

DIgesting Crises in Europe (DICE): Deconstructing and Constructing Media Texts in Dialogue with Students

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Abstract

This contribution introduces the project “DIgesting Crises in Europe” (DICE) and gives its funding background and implications. It argues that a more thorough and systematic analysis of language and texts than in traditional content analyses and in literary or cultural studies allows students to see more than meets the eye. It reveals more precisely how writers create meaning to persuade their readers by applying a set of tools from critical discourse analysis and corpus linguistics. As a theoretical background, it discusses critically different journalistic and linguistics perspectives that may be used as a starting point for discussion in a critical media project. As a practical exercise, it illustrates that the recent public dialogue in news world-wide can be followed and reconstructed by on-line resources like the NOW (News On the Web) Corpus, which is freely available on the web and allows us to investigate word combinations and phrases in context that reveal more about national and international discourse in English than students may think. Of course, it is necessary to critically observe output and input and remain aware of the well-developed traditions of politicians and journalists to construct the news in a persuasive attempt to influence their readers in their thinking and acting about Europe. Thus young readers from all parts of Europe, including the Balkans, must learn not to react only as passive consumers, but to act as conscientious citizens who deconstruct the news and develop this extra critical awareness necessary in our trying times of “crises in Europe”.

Key words: news, construction, deconstruction, corpus linguistics, critical discourse, crisis in Europe, fake news

1. Introduction

1.1. The Project Background

This contribution introduces the project “DIgesting Crises in Europe”. We chose the acronym DICE, since it alludes to the English phrase “the dice is/are cast”; originally, “The die is cast”, is a translation of the Latin *iacta ālea est* exclaimed by Caesar in the decisive moment when he crossed the Rubicon to start the civil war (as quoted in Suetonius, *Vīta Dīvī Iūlī*, The Life of the deified Julius, 121 CE, par. 33). Today it is used metaphorically to refer to a decisive moment in history,

in our case the future development of Europe, which is said to tumble from crisis to crisis. Some media texts lead their readers and listeners to think that Europe, or rather the European Union, is in a constant flow of crises.

“Digesting the crises” emphasises of course that a crisis is a period of time that presents challenges to the development of the European Union, but if these challenges are met and mastered, they can contribute to an even stronger and more vibrant Europe than before. By emphasising deconstructing and constructing media texts, I mean that there is no text that cannot be deconstructed, in the sense that the intentions and sometimes even hidden agendas of the text producers are analysed and discussed openly, and that the news items are always constructed consciously or unconsciously, so that the persuasive elements lead the reader to think or even act according to the proposals or intentions of the writer and speaker. In linguistic terms, it would have been even more convincing to use a more technical expression, like *construing* a text in self-constructing, as in the functional grammar terminology proposed by Halliday (now most forcefully presented by Halliday and Matthiesen 2006).

By emphasising *in dialogue*, we mean that it is important for a democratic European society to discuss the crises in well-established partnership and communication channels. In particular the European discourse by teachers and students from Germany and the Balkan countries should be undertaken in such a way that in the end all contributors are happy with the results and think that the discourse may make some contribution, however small, at least to the mutual understanding of European crises texts in the media, as well as to the mutual understanding of the European citizens who deal with these texts. The terms *deconstruction* and *construction* make it clear that there is no such objective ideal as the *unconstructed, unintentional, unbiased, uncritical* view of media texts in general. Of course, in such discussions it is most important that the critical dialogue of European identities in crises is portrayed from all different perspectives of the peoples and groups involved.

If we apply these basic principles to our own project, we have to discuss openly and critically the funding conditions for such a “Dialogue with countries from the Western Balkans”, as the DAAD (German Academic Exchange Service) programme is called. For the project it is important to show that: a) there is a certain continuation of projects, i.e. that the project includes experienced collaborators; that b) the dialogue is not only academic but involves civil society as a whole to support the development of a democratic culture; that c) it helps to avoid ethnic conflicts in the region. By establishing such a dialogue, we have to be careful, because dialogue as such implies that both sides have an opportunity to make their voices heard on all modern channels of media discourse. The definition of media has to be seen in a modern digital perspective, so that the media include not only newspaper articles and related letters to the editor or comments online, but also social media in a wide sense, from Twitter and Facebook to the exchange of current news and images via smartphones and other much more immediate means of communication than were available only 20 years ago. One of the advantages of such

modern approaches is, of course, that students are more than willing to contribute in such a context to the discussions, since they see this as a welcome change to their usual philological university routine.

1.2. Combining Critical Thinking and Writing

The student participants in this project came from a variety of universities, but all had a philological background in the widest sense. Whether they came from traditional English departments or from teacher training, or even from tourism or journalism, all were used to working with texts and had previously been instructed to work with texts critically. The critical thinking paradigm underlies all modern philologies in this sense. Even if the texts may differ, the detached attitude to texts and the critical discourse of them should be a good starting point for open student discussions on media texts.

1.3. Local Context in Macedonia: the Fake News Wiki Website

For students from the Balkan and particularly from Macedonia, the year 2016 brought a special relationship to news texts, as the Wikipedia “fake news” entry featured Macedonia under “Prominent Sources” first (Figure 1). Thus it was not surprising that during our Dialogue, students from Skopje in particular were very keen on reporting their personal experiences of the “colourful revolution”, also called the 2016 Macedonian protests, which led to an overturn of the government and the speaker of the protests being moved into the Ministry of Information, demonstrating convincingly the awareness of the importance of “news” for political developments in the Balkans.

Macedonia [\[edit\]](#)

Much of the fake news during the 2016 U.S. presidential election season was traced to adolescents in Macedonia,^{[16][38]} specifically Veles. It is a town of 50,000 in the middle of the country, with high unemployment, where the average wage is \$4,800.^[39] The income from fake news was characterized by *NBC News* as a gold rush.^[39] Adults supported this income, saying they were happy the youths were working.^[40] The mayor of Veles, Slavcho Chadiev, said he was not bothered by their actions, as they were not against Macedonian law and their finances were taxable.^[39] Chadiev said he was happy if deception from Veles influenced the results of the 2016 U.S. election in favor of Trump.^[39]

BuzzFeed News and *The Guardian* separately investigated and found teenagers in Veles created over 100 sites spreading fake news stories supportive of Donald Trump.^{[16][41][42]} The teenagers experimented with left slanted fake stories about Bernie Sanders, but found that pro-Trump fictions were more popular.^[41] Prior to the 2016 election the teenagers gained revenues from fake medical advice sites.^[43] One youth named Alex stated, in an August 2016 interview with *The Guardian*, that this fraud would remain profitable regardless of who won the election.^[16] Alex explained he plagiarized material for articles by copying and pasting from other websites.^[16] This could net them thousands of dollars daily, but they averaged only a few thousand per month.^[43]

The *Associated Press* (AP) interviewed an 18-year-old in Veles about his tactics.^[40] A *Google Analytics* analysis of his traffic showed more than 650,000 views in one week.^[40] He plagiarized pro-Trump stories from a right-wing site called *The Political Insider*.^[40] He said he did not care about politics, and published fake news to gain money and experience.^[40] The AP used *DomainTools* to confirm the teenager was behind fake sites, and determined there were about 200 websites tracked to Veles focused on U.S. news, many of which mostly contained plagiarized legitimate news to create an appearance of credibility.^[40]

NBC News also interviewed an 18-year-old there.^[39] Dmitri (a pseudonym) was one of the most profitable fake news operators in town, and said about 300 people in Veles wrote for fake sites.^[39] Dmitri said he gained over \$60,000 during the six months prior through doing this, more than both his parents' earnings.^[39] Dmitri said his main dupes were supporters of Trump.^[39] He said after the 2016 U.S. election he continued to earn significant amounts.^[39]



Figure 1: Screenshot of the Wikipedia page “Fake News Websites” (19/12/12)

2. Looking at Media from Journalistic and Linguistic Perspectives

2.1. Journalistic Perspectives

2.1.1. *The Crisis of Journalism*

The crisis of journalism has been discussed again and again, but has become more pronounced than ever in the last few years, in the professional but also in the popular media. The following excerpt from Bennet (2016: 4-5) illustrates the debate:

The struggles of the legacy press system may not worry most people because there appear to be so many outlets for information that it is hard to keep up with them. One only need enter a topic in a search engine to find hundreds or thousands of sites with information about it. Yet many of the blogs, webzines, and online news organizations are *merely recycling the shrinking journalism content produced by increasingly threatened news organizations*. Consider a revealing study of one news microcosm: the “news ecosystem” of the city of Baltimore. The Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism conducted a study of where information about politics, government, and public life came from in that city. The study looked at various media, from newspaper, radio, and television to blogs and other online sites. Although this information system seemed rich and diverse, with some 53 different outlets for news, tracking the origins of actual news items showed that 95 percent of the stories containing original information ‘came from traditional media—most of them from the newspaper’ [(Pew Research Center for Excellence in Journalism 2010 quoted in Bennet 2016: 4-5). Even more distressing was a look back in time showing that the sole surviving paper, the *Baltimore Sun*, reported 32 percent fewer stories between 1999 and 2009, and 73 percent fewer than in 1991.

In his sweeping look at the creation (and demise) of the modern media, Paul Starr [(2009, quoted in Bennet 2016: 5) argued that if these trends continue, *the growing ignorance of the citizenry and the diminished public accountability of officials will surely be accompanied by a great wave of public corruption*. Indeed, many citizens already see corruption in government as a major problem. For example, a 2008 poll on the roots of the financial crisis showed that 62 percent strongly agreed with the statement that political corruption played a major role in the crisis, and another 19 percent agreed “somewhat” with that statement. By 2013, 76 percent of Americans felt that the political parties were the most corrupt institutions and that the problem was growing worse (Bennett 2016: 4-5, italics are my own).

Thus the crisis of journalism can be seen on three levels: The quantity of journalistic texts is decreasing (although the number of information sources on the web seem to be increasing); the quality of journalistic texts is debated; and “established” democratic institutions are questioned.

2.1.2. *Definitions of News in the Context of the Expansion and Criticism of Journalistic Work*

In this sometimes heated political context, new definitions of news have become necessary, and again the classic handbook by Bennett (2016) provides a starting point for our dialogue:

How do the changing interactions among political actors, publics, and the press affect the way we define the news? As a starting point, it makes sense to adopt a simple definition

that expands political news beyond just what news organizations produce: *news consists of (a) the reporting of actions and events (b) over a growing variety of publicly accessible media (c) by journalism organizations and an expanding spectrum of other content producers, including ordinary citizens*. As the news process expands beyond the legacy media, standards for selecting, formatting, sourcing, and documenting reports become less shared and more open to challenges about accuracy and relevance. Yet as some properties of news change, others remain the same. Doris Graber suggested that news is not just any information, or even the most important information, about the world; rather, the news tends to contain information that is *timely*, often *sensational* (scandals, violence, and human drama frequently dominate the news), and *familiar* (stories often draw on familiar people or life experiences that give even distant events a close-to-home feeling). In this view, the news is constructed through the constantly changing interactions of journalists, politicians, and citizens often seeking different ends (Bennet 2016: 24-25, italics my own).

This argumentation includes again a constructionist perspective and the “expanding” spectrum and does not hide the possibly conflicting ends of journalists, politicians and citizens. These conflicting ends have brought about a discussion about gatekeepers in popular public discourse, in particular on social media, where today’s professional journalism is accused of not being sufficiently independent from political parties or governments to portray political events in an objective light. This has been criticised “extremely” by the new right movements in Europe, including in Germany, under slogans that suggest that the press “lies” (“Lügenpresse”) or also produces “fake news” (fake news is not only produced by “uncontrolled” social media, like Twitter, Facebook, etc., but also by the “traditional press”). Bennet (2016: 25) has the following to say about this:

At the height of the mass media era, journalists were often regarded as “gatekeepers” who screened information (ideally) according to its truth and importance. More recently, as the news habits change and the capacity for *direct news production and distribution by citizens grows*, gatekeeping by the legacy press is less effective and, in the view of some observers, less important. (Bennett 2016: 25, italics my own).

Despite all the changes outlined above, the legacy news reported by journalists remains important in the governing process, even as it may undermine the legitimacy of that same process for many citizens who consume it. The core question explored in this book is, *How well does the news, as the core of the national political information system, serve the needs of democracy?* (Bennett 2016: 25, italics in the original).

In public relations and politics, spin is a form of propaganda, achieved through providing a biased interpretation of an event or campaigning to persuade public opinion in favour or against some organization or public figure. While traditional public relations and advertising may also rely on altering the presentation of the facts, “spin” often implies the use of disingenuous, deceptive, and highly manipulative tactics. The Wikipedia entry on “Spin (propaganda)” states the following:

As such, a standard tactic used in "spinning" is to reframe, reposition, or otherwise modify the perception of an issue or event, to reduce any negative impact it might have on public opinion. For example, a company whose top-selling product is found to have a significant safety problem may "reframe" the issue by criticizing the safety of its main competitor's products or indeed by highlighting the risk associated with the entire product category. This might be done using a "catchy" slogan or sound bite that can help to persuade the public of

the company's biased point of view. This tactic could enable the company to defocus the public's attention on the negative aspects of its product.

[One] theory suggests [that] the omnipresence of the Internet in some societies will inevitably lead to a reduction in the effectiveness of spin.

This attack is much more dramatic than what we have seen over the past 20 years, when politicians, in particular British politicians and New Labour led by Tony Benn, started discussing the political discourse under the new concept of spin, which is an interesting metaphor to convey the idea that the news has to be twisted according to the needs of the politicians.

2.1.3. *Post-Truth Politics and Fake News and Journalistic and Political Reactions*

In 2016, this mistrust of news and the general public has culminated in the debate of post-truth politics, which again resulted in a relatively recent new entry on Wikipedia:

Post-truth politics (also called *post-factual politics*) is a political culture in which debate is framed largely by appeals to emotion disconnected from the details of policy, and by the repeated assertion of talking points to which factual rebuttals are ignored. Post-truth differs from traditional contesting and falsifying of truth by rendering it of "secondary" importance.

In the 2016 American presidential campaign, which led to the election of President Trump, the discourses of post-truth politics have been joined by the discourses of fake news. Although the term “fake news” is relatively new (it is not prominent in the Standard English dictionaries), the attempts by certain industries (in the US usually tobacco, weapons, or pharmaceutical industries) and, of course, most war-time “propaganda”, to influence buyers or citizens, has been a problem of news agencies since their beginning. However, ‘fake news’ clearly goes beyond what has been called a “bias”, since it has absolutely no basis in fact, but is simply presented as being factually accurate. The relevance of fake news has increased in post-truth politics and modern (social) media, which allow not only the rapid dissemination of “news”, but also anonymously-hosted fake news websites that lack known, credited publishers, and make it difficult to prosecute sources of fake news for libel. The connection of the American presidential campaign and fake news websites can be explained through the possibility of click-bait, which used to allow website creators to earn money by luring their customers onto special websites. This opportunity was used extensively by Macedonian unemployed youths (see Section 1.3 above), and may even have had an influence on the American presidential election.

The two most important organisational forms of fact-checking take place in Europe. These are the newsroom model associated with existing news media, and the NGO model that operates independently. Both exist across different countries, but with more newsroom-based fact-checking in Western Europe and more NGO-based fact checking in Eastern Europe. The fact-checkers identify fake news in different and sometimes multiple ways. Many see themselves as reporters, but others identify themselves as activists or experts, and in some cases two or all three

of these. Their relation is shaped in part by their perception of the existing political and media system in their country - the situation in Nordic countries with relatively robust news media and comparatively higher levels of trust in political institutions is different from that in the Balkans, with weaker and less independent news media and a more problematic political situation. Whatever their organisational form, research practices and funding models, all fact-checking outlets still rely in a large part on existing news media to publicise their work. All have a digital presence, ranging from their own websites, to various social media channels, but they also work, in a sometimes uneasy relationship, with the existing media that they aim to influence or provide an alternative to. Graves and Cherubini present the following example as a case study:

At the French news organisation *Le Monde*, the mission of Les Décodeurs (The Decoders) is to verify declarations, statements, and rumours, put information in context, and reply to readers' questions (Grave and Cherubini 2016: 31).

In the recent award ceremony on the occasion of the Marion-Dönhoff-Prize, the German President Steinmeier (2017) praised *The New York Times* (and its executive editor Dean Banquet) for asking the right critical questions, even though they were attacked frequently as the “East Coast establishment”, continuing to draw consequences from their questions. *The New York Times* promises clear institutional differentiation between reportage and comment, more resources into investigative research, strict criteria for source verification, more transparency in the Newsroom, and strict rules for social media use. The half a million new subscribers to *The New York Times* may be an indication that the independent critical press is felt to be needed in “Western” democracies more than ever before.

2.2. Applied Linguistic Perspectives

2.2.1. Detecting News Bias – Fake News

Due to the global concerns of news bias and fake news, the world-wide trend to include “fake news” in the teaching curriculum at every educational level, from school to university, is not surprising. In October 2017, even *The New York Times* reported on “Italian Schools, Reading, Writing and Recognizing Fake News” (Horowitz 2017) – and many other nations are thought to follow. Thus we witness an expansion of the traditional understanding of “literacy”, including new media and social media, and critical evaluation skills for all types of texts, i.e. an awareness of the deconstruction and construction of texts, as is the topic of our Dialogue programme. Most of the programmes currently in existence are however oriented towards the formal side of “detecting” fake news by looking at the situational and production context of texts (such as source, authors, dates and supporting sources) that are suspected of being fake, the linguistic means to recognise “outrageous” content, “jokes” and “biases” are not discussed in detail (see Figure 2).

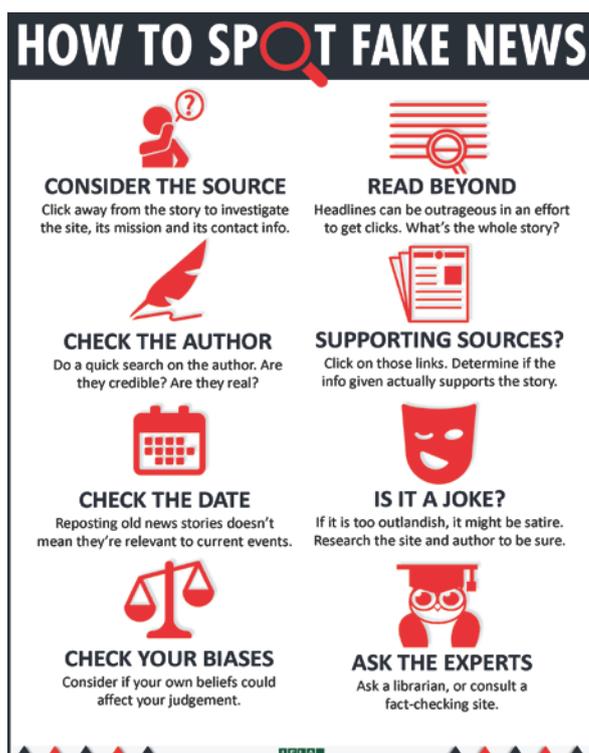


Figure 2: International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions infographic based on FactCheck.org's 2016 article "How to Spot Fake News".

2.2.2. From Media Bias to Fake News through Language Analyses

Applied linguistic approaches to journalistic texts have been around for many years. Standard approaches to news (media) language are Bell (1999) and, even more, practical Ludwig and Gilmore (2005). Parts of newspapers, like headlines or editorials have been analysed. The direct linguistic challenge to identify (maybe even automatically) clear news bias or fake news has not yet been taken up systematically, only logical argumentation is available.

Of course, there are grammatical approaches to fake news or biased news that use well-known features of language-specific parts-of-speech tagging, for instance. Such news stories contain more proper nouns, since they are focussed on celebrities and other well-known personalities, and they contain more adjectives and adverbs, since they are indicative of sentiment. They also have more comparatives and superlatives, since they want to attract the readers' attention by using, for instance *better*, *biggest*, *worst* etc. They also contain more question words (like *where*, *how*, *why*). Functional linguistic approaches show that the personalisation of such news stories can be seen by the use of pronouns like *we*, the specific stance can be seen by an overuse of boosters (e.g. *must*, *clearly*), compared to hedges (e.g. *may*, *possibly*). The use of affect words, especially negative words, which express anger, and little metadiscourse, which can be seen from the lack of conjunctions, and which would emphasise or clarify logical connections. Artificial intelligence

and computer-linguistic approaches could be used as well, since such news contain more exclamation marks, less sentence complexity (especially *semicolons, quotes, articles, apostrophes, commas*) - again, these stance markers are more headline-supporting and may provide conflicting evidence, but this does not, as of yet, lead to conclusive evidence.

2.2.3. Combining Critical Discourse and Corpus Linguistics

The central argument of this contribution is that two major fields of applied linguistics, critical discourse analysis and corpus linguistics, can make a major contribution to raising awareness of the “constructedness” of news. When critical discourse analysis, as an established set of tools for critical linguistics, is complemented by corpus linguistics, a wider set of data can be included in the debate and the threat of the researcher’s own ideological bias influencing the analysis can be avoided. This type of approach has developed in applied linguistics and is exemplified in section 3 below.

As early as 2005, Baker and McEnery have used a corpus of newspaper texts (as well as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) website) to analyse collocations of *refugee(s)* and *asylum seeker(s)* to show that such a combined methodology can make an analysis more objective and verifiable. In this type of analysis there are of course still some qualitative and subjective elements involved, and hard critics will always be able to point out that the analysis is not completely balanced, or that it is necessary to study the individual production mechanisms directly, e.g. by interviewing the author or including all relevant information that may play a role in biased construction or deconstruction of texts. Thus some newspapers like, the German weekly *Die Zeit*, have started adding boxes to their larger stories in order to explain the background of the investigation, especially financial implications, access to information and collaboration with local informants, media, and/or institutions.

3. Exploring BYU Corpora for “crisis in Europe” and “fake news”

3.1. Quantitative Analyses of the NOW Corpus

The well-known BYU corpora (Davis and Fuchs 2015) can be used to show the NOW (News On the Web) Corpus, which collects news on the web overnight and allows us to see the standard collocates of our keywords “fake” and “crisis”, and which can be used to investigate current issues in the news over the last few years.

In the first analysis, we searched for “crisis in Europe” in August and in October 2017 and can see at a first glance that the keywords in context (KWIC) were the same (Figure 3). Most frequent collocations were either *refugee, migrant* or *dead, political crisis* and *economic crisis*. As the two screenshots from the NOW Corpus in Figure 3 show, English speaking newspapers from all around the world seem to agree unanimously, as the national codes of the newspapers after the dates show (CA for Canada, IE for Eire, US, MY for Malaysia, etc.).

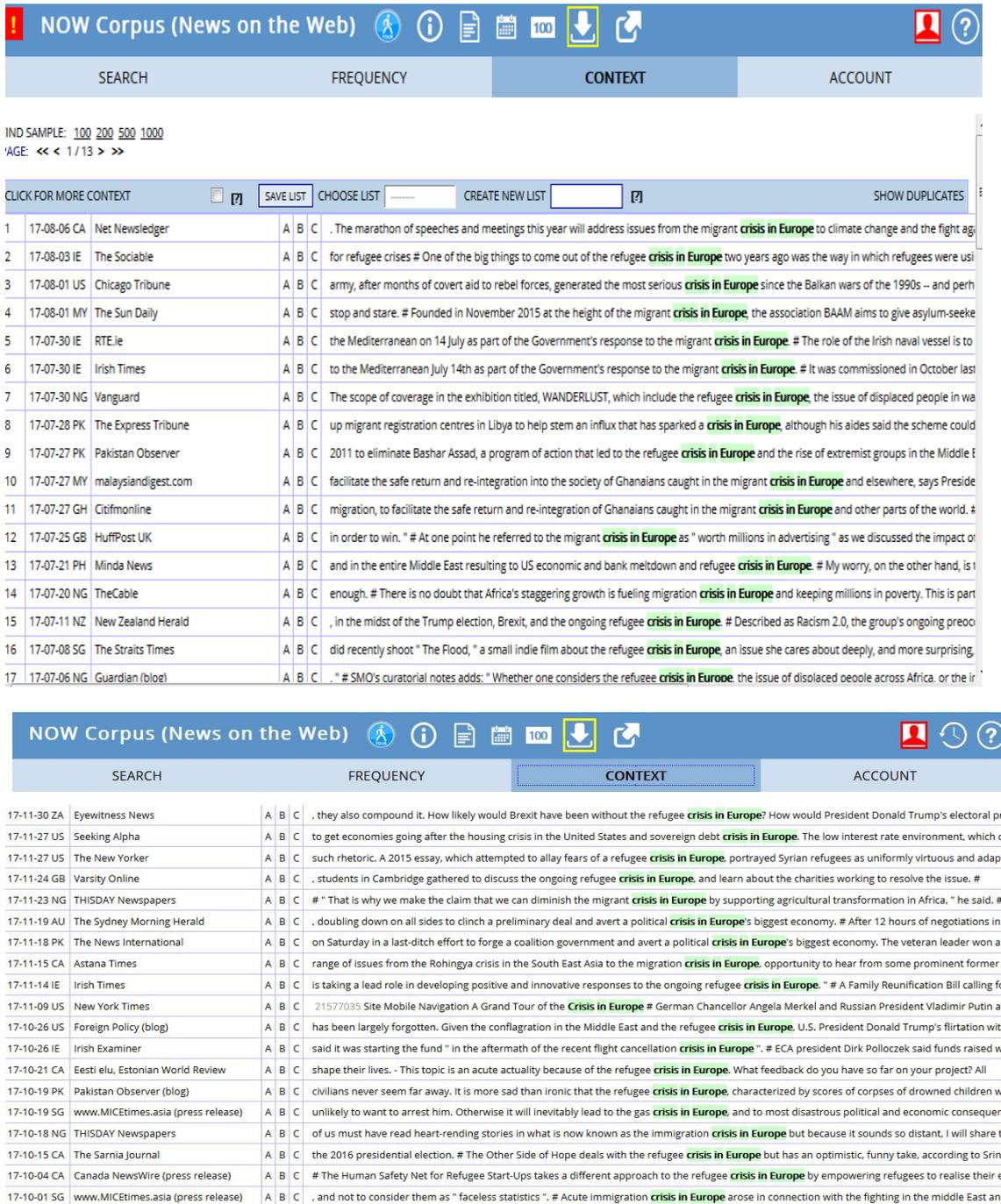


Figure 3: KWIC for “crisis in Europe” in the NOW corpus (04/07/17 and 12/12/17).

An analysis of the first 20 collocates after the notorious “Europe” shows the semantic group of *refugee*, *migrant*, *migration*, *humanitarian*, *Syria(n)*, and *immigration* are clearly prominent with the semantic field of *dead*, *economic*, *financial*, and *banking* a clear second (Figure 4).



Figure 4: Frequency collocates for “crisis in Europe” in the NOW corpus (12/12/17).

The time chart for “Crisis in Europe” in the NOW corpus (Figure 5) demonstrates clearly two peaks: in late 2001 and 2012 the “economic crisis” in a wide sense was longer prominent than the “refugee crisis” in late 2015.

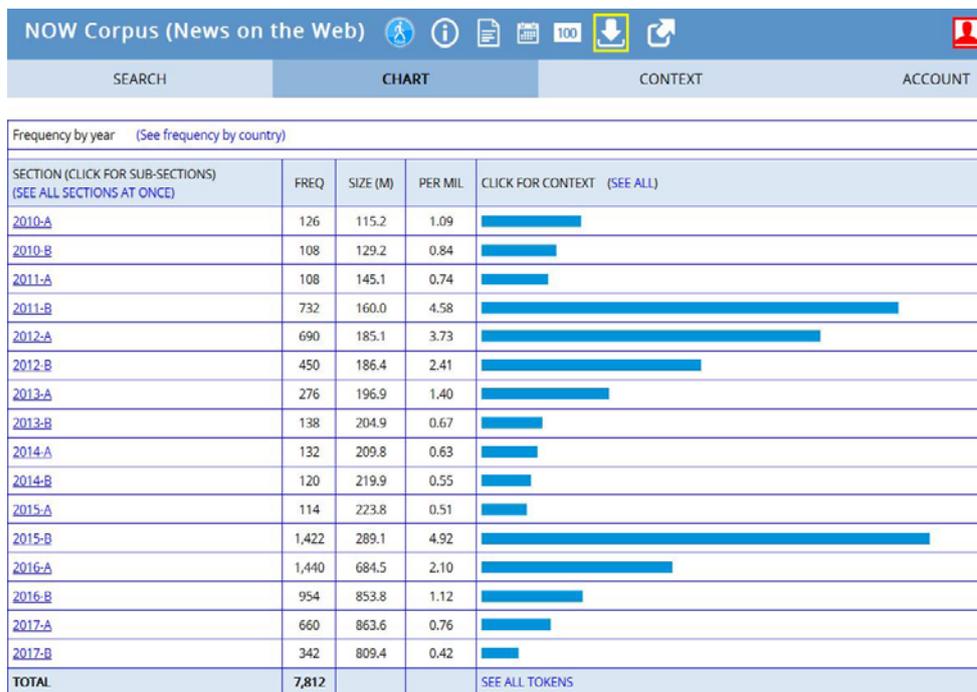


Figure 5: Time Chart for “crisis in Europe” in the NOW corpus (04/07/17).

The highlighted keyword *fake* in Figure 6 below illustrates very clearly the very restricted choice of following nouns in July 2017, because the most frequent collocate is *fake news* with almost half of the cases and others are related to *media* including *stories* and *comments*, maybe even *photos*. The rest like names are rare. The collocation analysis of “fake news” in Figure 7 shows that the words can be interpreted relatively easily by students, who can use it not only for vocabulary building but also for the analysis of associations in national and global contexts. The negative prosody (Sinclair 1991) can be seen in *hate*, *hoaxes* and *combat*.

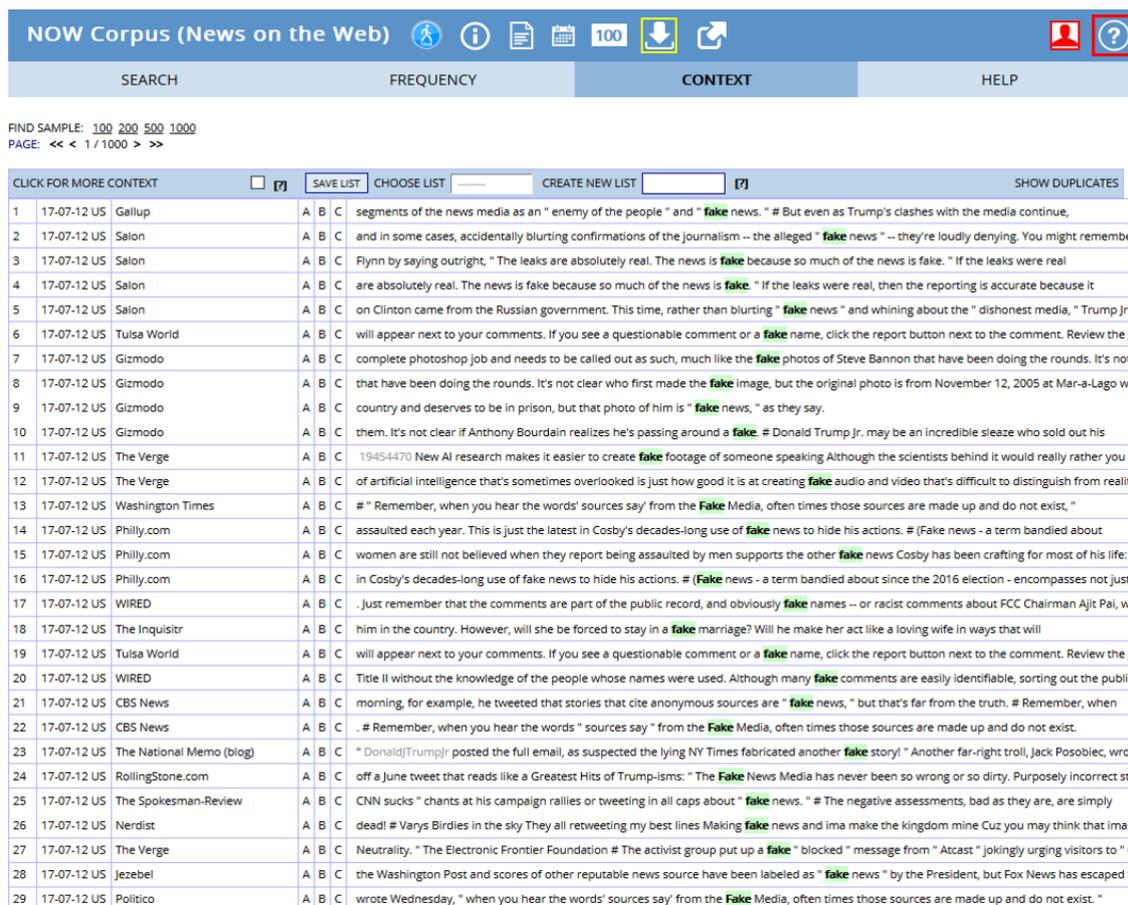


Figure 6: KWIC for “fake” in the NOW corpus in July 2017.

Figure 7 shows the frequency graph of the “fake news” collocates, which include a few more (less frequent, but predictable?) proper names (especially *Trump* and *Russia*), specific media (such as *Facebook* and *CNN*), attitude nouns (such as *facts*, *hate*, *hoaxes*, and *combat*?), and premodifications (the expected *spreading*, *so-called*, *alternative*).

Figure 8 below proves convincingly that the topic only really started in 2016 and is in full swing the whole of 2017 – the first year of the Trump administration.

Figure 9 finally provides a collocational analysis of “fake news” aligned by 2nd word on the left (in this case, the head postmodified by “of fake news”), a wonderful starting point for student discussions.

The screenshot shows the 'NOW Corpus (News on the Web)' interface. The 'FREQUENCY' tab is active, displaying a table of collocates for the search term 'fake news'. The table has columns for rank, a checkbox, the collocater term, frequency (FREQ), all occurrences (ALL), percentage (%), and MI score. The top collocates are 'NEWS', 'MEDIA', 'STORIES', 'SPREAD', 'FACEBOOK', 'SITES', 'STORY', 'TRUMP', 'SPREADING', 'FAKE', 'PROLIFERATION', 'FACTS', 'RISE', 'HATE', 'SO-CALLED', 'PROPAGANDA', 'WEBSITES', 'CNN', 'RUSSIA', 'ERA', 'ALTERNATIVE', 'SPEECH', 'HOAXES', 'PHENOMENON', and 'COMBAT'.

	<input type="checkbox"/>	CONTEXT	FREQ	ALL	%	MI
1	<input type="checkbox"/>	NEWS	20842	2710959	0.77	7.80
2	<input type="checkbox"/>	MEDIA	920	2002340	0.05	3.73
3	<input type="checkbox"/>	STORIES	714	772907	0.09	4.74
4	<input type="checkbox"/>	SPREAD	652	305816	0.21	5.95
5	<input type="checkbox"/>	FACEBOOK	563	874972	0.06	4.22
6	<input type="checkbox"/>	SITES	525	467575	0.11	5.02
7	<input type="checkbox"/>	STORY	456	1424202	0.03	3.21
8	<input type="checkbox"/>	TRUMP	411	1150540	0.04	3.37
9	<input type="checkbox"/>	SPREADING	402	68764	0.58	7.40
10	<input type="checkbox"/>	FAKE	277	159604	0.17	5.65
11	<input type="checkbox"/>	PROLIFERATION	208	23258	0.89	8.01
12	<input type="checkbox"/>	FACTS	190	213020	0.09	4.69
13	<input type="checkbox"/>	RISE	187	521307	0.04	3.37
14	<input type="checkbox"/>	HATE	181	187774	0.10	4.80
15	<input type="checkbox"/>	SO-CALLED	179	157354	0.11	5.04
16	<input type="checkbox"/>	PROPAGANDA	175	60539	0.29	6.38
17	<input type="checkbox"/>	WEBSITES	166	246306	0.07	4.28
18	<input type="checkbox"/>	CNN	163	88971	0.18	5.73
19	<input type="checkbox"/>	RUSSIA	152	406237	0.04	3.43
20	<input type="checkbox"/>	ERA	151	244535	0.06	4.16
21	<input type="checkbox"/>	ALTERNATIVE	149	248956	0.06	4.11
22	<input type="checkbox"/>	SPEECH	146	375121	0.04	3.49
23	<input type="checkbox"/>	HOAXES	144	2124	6.78	10.94
24	<input type="checkbox"/>	PHENOMENON	144	84856	0.17	5.62
25	<input type="checkbox"/>	COMBAT	143	133026	0.11	4.96

Figure 7: Frequency collocates for “fake news” in the NOW corpus in July 2017.

The screenshot shows the 'NOW Corpus (News on the Web)' interface with the 'CHART' tab active. It displays a time chart titled 'Frequency by year (See frequency by country)'. The chart is a table with columns for SECTION, FREQ, SIZE (M), PER MIL, and a link to click for context. The data shows a significant increase in frequency starting in 2016, peaking in 2017.

SECTION (CLICK FOR SUB-SECTIONS) (SEE ALL SECTIONS AT ONCE)	FREQ	SIZE (M)	PER MIL	CLICK FOR CONTEXT (SEE ALL)
2010-A	105	115.2	0.91	
2010-B	63	129.2	0.49	
2011-A	196	145.1	1.35	
2011-B	105	160.0	0.66	
2012-A	126	185.1	0.68	
2012-B	280	186.4	1.50	
2013-A	245	196.9	1.24	
2013-B	203	204.9	0.99	
2014-A	336	209.8	1.60	
2014-B	287	219.9	1.30	
2015-A	294	223.8	1.31	
2015-B	371	289.1	1.28	
2016-A	868	684.5	1.27	
2016-B	33,236	853.8	38.93	
2017-A	100,737	863.6	116.65	
2017-B	71,785	809.4	88.69	
TOTAL	209,237			SEE ALL TOKENS

Figure 8: Time Chart for “fake news” in the NOW corpus in July 2017.

NOW Corpus (News on the Web)				SEARCH	CHART	CONTEXT
55	17-03-31 GB	BBC News	A B C	mix . # But in a world in which accusations of fake news and cons		
56	17-01-20 IN	News18	A B C	, " Mosseri further noted . # " The amount of fake news on the p		
57	17-04-24 NG	TheCable	A B C	would not lose any supporter . # The major challenge of fake news is that it		
58	16-12-15 SG	THE BUSINESS TIMES	A B C	has been under fire for failing to stem an epidemic of fake news that som		
59	17-04-28 SG	Yahoo News	A B C	it is now , in the " new post-truth era of fake news " after a		
60	17-02-10 GB	The Zimbabwe Daily	A B C	? What purpose or agendas do some of the examples of fake news serve , a		
61	17-03-30 MY	malaysiandigest.com	A B C	disinformation in the US , including the possible generation of fake news for voter		
62	17-04-16 KE	Daily Nation	A B C	outrageous statements , for example , the false history of fake news about Afr		
63	16-12-05 US	Raw Story	A B C	listening to the national discussion about the impact of fake news . # I wou		
64	17-03-28 ZA	The Media Online	A B C	the country , " he said . The impact of fake news . # When		
65	17-04-04 SG	Marketing Interactive	A B C	towards raising awareness about the impact and implications of fake news . # We		
66	16-12-21 US	Phys.Org	A B C	since the experiment , however , the volume and influence of fake news have exp		
67	16-12-23 IN	The Wire	A B C	column from The Wire 's Public Editor : # Invasion of fake News . Credit :		
68	17-06-07 ZA	Independent Online	A B C	, # With online technology , however , comes issues of fake news , and thi		
69	17-01-25 MY	New Straits Times Online	A B C	, part of its effort to root out the kind of fake news stories th		
70	17-05-11 GB	The Guardian	A B C	, but what people believe . There is a lot of fake news and lies		
71	17-02-28 PK	The Express Tribune	A B C	expertise can be dismissed in favour of a corrupt narrative of fake news and lies		
72	17-04-26 SG	The Straits Times	A B C	content ' # WASHINGTON * Thanks to the phenomenon of fake news , Google		
73	16-12-07 US	WBUR	A B C	to democracy . This hour On Point : the problem of fake news , and wh		
74	17-05-03 SG	The Straits Times	A B C	It up . To look at how creators and purveyors of fake news might be		
75	17-06-11 PH	Business Mirror	A B C	Congress is being asked to pass a law penalizing purveyors of fake news , includin		
76	17-02-08 PH	Study International News	A B C	sure to use only legitimate sources . With the rise of fake news sites , it		
77	17-03-22 CA	Delta-Optimist	A B C	. # There 's one major problem with the rise of fake news - some p		
78	17-06-28 GB	The Drum	A B C	by KPMG has recorded rising public concern at the rise of fake news , with ha		
79	16-12-21 AU	CNET	A B C	research center decided to build Hoaxy and track the spread of fake news to figure		
80	16-12-15 GB	Daily Mail	A B C	that it 's taking new measures to curb the spread of fake news on its s		
81	17-06-26 NZ	NZCity	A B C	to go viral . # The scientists say the spread of fake news needs to		
82	17-04-08 CA	CBC.ca	A B C	Adrienne Arseneault talks about finding herself the subject of fake news , and Rai		
83	16-12-08 US	TechCrunch	A B C	have work to do to try to stem the tide of fake news . # he sa		

Figure 9: A collocational analysis of “fake news” aligned by 2nd word on the left (in this case, the head postmodified by the search compound in July 2017).

3.2. Qualitative analyses of texts in the NOW corpus

The NOW corpus also allows us to look at a complete text including “crisis” and to do a thorough qualitative analysis. A detailed model could be the case study by Smith/Bell (2015: 415-425) on a helicopter crash in Afghanistan in the British newspaper *The Telegraph*. Our short example is from the British *Daily Express* (see Figure 10), a hard Euroscepticist, right-wing Conservative newspaper. The starting point of the article is the “migration crisis”, which is preceded by the adjective “unprecedented” - and all this is a post modification of “Europe has been in the grip of” - and followed by “more than a million migrants” - all in one line. The other parts of the small excerpt represented in Figure 10 allow us to observe the use of the related, but legally quite different words “asylum seekers”, “new arrivals”, “refugees”, “migrants”, and the more specific “Muslims” or “Muslim groups”, as well as the repeated appeal to “West’s values” in the title, “Western values” in the subtitle, “European values” under picture (juxtaposing the long line of “Muslim migrants” and “one of Europe’s most respected and long-serving royals”) and “country’s principles of democracy and gender equality” in the second paragraph. Following a critical linguistics approach (e.g. Machin and Mayr 2012: 3), we would also look at other language choices or the strong commitment signalled by “put their foot down” and “unprecedented [again!] rallying cry”.

In other articles, we might also find surprisingly few details about what kind of “crisis” this is and which “values” are threatened – ambiguity and lack of precision are often used to make threats appear overwhelming. The British *The Guardian* usually is considered middle-class and left-wing in the sense of supporting the Liberal Democrats or Labour in British elections.

'Living here doesn't make you one of us' Danish Queen tells Muslims to adopt West's values. THE Queen of Denmark has urged Muslims arriving in Europe to adopt Western values in an extraordinary intervention in the migration debate.

By Nick Gutteridge

PUBLISHED: 06:46, Wed, Oct 26, 2016 | UPDATED: 14:56, Wed, Oct 26, 2016

Queen Margarethe II said it was “not a law of nature” that asylum seekers automatically integrated into society and called on Muslim groups to do more to help new arrivals understand Danish society.

The Queen, who is one of Europe’s most respected and long-serving royals, said politicians needed to “put their foot down” and strictly uphold the country’s principles of democracy and gender equality in her unprecedented rallying cry. ...

Europe has been in the grip of an unprecedented migration crisis, with more than a million migrants arriving on the continent from the Middle East and North Africa in 2015 alone.

Figure 10: Excerpt from the Daily Express on the “migrant crisis”. ‘Living here doesn't make you one of us’ Danish Queen tells Muslims to adopt West's values. *Daily Express* 26 October 2017.

Donald Trump tweet attacks NBC News, suggesting a challenge to 'their license'

Jamiles Lartey Wednesday 11 October 2017 17.04 BST

- President makes veiled threat claiming network broadcasts ‘fake news’
- NBC, like all other networks, is not licensed by the federal government

Donald Trump ramped up his war with the news media on Wednesday morning, suggesting that it might be appropriate to challenge the license of NBC News in response to what he claimed was its “fake news”.

Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump)

With all of the Fake News coming out of NBC and the Networks, at what point is it appropriate to challenge their License? Bad for country!

October 11, 2017

The spat between Trump – who worked for NBC for 14 years as the host of *The Apprentice* – and the network’s news arm has been swirling ever since NBC’s report on the strained relationship between Trump and the secretary of state, Rex Tillerson. It appears that Trump’s most recent outburst was triggered by a report that Trump requested a tenfold increase in the US nuclear arsenal, a report Trump called “made up” and “pure fiction”.

Figure 11: Excerpt from *The Guardian* on “Fake News”. ‘Donald Trump tweet attacks NBC News, suggesting a challenge to 'their license''. *The Guardian* 11 October 2017.

Interestingly, *The Guardian* example including “fake news” (Figure 11) is “contradictory” in the sense that some words appear really tentative, like “suggesting”, “might” and “appear”, in contrast to others that appear rather strong, like “his war with the news media”, “veiled threat”, “outburst” and, of course, the repeated “fake news”, which is even picked up by the equivalent “made up” and “pure fiction”. Of course, the “fake” is “claimed” by the President, as the evidence of the tweet in the centre of the excerpt demonstrates.

Finally, we have to admit that newspaper texts cannot be seen in isolation and various critical points mentioned above may have to be remedied, since newspaper discourse usually has to be seen in a wider context. Thus the examples above may be seen as selected to demonstrate a specific ideology and this can only be avoided by looking at many more articles in a wide comparative perspective.

3.3. Deconstructing and Constructing Media Texts with Students

As a theoretical framework for the constructing of news, we can use the systemic functional grammar framework that was developed by Halliday and his students. A good starting point is the concept *Construing Experience Through Meaning*, which was made popular mainly through the Halliday and Matthiesen (2006) publication. It can be combined well with Fairclough's seminal publications (1993 and 1995). After this introductory reading, the more practical work with students can consist of three parts:

- a) The text-based analysis, where prototypical texts selected for the purpose of analysis allow students to read critically and discuss the interesting twists and spins of a text, especially when they can integrate enough background information to put the text into a specific (interpretational) frame. This more qualitative approach is exemplified in Đorđević (2017) and Lazarevska-Stanchevska (2017).
- b) The corpus-based analysis, where a broader selection of texts is put together in a systematic and controlled way, where frames can even be included in the analysis as textual variables, and linguistic variables can be investigated qualitatively and quantitatively. The discussion of tables and figures allows students to read a more abstract interpretation into the discourse. This approach is exemplified Panajoti and Toska (2017) or Bednarek and Caple (2017), for example.
- c) The web-based analysis, where readily available web tools are used to produce Key-word-in-context as well as statistical materials that allow students to see key terms in a more global perspective (if the language allows this). This approach is exemplified in the previous section of this article, but also in Dheskali (2017) or McEnery and Hardie (2012).

4. Conclusion and Outlook

In this contribution, I hope to have shown that the issues of crises can be combined with the future of Europe as well as with the future of journalism, because in those cases the popular debate has been particularly strong over the last few years. Of course, in a democratic society, both aspects are very closely related, thus it is extremely important that European MA students are made aware of these issues in their studies. For specialists in English language, it should be self-evident that the deconstruction and construction of texts can be particularly well applied to recent newspaper texts. This may be an interesting additional component related to their studies, since many aspects overlap with academic writing, where they have to learn to produce enough convincing evidence for their argumentations and conclusions.

The corpus-linguistic analyses of the NOW (News On the Web) Corpus have been used to illustrate that the key terms discussed in this contribution have been rampant in the news in many countries of the world. Such a corpus-linguistic approach adds credibility to specific text analyses, since it demonstrates that many critical approaches do not only work with extreme texts, but are part of the regular patterns of news production and dissemination. Critical analysts can look at newspaper texts to find out what is foregrounded and what is backgrounded or even left out altogether. The basic principles discussed in this contribution can be exemplified easily in many current newspaper texts.

In this contribution, linguistic concepts from political discourse analyses (Fairclough 1993) and systemic functional grammar (Halliday and Matthiessen 2006) have been used extensively. All these approaches see language as a form of social semiotics (see Kress and van Leeuwen 1996, 2001). A multimodal analysis, for example, includes visual and occasionally acoustic aspects of a text into the analysis. This is extremely important in an age when the electronic options of news creation and dissemination have expanded enormously. This does not only apply to Twitter and Facebook, which provide resonant spaces for news, but also to new digital technologies like face2face, the new dense markerless facial performance capture method (Thies et al. 2016). This allows politicians' speeches to be manipulated and this means that from now on even digital videos cannot guarantee that news are genuine any more. Since the checking of such evidence takes time, the dissemination of fake news is much faster than the verification of their content. Thus the constant race between manipulators and forensic experts has entered a new stage. Because of these new opportunities of manipulation, in future, encrypting technology may be one option and intensive training for all news consumers the other.

In this context, it is extremely important that students from European universities are trained in the deconstruction and construction of news, since this is useful not only for their studies, but also for their lives as citizens in Europe. Such a language-based dialogue of the social practice of news increases their awareness of the broader ideas relevant to a society, and of how the world is constructed in our minds in national and international contexts. Language is intertwined with how we act and how we interpret the world, and we must make students in schools and universities aware of the inseparable nature of language and society.

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