



Call for papers

Look Who's Talking: Voices and Sources in the News

12-13 December 2024

Fifth biennial conference of the Brussels Institute for Journalism Studies (BIJU)
Department of Applied Linguistics
Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB), Belgium

Deadline for proposals: 30 June 2024

Plenary speakers

Patricia Moy (Washington University, US)
Lieven Vandelanotte (Université de Namur, Belgium)

Having established a solid reputation in research into journalism theory and journalism practice, the Brussels Institute for Journalism Studies (BIJU) is proud to launch its fifth call for papers for a new international conference. The topic for this year will be **voices and sources in the news**. As always, our conference is multidisciplinary. We invite scholars from different backgrounds like communication and media studies, conversation and discourse analysis, (cognitive) linguistics, translation studies, speech technology, epistemology and political and social sciences to share their insights with us on which voices and sources are heard in the news, and on how their words are represented.

True to tradition, we approach our central theme from two angles: communication studies and linguistics.

The concept of 'voice', extending well beyond the term's literal denotation, has become ever more relevant in our current interconnected societal environment, with a zeitgeist of heightened (self-)reflexivity, critical awareness and sensitivity to social and environmental justice and identity politics. Understood, in a political and a moral sense, as the articulation of an embodied social orientation, point of view or perspective, essentially tied to a particular positionality, 'voice' has been considered a human right or social good, fundamental to human communication and to normative ideas of democratic deliberation. In contemporary, networked societies saturated with media, various communicative avenues empower individuals to express their voices. This cultivates a dynamic and participatory environment where both journalistic and audience channels coexist. Consequently, news and opinions permeate the collective consciousness, becoming omnipresent or ambient. This context expands the scope and inclusiveness of public discourses and knowledge production practices as hitherto marginalized, underrepresented, suppressed, or otherwise 'silenced' social actors, speaking on behalf of themselves or the nonhuman 'voiceless', have been empowered to resist, talk back, counter hegemonic discourses, and reverse traditional source hierarchies.

However, for 'voice' to make an impact, it requires active 'listening', a recognition of the worth or value of one's voice by others. This is quite pertinent considering the well-established critique of dominant, mainstream news media's selection bias, privileging elite voices, and its propensity to contain contestation within the sociopolitical consensus or status quo, informed by power relationships, social conformity, and efficiency considerations. Likewise, persistent social inequalities, audience fragmentation and essentially selective 'news diets' in an 'era of plenty', combined with 'echo chamber' and 'filter bubble' mechanisms, all restrict 'exposure diversity'. Finally, 'cyber-utopian' aspirations of connectivity and dialogue are also qualified by the online proliferation of extreme, anti-social voices, materializing among others in the form of disinformation and deepfakes, hate speech, and radical deconstructive press criticism, feeding alienation, mutual distrust, and political polarization.

Shifting focus to the individual journalist's visibility and positionality, the notion of 'journalistic voice' engages with conceptions of journalism's institutional role and purpose. This pertains to a fundamental tension between an active/interventionist versus passive/detached disposition orienting journalistic practice and norms. This disposition is reflected in journalists adopting advocacy, adversarial or propagandist stances, as distinguished from disseminator or facilitator roles where the journalistic voice is muted. As such, the concept offers a gateway to contemplating societal, institutional, or professional factors shaping journalistic models and journalism cultures over time and across the globe. Against the background of global and professional crises challenging traditional mainstream journalism's authority and the 'news paradigm', the journalistic voice, long contained by the normative ideal of objectivity, has arguably been revitalized in the shape of appeals for an 'interpretive turn' in journalism, which increasingly finds traction. This is characterized by journalists stepping away from a more descriptive style, expressing their ('considered') opinion more explicitly and reflecting on their positionality in their work. Recently, this has also been resonating in the boundary work journalists engage in to cope with concerns about professional identity raised by the rapid development of AI technology. Similarly, the idea of 'finding one's own voice' applied to contemporary journalist authorship also opens to aesthetic interpretations of 'journalistic voice', to narrative and artistic forms of journalism.

Studying voices and sources in the news can be done empirically from many different angles. From a linguistic point of view, studying the voices and the sources in a given text comes down to studying the evidentiality expressed in the text. Evidentiality is the linguistic category which gives shape to perception, proof and evidence. While the formal designation of evidentiality may vary widely among languages, evidential meanings are universally expressed in all languages. We can say that evidentiality indicates the source of information of the speakers/writers, what speakers/writers base their knowledge on and how certain speakers/writers are of that knowledge.

From a journalistic point of view, studying evidentiality in a text makes us aware of the sources cited in the text. The study of reported speech and quoting is important to explain which voices are present in the news and how they are represented. Register also plays a role here, for example to examine how journalists deal with hate speech and rude speech.

Combining multiple disciplinary angles, it is relevant to look at the journalist's own voice and study how perception and other sources of knowledge are linguistically represented, and how certainty and reliability are expressed. Additionally, the language of fake news and the role AI and speech technology play in it are other possible topics for this conference.

Furthermore, as news sources are often international and interlingual, translation and interpreting processes in news production are of interest for this conference as well. How may translation, voiceover, dubbing or subtitling affect the news content, and do they increase or decrease the number of voices that are heard, are questions that could be addressed.

With this wide variety of possible approaches in mind, we invite participants to engage in a critical discussion of voices and sources in journalism, trying to answer questions like: whose voices sound the loudest in the public debate, which sources are quoted most often, does the traditional journalistic method of including multiple sources guarantee balanced reporting, how can voices and sources be rendered linguistically and/or visually, how is the perception of the journalist expressed linguistically, what are linguistic tools to indicate certainty and (source) reliability, are there any linguistic tools for identifying fake news, and what are legitimate applications of AI for journalism?

Suggestions for further reading

Moy, P. (2020). The promise and perils of voice. *Journal of Communication*, 70(1), 1-12.

Vandelanotte, Lieven (2022). Constructions of speech and thought representation. *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Cognitive Science*, 14(2), e1637.

We welcome submissions from all relevant disciplinary backgrounds approaching the central theme of 'voices and sources in the news' from a conceptual, empirical or methodological perspective; using quantitative and qualitative methods, or a mixed-methods design; and looking into journalism practices, products, or audiences. Possible topics include but are by no means limited to:

- Source diversity and source hierarchies in the era of digital journalism
- Plurivocality and ‘multiperspectivism’ in contemporary news reporting/journalism
- Factors and processes affecting voice/source silence versus salience in journalism
- Voice/sources and ‘alternative’, ‘ambient’, or ‘interpretive’ journalism
- Voice/source diversity, objectivity and fairness
- Transparency in journalism
- Voice/source diversity in journalism and knowledge production
- Journalistic voice and institutional roles from a global perspective
- Voice/source (in)visibility and social/environmental justice or identity politics
- Voice/sources in journalism, listening and exposure diversity
- Hate speech and rude speech in journalism
- Linguistic devices for expressing evidentiality in journalism
- The translation of foreign-speaking voices in the news
- The expression of voice in visual and artistic journalism
- The language of fake news
- Human-AI collaboration in journalism
- (Diverse) voices in AI-generated content
- AI and source authentication
- Voices behind the algorithms
- Innovative methodologies for the study of voice/sources in journalism

After the previous conferences, we have edited special issues of leading journals in the research fields of journalism studies or linguistics, and a book volume with a renowned publisher. We will endeavour to do the same after this conference.

Junior researchers are warmly invited to participate.

Venue: Brussels, TBA

Conference fee (including reception, lunches, coffee):

€ 200 (regular participants), € 100 (PhD students).

Dinner will be organized on Friday 13 December and charged separately.

Please send a proposal of no more than 300 words (excluding selected references) together with your affiliation and a short biography (c. 100 words) to **whotalks@vub.be** by **30 June 2024**. Decisions will be announced by 15 July.

Questions about any aspect of the conference should be addressed to **whotalks@vub.be**.

For updates on the practical organization, please check our website

<https://www.vub.be/en/event/voices-and-sources-in-news>

Previous conferences

A True and Fair View: Communicative, Linguistic and Ethical Aspects of Expressing Point of View in Journalism, 8-9 December 2022, The University Foundation, Brussels

<https://www.vub.be/en/event/true-and-fair-view>

What's (the) News? Values, Viruses and Vectors of Newsworthiness, 13-14 December 2018, Museum of Natural Sciences, Brussels

Constructed/Constructive Journalism, 8-9 December 2016, Royal Flemish Academy of Belgium for Science and the Arts, Brussels

Hybridity and the News: Hybrid Forms of Journalism in the 21st Century, 4-5 December 2014, VUB Campus Etterbeek, Brussels

Publications of the previous conferences

Point of view in Journalism
(*Language and Communication*)

The journalistic I: Mediating Subjectivity in Contemporary Journalism Practices
(*Journalism Practice*)

https://think.taylorandfrancis.com/special_issues/journalism-practice-journalistic-mediating/

Book volume *News Values from an Audience Perspective*

<https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-030-45046-5>

What's (the) News? Revisiting 'News Values' as a Concept and Methodology in the Age of Digital Networked Journalism

(*Journalism Studies*)

<https://www.tandfonline.com/toc/rjos20/22/6>

Post-truth and the political: Constructions and distortions in representing political facts
(*Discourse, Context & Media*)

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S2211695818303271>

Constructive journalism: Concepts, practices, and discourses
(*Journalism*)

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1464884918770885>

Hybridity and the news: Blending genres and interaction patterns in new forms of journalism
(*Journalism*)

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1464884916657520>