

Call for papers

Beware of the Stereotype:

Categories, Generalizations and Clichés in Journalistic Language and Journalism Practice

3-4 December 2026

Sixth biennial conference of the Brussels Institute for Journalism Studies (BIJU)

Department of Applied Linguistics

Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB), Belgium

Deadline for proposals: 30 June 2026

Plenary speakers

[Rachel Sterken](#) (University of Hong Kong)

[Bruce Mutsvairo](#) (University of Utrecht)

Building on its longstanding engagement with journalism theory and practice, the Brussels Institute for Journalism Studies (BIJU) launches its sixth international conference, devoted to the study of **categories, generalizations and clichés in journalistic language and journalism practice**. The conference is explicitly multidisciplinary and welcomes contributors from, among others, communication and media studies, discourse and conversation analysis, (cognitive) linguistics, corpus linguistics, translation studies, epistemology, social psychology, and the political and social sciences to share their insights with us on the way stereotypical representations, generalizations, and clichés occur in journalistic language and practice, and on how they are reproduced.

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

The relationship between ‘stereotype’ and ‘mass-mediated communication’ can be traced back to the term’s origins in the printing industry, a genealogy it shares with the notion of the ‘cliché’. Since then, stereotypes and clichés have come to signify processes of repetition, reduction and standardization in both everyday and scholarly discourse. Often credited with pioneering the idea of the ‘stereotype’ as a mental category – closely related to the concept of the ‘schema’ – Walter Lippmann, in *Public Opinion*, already engaged with the interaction between journalism, public discourse and what was famously described as ‘the pictures in our heads’, over a century ago.

Alongside a descriptive understanding of stereotypes as cognitive shortcuts fundamental to human communication, a critical perspective has foregrounded their reductionist, evaluative and potentially exclusionary effects. In this view, stereotyping is closely tied to power, inequality and ‘us versus them’ narratives structured around markers such as gender, race, nationality, culture or class. So understood, stereotyping intersects with broader themes of identity politics, social or epistemic (in)justice, hegemony, pigeonholing and disinformation.

These issues persist in contemporary societies considering increasing affective polarization and antagonism as well as a heightened sense of (self-)reflexivity and critical awareness of

positionalities and normative boundaries. Across both descriptive and evaluative interpretations, and whether occurring within or beyond news media, the meaningful yet complex relationship between stereotyping and social reality ultimately feeds into fundamental epistemological and ethical debates.

Given their intrinsic entanglement with processes of knowledge production, legitimation and public discourse, both descriptive and normative inflections of the 'stereotype' are closely entwined with journalism as an epistemic and socially situated meaning-making practice. From perspectives on news production, journalistic texts and audience reception, research has variously shown how standardized categories and generalizations function as structuring principles in news gathering, selection, representation and interpretation. These dynamics have acquired renewed urgency in a digital news environment characterized by speed, automation, algorithmic curation and efficiency-driven production processes.

Beyond – and closely related to – their role in journalism as a communicative practice, stereotypes also permeate the journalistic profession as a social field. As such, they variously affect newsroom organization, staff diversity and recruitment, shape (gendered) genre hierarchies of 'hard' and 'soft' news, and confine role perceptions and task allocations. By the same token, at a meta-level, clichés about journalism and archetypal conceptions of journalists, are both reproduced and contested in the public imagination, influencing common perceptions of journalism and its public value, for better or worse.

For a linguistic approach of categorization and generalization, the use of generic language will be worth examining. From a linguistic perspective, categorization and generalization are fundamental to meaning making. Generic language enables speakers and writers to refer to categories, formulate general claims and abstract from individual cases. This naturally entails the risk of overgeneralization and stereotyping, or drawing inferences based on overly limited observation, experience or evidence.

This conference aims to critically examine how journalistic language contributes to the formation, circulation and contestation of stereotypes and overgeneralizations, as well as how such processes shape journalistic knowledge production and public discourse.

Stereotypical or biased language in journalism, in connection with gender, religion, nationality, the generic use of pronouns like *you* and *we*, the way presuppositions and inferences are conveyed, these are just a few examples of what a linguistic approach to the topic of our conference can focus on.

We welcome submissions from all relevant disciplinary backgrounds approaching the central theme of 'stereotypes 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 not limited to, the following:

- Generic language use in journalism
- Presuppositions and inferences in journalistic language
- The linguistic expression of stereotypes and generalizations in journalism
- Possible stereotyping effects of LLMs on language use

- Stereotypes in relation to epistemology and journalistic truth claims
- Critical approaches to stereotyping, disinformation and social or epistemic justice
- Standardization, professional routines, and efficiency as drivers of stereotyping
- Stereotyping in digital news environments characterized by speed, automation, artificial intelligence, and algorithmic curation
- (Visual and multimodal) stereotyping in coverage of gender, race/ethnicity, nationality, culture, and class
- The effect of stereotyping on audience attitudes (perceptions of social groups, reinforcing prejudice) Resonance, identification, and resistance among news audiences
- Stereotypes within newsroom cultures and professional environments (homogeneity of staff and (epistemic) blind spots, diversity policies and inclusive storytelling)
- Stereotypes about journalism and their impact on trust, legitimacy, and democratic engagement

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 intend to pursue similar publications opportunities following this conference.

Junior researchers are warmly invited to participate.

Venue: Brussels, The AfricaMuseum (Leuvensesteenweg 13, 3080 Tervuren, Belgium)

Conference fee (including reception, lunches, coffee):

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

Dinner will be organized on Friday 4 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 **stereotypes@vub.be** by **30 June 2026**. Decisions will be announced by 15 July.

Questions about any aspect of the conference should be addressed to **stereotypes@vub.be**. For updates on the practical organization, please check our website:

<https://www.vub.be/en/event/beware-stereotype>

Previous conferences

Look Who's Talking: Voices and Sources in the News, 12-13 December 2024, The University Foundation, Brussels

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

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

Linguistic Aspects of Expressing Point of View in Journalism
(*Language and Communication*)

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/special-issue/10LJ2LHLFLZ>

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

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>