

From “heroes working in the public interest” to “guerriglieri del web”: The Role of Culture in British, Italian and German Editorials Addressing the NSA Scandal (Journal Article)

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Opinion discourse can be regarded as an encounter of different, partially contradictory relationships between discourse participants constructed through the editorial voice. The author tries to establish a consensus over the negotiated matter with the reader, while at the same time claiming authority over the *correct* description and evaluation of an event. One very polarizing topic is the issue of global surveillance and whistleblowing. More intriguing, however, is the way editorialists get their opinions across. To what extent does the social context of a news culture influence the selection of topics, the perspective and the expression of opinion? The research project presented in this paper attempts to give insights into the role that culture plays in designing editorials in Britain, Italy and Germany. The aim of this paper is to present a model of how culture-induced style differences can be made empirically measurable and comparable.

## 1. Introduction

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At the heart of this empirical study lies the question whether the British, the German and the Italian news culture and their respective opinion discourse are comparable in terms of thematic selection and style. If so, how can the respective similarities and differences be made tangible and empirically measurable?

The following article shall present the state of the art of my dissertation project, which, in turn, attempts to give insights into the role of news culture by trying to answer the following questions:

- What influence do language choice and the related news culture have on the representation of news events in editorials?
- To what degree does national and foreign politics, such as the involvement of a country in an international event, affect the angle of representation?
- To what extent does the social context of a given news culture influence the amount of criticism and the way it is mediated so that it is still culturally acceptable?

- How is editorial opinion expressed from a linguistic point of view? Does the author use adjectives, adverbials and modal verbs to evaluate news actors, their actions and the current state of affairs or does he/she prefer nominal labels?

My comparative study of British, German and Italian editorials aims to fill the gap in literature and empirical research by examining cross-cultural differences in persuasive and argumentative writing. In contrast to previous research, text samples from three different news cultures and thus three different languages form the basis for my qualitative analysis. To ensure comparability, all samples will be taken from national quality papers similar in distribution, national importance and the kind of readership they envisage.

As far as content is concerned, my corpus will only comprise editorials dealing with the NSA scandal and the reactions of the respective countries. This thematic orientation constitutes a further benefit, for these events were and are still relevant to each of the three news cultures. An estimated number of 15 editorials per language (i.e., 45 arti-

cles as a whole) should suffice to draw valid conclusions about culturally-motivated similarities and differences in the coverage and assessment of these events.

Another advantage of my study is that my theoretical framework, the so called *pyramid of discourse participants*, derives from a synthesis of previous research and exploits the benefits of various approaches (outlined in Section 0).

At this point, however, it is vital to stress that the research presented here is still work-in-progress and can therefore give by no means a fully comprehensive overview of culture-induced style differences in the respective news cultures. The aim of this article is therefore to propose a theoretical framework on which such an empirical analysis could be based on, hence the strong theoretical focus, and to give the reader an idea of which linguistic levels need to be taken into account to observe such differences. Instead of presenting extensive results, the article tries to illustrate the rationale of my research project in general. For this purpose, I have selected one *single* criterion for an exemplary analysis.

## 2. Culture, Journalistic Culture and News Culture

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According to Luginbühl (2012: 201), “[t]here is a long-established tradition in linguistics and in media studies when it comes to the relationship between different cultures, nations or languages.” New concepts of and views on culture have been developed and applied to culture-contrastive text analysis within the last few years. But how can *culture* be defined with respect to media studies and what role do journalistic texts play in this context?

If we conceptualize culture as a dynamic, semiotically based practice serving the production, tradition and change of social membership, then cultural artifacts become essential, because it is through artifacts and the correlative semiosis that social formations communicate, adjust and negotiate collective norms and ideas. (Luginbühl 2012: 202)

Any journalistic text is a cultural artifact. Genres of texts, in turn, are highly culture-dependent. It is thus impossible to study genres on their own without taking their cultural specificity into account (Luginbühl 2014: 41). Language use, in this context, is a

stylistic resource. A more extensive definition of the term *culture*, as well as a thorough discussion of the semantic change of the concept of culture through the centuries and the role of language in a culture-contrastive text analysis can be found in Luginbühl (2014: 46-60).

*Journalistic culture*, as opposed to *news culture*, “usually focuses on norms, ideas and professional standards of journalists and their relevance for the practices of news text production” (Luginbühl 2012: 203). This “shared occupational ideology among newsworkers [...] functions to self-legitimize their position in society” (Deuze 2005: 446).<sup>1</sup>

In contrast to this, the notion of *news culture*

focuses on journalistic texts and cultural artifacts as manifestations of journalistic norms and ideas. [...] In matters of a news culture analysis, this means that a linguistic analysis of the style of news texts becomes the key element for analyzing not only news culture, but also essential aspects of journalistic culture (Luginbühl 2012: 205).

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<sup>1</sup> For the three constituents of journalism culture see Luginbühl (2012: 203-205).

Since cultural practices often remain sub-conscious decisions, a stylistic analysis of news texts, such as editorials, may bring to light such hidden influences of news culture.

### 3. The Editorial as Object of Culture-Contrastive Studies

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#### 3.1 The Journalistic Genre *Editorial*

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Editorials can generally be defined as newspaper articles giving the opinion of the paper on a specific topic or event. Even though they may be written by single journalists, their opinion is generally institutional, i.e. they reflect the opinion of the editorial board. They are thus also called *the voice of the newspaper* or “die Flagge der Zeitung” (Reumann 2009:156), i.e. the flag of a newspaper (Fowler 1991: 209; van Dijk 1996: 18-19; Morley 2004: 239).

Bell (1996: 13) defines the journalistic genre of the editorial in contrast to other opinion discourse as “a statement of the newspaper’s own views on an issue, usually appearing on an inside page under a reduced banner of the paper’s ‘masthead’. Most of the remaining opinion copy is regular con-

tributed columns, letters to the editor and reviews.”

The primary goal of editorials is to shape public opinion by commenting on events already addressed by other journalistic genres in the respective newspaper. In doing so, they “rely on the news reports to supply the reader with information about which the editorial will give the newspaper’s opinion” (Pennock 2000: 16). Editorials thus fulfill a crucial symbolic function, i.e. “seeming to partition off the ‘opinion’ component of the paper, implicitly supporting the claim that other Sections, by contrast, are pure ‘fact’ or ‘report’” (Fowler 1991: 208).

Historically speaking, the editorial used to dominate the content of the newspaper in terms of layout in the 19<sup>th</sup> century since it was generally published on the front page (hence its name *leading article* or *Leitartikel*) and was highlighted by means of typography. Eventually, the editorial gave way to topical news reports and pictures. Today’s newspapers feature their editorials in separate Sections dedicated to opinion discourse (with a few exceptions such as the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*; see Reumann 2009: 156-158).

#### 3.2 The Cultural Aspect of Editorials

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The importance of the editorial and its influence on public opinion is one that should not be underestimated. Teun van Dijk even goes so far as to call editorials

public, mass communicated types of opinion discourse par excellence. After opinion programs on TV like talk shows, and together with the Op-Ed articles (i.e. opinion articles that are placed at the Opposite page of the Editorial page in much of the U.S. press) of columnists and other writers, they are probably the widest circulated opinion discourses of society, whether or not all readers of the newspaper read them daily. Their influence may not so much be based on massive popular influence, as rather on their influence on the elites. We may assume, for instance, that members of parliament or Congress, cabinet ministers, corporate managers, and other leaders follow the opinions of the most respected newspapers. Indeed, much critical media research suggests that general opinions of newspapers cannot be fully inconsistent with those of other elite institutions, and that processes of influence here are mutual. (van Dijk 1996: 18-19)

Van Dijk here argues in favor of a persuasive effect of editorials and one may want to ask how this persuasive effect is achieved. Another question arising in this context is the extent to which the linguistic means to express authorial opinion and the directness with which authorial opinion is stated vary from culture to culture. This brings us to the issue of culture-dependency in editorial writing: to what extent is style pre-determined by culture? Is style subject to variation within a genre of a given news culture? What influence does a given newspaper or a given journalist have on the style of an editorial irrespective of language or (news)culture?

Editorials, “perhaps more than any other type of writing, reflect national styles regarding modes of styles” (Connor 1996: 143). This is why cross-cultural research into editorials is interesting. Compared to the abundance of existing work on news writing in general, little has been published on the cultural aspect of editorials in particular. Research into the cultural dimension of this genre has thus become a common desideratum among media linguists. Ulla Connor (1996: 144) confirms that “[g]ood editorials are considered some of the best examples of persuasive writing in all countries; they set

standards for written persuasion. At the present time, little is known cross-culturally about the genre.”

Fowler (1991: 227) acknowledges that there is still room for further studies on this subject, noting that

[m]uch more could be done on stylistic variation [...] Sociolinguistics demonstrates [...] that there are complex and subtle variations of style in utterances and texts within a community; [...] I have not had the space to investigate stylistic differences and similarities between newspapers and groups of newspapers, nor to identify idiosyncrasies and explain their functions.

Since Fowler made these observations, a series of culture-contrastive studies on newspaper editorials have been conducted. Within this field, a considerable number of studies (such as those of Adriana Bolivar 1994 and Alireza Bonyadi 2010) focus on the construction of arguments and the schematic structures of editorials. Based on the notion that “different speech communities have different ways of organizing ideas in writing to reflect their cultural thought patterns” (Bonyadi 2010: 323), this strand of culture-contrastive research tries to detect

the cultural component in the formal and schematic organization of the editorial.

Research on lexical patterns or grammatical features focuses among other issues on transitivity (shifts), agent deletion through nominalization, active and passive constructions and modality (see Conboy 2007: 51-71). Although these studies do not always consider cultural variation, they still illuminate significant distinctive characteristics of the editorial.

Still, with respect to the amount of literature on opinion discourse in general and specifically on editorials, culture-contrastive studies continue to constitute a minority. Even though recently some studies have dedicated themselves to the relationship between culture and the expression of opinion within editorials, a considerable number of them have restricted themselves to a single point of observation, such as their rhetorical structure.

Those studies which have taken on the ambitious aim of illuminating various aspects generally lack an underlying framework connecting the individual criteria of analysis. Such a framework, however, is of vital importance for the interpretation of the results.

#### 4. Theoretical Framework: The Pyramid of Discourse Participants

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The research presented here pursues the goal of uniting a theoretical framework with a series of analytical tools to determine the role of (news) culture in the writer-reader relationship. The central thought behind my analysis will be the nature of interaction between the different discourse participants involved in the production and reception of an editorial.

Editorials can be regarded as an encounter of different, partially contradictory relationships between discourse participants.

In editorial discourse one can find four different types of participants (see Figure 2):

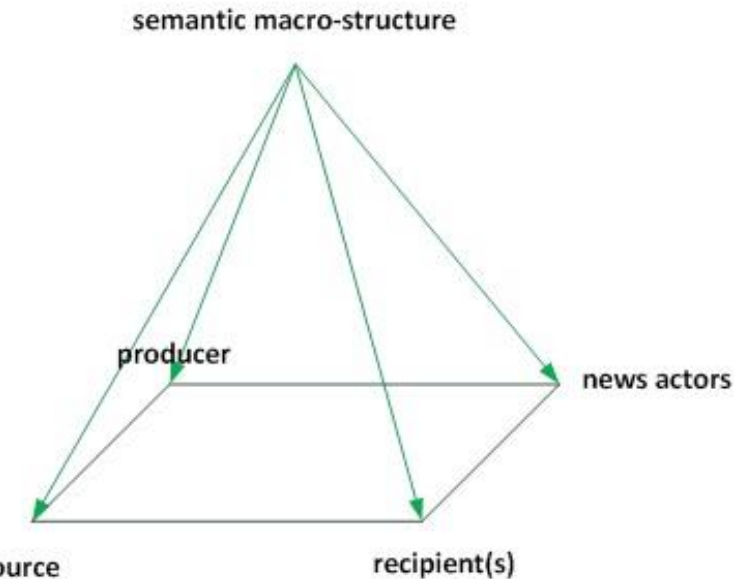
- the author or producer of the editorial,
- the reader
- and the people described in the text:
- These, in turn, can be sub-divided into two categories: those acting as a source of citations and those performing actions, e.g. people protesting during a demonstration. The latter will be referred to as *news actors*, whereas the former will be labelled as *news source*.

- A fifth cornerstone which is of major importance is the semantic macro-structure of the editorial. In contrast to other journalistic genres, the editorial does not have a conventional schematic structure. Cultural variation in this field can thus be expected. It is therefore interesting to study the author’s preferred structural mechanisms with which he/she tries to alter public opinion.

With the semantic macro-structure of the editorial as a uniting meta-level, these relationships in the interaction of news discourse could be visualized as a *pyramid of discourse participants*. Figure 1 and Figure 2 illustrate the relationships between the discourse participants.

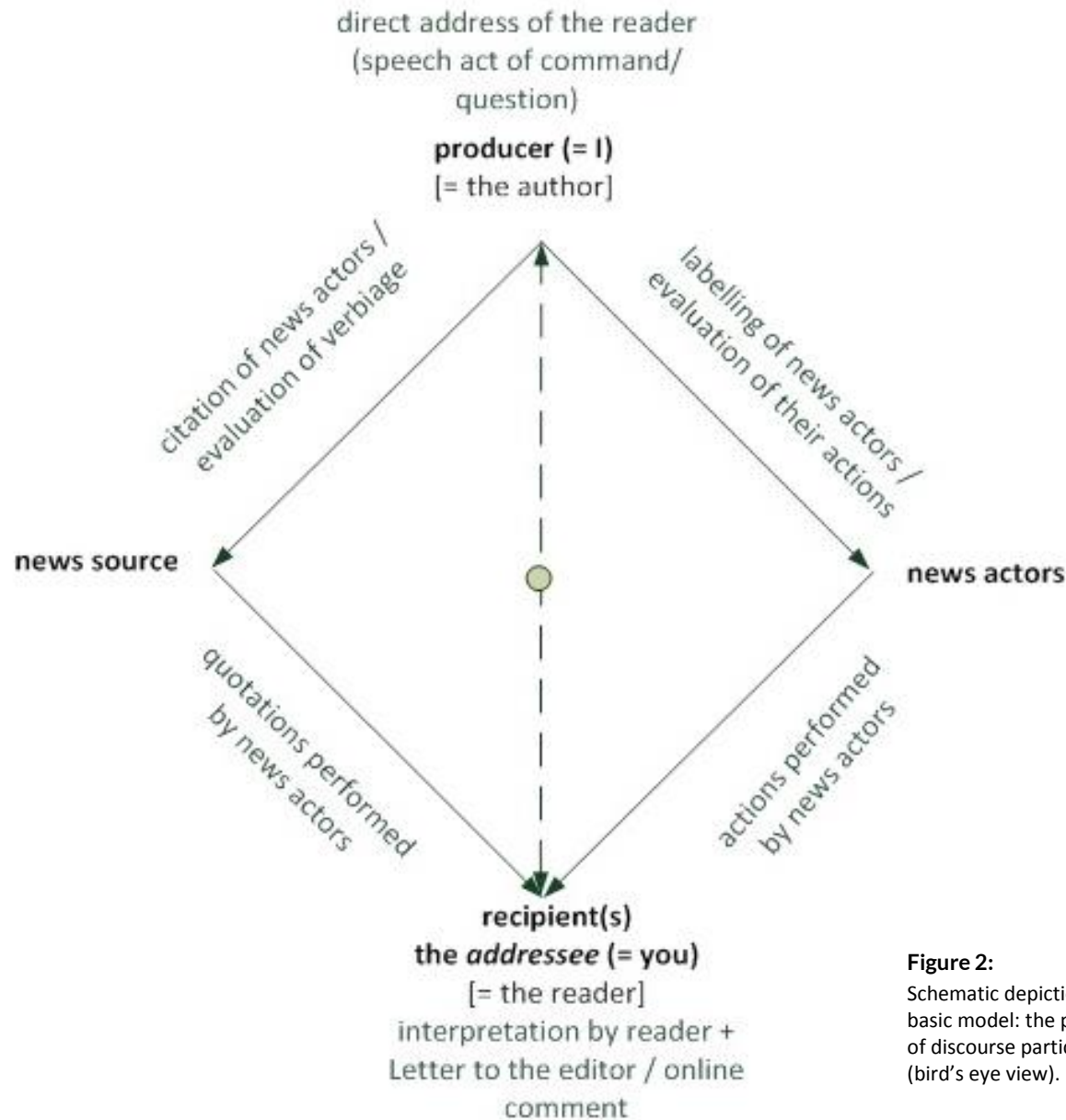
Each of these discourse participants fulfils one (or several) function(s) in the news event of an editorial (see Figure 2).

- The **author/producer** tries to establish a consensus on the negotiated matter (i.e. the news event) with the reader. At the same time, he/she claims authority over the “correct” description and evaluation of an event (Fowler 1991: 211-212).
- The author’s relationship with the **news actors** and the **news source** is ambiva-



**Figure 1:**  
Schematic depiction of my basic model: the pyramid of discourse participants (front side).

lent, too. They are either presented as experts whose actions and statements are cited in support of the journalist’s arguments or they are being criticized and their actions are being polemicized against by the author to claim solidarity with the reader.



**Figure 2:**  
Schematic depiction of my basic model: the pyramid of discourse participants (bird's eye view).

- The **reader**, in turn, may react to the editorial in the form of online comments or letters to the editor. This, however, happens in another journalistic genre and is thus not directly part of the editorial. An interesting question resulting from the fact that the reader can comment on the editorial would be how this circumstance influences the author and the way opinion is being expressed in the first place.

My pyramid of discourse participants constitutes an elaborated version of **Fowler's triad of discourse participants**. In addition to Fowler's basic division, it includes:

- the **actions performed** by the individual discourse participants,
- a **further division** between news actors and news source,
- and the additional meta-level of the **semantic macro-structure**.
- My **focus** is also a different one. Whereas Fowler's major concern is to challenge the general assumption that news coverage is the unbiased representation of facts (Fowler 1991: 1), my research aim is to highlight culturally induced

differences in the linguistic realization of opinion expression, the degree of assertiveness and the manner in which these standpoints become culturally-acceptable opinion discourse.

Based on this framework, my dissertation project allocates criteria of analysis to these five cornerstones in discourse participation according to their semantic function in the negotiation of relationships in opinion discourse. In this fashion the three distinct news cultures will be examined.

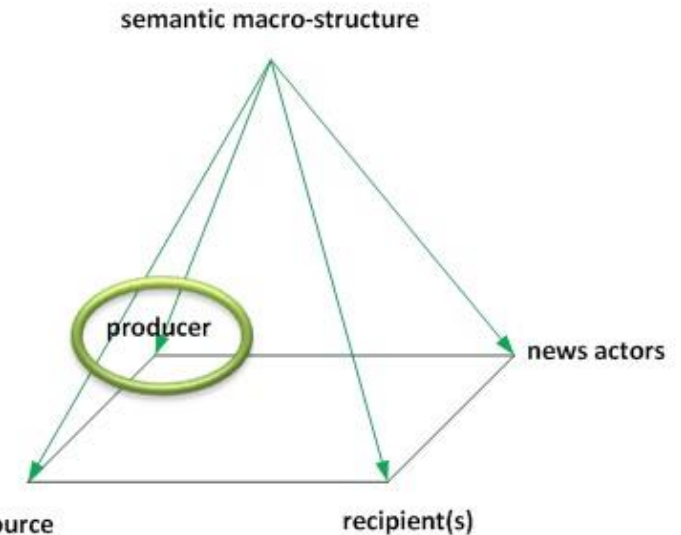
In sum, five different criteria will be assigned to the four discourse participants and the meta-level of the semantic macro-structure in my final analysis. For the purpose of illustration, I have selected a single criterion referring to the salience of authorial opinion. At this point, I would like to emphasize that this exemplary analysis tries to roughly sketch how the pyramid of discourse participants can be applied as a basis for the empirical study to come.

One criterion with regard to **the producer** will be authorial *evaluation* through modal verbs, stance adverbials and evaluative adjectives (see Figure 3). The aim is to examine the salience of the authorial voice and the degree of (in)formality.

**Figure 3:**  
Criterion 1: Authorial evaluation through modal verbs, stance adverbials and evaluative adjectives.

*Evaluation*, with respect to the editorial or any journalistic text, is commonly defined as “the function and usage of language to express the speaker’s or writer’s opinion” (Bednarek 2008: 7). More specifically *evaluation* can be regarded as “the broad cover term for the expression of the speaker’s or writer’s attitude or stance towards, viewpoint on, or feelings about the entities or propositions that he or she is talking about” which may be measured through so called “sets of values” (Thompson & Hunston 2000: 5) or, in Bednarek’s terms, “evaluative parameters” (2008: 9).

Approaches investigating evaluation have been numerous, among them those developed by proponents of the systemic-functional appraisal theory, such as Martin & White (2004). Bednarek (2006, 2008), however, presents an alternative approach to these studies in that her theory represents a “synthesis and development of several previous linguistic approaches to evaluation that distinguish between different kinds of evaluation” (Bednarek 2008: 9), such as



COMPREHENSIBILITY, EMOTIVITY, EXPECTEDNESS, HUMOROUSNESS, etc. (15-16). In her theory, evaluation is analyzed along ten different meaning dimensions (i.e. seven core and three peripheral evaluative parameters). The benefits of her theory in contrast to previous research is that Bednarek’s framework encompasses not only propositions but all aspects that can be subject to evaluation, such as participants, events, situations, etc. (Bednarek 2008: 13). This circumstance makes her theory ideal for my research, since my model aims at providing a more holistic and balanced view by focusing on each of the four discourse participants (i.e. not only the producer, but also the

reader, the news actors and the news source; see Figure 1 and Figure 2).

Yet, so far, Bednarek’s theory has mainly been applied to British newspaper language, as she herself concedes (2008: 10). Adapting her framework to a cross-cultural study and comparing her most significant results to my findings (just with respect to authorial evaluation) may shed further light on culture-induced style differences in authorial evaluation.

A further study my research draws on regarding this criterion of analysis is Susan Conrad & Douglas Biber’s (2000: 56-73) comparative statistical analysis of the meaning and the grammatical form of stance adverbials in three different registers, viz. conversations, academic writing and news reportage. For their purpose, they identified three distinctive types of meaning:

- epistemic stance: indicating the certainty of the speaker and the source of information (e.g. *probably*, *according to* ...),
  - attitudinal stance: indicating feelings and value judgements (e.g. *surprisingly*),
  - and style stance: commenting on the communication (e.g. *honestly*)
- (Conrad & Biber 2000: 56; Bednarek 2008: 9).

Their analysis aimed at identifying which of these types of meaning was most frequent in the respective registers. A further question was: Which grammatical realization of evaluation (i.e. as a single adverb, an adverb phrase, a prepositional phrase, ...) do the writers or speakers opt for?

Both Bednarek’s and Conrad & Biber’s studies provide us with useful tools for the analysis of authorial evaluation. Yet, neither of them addresses explicitly the editorial as a representative of opinion discourse, nor the influence of a given news culture on the manner of evaluation.

Out of these studies I have thus created a distinctive set of criteria fitting exactly my purpose. The result is a set of ten evaluative parameters.<sup>2</sup> Some of them have been taken over in their core meaning from Bednarek’s theory (i.e. criteria with the abbreviation BE), others have been adapted to my purpose (see abbreviation AD) and a few have been added due to their necessity in my pretest (see abbreviation NEW).

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<sup>2</sup> The spelling of my evaluative parameters follows the example of Monika Bednarek’s all caps spelling. For the sake of clarity the labels of the parameters have sometimes been shortened in the figures.

Table 1 (next page) provides an overview of the evaluative parameters of my analysis.

The parameters from Bednarek’s (2008: 12-22) theory that have not been considered in my culture-contrastive survey of stylistic difference within British, German and Italian opinion discourse are the following: HUMOROUSNESS, EXPECTEDNESS, EVIDENTIALITY, MENTAL STATE and STYLE.

Some parameters, such as HUMOROUSNESS, turned out to be of minor importance for my purpose, others have been (partially) included in one of my own parameters, such as EXPECTEDNESS. The rest will be taken into account and analysed according to other criteria of my analysis. EVIDENTIALITY, for instance, which “deals with the writers’ evaluations of the ‘evidence’ for their knowledge [such as] [...] He **thought** they were wrong [...] [or] **It’s well-known** they were wrong” (Bednarek 2008: 18) will be covered by a separate analysis of quoting verbs.

Moreover, my study will take a detailed look at, amongst others, the choice and status of the accessed voices and the kind of evidence supporting the journalist’s arguments.



My evaluative parameters	Definition	Example(s) from my British, German and Italian corpus
PROBABILITY/POSSIBILITY (AD)	<p>In the case of the evaluative parameters of PROBABILITY/POSSIBILITY and NECESSITY/IMPORTANCE I have subsumed two criteria under one label, each due to the overlap in meaning. The findings from my pre-test suggest that the concepts of PROBABILITY and POSSIBILITY are not easily separable since there is only a very subtle difference in meaning with respect to terms such as <i>probably, possibly, might, may,...</i></p> <p>The same is true for the concepts of NECESSITY and IMPORTANCE. Phrases such as “... is indispensable” may refer to both of them. In this respect my set of parameters differs from Bednarek’s (2008: 12), who classifies the instances of evaluation into POSSIBILITY/NECESSITY and IMPORTANCE.</p> <p>In my case, the parameter of PROBABILITY/POSSIBILITY evaluates the likelihood of a future event or situation coming true.</p> <p>In contrast to this, the author makes use of the parameter of NECESSITY/ IMPORTANCE to emphasize the significance or relevance of an action or an event.</p>	<p>(BR) <i>can, could, may, might,</i>            (GE) <i>wahrscheinlich, möglich,</i>            (IT) <i>probabile,...</i></p>
NECESSITY/IMPORTANCE (AD)		<p>(BR) <i>must, should, long overdue,</i>            (GE) <i>brauchen,</i>            (IT) <i>una scelta storica,</i>  <i>è indispensabile,...</i></p>
IMPOSSIBILITY/ UNLIKELIHOOD (NEW)	<p>Whereas Bednarek (2008: 12) regards the opposite of POSSIBILITY, i.e. IMPOSSIBILITY, as part of the parameter, I have separated this concept and subsumed it with UNLIKELIHOOD under a new label to give it more prominence. The author uses this parameter to express the view that an event or situation is unlikely to occur, e.g. “It is difficult to imagine Mr. X doing Y”, but also to point out narrow-mindedness or bias, e.g. “It would be unthinkable for a president to suggest that ...”.</p>	<p>(BR) <i>cannot, must not,</i>  <i>difficult to imagine,</i>            (IT) <i>difficile,...</i></p>
PREDICTIVE/ PREDICTABILITY/ WISHES/WARNINGS (NEW)	<p>This parameter turned out to be necessary for the interpretations of my findings from the pretest. There is a slight overlap with Bednarek’s (2008: 15) parameter of EXPECTEDNESS. Yet, the parameter of PREDICTIVE/ PREDICTABILITY/WISHES/WARNINGS aims at addressing a much wider concept, including the speech act of predicting the near future or a likely situation. My research has shown that wishes and warnings are also a common tool to express personal opinion in editorials, especially as a concluding remark.</p>	<p>(BR) <i>much-anticipated, the likely consequences,</i>            (DE) <i>Mögen Edward Snowdens Enthüllungen dazu beitragen, dass ...</i>            (IT) <i>è ora che, ...</i></p>

RELIABILITY/GENUINENESS (BE)	This parameter includes both “the writer’s evaluation of the reliability of a proposition and his/her evaluation of the ‘genuineness’ of an entity/entities” (Bednarek 2008: 17).	(BR) <i>correct, incorrect, reportedly, no doubt</i> , (IT) <i>ovviamente</i>
positive EMOTIVITY (AD)	Both positive and negative EMOTIVITY are probably the most direct instances of expressing opinion. According to Bednarek (2008: 15) they constitute two poles of a scale (between approval and disapproval), rather than two opposites. For the sake of clarity, though, I have divided them into two separate parameters. In this way, it becomes clearer whether an author exploits the parameter of negative EMOTIVITY to point out societal ills and social injustice or to criticize a person, or whether he/she endorses the actions of a news actor or approves of a situation.	(BR) <i>remarkable, shining example</i> , (GE) <i>ruhig, souverän, sehr genau</i> , (IT) <i>fa benissimo, attentamente</i>
negative EMOTIVITY (AD)		(BR) <i>aggressive, dishonest</i> , (GE) <i>unerträglich, unbelehrbar</i> , (IT) <i>imbarazzante, malizioso</i>
(IN)COMPREHENSIBILITY (BE)	In this context, the writer evaluates events, situations, state of affairs, etc. as being “more or less within or outside the grasp of their understanding” (Bednarek 2006: 67).	(BR) <i>conceivable</i> , (GE) <i>natürlich, verständlich</i>
TOPICALITY (NEW)	With the parameter of TOPICALITY the author stresses the up-to-datedness and thus indirectly the importance of an event or a state of affair. It is the only parameter to add a temporal dimension.	(BR) <i>currently, latest, recent</i> , (GE) <i>die neuesten ...</i> (IT) <i>oggi</i>
COMPARATIVE/ SUPERLATIVE (NEW)	My findings suggest that to emphasize a point, editorial writers tend to use the superlative quite regularly, either to stress the importance of an event or to express their approval or disapproval.	(BR) <i>far more often than ...</i> , (GE) <i>schon mehr als..., aus dem demokratischsten Land der Welt</i> , (IT) <i>La minaccia di oggi è molto più pericolosa e complessa.</i>

**Table 1:**

Overview of my 10 evaluative parameters with respect to authorial evaluation.

## 6. Corpus

As has already been pointed out briefly, this research is based on editorials from three different news cultures, i.e. the British, the German and the Italian, to examine tangible differences in the expression of opinion and the preferred linguistic means employed. A corpus of 45 editorials, i.e. 15 per news culture, from six national quality papers will serve as the basis for my empirical analysis.

The opinion sites of the British *The Guardian* and *The Independent*, the German *Frankfurter Rundschau* and *Die Welt*, and the Italian *Corriere della Sera* and *La Stampa* were scanned for editorials dealing with one thematic field: the hotly disputed topic of global surveillance and whistleblowing. For the sake of comparability, only editorials focusing on this topic were selected. All of the editorials stem from the time span between 2012 and 2015. Of course, the editorial policies of the individual newspapers will not and cannot be taken into account, though these unquestionably have a considerable influence on the presentation of news.

Detailed information on the individual papers, such as their history, their ethics, and their thematic focus can be retrieved from

the respective websites: [theguardian.com](http://theguardian.com), [independent.co.uk](http://independent.co.uk), [fr-online.de](http://fr-online.de), [welt.de](http://welt.de), [corriere.it](http://corriere.it), [lastampa.it](http://lastampa.it).

### 6.1 The Topics Selected and Their Thematic Orientation

The topic of global surveillance and whistleblowing, in turn, can be subdivided into three topical areas:

- individual whistleblowers, such as Julian Assange, Bradley/Chelsea Manning and Edward Snowden, the ensuing WikiLeaks and NSA scandal and the phenomenon of whistleblowing in general, (i.e. **topic a: “NSA/whistleblowers”**)
- the resulting impact on trade, foreign politics and investigative journalism, (i.e. **topic b: “impact and reactions”**)
- and the socio-ethical question of what should be paramount: freedom or security (i.e. **topic c: “mass surveillance”**).

More than half of the articles (i.e. 53 %) address **topic a**, which centres on the polarizing figures of the leaks that started with the disclosures by Assange and Manning on questionable US military actions and culminated

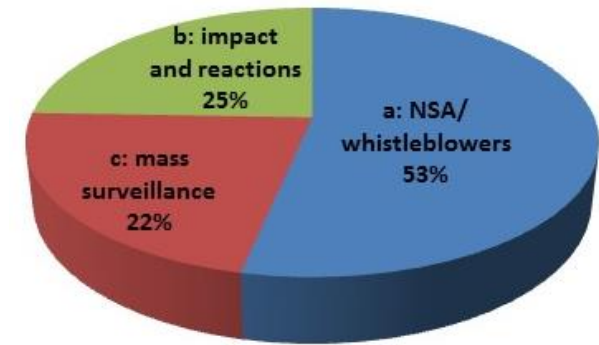


Figure 4: Thematic orientation of editorials in general.

in Snowden’s revelations on the surveillance of respectable citizens (see Figure 4). The other two subjects make up just about one-fourth each.

Why Snowden and his revelations managed to attract so much more public and journalistic interest than those of his predecessor is probably best explained by a statement from Sergio Romano, editorialist for the *Corriere della Sera*. Romano asserts that while Assange exposed classified information on military actions which the public may deem legitimate, Snowden leaked information intimately affecting every citizen, i.e. the systematic surveillance of millions of households, not only in the US but worldwide. Once the reader feels directly involved

in the matter, public interest increases. On top of that, Romano affirms that these disclosures were preceded by continuous accusations by the US against Russia for violating human rights.

Edward Snowden, dal canto suo, ha qualche merito in più. Mentre Assange ha rivelato segreti militari (una categoria che molti considerano legittima), Snowden dice al mondo che gli Stati Uniti entrano sistematicamente nelle nostre case e nella nostra vita. Tutto ciò è accaduto, per di più, in una fase in cui l'America non perdeva occasione per rimproverare a Vladimir Putin la sua sistematica violazione dei diritti umani e ai cinesi le loro scorrettezze cibernetiche. (I\_COR\_03.07.13)

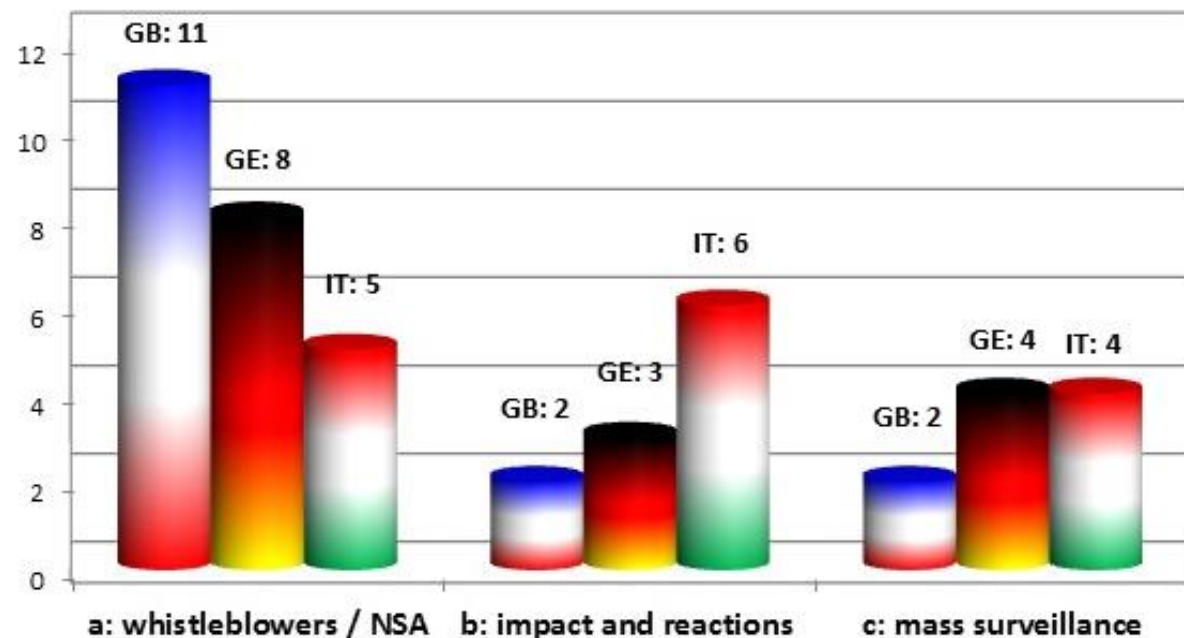
The rest of the editorials address issues arising from these disclosures, such as:

- potential pitfalls for EU-US trade relations resulting from a “hypocritical dispute over eavesdropping” (GB\_IN\_08.07.13) and Obama’s controversial (dual) strategy in his war against terrorism (i.e. **topic b**: 25%),

- and the blurred line between the protection of privacy and the guarantee of security (**topic c**: 22%).

Of course, one has to keep in mind that this corpus constitutes just a selection of editorials, neither including other genres of opinion discourse nor providing a complete overview of all editorials available on the topic. However, my findings may indicate a general trend in press coverage.

**Figure 5:** Thematic orientation of editorials according to news culture.



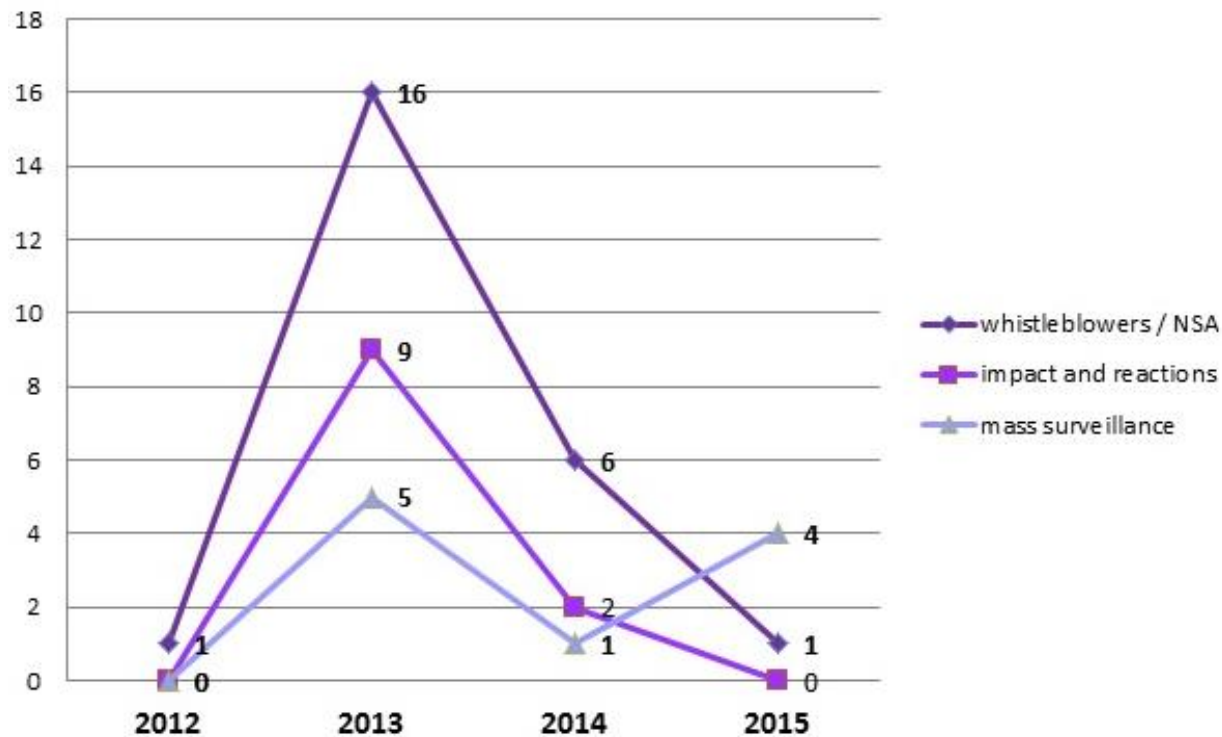
In terms of news culture (see Figure 5), the British quality papers seem to display most interest in the personalities of individual whistleblowers whereas the other news cultures divide their attention more evenly between the three main topics.

What is more striking is the coverage of topics per year (see Figure 6). Whereas 2013 clearly saw a peak in each of the three topics, the concentration on **topic a** (i.e. whistleblowers and NSA scandal) abruptly fades. At the same time the editorials from 2015 display a renewed interest in **topic c**, i.e. the right balance between freedom and security.

In the light of the Paris terrorist attacks of January 2015, editorialists seemingly reconsidered their predominantly pro-whistleblowing, con-surveillance perspective (from 2013). Apparently, they diverted their concern to the more general question of how much control and surveillance a government should exercise in order to protect its citizens without infringing upon their human rights. Still, this trend is far more visible in the Italian quality press. More than half of

these articles were written by Italian journalists (see Figure 5). Interestingly, the Italian editorialists appeared to be more critical of Snowden and other whistleblowers right from the start (see Figure 10). A possible reason for this may be that Italy was rather peripherally touched by the scandal compared to Great Britain, or, above all, Germany.

Figure 6: Distribution of topics per year.



However, what may be more intriguing with respect to (news-)cultural differences than a mere overview of their thematic orientation is an empirical analysis of the (linguistic) means of authorial evaluation. First, however, a brief introduction to the characteristics and peculiarities of the news cultures under scrutiny is needed (see Sections 6.2-4).

## 6.2 The British Quality Press

According to Monika Bednarek (2006: 12), “the British are the third biggest newspaper buyers of the world; nearly 80 per cent of all the households buy a copy of a newspaper each day (O’Driscoll 2000: 151), and no country has as many national daily and Sunday newspapers as Great Britain”.

British journalism culture is idiosyncratic in several respects. Its national press is dominated by its center of power, London, on the one hand, and influenced by class and education on the other. Historically speaking, London played an important role in the nationwide distribution of the press through its railway network. From the growing importance of the rail network in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the beginning of distribution per road in the 1980s, London represented the centre

of circulation. Moreover “a culture of nationalism rather than regionalism” (Cole & Harcup 2010: 20) enhanced the influence of Great Britain’s capital on its national press (Cole & Harcup 2010: 19-20).

The second factor peculiar to British journalism culture is its preoccupation with the social class of the targeted audience. A look at the stratification of British national dailies and their target readership reveals the tendency of British newspapers to sell to the richer, better educated social classes. The five serious dailies mainly directed at that readership are *The Times*, *Telegraph*, *Guardian*, *Independent* and *Financial Times*. Together, they cover the political spectrum from left of centre (with the *Independent* and the *Guardian*) to the right (*The Times* and the *Telegraph*) (Cole & Harcup 2010: 31).

Though a comparable body of research in this direction cannot be found in German media linguistics, German news culture displays the same two-fold division into quality and popular press. The Italian press, in contrast, makes no neat, rigorously researched distinction according to target audience or socio-economic status of their readership whatsoever. This, of course, has an influence on the selection of topics addressed, on the linguistic style and, more specifically, on the

way events are evaluated by editorial writers.

### 6.3 The German Quality Press

No other European country sells as many daily newspapers as Germany. Davide Brocchi (2008), journalist and social scientist, interprets this as a sign of a healthy and flourishing democracy. In contrast to Great Britain, however, neither Germany nor Italy have a truly national press. This circumstance results from the political development of the German and Italian press in the post-World War II era.

With the establishment of the freedom of the press in 1919 a multitude of daily newspapers were founded. Almost half of them had a clear political or social alignment (Brocchi 2008). After World War II the Allies outlawed the publication of any kind of newspaper, only to authorize the distribution of newly launched papers under their control a few years afterwards. From 1945 till 1949 publishers were forced to get a license. Within this period of the so called *Lizenzierungszwang*, some of the most popular daily newspapers that still dominate Germany’s news culture were founded,

amongst them the *Frankfurter Rundschau* and the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*. The lifting of this law resulted in a sudden increase in the launching of German newspapers. Within a time-span of six months 400 new papers were introduced (Röper 1994: 506-508; Altendorfer 2001: 27-37).

Yet, the fact that the German press has neither a center of power nor a truly national paper does not imply that there are no daily quality papers with a national circulation. The most prominent ones are *Die Welt*, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (FAZ)*, *Süddeutsche Zeitung (SZ)*, and *Frankfurter Rundschau (FR)*. In terms of political stance, the four of them cover the political spectrum from right of center to moderately right to moderately left and left of center (Wilke 2009: 471).

With respect to readership, the German news culture is distinct from the British and the Italian in several respects. One factor is the preference for subscription newspapers. Whereas in Germany subscription newspapers account for three-quarters of the overall daily sales, they constitute only 9 percent of the Italian market (Brocchi 2008). Practically speaking, this makes the German reader a more predictable one.

Content wise, the German readership is pre-eminently interested in national and

foreign politics but also in leading articles and letters to the editor. However, this can be partially traced back to the neat division into quality and popular press in the German and the British news culture, which is clearly missing in the Italian press (Murphy 2005: 21; Brocchi 2008). For the sake of a greater comparability, quality papers will thus be preferred in my empirical analysis.

#### 6.4 The Italian Quality Press

As already mentioned, Italy’s major newspapers are – as in Germany – all regionally based. In terms of circulation, five main newspapers can be distinguished in the Italian media landscape: *Il Corriere della Sera*, *La Repubblica*, *il Gazzetta dello Sport*, *il Sole24Ore* and *La Stampa*. With respect to the political stance, “*La Repubblica* is a left-wing paper, *Il Corriere della Sera* is a centrist to right, [...] *La Stampa* is liberal in orientation, because it is, above all, a regional newspaper from Piedmont [i.e. a family], rather than a paper that has political origins, as is the norm in Italy” (Murphy 2005: 25).

Compared to the British and the German press, Italian journalism culture differs with respect to

- the political ownership of prominent dailies and the resulting influence on the journalistic content (the so called *quotidiani di tendenza*),
- the considerable influence of television (the so called *teledipendenza*),
- the relatively small readership,
- the blurred line between fact and opinion within the journalistic genres
- and the absence of a neat distinction between quality and popular press.

Most of these characteristics can indeed be traced back to the cultural and political development of Italy within the late 19<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The first journals with a nationwide distribution were launched at the time of the Italian unification (in 1871). Soon the most influential dailies were financially supported by industrialists and financiers, like the *Corriere della Sera* by the Crespi family, who were wealthy cotton salesmen.

“[T]he extensive buying of daily newspapers by the country’s leading industrialists, businessmen and financiers” during the 1950s and 1960s led to a “large-scale press concentration” (Humphreys 1996: 88) which resulted in today’s situation where all of Ita-

ly’s main journals used to be or are still owned by industrialists or financiers. Their interest in press ownership is motivated by the political influence it confers.

Another major characteristic of the Italian news culture is the decisive role of television. The dominant influence of TV can be observed from the reduced number of readers on the one hand and the layout and the style of the dailies on the other. According to a number of linguists, such as Bonomi (2003: 127), Brizzi (2006: 23) and Froio (2000: 146), TV has replaced the national press as the main source of information. According to surveys, 93% of political information is disseminated via TV (Brizzi 2006: 23). This *teledipendenza*, in turn, pressures the dailies to adapt to their (remaining) readership’s preferences in terms of layout and style. Obvious stylistic differences with respect to the British and the German quality press are the prevalence of spoken language and direct citations to render the descriptions in the journalistic genres more vivid, the use of expressive and figurative language and the dominance of the visual element (e.g. infographics, illustrations and tables accompanying the journalistic texts; see Bonomi 2003: 129-133; Brizzi 2006: 30-40).

## 7. Empirical Analysis: Description and Interpretation of Findings

A brief glance at the overall distribution of evaluative parameters regardless of news culture reveals that editorial writers make strong use of NEGATIVE EMOTIVITY (33%) when expressing their opinion. Figure 7 shows that every third instance of evaluation through modal verbs, stance adverbials and evaluative adjectives is one that puts the event, the situation or the news actor addressed in a negative light. Respective examples will be provided later on in this chapter (see Ex.1 - Ex.11).

That is especially interesting if we keep in mind that Monika Bednarek (2008: 15) does not differentiate between POSITIVE and NEGATIVE EMOTIVITY, as she regards them as two poles of a scale (between approval and disapproval), rather than two opposites (see Section 5). Considering the fact that *good* and *bad* are antonyms, which implies that they are gradable and thus no direct opposites, this decision seems legitimate. In addition, cases in which the author negates a positively evaluated event, in which he/she talks about its unlikelihood or

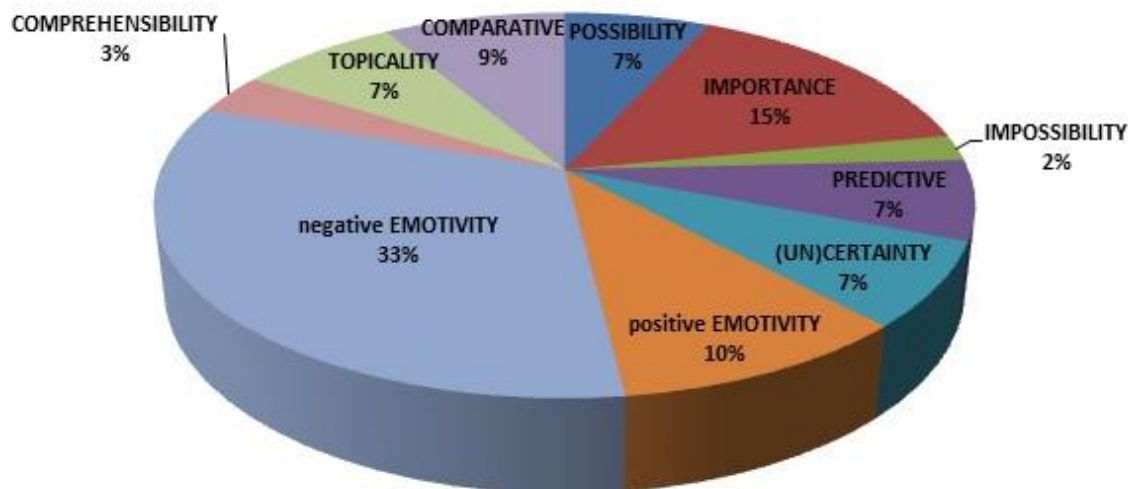
in which he/she uses positively connoted terms in an ironic way further complicate the matter. However, the findings of my analysis suggest that it is worthwhile to treat POSITIVE and NEGATIVE EMOTIVITY as two separate parameters.

In each of the three news cultures NEGATIVE EMOTIVITY clearly dominates the picture, which means that it is about twice as frequent as the second criterion IMPORTANCE. From a culture-contrastive perspective, the German editorials evidently make use of NEGATIVE EMOTIVITY most often (with 166 instances; see Figure 8), compared to the British with 143 instances and the Italian with 112 instances. On the

whole, about one third of all the evaluative instances per news culture display NEGATIVE EMOTIVITY: 34% in the British, 32% in the German and 32% in the Italian editorials.

This considerable amount of NEGATIVE EMOTIVITY leads to great diversity in the intensity of negativity expressed. However, more illuminating than mere figures is the way editorial writers employ this parameter to denounce the subject or person of interest:

Figure 1:  
Distribution of evaluative parameters as a whole.





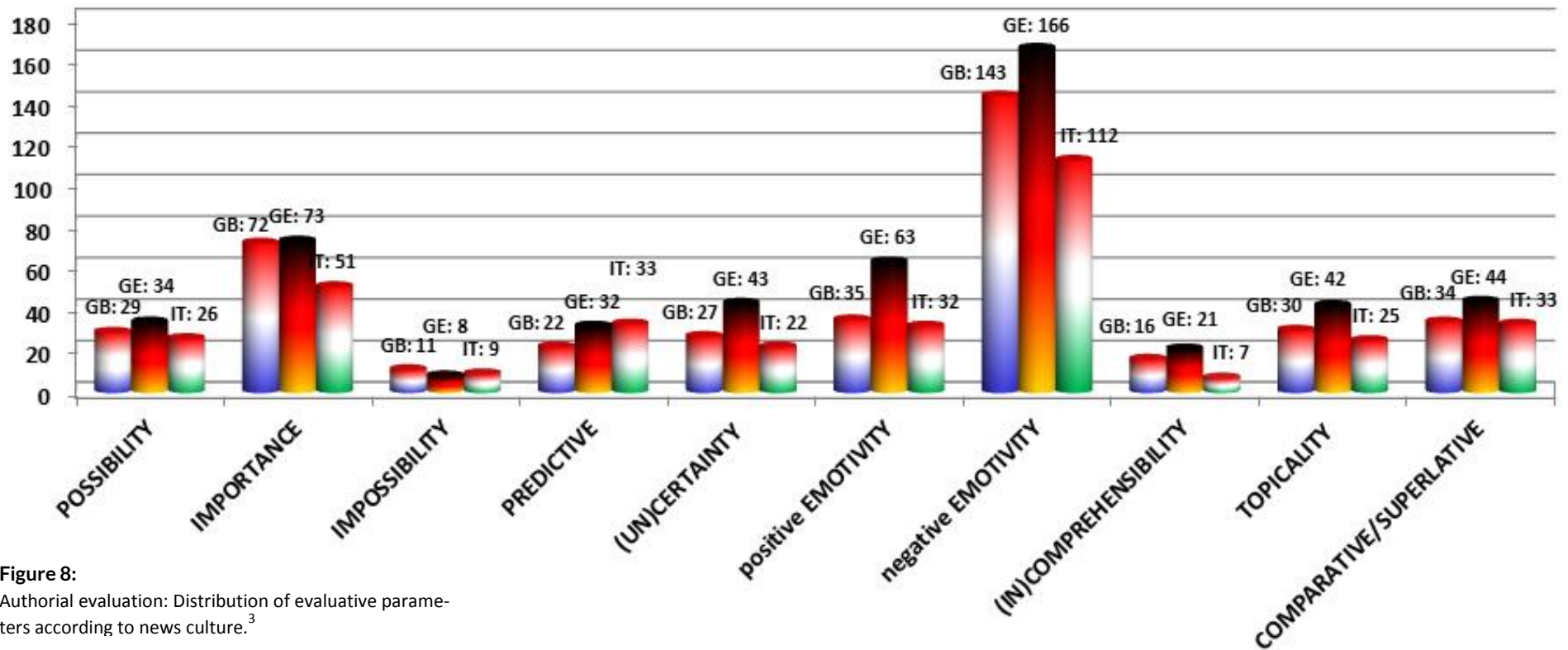


Figure 8:

Authorial evaluation: Distribution of evaluative parameters according to news culture.<sup>3</sup>

The German instances of NEGATIVE EMOTIVITY range from moderate criticism to highly alarming warnings concerning the current or a possible future state of affairs.

Most of the criticism in the German editorials is aimed at the US government for granting the NSA so much insight into the private lives of blameless citizens. The other cases mainly express the authors' disapproval of the NSA's practices or critically

assess the German government for showing (in the journalists' eyes) too mild a reaction to Edward Snowden's revelations.

- **Ex. 1:** Abwarten und die anderen kommen lassen, um ihnen im Zweifel deutsche Interessen aufzuzwingen, ist **keine angemessene** Strategie,... (G\_FR\_27.10.13)

- **Ex. 2:** Da ist zum einen der **schockierende** Einbruch in die Privatsphäre von Milliarden Einzelnen und die Misshandlung der Bürgerrechte großer Teile der Weltbevölkerung. (G\_FR\_24.06.13)
- **Ex. 3:** Snowden hat **skandalöse** Praktiken seiner Regierung gegen europäische Bürger, Politiker und Institutionen offengelegt. (G\_FR\_02.07.13)

- **Ex. 4:** Es ist eine **beängstigende, verstörende** Doppelstrategie, die Obama im sogenannten Krieg gegen den Terrorismus verfolgt. (G\_FR\_31.07.13)
- **Ex. 5:** Wenn sich die Kanzlerin und ihre Apologeten erst angegriffen fühlen, wenn Merkels Handy abgehört wird, dann ist das **verlogen**. (G\_FR\_27.10.13)

Yet, why does the amount of criticism in the German editorials (measured per instances) so drastically exceed that of the Italian and the British editorials?

The figures concerning the overall distribution of evaluative parameters according to news culture (see Figure 8) illustrate that apart from two exceptions (i.e. IMPOSSIBILITY and PREDICTIVE), the German editorials analyzed display by far the most cases of

<sup>3</sup> The figures indicate absolute numbers of instances and are not normalized with respect to the length of the editorials for a number of reasons. Firstly, the British editorials are shorter which could be interpreted as a characteristic inherent to the British news culture. Secondly, since this analysis compares texts from three different languages, which per se differ in term of structure and length of expression, normalization would distort the results. Thirdly, article length could also be seen as a conscious choice of the author and it cannot be assumed with certainty that a longer article would include considerably more instances of a certain parameter of evaluation.

authorial evaluation expressed through adjectives, adverbials and modal verbs as a whole.

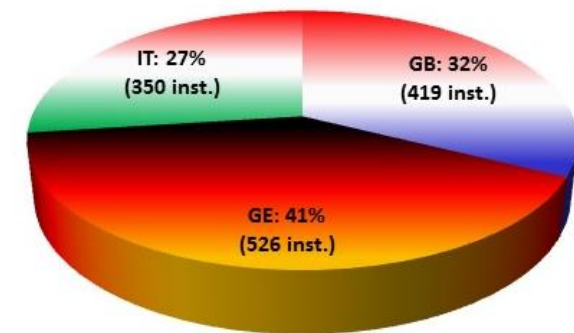
In sum 41% of all instances of authorial evaluation stem from German editorials, whereas those from the British editorials account for only 32% and the Italian for only 27% (see Figure 9). However, the assumption that German editorialists generally express their opinion more regularly and in a more direct manner would be too simple an explanation. For a reliable interpretation of these results the grammatical variation in how opinion is most commonly expressed in the three languages analyzed cannot be left aside.

While German apparently makes exhaustive use of adjectives and adverbials for evaluation and opinion expression, Italian in particular seemingly exploits other linguistic sources, such as evaluative nouns and verbs, more frequently, as the following examples show:

- **Ex. 6:** *distruggere* ('destroy') (I\_STA\_27.10.13)
- **Ex. 7:** *cacciare* ('hunt') (I\_COR\_11.07.14)
- **Ex. 8:** *imbarazzo* ('embarrassment') (I\_COR\_31.10.13)

- **Ex. 9:** *il declino del mondo occidentale* ('the decline of the Western World') (I\_COR\_31.10.13)

A second explanation for the considerable amount of criticism in the German editorials could be that the German government and their relationship to the US were more intimately affected when the bugging of the German Chancellor's phone came to light. This scandal called not only for the denouncing of the NSA and the US government but also for lengthy and detailed comment by the national papers on the ensuing reaction by the German government.



**Figure 9:** Sum of instances of authorial evaluation per news culture.

A comparison between the overall distribution of evaluative parameters (see Figure 7) and the distribution according to news culture (see Figure 8) shows that the figures correspond in terms of frequency. The parameters that have generally been most often employed, such as NEGATIVE EMOTIVITY (33%), IMPORTANCE (15%), POSITIVE EMOTIVITY (10%) and COMPARATIVE/SUPERLATIVE (9%), appear in the same order of frequency in the individual news cultures. Furthermore, my findings suggest that the parameters of (IN)COMPREHENSIBILITY (3%) and IMPOSSIBILITY (2%) can easily be left aside, as they seem to play a very minor role. At this point, I have to concede that IMPOSSIBILITY is a criterion I added with the intention of pointing out instances where the author enlightens the reader on the difficulties a certain news actor has to face or where he/she points out the hopelessness of a situation. However, journalistic criticism appears to be mainly directed at the actions performed by the news actors rather than at the situation.

Finally, I will turn to the general attitude of the editorialists towards the topic of global surveillance and whistleblowing (see Figure 10). My findings seem to support the general trend visible from the thematic ori-

entation of the papers described in Section 6.1. Whereas the majority of British and German editorials argue in favor of Edward Snowden and other whistleblowers and condemn any surveillance whatsoever, the Italian pro- and con-whistleblowing articles balance each other. This trend has already been observed in the thematic orientation of the editorials analyzed, where Italy displayed a greater variety of sub-topics, whereas the British and the German quality papers were mainly concerned with the agents of the leak scandals (see Section 6.1 and Figure 5). These critical voices, however, also echo in the labels Italian journalists employ to refer to the news actors and their actions as the following examples illustrate:

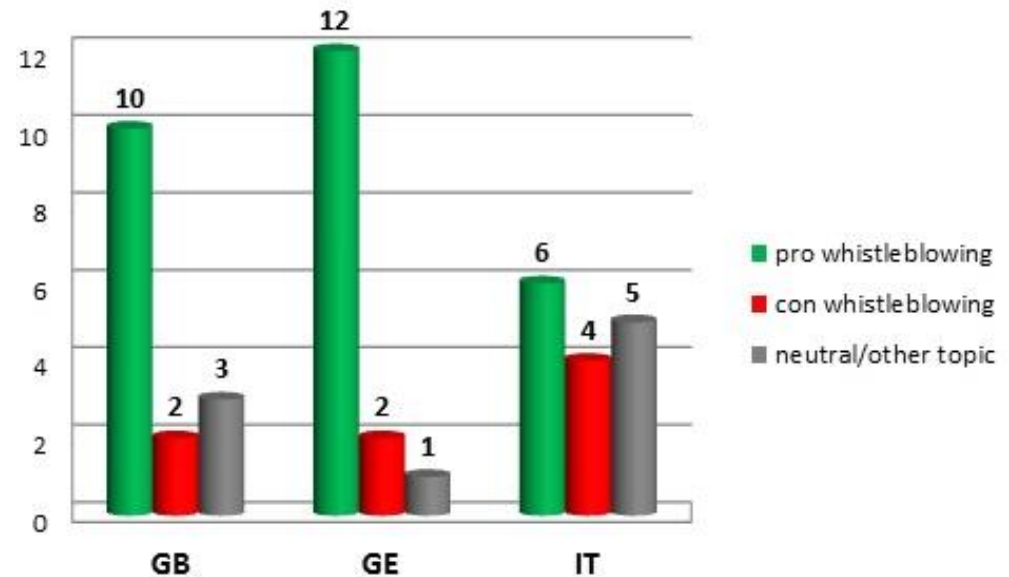


Figure 10: Attitudes towards whistleblowing.

- **Ex. 10:** Hanno ragione i **guerriglieri del web?** (I\_STA\_22.10.13) ('Are the **guerilla of the Internet** [i.e. the whistleblowers] in the right?')
- **Ex. 11:** Come ha detto il capo dei servizi segreti inglesi MI5, Andrew Parker, l'impresa di Snowden «è un **regalo immenso ai terroristi**». (I\_STA\_22.10.13) ('As the head of the British Secret Service MI5, Andrew Parker, affirmed Snowden's undertaking "is an **immense gift to the terrorists**".')

Even though these findings may already be indicative of obvious differences in the news coverage of the three news cultures, a closer examination of evaluation in the respective opinion discourse is still to be done. This is why my future research will study the interaction between discourse participants from five different angles, viz. the perspective of the author/producer, the reader, the news actors, the news source and the meta-level of the semantic macro-structure (see Figure 1). As a whole, for each of these five cornerstones one criterion will be assigned to in order to draw more significant conclusions on the relationship between style and news culture.

## 8. Conclusion and Outlook

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On the basis of these findings I can now close the circle by answering the two principal questions I started out with:

- Are the British, the German and the Italian news culture and their respective opinion discourse comparable at all in terms of thematic selection and style?

- If so, how can the respective similarities and differences be made tangible and empirically measurable?

Yes, these stylistic and thematic differences can be compared critically and analyzed objectively but only with an underlying framework illuminating the perspectives of all the discourse participants involved, since the sole viewpoint of a single discourse participant, such as the producer’s or the reader’s, would certainly lead to one-sided results. In Section 4, I have proposed such a framework, the so called *pyramid of discourse participants*. In addition, this model takes the semantic macro-structure into account as the uniting meta-level for analysis.

To illustrate how this framework can be applied to an empirical study, I have selected one criterion of analysis: the authorial evaluation through modal verbs, stance adverbials and evaluative adjectives (see Chapter 5). 45 editorials in all (i.e. 15 per news culture) have served as sources for my study of the directness of opinion expression and the linguistic means employed.

The conclusions that can be drawn from the results are certainly indicative of apparent trends in editorial coverage in the three

news cultures (see Sections 6.1 and 7). A complete study taking into account all of the five criteria envisaged for my future research will unquestionably lead to more significant and far-reaching findings.

The research presented is only a starting point for future research on culture-contrastive analyses of opinion discourse. This field of comparative text linguistics still hosts an abundance of interesting questions which have not been taken into account, such as:

- What role do editorial policies play in the representation of news irrespective of news culture?
- What other linguistic tools (apart from evaluative modals, adjectives and adverbials) could indicate culture-induced style differences?
- Does the thematic focus of the editorials analysed influence the results?

These and further questions will be addressed in my ongoing dissertation project.

Since the study presented in this article is still work-in-progress, feedback on it or possible answers to these or other related questions are very welcome.

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