

Conflicting Truths in Academic and Journalistic Writing: Forms, Functions and Intentions ¹

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Abstract

This contribution introduces the key concept of truth from philosophical, linguistic and journalistic perspectives and tries to illustrate the different forms of conflicting and competing truths in different forms, like figures, images, and narratives. It puts truths in relation to intentions and the wider contexts, so that a much wider spectrum of misinformation is taken into consideration. Numerous examples are taken from German and international contexts to show that the issue is not restricted to South Eastern European countries, but a common issue for modern societies, which are based on digital discourses and their construction and deconstruction.

Keywords: truths, journalism, academic writing, intentions

1. Introduction

This is a continuation of the project discussions that focussed on credibility, honesty, ethics and politeness (Schmied/Dheskali 2018 eds.). It explains the new key concept of conflicting truths from a wider perspective. It tries to give a broad framework for the following introductions and exemplifications from the related projects from South Eastern Europe.

2. Truth concepts

The concept of truths has been discussed in many philosophical and academic treatises (e.g. the classic publications by Davidson 1984 or Janich 1996). These are often quite in contrast to the popular belief that there is only one truth and that is closely related to the “objectivity” of the reporter and the “facts” that can be clearly observed.

2.1. Language Approaches to „truths“

2.1.1. Reference works on “truths”

As a starting point, I take Wikipedia (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Truth> from 05/05/17) and find a complex entry with five types of truth, each with a link to

¹ I wish to thank my partners in the project, esp. Marina Ivanova and Jessica Dheskali, for many discussions. The translation of the German original texts was made using DeepL.com, hoping that computers translate “objectively.”

more specific explanation pages, which I try to summarise in the following five approaches with one interesting change, the last theory was renamed between 2017 and 2019. I just include one famous representative as starting point for further study:

- correspondence theory “states that the truth or falsity of a statement is determined only by how it relates to the world and whether it accurately describes (i.e., corresponds with) that world” (Socrates),
- coherence theory “regards truth as coherence within some specified set of sentences, propositions or beliefs” (Leibnitz),
- pragmatic theories “hold in common that truth is verified and confirmed by the results of putting one's concepts into practice” (Peirce),
- (social) constructivist theory “holds that truth is constructed by social processes, is historically and culturally specific, and that it is in part shaped through the power struggles within a community” (Marx),
- discourse [2017] or consensus [2019] theory “holds that truth is whatever is agreed upon, or in some versions, might come to be agreed upon, by some specified group. Such a group might include all human beings, or a subset thereof consisting of more than one person” (Habermas).

The most linguistic of the “representatives” mentioned are probably the modern philosophers Peirce, who corresponds to describe one aspect of the pragmatic sign relation, and Habermas, who sees truth is what would be agreed upon in an ideal speech situation.

As usual, it is interesting to compare the (popular) Wikipedia entry with the (specialist) on-line (Encyclopaedia) Britannica entry (19/1/20). The latter distinguishes only between “Coherence theory” and “Coherence and pragmatist theories” before moving on or off?) to “Tarski and truth conditions”. This is why the Wikipedia definitions will be taken as reference for the following discussions from a language and journalistic perspectives.

2.1.2. *Dictionary approaches to „truth“*

The Oxford English Dictionary Online (s.v. 20/05/19) offers 12 distinct senses of truth, which can be summarised as three main distinctions and the rest technical senses:

- 1) Loyalty, faithfulness, etc. (4 senses, some obsolete!)
- 2) Something that conforms with fact or reality.” (5 senses, a few obsolete!)
- 3) Conformity with fact, reality, a standard, a pattern, etc. (3 senses, 1 obsolete?)

As usual with the Oxford English Dictionary (OED), the meanings are often illustrated in specific syntagmatic contexts and in different historical contexts, especially in the quotations from famous writers, which are taken as cultural accepted. Further interesting usages can be seen in the many phrasal and idiomatic expressions that are listed below, but none of these historical examples show truth in plural:

1) With a Preposition:

2009 D. Nicholls *One Day* (2010) i. 11 In **truth** he had never really seen the point of cuddling.

2) In various proverbs and proverbial phrases:

1823 Byron *Don Juan: Canto XIV* ci. 165 **Truth** is always strange; Stranger than fiction.

1939 *Washington Post* 19 Jan. 9/2 It has been well said that truth is the first casualty of war.

3) In idiomatic phrases:

1988 *Mother Jones* July 14/3 The **truth** is, nobody really knows why ratings go up or down.

1905 W. Osler in *Med. News* 30 Sept. 625/1 No human being is constituted to know **the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth**; and even the best of men must be content with fragments, with partial glimpses, never the full fruition.

If all these senses are too complex, we can try a Learners' Dictionary like Oxford's on-line (s.v. 20/05/19):

- 1) [singular] the true facts about something, rather than the things that have been invented or guessed
- 2) [uncountable] the quality or state of being based on fact
- 3) [countable] a fact that is believed by most people to be true

This entry is interesting since it tries to distinguish between the first two senses ("truth as corresponding facts" vs. "truth as abstract quality") in the restricted vocabulary available in Learners' Dictionaries (and only the following well-chosen examples make the difference really clear) and that it emphasises that only the last sense has a plural and the mean is well illustrated with prototypical examples (*universal truths* and *She was forced to face up to a few unwelcome truths about her family*).

This entry is also interesting since it offers a useful link to *half-truth* (a statement that gives only part of the truth, especially when it is intended to cheat somebody with the telling example *The newspaper reports are a mixture of gossip, lies and half-truths*) and a less useful link (see below) to *untruth* ([countable] (formal) a lie. People often say 'untruth' to avoid saying 'lie').

The much more modern WordNet (s.v. 20/05/19), which is applied computational linguistics and natural language processing, also distinguishes five senses:

- **S:** (n) **truth** (a fact that has been verified) "*at last he knew the truth*"; "*the truth is that he didn't want to do it*"
- **S:** (n) **truth, the true, verity, trueness** (conformity to reality or actuality) "*they debated the truth of the proposition*"; "*the situation brought home to us the blunt truth of the military threat*"; "*he was famous for the truth of his portraits*"; "*he turned to religion in his search for eternal verities*"
- **S:** (n) **truth, true statement** (a true statement) "*he told the truth*"; "*he thought of answering with the truth but he knew they wouldn't believe it*"
- **S:** (n) **accuracy, truth** (the quality of being near to the true value) "*he was beginning to doubt the accuracy of his compass*"; "*the lawyer questioned the truth of my account*"

- **S:** (n) **Truth**, [Sojourner Truth](#) (United States abolitionist and feminist who was freed from slavery and became a leading advocate of the abolition of slavery and for the rights of women (1797-1883))

If we leave out the last capitalised, special case, we can compare the two on-line dictionaries and see that WordNet has an additional, third sense: *true statement*, which corresponds to the traditional correspondence theory (above).

2.1.3. Collocations

A different approach can be followed by using the Oxford Collocation Dictionary Online (s.v. 20/05/19), which is particularly useful because co-text adjectives and verbs (in front and after the key word *truth*) indicate senses and this clearly provides two senses (Fig. 1):

The first “what is true” (with the adjective groups *absolute, real; full, whole; exact; simple; terrible; empirical*, to name just a few) seems to point to an absolute value and to be more in line with the correspondence theory?), the second, “fact that is true”, (with the adjective groups *central; ancient; half; unwelcome; necessary; moral: divine*) seems more relative and more in line with the coherence theory. Of course, there is some overlap (*underlying* and *moral* etc. occur in both lists), but plurals (*truths*) are only mentioned in the second list. The second meaning also seems to have fewer collocates, which allows us to conclude that it is less common and more special – and thus confirms our feeling that plural truths are special cases in English.



Fig. 1: “Truth” in the Online Oxford Collocation Dictionary (19/05/20) <http://www.freecollocation.com/>

2.1.4. Contrastive approaches to “truths”

Finally, the current bilingual online database *Linguee* (s.v. 20/05/19) is revealing, since it offers a contrastive perspective of English and German and again shows (Fig. 2) two main senses: The first and most prominent (*almost always used*) sense “reality” seems more in line correspondence theory, the second “fact” more in line with coherence theory, but we can also see many special cases; the third “less common” sense, *Wahrhaftigkeit* relates to the abstract ideal again. Generally, the two languages seem to be relatively similar, even if the German explanation (included from Wikipedia!) seems more detailed and includes the concept of *truism*, which has no direct lexical equivalent in German (*Binsenwahrheit?*, *Binsenweisheit*, *Gemeinplätze*, all accepted by the German spell-checker here!).

When we click on the English and German plural forms offered here, we find phrases similar to the collocation entries in Fig. 1 above: *supposed* or *biblical truths* vs. *unangenehme, alte*, etc.

The screenshot shows the Linguee website interface. At the top, there is a search bar with the word "truth" entered. The language pair is set to English ↔ German. Below the search bar, the dictionary entry for "truth" is displayed. The entry includes the English word "truth" (noun, plural: truths) and its German equivalents: "Wahrheit" (f, plural: Wahrheiten), "Tatsache" (f), and "Wahrhaftigkeit" (f). Each German equivalent is accompanied by example sentences in both languages. For "Wahrheit", examples include "You should always tell the truth." and "I do not want to deceive you so I will tell you the truth." For "Tatsache", an example is "The scientist's theory is now accepted as the truth." For "Wahrhaftigkeit", it is noted as "less common". Below the main entry, there is a section for "Examples" with phrases like "in truth", "statement of truth", and "tell the truth". At the bottom, there is a Wikipedia section with entries for "Truth" and "Wahrheit" in both languages, including their respective Wikipedia URLs.

Fig. 2: “Truth” in the bilingual online dictionary *Linguee* (19/05/20)

Needless to say that apart from these very practical approaches, many more theoretical approaches could be discussed: truth-conditional approaches to linguistic meaning have dominated the literature in linguistics and the philosophy of language for a long time (cf. the Britannica entry above).

To sum up the language approaches, we can say that “truth” seems to have a dominant core meaning, which has some variation from the correspondence of an abstract ideal and facts in reality, to either side, the facts and the ideal. If *truths* occur they are either in firmly established collocates (like *ancient*) or they point to non-correspondence theories, e.g. consensus or discourse theory, which seems to be spreading over the last few years.

If however we hold the impression that the plural usage has become more frequent recently, a quick check in BYU corpora reveals that this is not the case, at least over the last 10 years (e.g. <https://www.english-corpora.org/now/>).

2.2. Journalistic approaches to truth

2.2.1. *A strategic communications consultant on „truths“*

Truth is a difficult concept today in political communication when not only traditional speech writers are employed by all political institutions, but also spin doctors and talking point developers, who design public discourses to support persuasively their specific perspective on an issue.

This is related to the concepts of frame and framing (cf. Schmied 2020). On the one hand, a frame is needed to organize a fragmented reality, but framing is usually not independent but follows a political

Macdonald (2018: 19-21) distinguishes four classes of competing truths and provides 1 chapter each afterwards:

- 1) Partial truths: the complexity of the world makes this an unavoidable feature in communication, esp. context, numbers, stories!
- 2) Subjective truths: morality, desirability, financial value to alter someone's subjective truths to persuade them to act differently
- 3) Artificial truths: communicators establish new names, changing social constructs for human inventions
- 4) Unknown truths: as long predications cannot be proven to be false, beliefs are for many a form of truth

Depending on intentions, Macdonald (2018: 16) distinguishes:

- 1) *Advocates*: selecting competing truths that create a reasonably accurate impression of reality in order to achieve a constructive goal.
- 2) *Misinformers*: innocently propagating competing truths that unintentionally distort reality.
- 3) *Misleaders*: deliberately deploying competing truths to create an impression of reality that they know is not true.

An interesting feature of this book is that it provides many entertaining, illustrative anecdotes that it certainly helps readers to understand how they are manipulated in this age of misinformation, possibly even to manipulate others for virtuous ends, but it does not give easy recipes to adjudicate competing truths or even oppose manipulation.

2.2.2. *Journalistic approaches to truth*

A narrative approach to truth from an experienced German journalist can be found in Wolf von Lojewski's memoirs *Der schöne Schein der Wahrheit* ("The beautiful appearance of truth"), in which he presents the sad truth at the very beginning that "many things are simply more important than the truth" (2006: 11f):

But let's get back to the question of how a politician or business leader gets along best with people like me in the age of communication. Managers take courses in this subject, and occasionally I am offered the opportunity to be a lecturer in front of such an audience. I have always expressed my gratitude for this, because they would not have accepted my

advice: "Just tell the truth - briefly and in clear, understandable sentences! And if you do not know something or are not sure of your case, then admit it!"

I can already hear the answer that such [an] advice is naive. In dealing with the truth there is a lot to consider: the anger of the minister, the disappointment of the shareholders, the unrest in the workforce, in the party or in public, the turnover, the next elections, the career, the well-being of the family and a thousand other overriding values and dangers. From this we learn that for people who bear responsibility, much is simply more important than the truth. And so we have to live with the fact that it just remains difficult with us journalists and communication.

Adapted from www.DeepL.com/Translator (16/09/19)

Later on (ibid. 211-21) he gives a telling example of Truth A vs. Truth B from his own experience at the time of writing (in 2005). On the one hand, the German economy is strangled by laws and regulations, productivity is low because labour is too expensive in Germany. On the other hand, German companies are making huge profits, shares are rising, the finance economy is successfully playing in the global markets – only workers find it difficult to see the virtues of this globalisation when wages are reduced, working hours increased and workers “laid off”. He concludes that there is not too little truth in the public discourse, but too much (p. 218) – a discouraging example of conflicting truths?

2.2.3. *A wider frame for information and misinformation*

In her recent book “Lies on the Internet”, Brodnig (2017) sees a “new era of manipulation” and distinguishes seven types of “Fake News” (ibid: 31-37), referring to Claire Wardle’s influential “break down of the types of fake content, content creators motivations and how it's being disseminated” (Fig. 2).

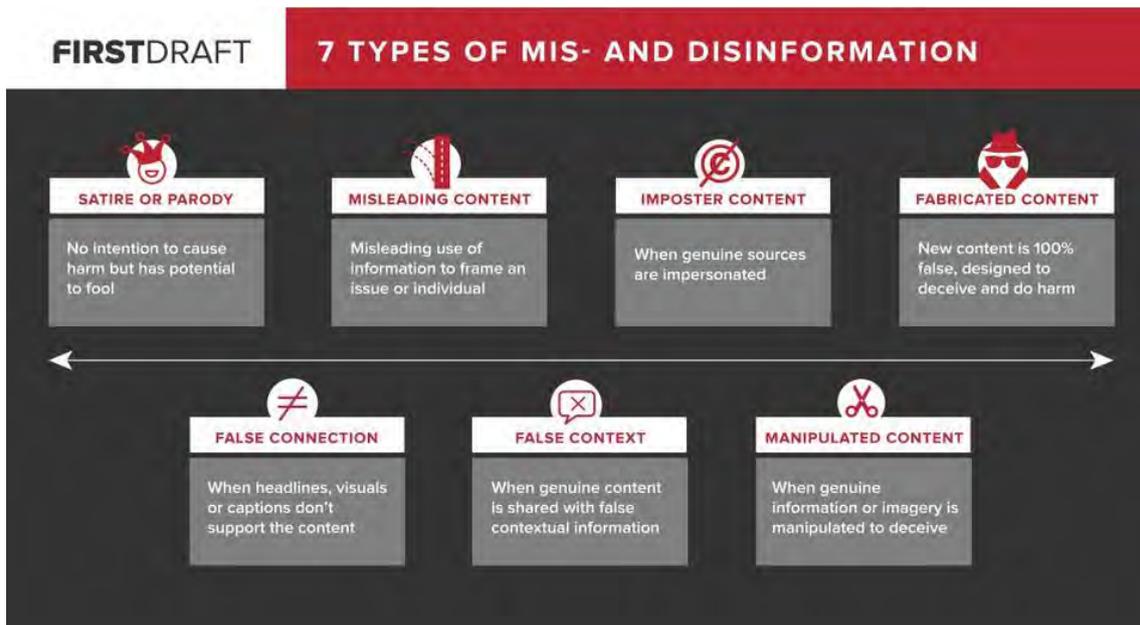


Fig. 6: Wardle’s seven types of misinformation

In her blog FirstDraft, Wardle has provided an appealing matrix of seven “Ps” to “help explain the motivations” and even suggests “to work up a 3D matrix to map my graph against the different dissemination mechanisms” (Wardle 2019: n.p.):

FIRSTDRAFT MISINFORMATION MATRIX

	SATIRE OR PARODY	FALSE CONNECTION	MISLEADING CONTENT	FALSE CONTEXT	IMPOSTER CONTENT	MANIPULATED CONTENT	FABRICATED CONTENT
POOR JOURNALISM		✓	✓	✓			
TO PARODY	✓				✓		✓
TO PROVOKE OR TO 'PUNK'					✓	✓	✓
PASSION				✓			
PARTISANSHIP			✓	✓			
PROFIT		✓			✓		✓
POLITICAL INFLUENCE			✓	✓		✓	✓
PROPAGANDA			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Fig. 7: Wardle’s matrix on intentions for different types of misinformation

She also emphasises that “folders of sharable ‘meme-shells’ may be used to drop visuals into hashtag streams”, because “we’re much less likely to be critical of visuals. We’re much less likely to be critical of information that supports our existing beliefs. And, as information overload exhausts our brains, we’re much easier to influence” (ibid).

3. Forms of conflicting truths

Conflicting truths can be found in different forms from images to narratives and figures. The following examples show some particularly obvious cases which may be used as stereotypes.

3.1. Figures/statistics

Figures and statistics were identified a long time ago as central in the persuasive endeavour of leading or misleading readers and listeners. As early as 1954, the journalist Darrell Huff wrote a popular introduction *How to Lie with Statistics*, which has almost become a classic. He included humorous images and three famous historical sayings, which show that the topic is as important today as ever before:

There are three kinds of lies: lies, damned lies and statistics. [attributed to] Disraeli

Statistical thinking will one day be as necessary for efficient citizenship as the ability to read and write. H.G. Wells

Round numbers are always false. Samuel Johnson

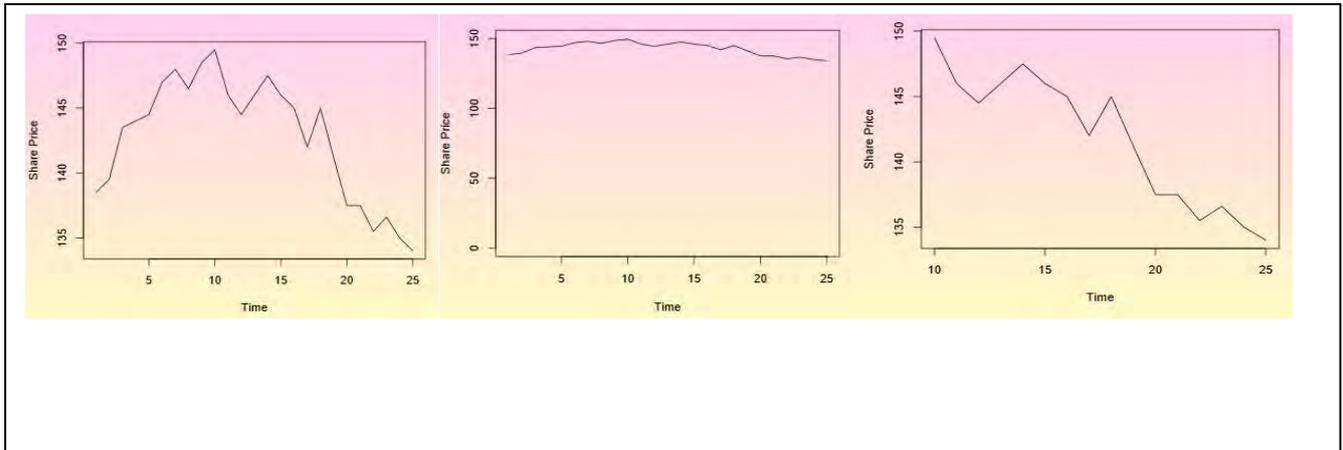


Fig. 3: Between stable and dramatic developments in graphs

Fig. 4: Growth despite continuity?

A relatively recent example of public use or misuse of statistical information can be found in *Armuttsbericht* (2013: 7).

arithmetic mean instead of median?

https://www.der-paritaetische.de/fileadmin/user_upload/Schwerpunkte/Armuttsbericht/doc/2018_armuttsbericht.pdf
(19/04/15)

Average income is not the average common income calculated by adding all household incomes and dividing the sum by the number of households (arithmetic mean). Instead, the so-called median, the mean value, is calculated: All households are ranked according to their income, with the household income in the middle of the row representing the mean. The difference between the arithmetic mean and the median can be very large. For example, if five households each have an income of 700 euro, 1,300 euro, 1,900 euro, 6,500 euro and 9,000 euro, they have on average $(700 + 1,300 + 1,900 + 6,500 + 9,000) : 5 = 3,880$ euro. The median value, however, would be 1,900 euros. The poverty threshold calculated with the median and the resulting poverty rates are very "stable":

households in the upper range can become richer and richer. As long as the household in the middle of the ranking has no increase in income, this has no influence on the poverty thresholds.

Fn 16 Empirically, the median income is regularly below the average (cf. Markus Grabka / Jan Goebel (2018): Einkommensverteilung in Deutschland: Realeinkommen seit 1991 gestiegen, aber mehr Menschen beziehen Niedrigeinkommen, in: DIW Wochenbericht 21, p. 451). An orientation towards average income would be perfectly appropriate. This approach would noticeably raise the poverty threshold - and thus also the number of households below it. Here too, however, parity follows the established convention: poverty is underestimated rather than overestimated by this approach. Translated with www.DeepL.com/Translator (13/05/19)

3.2. Images

Fig. 5: Image of the Blind Men and the Elephant

A group of blind men heard that a strange animal, called an elephant, had been brought to the town, but none of them were aware of its shape and form. Out of curiosity, they said: "We must inspect and know it by touch, of which we are capable". So, they sought it out, and when they found it they groped about it. In the case of the first person, whose hand landed on the trunk, said "This being is like a thick snake". For another one whose hand reached its ear, it seemed like a kind of fan. As for another person, whose hand was upon its leg, said, the elephant is a pillar like a tree-trunk. The blind man who placed his hand upon its side said the elephant, "is a wall". Another who felt its tail, described it as a rope. The last felt its tusk, stating the elephant is that which is hard, smooth and like a spear.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blind_men_and_an_elephant (19/09/19)

"The Blind Men and the Elephant" by John Godfrey Saxe (1816–1887):

And so these men of Indostan

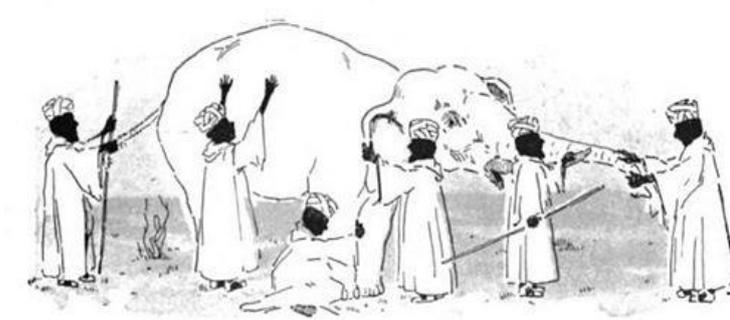
Disputed loud and long,

Each in his own opinion

Exceeding stiff and strong,

Though each was partly in the right

And all were in the wrong!



3.3. Narratives

Macdonald (2018: 10) offers a modern example of how consumers today may be talked into certain truths concerning the relatively new food Quinoa.

Wind the clock back a few years and imagine you've never heard of quinoa. You find it on a shelf in your local store and ask the nearest assistant about it.

He tells you one true thing about the bag of seeds in your hand. It could be:

Quinoa is really nutritious, high in protein, fibre and minerals, and low in fat.

Or:

Buying quinoa improves the incomes of poor farmers in South America.

Or:

Buying quinoa makes it more expensive for Bolivians and Peruvians to eat their traditional food.

Or:

Quinoa farming is having a serious environmental impact on the Andes.

4. Truth and untruth: intentions and contexts

4.1. Truth and untruth in the news and in literature

Truth concepts occur very frequently in the context of fake news today (Schmied 2018), but they have been discussed by philosophers for a long time Janich, P. (1996), especially in view of the effect, they have distinguished a lie from an untruth. Kant holds that lying (Lüge) is unethical and harmful to humanity but an untruth (Unwahrheit) is permissible in circumstances. This is based on the earlier distinction between *mendacium*, with the intention and effect to harm the interlocutor or others, and *falsiloquium*, with no serious consequences (Schneider 2012: 215f). Untruths may be told to protect the hearer(s) and a relationship, as in an emergency lie, a “white” or noble lie (when you do not want to offend a patient, a relative or a friend by telling them the “blunt” truth. The examples for such cases are plentiful, in history and in literature (idib).

From a British perspective, the tradition of lies in politics was started long before Prime Ministers Tony Blair or Boris Johnson. Johnathan Swift, at the same time the most famous journalist and the most famous satirist, wrote his “Essay upon the Art of Political Lying” in 1710, in which he claims to review someone else’s work. There he distinguishes the “private truth” that people have a right to from the “political truth” that they do not have a right to. And he seems to anticipate all modern concerns about the information bubble and the bias of confidence: “As the vilest writer hath his readers, so the greatest liar hath his believers: and it often happens, that if a lie be believed only for an hour, it hath done its work.” (Swift 1710/1916). Oscar Wilde published his *The Decay of Lying* in 1891 in his collection of essays titled *Intentions*. Here a discussant deplors that the decay of Lying "as an art, a science, and a social pleasure" is responsible for the decline of modern literature, which is excessively concerned with the representation of facts and social reality. He writes, "if something cannot be done to check, or at least to modify, our monstrous worship of facts, Art will become sterile and beauty will pass away from the land."

4.2. Truths in current journalistic discourse

A recent example is the following Brexit discussion in the German media.

<https://www.spiegel.de/wirtschaft/service/brexit-und-gelbwesten-demokratie-braucht-eine-solide-faktenbasis-a-1259144-druck.html>

Falsche Wahrheiten – False/Wrong Truths [Untruths] 24. März 2019, 07:48 Uhr

The Brexit disaster and the yellow vest movement show Democracy needs a solid factual basis to make sensible decisions. If faith in the truth crumbles, disaster threatens.

What is true? Actually a simple question. But it is no longer so easy to answer. More than half of German citizens believe that they frequently come into contact with reports that are false or at least reflect reality in a falsified way. After all, one third say it is difficult for them to recognise such reports. Germany is even still in quite a good position. In other European countries the confusion is greater. In France, for example, more than 80 percent of citizens believe they are frequently confronted with false reports. In the UK, the proportion is 75 percent, according to the latest Eurobarometer survey. Quite serious findings. When the sense of truth is lost, societies become unable to act. Two current developments obviously have something to do with the loss of the common fact base: the hanging game around the Brexit and the protests of the yellow vests in France. It is not even so important whether reports are actually wrong - or whether citizens merely suspect they are being presented with untruths. Much falls into this category: malicious fake news, launched by propagandists, activists or secret services and distributed via social networks, as well as serious press reports whose truthfulness is wrongly questioned by users. In any case, the result is uncertainty - with destructive side effects.

Translated with www.DeepL.com/Translator (16/05/19)

This is only one example that can be expanded in two other political contexts and national discourses example from the UK.

The following example comes from France more or less at the same time and illustrates the relationship of untruth and distrust:

<https://www.spiegel.de/wirtschaft/service/brexit-und-gelbwesten-demokratie-braucht-eine-solide-faktenbasis-a-1259144-druck.html>

Falsche Wahrheiten – False/Wrong Truths (cont.)

Feeling Fake News

The phenomenon of yellow vests in France also results from a fundamental distrust. It is an uprising by sections of the population who feel detached and have nothing but cynicism for the ruling system. President Emmanuel Macron has made an effort with his great "national debate", taking a lot of time, listening and arguing. But the hardcore demonstrators don't get caught. They want to overthrow the system - because it seems wrong and untrustworthy to them.

This shows a fundamental tendency. In countries such as France and the UK, where there is a high prevalence of actual or perceived fake news, citizens tend to have little confidence in politics and the public authorities as a whole.

On average, only 31 percent of the French and 32 percent of the British trust the respective political institutions - significantly less than the citizens of Germany (54 percent) and other northern European countries. A similar gap can be seen in trust in the media.

One pattern becomes apparent: where political and media institutions enjoy little trust, there is also distrust of the truth. Where does this connection come from? Who is to blame?

Translated with www.DeepL.com/Translator (16/05/19)

In the American context, historical truths have been constructed and deconstructed by the current bestseller *These Truths* by Lepore (2018). She takes the title of her monumental work from the changes Franklin made to Jefferson's draft of the Constitution: "these truths" were no longer "sacred & undeniable", instead they were "self-evident", which emphasises the evidence from primary sources to show a nation caught between its "sunny ideals" and its "darker realities".

4.3. Fake as propaganda or embellishment

The following example from the German press illustrates very closely the pressures that maybe felt in journalistic circles where the recent Relotius case illustrates very clearly that we often see truth in what we would like to hear and the journalist feel forced to write in this persuasive style what is expected and even get the #present prices for their well written stories.

<https://www.spiegel.de/kultur/gesellschaft/leserbriefe-zum-fall-claas-relotius-a-1245713.html> Freitag, 28.12.2018 18:03 Uhr

"Well written. At the expense of truth" Letters to the editor on the Relotius case

The current "SPIEGEL affair" is all the worse as it will be a great food for those who are constantly spreading slogans of "lying press" and "fake news" (e.g. Lilienthal/Neverla Eds 2017).

Joachim Kasten, Hamburg

I also enjoyed reading Mr. Relotius' texts. They were and are very well written. At the expense of the truth, as we now know. You must and will improve the controls. But there can and will never be one hundred per cent control of people, and I do not think anyone can want that either. Transparency and self-criticism are important. That is what you are doing. And you do it in your usual professional way, well-written as well. Why not?

Sabine Lagies, Pleystein (Bavaria)

With its premature public reappraisal of the "falsified stories" and "fraudulent works" of a "criminal individual perpetrator", the Spiegel apparently wants to artificially enhance its own significance in times of the increasing decline of the seemingly obsolete print media in view of the overwhelming digitalization and diverse Internet offerings.

Dr. David Perteck, Hamburg

Translated with www.DeepL.com/Translator (16/05/19)

<https://www.spiegel.de/kultur/gesellschaft/fall-claas-relotius-versuch-einer-aufarbeitung-in-fergus-falls-a-1245694.html> Freitag, 28.12.2018 18:03 Uhr

Case Relotius The Fake City

Former SPIEGEL employee Claas Relotius invented a report about the US small town of Fergus Falls in Minnesota. Attempt at a reappraisal.

The text by Claas Relotius, published at the end of March last year, is entitled "In a small town". Last Wednesday, the SPIEGEL editor-in-chief revealed that this and probably most other texts by Relotius contain forgeries, if not completely invented. (You can read more about this here.) He came up with names, people, scenes, he put together a completely new reality, also in Fergus Falls in Minnesota, "typical of rural America", as the subline of his report says.

Translated with www.DeepL.com/Translator (16/05/19)

This case may be extreme but it is obvious that many writing courses in journalism may tempt journalists to see the truth as what is expected from the audience.

5. Conclusion: permanent endeavour

In the midst of all current controversies on truth, untruth and post-truth, it is difficult or even impossible to give and accept general guidelines on issues of conflicting truths. It is worth, however, to mention some recent attempts. Brinkbäumer (2017: 62f), the former Spiegel editor-in-chief, has quoted and interpreted Gordon Ash's principles:

Furthermore, it is necessary to update

<https://firstdraftnews.org/misinformation-reading-list/> (29/09/19)

I am fine with multiple truths. Misleading truths is a huge problem

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