ILDIKÓ HORTOBÁGYI – ISTVÁN KOCSIS

University of Pannonia
ildiko@almos.uni-pannon.hu
k.istvan@t-online.hu

# Follow the Reader Profile!
# A Comparison of News Articles and Outlets from English Speaking Countries

Az újság a tömegtájékoztatás egyik legrégebbi eszköze. Napjainkban a média e formája mindenfajta ismeret közvetítésére képessé vált, a tudományos kutatási eredményektől a celebek világáig. Az angol nyelvű média világméretű elterjedésével nemcsak a médiaműveltség és a médiatudatosság fejlesztésében hatékony eszköz, hanem az újságírói diskurzust befolyásoló szociolingvisztikai tényezők megértésében is. A tanulmány azt vizsgálja – angol nyelvű országok hírportál-webhelyeire összpontosítva és összehasonlító szempontú megközelítést alkalmazva –, hogy a különböző webhelyek cikkei hogyan használják a meggyőzési technikákat a címben és a szövegekben, továbbá, hogy a mondatok száma, és ezen belül a szavak száma egy mondatban mennyire vetíti előre egy szöveg megértési nehézségeit. A kutatás célja az „ideális olvasó" profiljának a létrehozása, mely segítheti a különféle médialektusok dekódolását. Azonos hírek különböző nyelveken megjelenő változatai lehetőséget adnak összehasonlító vizsgálatokra, azaz hogy különböző országok, társadalmi, kulturális természetükből adódóan nyelvileg hogyan építik fel az információközlést.

## Introduction

At the frontier between past and present, in a global society where human communication is highly mediatized, Thomas Carlyle is the first scholar to be credited for his 1841 reference to the press as the *Fourth Estate*, as a subsequent continuation of the balance of powers known as the *Estates-General* in the legislative assembly in France before the 1789 Revolution (Hortobágyi, 2009). We definitely live in a media saturated world where our culture is a huge supermarket of media messages. If in the past the main issue was how to gain information at all, nowadays the major problem is how to protect ourselves from the flood of information (McNair, 2006). The daily media diet of the students explores the lexis found at the crossroads of business, politics, infotainment and Hollywood. When developing students' media literacy skills, we need to consider that the strategic and tactical use of specific words and phrases can change how people think or behave (Hortobágyi, 2012: 144). Almost simultaneously with McNair's scholarship, in 2007 the Oxford Internet Institute launched a new project called the Fifth Estate developed from Bill Dutton's Inaugural Lecture: *Through the network (of Networks) – the Fifth Estate,* to examine the newly

emerged powerful individual voices and networks, which act independently of the traditional media (Hortobágyi, 2017).

Generally speaking, languages are not neutral, since our worldviews affect the systems of symbolic representation. Within any language, descriptions are not neutral either, as they are influenced by the background and the individual capacities of the speaker or writer. In order to understand medialects we have to learn to recognize that all messages in all media forms are targeted messages, and that very often tricks of persuasion are employed to manipulate language (Hortobágyi, 2010: 205). Among the most often utilised bias techniques we can list the following: equivocation, charged words, jargon, repeated affirmation, innuendo, unidentified sources and padding of high sentiment. As far as fallacies of argument are concerned, we can distinguish argument against the person, appeal to authority, argument to the people or appeal to the gallery, wrapping oneself in the flag, appeal to force, appeal to pity, special pleading or simply ignoring the question (Domborovski, 2004).

The newspaper is one of the oldest forms of mass communication. Nowadays there are different types of newspapers in every country, suited for their own specific audiences in terms of lexis, grammar, discourse patterns, sociolinguistic factors, just to mention only a few building blocks of communication. Today it is an effortless feat to obtain a newspaper and read it either in printed or electronic format. In recent years, the internet has speeded up information exchange, which also made article writing faster, more accessible as well as cheaper for the news outlets, hence the reason why most major newspapers and news stations also feature an online platform where the audience and readers can gain access to the written form of current news. However, this fast information exchange brings up the concerns that the quality of the editorials can suffer from the hastened release schedule. The author does not know the origin and the characteristics of the readers, thus needs to convey the information in a way that is clearly understood by all. Despite this, one might use idioms or other dialect dependent phrases that are common to a given area, which might prove difficult for some to understand. For that matter there are research findings of news outlets run by minority communities who live in English language dominant countries and use intentional code-mixing in their newspapers or newsletters (Forintos, 2017; 2018).

Similarly, one's intention to display their personal views or include fact altering or otherwise manipulative content in their stories might differ according to logistical or cultural origins. In this study, news articles from Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States are compared to showcase potential differences in communication strategies, even if these Anglo-Saxon origin countries are supposed to be sharing a common cultural, linguistic and communication heritage. One news outlet was chosen from each country.

News sites for each country

| Canada | CBS News |
|---|---|
| USA | New York Times |
| UK | BBC News |
| Australia | ABC News |

The news outlets were picked based on popularity; thus Canada, the UK and Australia's news outlets are also their local television network's news broadcasts' online sites. For the USA, the New York Times is one of the most popular and most renowned news outlets, consequently it is arguably the most read across the country.

## Literature and Methods

Nowadays researchers are fundamentally influenced by findings reached in other disciplines. Viewed through the lens of contemporary academic disciplines, research in media linguistics in general and applied linguistics in particular can be situated at a multidisciplinary intersection. One related concept is found in communication sciences, namely the concept of media literacy as the phenomenon of developing conscious awareness in understanding and decoding medialects as media-bound varieties of language. While discussing the main building blocks of media literacy, and through the analysis of knowledge structures, Potter (2008) proposes a clear-cut distinction between information and knowledge, where "information resides in the message, whereas knowledge resides in a person's mind. Information gives something to the person to interpret - answering the question *what?* -, whereas knowledge reflects that which has already been interpreted by the person, answering the questions *how?* and *why?*" (2008: 13). Secondly sociology can offer a functionalist perspective (Turner and Stets, 2006), which enables us to understand how social systems operate as a whole, how they change, and what social consequences they have. Only with a conscious sensitivity to these issues can we decode messages and co-create new meanings when negative aspects of social life provide the context.

When scrutinizing new technological communication, - and all newspapers have a digital platform - Susan Herring is to be credited for having recognized and developed the CMDA paradigm (Computer mediated discourse analysis, a term coined by her at her 1994 GURT workshop) as a logical positioning of linguistics into the Web 2.0 environment. Since then CMC (Computer mediated communication) has undergone a remarkable shift, juxtaposing messages with infotainment content, giving birth to what Herring (2013) defines as convergent media computer mediated communication (CMCMC), where discourse in new contexts raises new issues.

Echoing both Herring's (2013) and Hesmondhalgh's (2013) argument of what can be considered as *text*, we can rightfully agree that convergent media operate with what Danesi (2016: 18) identifies as three new dimensions focusing on the

old Saussurian langue-parole interface, namely environment (real or virtual), multimodality and hypertextuality.

For authentic comparison and reliable findings, the authors have opted to analyse the same breaking world news presented by each of the above listed news outlets, followed by the first and second articles of each local news on the very same day, highlighting thus the major interests of the readership. The benchmarks for scrutiny are the wording of the titles and how eye-catching they are; dialect specific grammar; the average length of sentences and paragraphs as well as the information the text conveys and whether there is additional unrelated or non-important information included, which would otherwise steer the reader's attention into another direction. The level of complexity in sentence length coupled with the used vocabulary will also be observed. Depending on the region where the news article is released, it is inferred that the author, calibrating the reader's estimated intelligence, might deliberately use simpler or more complex wording, well-structured and longer sentences to share the information.

McIntyre's Text Difficulty Table
(McIntyre, 1996: 19)

| Sentence Length | Readability |
|---|---|
| 8 words or fewer | Very easy to read |
| 11 words | Easy to read |
| 14 words | Fairly easy to read |
| 17 words | Standard |
| 21 words | Fairly difficult to read |
| 25 words | Difficult to read |
| 29 words or more | Very difficult to read |

The above table will be used to determine whether a text is easy or difficult to understand as well as to compare news outlets based on their average words/ sentence ratio to determine which outlet could prove harder for readers to decode. Itule and Anderson (2007) remind us that a complex sentence is made up of an independent clause, which is joined by a single or multiple dependent clause. According to Gatt (2014) these are the most commonly used sentence structures in news articles. A complex structure also increases the sentence length, which as a result makes the body of the text harder to understand. Manipulation and attention-grabbing techniques in the title are observed following Ecker's concepts (2014), with special focus on headlines, which determine the main content, theme and mood of the editorial, thus it is vital for the authors to provide the proper titles for their stories. Even a decade earlier, Timuçin (2010) posited that one and the same piece of information can be formulated in different ways and the different versions are neither random, nor accidental alternatives, rather they are expressions that carry ideological distinctions that prompt different

representations. The speedy expansion of the internet has never nullified the scientific results of earlier research. Five decades ago, Crystal and Davy (1969) already recognized that the language used in newspaper stories is adopted to suit the intended audience, thus being more, or less biased as well as including manipulative content accordingly.

Each article has a short summary of the covered event, followed by the observations and analysis of the report. All unique features are noted and gathered to ultimately compare news sites to one another, point out differences and deduce a profile to each news outlet regarding their habits, text complexity and potential targeted readers. To see different situations in terms of stories, four different kinds of news topics are analysed: *World News*, *Entertainment*, *Political News* and *Local News*. At the end of every batch of articles from each news outlet, a table is made to compare some key elements. The points are as follows:

- Unique features in the title: Any form of attention grabbing, click-bait or otherwise manipulative techniques used in the title to either share political/ personal views or generate more interest in the reader.
- Out of context information: Whether the writing stays true to the promised content by the title.
- Unusual Vocabulary: Jargon, slang or other rarely used words that might prove difficult to understand for people who are not familiar with particular topic.
- Text Difficulty: The general difficulty to read the given text. Whether it features long, complex sentences, a high words/ sentence ratio or any form of rarely seen vocabulary such as slang or jargon.
- Average Words/ Sentence ratio: The dividend of the amount of words the story consists of, by the number of sentences the words are separated into. This data can point to the complexity and required knowledge of the language to read the article according to the average sentence lengths by McIntyre.
- Signs of manipulation in the text: Whether the text contains political, personal views, any form of manipulation from pun, to obvious insulting of a person, political group or changing the topic in order to shift the attention of the reader.

## Discussion and Results

An analysis of research data gathered during reading the leading articles is presented in this sub-chapter, and the research questions presented in the introduction are reiterated and addressed. Namely, the authors have chosen leading breaking news from the four Anglo-Saxon news outlets: *World News* in two batches, *Entertainment* and *Local News*. Articles on politics and a second batch of local news will not be discussed in detail in this paper, but their quantitative and qualitative results will be reflected on in the overall tables

presented in the Annex. World News tackled the same breaking news event with global reference and importance in the first batch, and a local natural disaster in France with relevance of global environmental issues. Entertainment and Local News scrutinized the first and second leading piece of news to find out what the specific country found relevant for their community.

**World News 1.**

The first batch of articles reports on **the misfunction of the Russian Soyuz rocket and the executed emergency landing**.

The Canadian **CBC News'** editorial is entitled *2 astronauts safe after Soyuz forced to make emergency landing*, posted on Oct 11, 2018. The title does not contain any persuasion tactics, it conveys the core issue that the corpus talks about. In the text, the reader learns about a malfunction with the Soyuz rocket that as a result had to perform an emergency landing. Both astronauts, Nick Hague and Alexei Ovchinin have survived the landing, even though the situation was not ideal due to the sharp falling angle. They were checked for injuries but none was found, so they were transported back to Star City, Russia's space training station outside Moscow. The document also explains the failure itself, a booster malfunction in the second stage about two minutes after lift-off. Additionally, the author also points out that due to this issue, the people currently on the ISS are trapped up there for an indefinite amount of time until investigations are going on.

The text also features a list of previous issues with the Soyuz rockets and highlights the tension between Russia and the USA: *Relations between Moscow and Washington have sunk to post-Cold War lows over the crisis in Ukraine, the war in Syria and allegations of Russian meddling in the 2016 U.S. presidential vote, but they have maintained co-operation in space research*. (CBC, 2018). Additionally, the author also mentions the recent drop of quality of the rocket, as many engines had to be sent back for quality issues. This can be considered manipulation, as it is not directly connected to the current event. When it comes to unusual vocabulary, there are several examples of technical terms; words such as *"jettisoned", "cosmodome", "dogged"* are arguably less frequently used words, which might cause some misunderstanding to some readers. The text is also rather lengthy, containing 1226 words and 53 sentences, which results in a 23.1 words/ sentence ratio - according to McIntyre (1996), this is considered a fairly difficult text to read.

In conclusion, we may state that the CBC News' article talks about the emergency landing of the Soyuz rocket. Besides the main topic, the author also points out previous issues with the rocket and highlights the U.S. - Russia tensions. The document is fairly difficult to read according to the average words/ sentence ratio, and the corpus also contains technical jargon.

**BBC News** has also reported about the event and titled it *Astronauts escape malfunctioning Soyuz rocket.* The author focuses more on the current event, explains the accident in detail by offering an explanatory description. The readers are told about the healthy condition of the astronauts. The report then shifts focus towards the political questions regarding the event, as both a U.S. and a Russian astronaut were involved, however as Yuri Borisov stated, the event would not harm the U.S. – Russian relations. Additionally, the article recalls in detail previous similar events, highlighting how in recent years the Soyuz rockets have failed on 13 occasions since 2010. This part of the article also lists all previous fatal, and non-fatal accidents that happened during space-travel, which potentially paints the editorial into a melancholic and intimidating colour as this is the longest paragraph by taking up 15 out of the 52 total sentences regarding the story; and since this is the closing part of the article, the last information definitely leaves a most vivid memory of the details. Grammatically, this article is well written, formal, lacks the first person singular and uses an average of 19.3 words per sentence. Thus, the sentences are not too long for an average reader to comprehend also, all technical terms are explained shortly thereafter, the spelling follows strictly the norms of British English (e.g.: *programme*). However, it can be speculated that the text wants to implant fear into the readers due to how the story is organized, as it focuses on politics and threatens the reader with conflicts between two big powers of the world, or by detailing previous serious accidents during space-travels.

The **New-York Times**, which has entitled the story *Russian Rocket Fails, and 2 Astronauts Make Safe Emergency Return*, takes a slightly different approach in terms of writing style. The title directly points towards the main event and does not contain any personal views nor any sign of manipulation. They attention is switched from information about material losses during this accident a heavy focus on the personal well-being of the astronauts, as well as on the international relations throughout the entire story. However, unlike other reports, this article does not offer a contextual explanation of the event, and strictly reports on the accident. The text features comparisons, metaphors complex and colourful vocabulary such as "*As they hurtled toward space faster than a rifle bullet*" … "*they were forced to make a harrowing but safe emergency landing*" (The New York Times, Oct 11, 2018), organized in sometimes 50-word long sentences. Each sentence is well structures and cohesive, there are no breaks in-between paragraphs. This might be due to the NYT being a premium news site, requiring bi-weekly subscription to read more than five articles a month. Consequently, their selling point behind the subscription makes the paper unbiased, which is proven in this report, as there seem to be no hidden messages, no personal subjective views. The contents also lack any unique features that would deviate it from the General American English such as dialect specific vocabulary or grammar. Due to the more complex and well-chosen wording, the text might have

been written for a more intellectual audience, the longer sentences with an average of 25.6 words/ sentence also points towards this. There are also no signs of deviation from the main topic or any unnecessary information being shared for no good reason. In summary, the writing is very comprehensive and cohesive, no fracturing can be found in the corpus with an advanced vocabulary and writing style that has a certain charm to it while also lacking any kind of noticeable manipulation of the reader.

Lastly, regarding this story, Australia's **ABC News** has also written an article about the event titled *Astronauts make emergency landing after rocket malfunction*. The title contains no unique vocabulary, similarly to other News sites, nor does it feature any manipulation or personal view. The text, however is more unique than the previous ones. Numerous words can be found, which are uncommon in the context and were not used by the other three news authors. Words such as *"jettisoned", "dogged"* are not very frequently heard, however ABC News's article features them more than once. It also contains jargon that is unexplained to the reader, such a word as *"cosmodrome"*, which is another term for spaceport that is located in former Soviet land. Thus, the reader is required to possess knowledge of certain jargon and unique vocabulary that is outside of every day's spoken English. The writing has an average of 22.9 words/ sentence ratio, which points towards fairly difficult enterprise to read the text. Grammatically there are no noticeable differences, most sentences are kept simple yet descriptive with enough cohesion to link them together to form a comprehensive story. The article is more politics oriented, compared to the rest, with a heavy emphasis on the international tension between the U.S. and Russia. The author also talks about the recent drop in quality of Russian rockets prior to saying *"Russia has continued to rely on Soviet-designed booster rockets…" (ABC News Oct 11, 2018).* The author focuses on this topic very heavily in the story, as 10 sentences out of the total of 30, are about international tension as well as the detailed explanation of the faultiness of the Soyuz rocket in recent years, this part is also the longest written in the entire text. A noticeable amount of anti-Russian bias can be observed.

There is also a noticeable resemblance to the CBC's article regarding the content. Many paragraphs are the same, such as the very end of both reports:

*"He did not say if he suspected any of the current crew of three Americans, two Russians and a German aboard the station of malfeasance."* (ABC News, 2018)

*"He didn't say if he suspected any of the current crew of three Americans, two Russians and a German aboard the station of malfeasance."* (CBC News, 2018)

Many previous sentences have the same traits as well. Potentially both news outlets used an already written source to make their reports as both released the news at roughly the same time in their respected time zones. In conclusion, ABC News' article features heavy emphasis on international politics and some subtle anti-Russian bias, yet it does not feature any personal views. The corpus of the

body bears heavy resemblance to CBC News' piece, which could point to using the same written source.

World News Comparison #1

| Comparison aspects | News Sites | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | CBC News | BBC News | NYT | ABC News |
| Unique features in the title | No | No | No | No |
| Out of context information | Yes | Yes | No | Yes |
| Unusual Vocabulary | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Text Difficulty | Fairly Difficult | Standard | Difficult | Rather Difficult |
| Average words/ sentence | 23.1 | 19.3 | 25.6 | 22.9 |
| Presence of manipulation | Yes | Yes | No | Yes |

While there are no major differences between texts outside of their respected area's common dialect, there are some differences in what their main emphasis within the story is, as well as their willingness to show their personal views or political/ national bias.

For a bilingual contrastive analysis see Notes 1. for the Hungarian media articles in the topic.

## World News 2.
Moving forward, the next story that all news sites have covered was **the floods in southern France.**

The **CBC News** article's entitled *At least 12 dead in southwestern France flooding*, posted on Oct 15, 2018, already highlights the weight of the tragedy. The story does not go into detail about the casualties but rather focuses on the property damage and the damages the floods have done to the towns it swept through. There are no names to the dead, nor any coverage on how the floods affected residents in any further detail than that they needed to be rescued from their rooftops.

The feature is very brief, containing only 355 words and 23 sentences with an average of 15.4 words/ sentence. The sentences are rather disconnected and the text appears to be frequently updated after release, badly edited and lacking proper structure. The corpus does not contain any unusual grammatical item or vocabulary. There is nevertheless a less frequently used word, specifically: "*helicoptered*" instead of "*carried by helicopter*" (this might be due to an unhappy translation of the French technical term for the movement, namely *hélitreuiller*/ lifting and carrying by helicopter). The required language knowledge to fully

comprehend the text is quite low, this making it very accessible to all kinds of readers. The article does not seem to manipulate the readers in any way; however, it is heavily focused on the material damages of the tragedy while only briefly mentioning the human lives involved in the disaster. In summary, the text is very short, only writes as much as necessary to convey the information, it does not feature any unique grammar or special vocabulary or any manipulation except for the attention-grabbing title.

The **BBC News** article is entitled *France weather: Red alert as flash floods kill 10 in south-west* posted on Oct 15, 2018. This story goes more into detail of the casualties including a nun, as well as other news regarding human lives, however it does not feature the names of the people killed in the floods. Additionally, there is little to no mention of the material damages. In this sense, the British approach is the opposite of the Canadian one. Similar to the CBC, the contents are rather short, containing 396 words and 21 sentences altogether with an average of 18.8 words/ sentence ratio. While the editorial itself is rather brief, it has a better organized flow than that of CBC. While fragmenting is still apparent, the sentences are better connected to one another and the flow is better lead thus creating a more comprehensive story. However, nothing else noteworthy can be said about this article, as it follows the British English standards and does not use any noticeably rare or uncommon words. The text does not employ any kind of manipulation; however, it features a brief mention of a resident angry at the government for not having informed the people beforehand about the disaster. In conclusion, the writing is very short, lacks any colourful vocabulary and grammar and only intends to provide the needed information. The body does not contain any manipulation except for the title and a debatable note of the government not having informed the residents about the floods beforehand.

The **New York Times** article, entitled *French Flash Floods Kill at Least 11* posted on Oct 15, 2018 and written by Aurelien Breeden has no different characteristics than that of the previous two stories about the floods. It almost entirely focuses on the people who suffered through the event, many survivors and witnesses are quoted in the report with small stories about their reactions. Moreover, the article also talks about France's answer to this catastrophe as well as their plans to help the victims. New York Times author, Aurelien Breeden, also mentioned the death of the nun, who was washed away by the floods, yet in his article this casualty is mentioned along many other people related news and not separated from the main content of the article body, as found in the BBC report. The article is almost twice as long as the previous two, consisting of 680 words and 25 sentences with an average of 27.2 words/ sentences ratio. Out of the chosen articles, this is the most comprehensive one, the explanations featuring a wider array of words and descriptions for instance "*Muddy rivers and streams swollen by torrential rains tore through southwestern France on Monday*" (Aurelien Breeden, Oct. 15, 2018). While the core information remains the same, the

delivery of the information is highly advanced and colourful. Thus, the expected reader needs to be skilled in understanding and decoding both formal and literary English. The author does not want to manipulate the viewer in any way. Opposite to the BBC article, it does not mention any controversy regarding the government's negligence to alert the residents. To sum it up, the report is longer than the previous one, with well structures sentences offering a colourful palette of vocabulary, yet lacking any techniques of persuasion.

The **ABC News** article regarding the event is entitled *France hit by worst flash floods in over a century, killing at least 12 including a nun* posted on Oct 16, 2018. This title is arguably the most attention seeking of them all, using shocking exaggerations and a religious mention already in the title. While in the text the author does not detail the facts mentioned in the title, it tells the same story as CBC and BBC with minor changes in structure and wording, and a considerable number of parts identical to CBC and BBC's. Unlike the previous story, the ABC News does not contain any jargon. The fragmenting is still apparent as well, which might be due to bad editing, the need to release the article as soon as possible or the frequent post-release updates as things unfolded. Although simple words and sentences are used, the 431 words and 19 sentences, averaging at 22.7 words/sentence, qualifies the text under the fairly difficult to read bracket. The text, like NYT's story lacks any sign of manipulation. In conclusion, ABC News article regarding the topic is similar to CBC and BBC News as the heavily fragmented corpus could make the reading experience less enjoyable. The title uses shock and exaggeration as a teaser for people to read the report, however in the corpus, there are no sign of any further manipulation of the reader.

As for comparison of the four articles:

World News Comparison #2

| Comparison aspects | News Sites | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | CBC News | BBC News | NYT | ABC News |
| Unique features in the title | No | No | No | Yes |
| Out of context information | No | No | No | No |
| Unusual Vocabulary | No | No | Yes | No |
| Text Difficulty | Fairly Easy | Standard | Difficult | Fairly Difficult |
| Average words/ sentence | 15.4 | 18.9 | 27.2 | 22.7 |
| Presence of manipulation | No | No | No | No |

In this case, the heavy fragmentation of the text and disconnection between sentences is noticeably apparent in CBC, BBC and ABC News' articles whereas the NYT retains its coherent structure for a more pleasant and comprehensive

reading experience. The stories do not feature any manipulation or subconscious messages with the exception of BBC News' brief mention of the lack of governmental warning regarding the floods beforehand. In the title, each report used techniques of persuasion via shock value of the story, while the ABC News, persuasion by mentioning a religious figure. The vocabulary and grammar in the writings - except for the NYT - are simple and easy to understand at any level of the language proficiency, while the NYT uses more complex, longer sentences with a wider variety of vocabulary. For a bilingual contrastive analysis see Notes 2. for the Hungarian media articles in the topic.

In what follows, the analysis scrutinizes articles on different topics, with the main aim to highlight specific characteristics used by the news outlets. For each outlet, the first article has been chosen to present the interest of the readers. Ultimately, for educational ends, the approach and the final results might be employed at interdisciplinary level, as a prompt both in ESL/EFL, cultural, linguistic and communication studies.

## Entertainment

**CBC News** posted an article entitled *Alec Baldwin arrested in alleged parking dispute punch* on Nov 2, 2018. The title does not contain any manipulation, personal views and as a whole, any kind of persuasion to compel the audience to read the document, however within the corpus, there is a slight sign of manipulation in the sense of showing Mr. Baldwin as an unsuccessful actor who wants to distance himself from the community. The text is accessible to a wide audience.

**BBC News** had also written an article about this topic, entitled *Alec Baldwin charged with assault over parking dispute in New York*, released on Nov 3, 2018. The title does not contain any persuasive or manipulative features, however the text focuses on manipulating the reader more than telling the events, as the author spends ten sentences on the news and thirteen on showcasing Mr. Baldwin misdemeanours and lawbreaking stories in the past. The text keeps an easy to understand profile with simple words and grammar as well as short sentences to be accessible to anyone.

**New York Times**' article entitled *How Did 'House of Cards' Kill Frank Underwood? Very Patiently* released on Nov 2, 2018, has an entirely different topic at hand. The report talks about the latest season of the show *House of Cards,* specifically the death of one of the main characters. The title contains ways of persuasion by asking a specific question and giving a vague answer, encouraging the viewer to find out the truth within the story. The tone and the attitude of the author is informal and inclusive, *"us"* is used to signal their inclusion in the audience of the show, the text features advanced vocabulary and extended sentences, which points towards a more informed and intellectual targeted reader.

On the contrary, **ABC News** article entitled *Bohemian Rhapsody: Freddie Mercury biopic presents sanitised, conservative view of a rock iconoclast*, released on Oct 31, 2018 reviews the movie *Bohemian Rhapsody*. It uses rich vocabulary, elevated writing style and long sentences, which points toward an intellectual audience as expected readers. The writing and the title both contain the political views of the author and controversies with the reviewed material.

Entertainment News Comparison #1

| Comparison aspects | News Sites | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | CBC News | BBC News | NYT | ABC News |
| Unique features in the title | No | No | Yes | Yes |
| Out of context information | Yes | Yes | No | No |
| Unusual Vocabulary | No | No | Yes | Yes |
| Text Difficulty | Standard | Standard | Difficult | Difficult |
| Average words/ sentence | 20.4 | 18.4 | 26.4 | 26.4 |
| Presence of manipulation | Yes | Yes | No | Yes |

## Local News Articles

**CBC News'** first local news story is entitled *'There is no validity': Unproven blood tests for food sensitivity widely offered in Canada* by Charlsie Agro and Tyana Grundig was posted on Nov 2, 2018. The title does not contain any attention-grabbing technique, the quote is directly connected to the context provided afterwards. The article talks about the invalidity and threats of a blood test that can misguide people into changing their diet in ways that can cause them harm, this is proven by the interviews featured in the story. The writing is lengthy, however easy to comprehend, it uses medical jargon, which is explained. Persuasion techniques are missing both from the title and the text, as the authors do not give personal views nor any emotional input to the story, they only provide facts from interviews.

**BBC News'** local article is entitled *Leicester City helicopter crash: Wreckage removed* by an unnamed author, and was posted on Nov 2, 2018. The title is brief and goes right into the detail without any form of persuasion. The article talks about the events after a helicopter crash, it tells the reader about the funeral of the passed away chairman of Leicester City club as well as further investigations about the crash. The writing is brief, disjointed and uses simple vocabulary and grammar, thus it is easy to understand for everyone. There are no signs of manipulation, however meaningless information can be found in the text.

**New York Times** first local news, entitled *Man Shoots 6 at Florida Yoga Studio, Killing 2 and Then Himself* by Jacey Fortin was posted on Nov 2, 2018.

The New York Times first report talks about a shooting in a Tallahassee yoga studio, about the victims who suffered from this shooting as well as the comments made by political figures. The body is simple to read, it does not feature complex or lengthy sentences, nor any kind of unusual vocabulary. Similarly, the corpus does not contain any form of persuasion, personal view or any form of non-topic related content.

**ABC News**' first local story is entitled *Man charged over murder of woman found dead at Maryborough motel* by an unknown author, and was posted Nov 3, 2018. The report covers a murder that happened in a motel, a man was already arrested for killing a 58-year-old woman. Grammatically the text is simple, only containing short, easy to understand sentences without any advanced vocabulary, similarly, there are no signs of manipulation in the body, nor in the title.
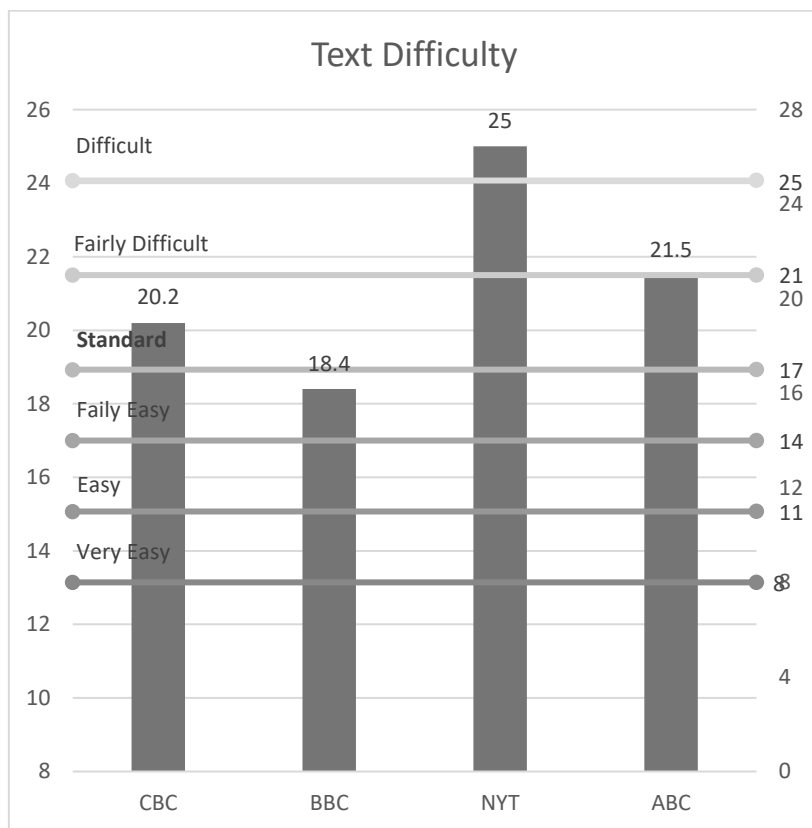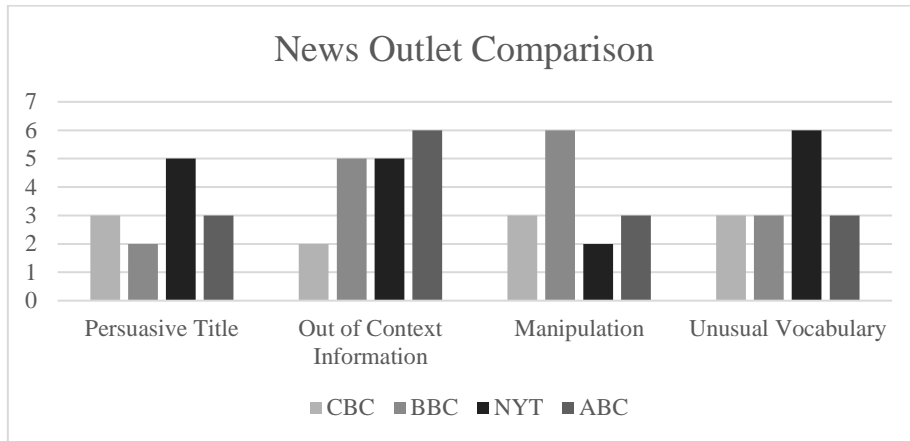
Local News Comparison #1

| Comparison aspects | News Sites | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | CBC News | BBC News | NYT | ABC News |
| Unique features in the title | No | No | No | No |
| Out of context information | No | No | No | No |
| Unusual Vocabulary | No | No | No | No |
| Text Difficulty | Standard | Standard | Standard | Standard |
| Average words/ sentence | 20.8 | 18.1 | 20.6 | 18 |
| Presence of manipulation | No | No | No | No |

For lack of space the second local news editorial as well as the political articles are not tackled in detail here. The results of the analysis are found in the Appendix.

## Comprehensive Comparison

For a comprehensive comparison of the news outlets, the average statistics of each outlet are necessary, as presented in Appendix. We can deduce the final comparison between news outlets by taking the results from the *Summary* column from each table to get the following charts:

## News Outlet Comparison

Categories: Persuasive Title, Out of Context Information, Manipulation, Unusual Vocabulary

Legend: CBC, BBC, NYT, ABC

## Text Difficulty

Difficult
Fairly Difficult
Standard
Faily Easy
Easy
Very Easy

CBC: 20.2
BBC: 18.4
NYT: 25
ABC: 21.5

## Profiling

Based on the results, one of the goals of the paper was to find out the type of audience for all the Newspapers, thus facilitating the choice of the outlet for linguistic training with educational ends.

**CBC News**, as part of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, provides stories from events that are not necessarily covered on television. In majority of the cases they keep the titles simple and persuasion free, similarly, the contents are as promised in the title, hardly containing irrelevant information. Additionally, the outlet does not seem to frequently include manipulative material in the text, it provides well written, cohesive reports. The intended reader would be someone

who prefers an unbiased outlet that does not indulge in persuasive, click-baiting titles, sticks to what is promised, while also offering a decent reading experience.

**BBC News** is part of the British Broadcasting Corporation, a statutory corporation, owned, but not controlled by the British government. Despite being part of a bigger media, BBC provides standalone articles about news that are not covered by other means. The news outlet seems to avoid attention seeking titles, but often features off-topic content in the text, and uses techniques of persuasion more frequently than the other three outlets. The corpus is generally fragmented, spaced out, with low average sentence length. While this makes them accessible to all readers, the reading experience may heavily suffer from this practice. BBC News could prove ideal for readers who prefer a fast read, do not mind extra off-topic information and the author's personal views. It can suit any social class and EFL learners.

With a considerable TV media presence, the **New York Times**' main source of information is still the newspapers. It is a widely known and critically acclaimed news outlet, with over 120 Pulitzer Prices. The stories tend to possess a persuasive, attention seeking title, with the corpus containing extra, out of context information that increases the length. Similarly, most often the content displays colourful, poetic vocabulary, which forecasts an advanced reading experience. While the news outlet is privately owned, meaning there is no connection to the government and is said to be unbiased, when it comes to political news, there is a chance that some form of manipulation might appear, however it is not nearly as frequent as with other newspapers.

**ABC News** is owned by the Australian government, however editorially it remains independent. Titles from this news outlet tend to feature occasionally persuasive techniques, and additional out of context information. The usage of the techniques of persuasion is balanced. Structure-wise the outlet features both fractured and well-structured parts, which yields an average reading experience.

## Conclusion

Four major news outlets were analysed from Canada, the U.S., the UK and Australia respectively. In the attempt to make the study as comprehensive as possible in the given scope, multiple topics were analysed, specifically world news, entertainment, politics and local news to draw a thorough picture that can represent the trends each news outlet follows.

Although historically issued from the same source – Anglo-Saxon journalism – the result of the comparison shows considerable differences between news outlets in terms of manipulation, and text difficulty, most specifically between the New York Times and BBC News. Additionally, for each outlet a profile was outlined, which tries to specify the intended and ideal reader. While the main aim of all the newspapers is report on current events, they are doing so in a slightly different manner, thus BBC tends to include manipulation more frequently as

opposed to the New York Times, similarly, NYT tends to use advanced language, which includes lengthier sentences as well as poetic terms and a rich vocabulary to make the text more challenging yet rewarding for the reader. Opposite of that were BBC and to some respect ABC News, who wrote their articles in a fractured and disjointed fashion, which made the reading experience rather bleak and over simplified.

While the main aim of this study was to compare the four major news outlets, there are still countless opportunities to further analyse and study their differences, specifically in the field of applied linguistics, namely sociolinguistic factors determining language use, and translation issues when comparing the same news reported in another country. For further investigation, in the Notes we are providing the Hungarian versions of the tackled world news, prompting potential bi/multilingual research opportunities. In addition, a secondary aim of the authors was to return to the grassroots of the literature in the field and to prove that despite the speedy development of communication studies in the digital era, several decade-long findings still hold a strong and underlying position.

## References

**Crystal, D. & Davy, D.** (1969). *Investigating English Style*. London: Longman, e-book: 15 April 2016. DOI https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315538419

**Danesi, M.** (2016) *Language, Society, and New Media: Sociolinguistics Today*. New York: Routledge. [Kindle DX version]. Retrieved from Amazon.com.

**Domborowski, E.** (2004) *Tricks of Persuasion: Manipulation of Language. Thinking Critically about the World:Media.* http://peernet.lbpc.ca/edombrowski/media_criticism/02ccritlang.html

**Ecker, U., Lewandowsky, S., Chang, E. P. & Pillai, R**. (2014) The Effects of Subtle Misinformation in News Headlines. *Journal of Experimental Psychology-Applied* 20. pp. 323-335. https://doi.org/10.1037/xap0000028

**Forintos É.** (2018) Intentional Code-mixing in the Australian-Hungarian Community's Newspaper. In: Borbély J, Bökös B, Kállay G. K, Nagy J, Veres O, Bánhegyi M, G. Pillar (eds.) *English Language and Literatures in English 2016. Károli Könyvek.* Budapest: L'Harmattan Kiadó. pp. 241-259.

**Forintos É.** (2017) The Communicative Aspect of New Linguistic Discourse - a Case Study of Language Alternation in Multilingual Written Texts. *Journal of the European Association for Studies of Australia*. ISSN 2013-6897. Vol. 8(1). pp. 31-43.

**Gatt, E. G.** (2014) An Analysis of Sentence Length and Complexity in News Articles. *Creative Research in English and the Media*. 5040. pp. 3-22.

**Herring, S. C.** (2013). Discourse in Web 2.0: Familiar, Reconfigured, and Emergent. In: Tannen D. and A.M. Trester (eds.), *Discourse 2.0. Language and the New Media*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press. pp. 1-25.

**Hesmondhalgh, D.** (2013) *Cultural Industries*. Los Angeles: SAGE.

**Hortobágyi I.** (2009) Individual Voices in Contemporary Communication. In *7th Conference on British and American Studies*. Brasov: Transylvania University Press. pp.171-178.

**Hortobágyi I.** (2010) The Sky is the Limit – Acquiring the Lexis of Medialects. In: Navracsics J. (szerk.) *Nyelv, Beszéd, Írás: Pszicholingvisztikai tanulmányok I./ Language, Speech, Writing: Papers in Psycholinguistics I.* Budapest: Tinta Könyvkiadó. pp. 202-208.

**Hortobágyi I.** (2012) 3Ws! Words in the 21st Century. In: Navracsics J.- Szabó D. (szerk.) *A mentális folyamatok a nyelvi feldolgozásban: Pszicholingvisztikai tanulmányok III. Segédkönyvek a nyelvészet tanulmányozásához.* Budapest: Tinta Könyvkiadó. pp. 138-145.

**Hortobágyi I**. (2017) Renegotiating Meaning in Multimodal Media Contexts. *Synergy, Journal of the Department of Modern Languages and Business Communication*. University of Bucharest, Romania, Vol. 13/No. 1. pp. 145-161**.**

**Itule**, **B.D. & Anderson, D. A.** (2007) *News Writing and Reporting for Today's Media*. 7th Edition. New York: McGraw-Hill Publishing.

**McIntyre**, **B.T.** (1996) *English News Writing*. Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press.

**McNair**, **B.** (2006) *Cultural Chaos. Journalism and Power in a Globalised World*. London and New York: Routledge.

**Potter, W. J.** (2008) *Media Literacy*. (4th edition), Los Angeles: SAGE Publications.

**Timuçin**, **M.** (2010) Different Language Styles in Newspapers: An Investigative Framework. *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*. 6/2. pp. 104-126.

**Turner J.H. & J.E. Stets.** (2006) *Handbook of the sociology of emotions*. New York: Springer.

## News outlets

**ABC News**, (n. a.), Astronauts make emergency landing after rocket malfunction, 2018 Oct. 11, Accessed from https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-10-11/astronauts-make-emergency-landing-after-rocket-malfunction/10366556

**ABC News**, (n. a.), France hit by worst flash floods in over a century, killing at least 12 including a nun, 2018 Oct. 15, Accessed from https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-10-16/flash-flooding-in-southern-france-worst-in-more-than-a-century/10380864

**ABC News**, York K., Bohemian Rhapsody: Freddie Mercury biopic presents sanitised, conservative view of a rock iconoclast, 2018 Nov. 1, Accessed from https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-11-01/bohemian-rhapsody-review-freddie-mercury-biopic-sanitised/10448986

**ABC News**, (n. a.), Man charged over murder of woman found dead at Maryborough motel, 2018 Nov. 3, Accessed from https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-11-03/woman-found-dead-outside-maryborough-motel/10463088

**BBC News**, (n. a.), Astronauts escape malfunctioning Soyuz rocket 2018 Oct. 11, Accessed from https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-45822845

**BBC News**, (n. a.), France weather: Red alert as flash floods kill 10 in south-west, 2018 Oct. 15, Accessed from https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-45861428

**BBC News**, (n. a.), Alec Baldwin charged with assault over parking dispute in New York, 2018 Nov. 3, Accessed from https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-46074196

**BBC News**, (n. a.), Leicester City helicopter crash: Wreckage removed, 2018 Nov. 2, Accessed from https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-leicestershire-46069679

**CBC News**, (n. a.), 2 astronauts safe after Soyuz forced to make emergency landing, 2018 Oct. 11, Accessed from https://www.cbc.ca/news/technology/soyuz-iss-incident-emergency-landing-1.4858238

**CBC News**, (n. a.), At least 12 dead in southwestern France flooding, Accessed from https://www.cbc.ca/news/world/southwest-france-flooding-1.4862895

**CBC News**, (n. a.), Alec Baldwin arrested in alleged parking dispute punch, 2018 Nov. 3, Accessed from https://www.cbc.ca/news/entertainment/alec-baldwin-arrest-1.4889704

**CBC News**, Agro C., Grundig T., 'There is no validity': Unproven blood tests for food sensitivity widely offered in Canada, 2018 Nov. 2, Accessed from https://www.cbc.ca/news/health/food-sensitivity-intolerance-tests-blood-marketplace-1.4886592

**New York Times**, Preéz-Pena R., Chang K., Kramer E. A., Russian Rocket Fails, and 2 Astronauts Make Safe Emergency Return, 2018 Oct. 11, Accessed from https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/11/science/soyuz-rocket.html

**New York Times**, Breeden A., French Flash Floods Kill at Least 11, 2018 Oct. 15, Accessed from https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/15/world/europe/france-floods-weather-southwest.html?rref=collection%2Fsectioncollection%2Fworld

**New York Times**, Tallerico B., How Did 'House of Cards' Kill Frank Underwood? Very Patiently, 2018 Nov. 2, Accessed from https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/02/arts/television/house-of-cards-season-6.html?rref=collection%2Fsectioncollection%2Farts

**New York Times**, Fortin J., Man Shoots 6 at Florida Yoga Studio, Killing 2 and Then Himself, 2018 Nov. 2, Accessed from https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/02/us/tallahasee-shooting-yoga-florida.html

## Notes

**Hungarian sites and titles for Soyuz Rocket incident:**

Kényszerleszállást hajtott végre a Szojuz/*Emergency landing for Soyuz*

https://infostart.hu/kulfold/2018/10/11/kenyszerleszallast-hajtott-vegre-a-szojuz-video

Ilyen érzés, ha bekrepál alattad egy orosz rakéta/*This is how it feels when you sit on a failing Russian rocket*

https://24.hu/tudomany/2018/10/18/szojuz-nemzetkozi-urallomas-urhajosok-kenyszerleszallas/

Baleset történt a Szojuzzal, kényszerleszállást hajtott végre/*Soyuz accident, emergency landing*

https://hvg.hu/tudomany/20181011_baleset_szojuz_felbocsatas_bajkonur_urhajo

**Hungarian sites and titles for floods in France:**

Egy éjszaka alatt válsághelyzet alakult ki Dél-Franciaországban, hatan meghaltak az áradásokban/ *Crisis in southern France following one night's rain; six dead*

https://hvg.hu/vilag/20181015_Egy_ejszaka_alatt_valsaghelyzet_alakult_ki_DelFranciaorszagban_hatan_meghaltak_az_aradasokban

Hét hónapnyi csapadék zúdult Franciaországra – az árvíz halálos áldozatokat is követelt/ *Deadly seven-month rainfall amount in a single day in France*

https://www.elobolygonk.hu/Klimahirek/Viz/2018_10_16/het_honapnyi_csapadek_zudult_franciaorszagra__az_arviz_halalos_aldozatokat_is_kovetelt

Katasztrófahelyzet van Franciaországban / *Post-catastrophe crisis in France*

https://www.elobolygonk.hu/Klimahirek/Viz/2018_10_20/katasztrofahelyzet_van_franciaorszagban

Rengeteg halott a francia árvízben / *Scores dead in French floods*

https://tenyek.hu/tenyek/272575_rengeteg-halott-a-francia-arvizben.html

Árvíz ölt meg 13 embert Franciaországban, a helyzet tovább romolhat / *Floods kill 13 in France, worsening forecast*

https://nepszava.hu/3012031_arviz-olt-meg-13-embert-franciaorszagban-a-helyzet-tovabb-romolhat

# Appendix

Average statistics for the News Outlets

CBC News Summary Table

| CBC News | Wrd #1 | Wrd #2 | Ent #1 | Ent #2 | Pol #1 | Pol #2 | Loc #1 | Loc #2 | Summary |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Persuasive Title | No | No | No | Yes | Yes | No | No | Yes | 3/8 |
| Out of context info | Yes | No | Yes | No | No | No | No | No | 2/8 |
| Unusual Vocabulary | Yes | No | No | No | No | Yes | Yes | No | 3/8 |
| Text Difficulty | Fairly Diff | Fairly Easy | Stand | Stand | Stand | Fairly Diff | Stand | Stand | Standard |
| World / sentence | 23.1 | 15.4 | 20.4 | 20.1 | 20.2 | 23.1 | 20.8 | 18.7 | 20.2 |
| Signs of Manipulation | Yes | No | Yes | No | Yes | No | No | No | 3/8 |

BBC News Summary Table

| BBC News | Wrd #1 | Wrd #2 | Ent #1 | Ent #2 | Pol #1 | Pol #2 | Loc #1 | Loc #2 | Summary |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Persuasive Title | No | Yes | No | No | No | Yes | No | No | 2/8 |
| Out of context info | Yes | No | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | No | No | 5/8 |
| Unusual Vocabulary | Yes | No | No | No | Yes | Yes | No | No | 3/8 |
| Text Difficulty | Stand | Stand | Stand | Easy | Stand | Fairly Diff | Stand | Stand | Standard |
| World / sentence | 19.3 | 18.9 | 18.4 | 12.6 | 20.2 | 21.1 | 18.1 | 18.8 | 18.4 |
| Signs of Manipulation | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | No | No | 6/8 |

The New York Times Summary Table

| NYT | Wrd #1 | Wrd #2 | Ent #1 | Ent #2 | Pol #1 | Pol #2 | Loc. #1 | Loc #2 | Summary |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Persuasive Title | No | Yes | Yes | No | Yes | Yes | No | Yes | 5/8 |
| Out of context info | Yes | No | No | Yes | Yes | Yes | No | Yes | 5/8 |
| Unusual Vocabulary | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | No | No | 6/8 |
| Text Difficulty | Diff | Diff | Diff | Stand | Very Diff | Fairly Diff | Stand | Diff | Difficult |
| World / sentence | 25.6 | 27.2 | 26.4 | 19.1 | 31.3 | 22.7 | 20.6 | 27.4 | 25 |
| Signs of Manipulation | No | No | No | No | Yes | Yes | No | No | 2/8 |

ABC News Summary Table

| ABC News | Wrd #1 | Wrd #2 | Ent #1 | Ent #2 | Pol #1 | Pol #2 | Loc #1 | Loc #2 | Summary |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Persuasive Title | No | Yes | Yes | No | No | Yes | No | No | 3/8 |
| Out of context info | Yes | No | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | No | Yes | 6/8 |
| Unusual Vocabulary | Yes | No | Yes | No | Yes | No | No | No | 3/8 |
| Text Difficulty | Fairly Diff | Fairly Diff | Diff | Stand | Stand | Fairly Diff | Stand | Fairly Diff | Fairly Diff |
| World / sentence | 22.9 | 22.7 | 26.4 | 17.3 | 19.6 | 23.9 | 18 | 21 | 21.5 |
| Signs of Manipulation | Yes | No | Yes | No | Yes | No | No | No | 3/8 |