reality holds potential news value for a given community (material perspective); news workers and audience members have beliefs about news values and newsworthiness (cognitive perspective); news values are applied as selection criteria in journalistic practice (social perspective); and news values can be communicated through discourse (discursive perspective). As discourse analysts, it is the discursive perspective that we are adopting here. More specifically, we align ourselves with the perspective on discourse as language in use and consider *discourse* as multimodal. This means we are interested in analysing how news values are constructed through semi-otic resources, that is, in the linguistic devices and visual techniques that are used in multimodal news stories to establish the 'newsworthiness' of reported events.

In contrast to most other approaches to news values, this perspective does not treat news values as pre- and therefore a-textual. The question is not how an event is selected as news (selection), but how it is constructed as news (presentation/treatment). We analyse how specific events are constructed as newsworthy in published news stories. Importantly, this discourse analysis is not meant to tell us anything about speaker intentionality or audience effects, but rather focuses on the meaning potential of texts. We do nevertheless make a general assumption about news discourse, namely that it 'is intended to attract an audience through presenting a story to them that is newsworthy' (Bednarek & Caple, 2012: 46).

Our aim is not to reduce values to discourse or to assume that they are only constructed through discourse. We simply argue that the study of news values should incorporate a more systematic analysis of how they are established in discourse. We use verbs such as *establish*, *construct* or *construe* in order to underline that texts have a constitutive dimension in what Fairclough (1995) regards as the dialectical relationship between texts and culture. In his words, '[t]exts are socioculturally shaped but they also constitute society and culture, in ways which may be transformative as well as reproductive' (Fairclough, 1995: 34). There is a 'top-down' aspect of social reproduction, but there is also a 'bottom-up' aspect of social reproduction, where social practices sustain, continue and change the system (van Dijk, 1998: 229). Importantly, top-down

aspects do matter and events in their material reality put constraints on how they can be discursively constructed. Our choice of verbs such as *construct/construe/establish* simply highlights the power of discourse and represents a much-needed shift in emphasis in news values research.

In sum, we systematically link commonly recognised news values (such as Eliteness, Impact, Negativity, Proximity, etc.) to the verbal and visual semiotic resources that have the potential to establish these values in published news stories. This provides a framework for analysis, in that we can identify forms, expressions and techniques that establish newsworthiness in such texts. The specific verbal and visual semiotic resources that provide the framework for discourse analysis – whether corpus-assisted or ‘manual’, whether monomodal or multimodal – are described in more detail in the next section.

1.2.2 News Values and Semiotic Resources

There are ongoing debates around the number and types of news values and the labels used to refer to them. Based on a basic consensus around commonly recognised news values and considering the advantages/disadvantages of particular labels, we work with a list of eleven news values (see Table 1.1).

Table 1.1 The news values and their definitions

News value	Definition
Aesthetic Appeal	The event is discursively constructed as beautiful (visuals only)
Consonance	The event is discursively constructed as (stereo)typical (limited here to news actors, social groups, organisations, or countries/nations) <sup>a</sup>
Eliteness	The event is discursively constructed as of high status or fame (including but not limited to the people, countries or institutions involved)
Impact	The event is discursively constructed as having significant effects or consequences (not necessarily limited to impact on the target audience)
Negativity	The event is discursively constructed as negative, for example as a disaster, conflict, controversy, criminal act
Personalisation	The event is discursively constructed as having a personal or ‘human’ face (involving non-elite actors, including eyewitnesses)

Table 1.1 (cont.)

News value	Definition
Positivity	The event is discursively constructed as positive, for example as a scientific breakthrough or heroic act
Proximity	The event is discursively constructed as geographically or culturally near (in relation to the publication location/target audience)
Superlativeness	The event is discursively constructed as being of high intensity or large scope/scale
Timeliness	The event is discursively constructed as timely in relation to the publication date: as new, recent, ongoing, about to happen or otherwise relevant to the immediate situation/time (current or seasonal)
Unexpectedness	The event is discursively constructed as unexpected, for example as unusual, strange, rare

<sup>a</sup> Consonance is defined as the construction of an event’s news actors, social groups, organisations or countries/nations in a way that conforms to stereotypes that members of the target audience hold about them.

Importantly, Aesthetic Appeal only applies to visuals, while Positivity is a news value that does not apply to all types of news stories. It is useful, however, to be able to consider both Negativity and Positivity in order to explore whether a particular event/topic is constructed as more negative or positive. We must emphasise that Positivity does not equate to positive evaluation, nor does Negativity equate to negative evaluation. For instance, references to clashes between protestors and police construct Negativity, as they point to conflict, regardless of whether the newspaper ‘sides with’ the protestors or the police (Bednarek & Caple, 2017: 61). Further elaboration on these and other issues as well as extensive explanations of each news value can be found in Bednarek and Caple (2017).

Since the news values are deliberately broad, researchers can dig deeper in their analysis, if required. For example, in relation to Eliteness we could distinguish between references to celebrities, politicians, athletes, academics, officials, etc. In relation to Negativity, we could analyse what type of Negativity is established (e.g. accidents vs. opposition/division vs. terrorism vs. crime). This is an approach that we will adopt in this Element, where appropriate. News values are also scalar – for instance, references to police chiefs construct a higher degree of Eliteness than references to ordinary police officers (‘weak’



Eliteness), and references to locations in the same city as the target audience construct a higher degree of Proximity than references to the whole country of the target audience. However, it is difficult to objectively quantify the extent to which a linguistic resource constructs a particular news value, for example by applying a numerical weight to it. For this reason, we adopt a categorial approach in this Element, although we occasionally comment on this where particularly relevant.

Bell (1991: 155) suggests that these news values are valid for many countries, and this seems to be the case for China. Through newsroom observations at a Chinese news organisation, Huan (2018) found that similar news values are part of daily editorial discussions. Specifically, daily editorial meetings tended to foreground Personalisation, with events also discussed in term of Eliteness, Impact, Timeliness, and Proximity. Analysing Chinese news reporting of risk events, Huan (2016, 2018) found a clear co-patterning of Eliteness and Positivity in relation to elites, while constructions of Personalisation and Negativity related to ordinary citizens. Historically, the Chinese news media have had a reputation of reporting only positive news (Shi-xu, 2014: 86), maintaining the ‘normative Chinese value of harmony’ (Wu & Ng, 2011: 80). However, in relation to broadcast and international news, Wu and Ng (2011) report an increase in negative news. Shi-xu (2014: 86) also notes that more attention is now being paid to ‘bad news’, including in key Communist Party outlets such as *People’s Daily*. However, further empirical studies are needed to capture more recent shifts in news values in the Chinese news media.

Bell (1991: 65) made the important observation that news values can be ‘enhanced’ through language by journalists, and that ‘maximizing news value is the primary function’ (Bell, 1991: 76) of copy editing, illustrating this with authentic examples. This provided us with an important impetus for the development of our own ‘discursive’ approach – namely the idea that news discourse can be systematically examined for its construction of newsworthiness. We have taken this further and have developed comprehensive inventories for the semiotic resources that have the potential to construct these eleven news values. We provide a summary of our framework here, with selected examples used for illustration (see Table 1.2). A more detailed explanation is provided in Bednarek and Caple (2017). Researchers interested in undertaking DNVA themselves should not rely on the brief introduction here, but rather consult this earlier book-length treatment and other relevant literature listed at [www.newsvaluesanalysis.com](http://www.newsvaluesanalysis.com).



Table 1.2 Linguistic and visual resources that have the potential to constr

News value	The event is constructed as . . .	Linguistic resources	Visual
<i>Aesthetic Appeal</i>	aesthetically pleasing	N/A [this news value only applies to visual resources; see Bednarek & Caple 2017: 66–7]	<b>Representational</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The c lands beau</li></ul> <b>Compositional</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Dyna use o</li><li>• Balan symr</li></ul> <b>Technical</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Mov</li><li>• Nois</li><li>• Focu withi</li></ul>

Table 1.2 (cont.)

News value	The event is constructed as . . .	Linguistic resources	Visual
Consonance	(stereo)typical	References to stereotypical attributes or preconceptions; assessments of expectedness/typicality ( <i>typical, famed for</i> ); similarity with past ( <i>yet another, once again</i> ); explicit references to general knowledge/traditions, etc. ( <i>well-known</i> )	<b>Representations</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The c that f perso Germ</li></ul> <b>Activities</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Stage typic group</li></ul>
Eliteness	of high status or fame (including news actors, organisations, etc.)	Various status markers, including role labels ( <i>Professor Roger Stone, experts</i> ); status-indicating adjectives ( <i>the prestigious Man Booker prize, top diplomats</i> ); recognised names ( <i>Donald Trump</i> ); descriptions of achievement/fame ( <i>were selling millions of records a year</i> ); use by	<b>Representations</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Show figur</li></ul> <b>Attributes</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Show form</li><li>• Show phon</li></ul>