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# Drinkopoly?

## A Critical Discourse Analysis of the Linguistic Representation of Alcohol in British and Russian Newspapers

### Abstract

*Drawing from the main theoretical tenets of the socio-cognitive approach to Critical Discourse Analysis, this study investigates the linguistic strategies adopted to represent alcohol in a self-compiled dataset of articles from three British and Soviet (Russian) broadsheets published between 1990 and 2000. While most research on alcohol-related discourse in the UK and the USSR/Russia addresses the question from a socio-economic perspective, insufficient attention has been paid to the complex linguistic relationship between discourse meaning and the ideological instantiation of private and/or socially shared attitudes that guides the public debate on alcohol. The articles have been qualitatively analysed and linked back to three main cognitive models, i.e., legitimisation, delegitimisation, and neutral. The analysis reveals that while Soviet (Russian) newspaper discourse stresses the importance of state-driven alcohol production and sale to replenish the national budget revenue, English newspapers voice greater concern over health issues related to alcohol abuse.*

**Keywords:** *Critical Discourse Analysis, Alcohol, Russia, UK, Cross-cultural linguistic studies*

### 1. Introduction

In 1927 the Czech composer Jaromír Vejvoda wrote the sheet music of *Modřanská polka* ('Polka of Modřany'), which in the years before the outbreak of WWII would gain worldwide popularity, especially in its German (*Rosamunde*) and English adaptations (*Beer Barrel Polka*). The English version, celebrating the joys of gathering and drinking together against the horrors of the world ("Roll out the barrel, we'll have a barrel of fun/Zing boom tatarrel, we've got the blues on the run"), was to become a living symbol of UK social rebirth in the post-war years. Interestingly, this cultural induction of inebriation would take place just a couple of years after a Cambridge-based institution, the Mass Observation, had conducted a sociological

investigation aimed at witnessing the socio-cultural importance of the pub for British culture and provided a description of the behaviours of British people living the pub life in the aftermath of WWII within the Bolton area (Hubble 2006).<sup>1</sup>

Since its widespread broadcast, *Beer Barrel Polka* has been paid homage to countless times in popular culture. One interesting use is displayed in the official video of Massive Attack's *Live With Me* (2006).<sup>2</sup> The first sequences feature the silhouette of a town crier shouting out the first lines of the song, in a sort of joyous prologue to a party. What we see in the video, however, is a young woman intent on purchasing large quantities of alcohol, which she consumes alone throughout the night, becoming unresponsive on a bench in the streets of South London. Here two apparently irreconcilable graphic representations of alcohol seem to be clashing. On the one hand, alcohol is depicted as a socio-cultural construct historically embedded in a society's shared system of values and beliefs; on the other hand, the major impact of alcohol consumption in everyday life is portrayed in all its dramatic consequences.

Crucially, such a sharp juxtaposition in the representational patterns of alcohol and alcohol consumption does not characterise the British case solely. Equally symbolic is, for instance, the ideological duality surrounding alcohol in the former Soviet Union. Despite the socio-cultural centrality that alcohol has historically played in Eastern Slavic territories,<sup>3</sup> alcohol-related issues had become a social scourge long before Michail Gorbačëv was appointed General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1985. Gorbačëv engaged in a merciless battle against alcohol production and consumption, conducting a 'dry law' advertising campaign (*suchoj zakon*)<sup>4</sup> which would act as a forerunner of the new *glasnost* ('transparency') and *perestrojka* ('restructuring') regulations (Nemtsov 2011, 99-116). The campaign had aimed to challenge the traditional positive representation of alcohol by promoting its pervasive influence as a threat to the destiny of an entire country long before its economy. Sadly, it failed.

Taking the significant economic differences between countries into consideration, such relevant socio-cultural similarities between the UK and the USSR in the twofold representation of alcohol are unusual and thus warrant an in-depth comparison. This paper examines the content of a compiled dataset of alcohol-related newspaper articles published in two Soviet (later on

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<sup>1</sup> More information on the project is available at the following link: <http://www.massobs.org.uk/about/history-of-mo>. All websites last visited on 09/05/2022.

<sup>2</sup> The video is available at the following link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AIiovpUQiro>.

<sup>3</sup> For a succinct historical review of the topic cf., a.o., Nosilia and Giraud (2014) and Nemtsov (2011, 87-97).

<sup>4</sup> For the sake of clarity, here and elsewhere we provide the reader with the scientific transliteration of Russian terms commonly adopted in linguistics.

Russian) and one British broadsheet over a time span stretching between 1990 and 2000. The objective of the study is twofold. On the one hand, relying on the multi-layered theoretical model sketched out in van Dijk (1995, 247-256), we seek to examine the formal strategies employed in journalistic discourse to represent a liminal subject such as alcohol. Particularly, we aim at unveiling the specificity of the cognitive interfaces behind them which provide a link between shared *ideologies*<sup>5</sup> and their (con)textual instantiation. On the other hand, we intend to discover to what extent variations in the ideological representation of alcohol could be possibly fed by political and/or cultural factors.

The paper is organised as follows: Section 2 provides a brief outline of the socio-economic prominence of alcohol-related issues both in the UK and the USSR/Russia following the end of WWII, with a focus on the tentative implementation of national legislations during the 1980s and their aftermaths for the reference time span. Section 3 introduces the theoretical and methodological reference framework adopted, i.e., the socio-cognitive approach of Critical Discourse Analysis, alongside with the description of our dataset. Section 4 discusses a sample of relevant British (Sub-section 4.1) and Russian examples (Sub-section 4.2). In Section 5, conclusions are drawn.

## 2. How did it get to this? An historical outline of the issue

In this section we sort through the most important post-war events that contributed to shaping the socio-political background to the analysis, both in the UK (cf. Subsection 2.1) and in the USSR/Russia (cf. Subsection 2.2). It should be immediately stressed that a direct comparison of the respective economic junctures can hardly be drawn, among other things, in view of the fundamental ideological rift separating free market from socialist (i.e., planned) economies and, consequently, the notably uneven growth rates that historically characterise the two countries. Nevertheless, it is striking how a recursive pattern of socio-political similarities between the UK and the USSR during the 1980s can be still highlighted with respect to alcohol-related issues and their possible impact on social structures and national budgets. Moreover, it is precisely between 1990 and 2000, i.e., the reference time span of this study, that the outcomes of political initiatives undertaken both in the UK and in the USSR throughout the preceding decade(s)

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<sup>5</sup> The definition of ‘ideology’ we will be using throughout this article is built upon van Dijk (1995) and Hodge and Kress (1993). We take ideologies to be “basic framework of social cognition, shared by members of social groups, constituted by relevant selections of socio-cultural values, and organised by an ideological schema that represents the self-definition of a group” (van Dijk 1995, 248).

enter into full effect, leading up to a period of significant change and instability on both sides of the then-Iron Curtain and marking a decisive turn from Thatcherism (Evans 2018) and the Soviet regime towards a new era of globalisation (Harrison 2004). Considering the socio-economic character of these initiatives, the consequences for our case study are important. These factors, which will be treated in detail in the following subsections, might have contributed to the representation of alcohol and alcohol consumption in newspapers.

### **2.1. Alcohol in the UK**

Alcohol has had a considerable social and economic<sup>6</sup> impact on 20th century British society (van Wersch and Waler 2009; Edwards 2000). The liberalisation of alcohol policy started in the 1960s was the expression of a social shift in relation to drinking; from a source of social disintegration to a source of social pleasure (Butler et al. 2017, 108). What happened later between the late 1980s and the 2000s—a series of events culminating with two restrictive measures implemented between 2003 and 2004—should be interpreted as a reflection of the shifty approach of British governments towards the development of consistent alcohol policies and the management of alcohol-related issues, which have always swung between “either sought to reduce consumption or to further liberalise the production and retail of alcohol” (Butler et al. 2017, 94).

In the late 1980s, the Thatcherian government had to face an unexpected problem, especially for a political administration ideologically committed to free trade and free enterprise; the majority of all pubs were owned by brewers and the market was dominated by just six companies (Butler et al. 2017, 134). Therefore, any brewery owning more than 2000 pubs was required by the government to sell half of the surplus number, which resulted in the introduction in the market of new companies and a new retail chain. New investment based on leisure and led by alcohol outlets represented a great opportunity for the development of urban economies, mostly locally based manufactures which had been struggling throughout the decade (Nicholls 2012; 2009). Late-night drinking zones full of pubs and bars began to emerge in many cities and a growing optimism over the potential for alcohol-led night-time economies to drive urban regeneration rose resulting in the increase of profits for the outlets (Butler et al. 2017, 135).<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> According to Bhattacharya (2017), the alcohol industry contributes to the UK economy with £46 billion a year, around 2,5% of the UK's total GDP.

<sup>7</sup> In the six-year time span from 1991 to 1997, both the constant GDP growth (from -1,10% to +4,97%) and the increase of Real GDP per head (from 18,198 £ to 20,754 £, i.e., +12,30% in six years; cf. World Bank 2021b) might suggest that the British economy was experiencing an overall positive conjuncture which, in turn, might have positively affected the social perception of well-being.

During the 1990s, a newly restored consumer confidence, ever-rising levels of disposable income and a general economic improvement decisively contributed to “a national ‘mood’ in which alcohol consumption tended to be integrated into a range of social activities. In this context, public intoxication became a more familiar sight, especially in the newly ‘vibrant’ night-time economy” (Butler et al. 2017, 136).

At the same time, however, the healthcare situation was worsening. Since the 1980s, health practitioners started expressing apprehension about the impact of alcohol consumption on British people’s health. Around the same period, the image of ‘Binge Britain’ and the so-called ‘binge and brawl’ behaviour had already come to the fore in the political and social discussion (Smith 2014; Measham and Brain 2005). Such phenomena were to be recognised later as the ‘British disease’ in terms of their social and health consequences (Martinic and Measham 2016, 13). In the following decade, the fallout proved to be particularly relevant. Between 1990 and 2000 the number of alcohol-related deaths per year dramatically increased from 4,000 to 7,000 and the incidence of alcohol-related deaths, calculated per 100,000 people, almost doubled from 6,9 in 1991 to 12,8 in 2003, with premature deaths increasing from 3,85 in 1990 to 15,09 in 2000 (ONS 2018).<sup>8</sup> The estimated alcohol consumption increased from about 9,25 litres *per capita* in 1994 to 13,73 litres *per capita* in 2000, mostly beer (cf. World Bank 2021a), with 17% of the total adult population and more than 30% of the total young population showing heavy episodic drinking (WHO 2004). Conversely, despite healthcare apprehensions, the application of the Licensing Act in 2003 can be interpreted as the natural continuation of the reforming action<sup>9</sup> resulting from the need for a cultural modernisation and business deregulation. Following Butler et al. (2017, 136-137), the way the Licensing Act was defined, presented and then applied “provides a further illustration of the degree to which public policy on alcohol in Britain suffers from a lack of coherence both within government and between government and the wider community.” In this sense, the two political initiatives undertaken by the government in the

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<sup>8</sup> An anonymous reviewer has pointed out that the number of total deaths in the UK over the same period steadily decreased from 640,000 to 610,000. While this is an interesting statistic, it should also be stressed that no mention of death causes is adduced alongside, which makes a tenable data comparison difficult. Moreover, although 7,000 alcohol-related deaths per year may not be a very big portion of the total amount ( $\approx 1,15\%$ ), this still does not provide an explanation for the ever-rising statistical incidence of alcohol-related items. It might be the case that both the increase in alcohol-related deaths and the overall decrease of the total deaths are linked to the favourable economic juncture the UK was experiencing during the (second half of the) 1990s (see also Sub-section 2.2 for a comparison with post-WWII USSR).

<sup>9</sup> Alongside continuing the late 1980s tradition of making opening hours for licensing premises more flexible, the Licensing Act cut down on bureaucracy by bringing together the six existing licensing regimes into one.

following years represented the necessary outcome expected after the peak reached by the liberal season of the 1990s.<sup>10</sup>

## 2.2. *Alcohol in Russia*

The association between heavy alcohol consumption and Eastern Slavic territories can be considered as a post-war by-product of the ‘alcohol boom’ favoured by the substantial improvement of the economic and living standards of the urban populations in most European countries after WWII (Nemtsov 2011, 59-60). The rise in alcohol consumption in the USSR, however, had such a peculiar and rapid manifestation that already in 1958 Soviet executives tried to take remedial actions by implementing the first ‘dry law’ in almost forty years (Smelova 2018; Nemtsov 2011, 91). Crucially for similar political initiatives to come, the law failed to yield the expected results. On the contrary, as Nemtsov (2011, 92) points out, “[t]he special national quality of Soviet consumption was its very high level, the predominance of high spirits and the great share contributed by illegal alcohol to total consumption.” Despite the decline of the Soviet economy after the country had been stifled for almost two decades under Leonid Brežnev,<sup>11</sup> the increase in alcohol consumption in the USSR from the early 1960s to the late 1980s allegedly amounted to an astounding 358%, reaching an estimated 17 litres of consumption *per capita* around 1984 (Danilova et al. 2020; Nemtsov 2011, 91-92)—70% of which attributable to hard liquor and illegal alcohol (Nemtsov 2011, 93-94). As early as the 1980s, executives of the Communist Party embarked on a long-term plan to eradicate drunkenness and increase productivity. This so-called anti-alcohol resolution would go unheeded for years, until it was finally adopted in May 1985 as the cornerstone of the new policy of *uskorenje* ‘acceleration’—just two months after Gorbačëv’s official appointment as General Secretary.<sup>12</sup>

Although an objective assessment of the outcomes and the shortcomings of the campaign seems far from being achieved, a distinction should still be made between the moral implications of Gorbačëv’s ‘dry law’ and its concrete economic repercussions. On the one hand, cross-referencing data from several independent studies, Nemtsov (2011, 109-110) concludes that the anti-alcohol

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<sup>10</sup> The Interim Analytical Report for the National Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy in 2003 (PMSU 2003) and the Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy for England in 2004 (PMSU 2004) were both promulgated by the Prime Minister Strategy Unit in order to cut down on binge drinking, alcohol-fuelled violence, and the number of people drinking to damaging levels.

<sup>11</sup> Publicly available data addressing alcohol-related issues in the USSR (and later on Russia) are often fragmented and tendentious (McKee 1999, 825-826).

<sup>12</sup> The resolution, called ‘On Measures to Overcome Drunkenness and Alcoholism’ (*O merach po preodoleniju p’janstva i alkogolizma*), can be retrieved at the following link: <https://docs.cntd.ru/document/765707559>.

campaign was doomed to economic failure from its very inception; the budgeted state revenue for the three-year period 1985-1987 recorded a contraction of approximately 49 billion rubles caused by the sharp drop in state sales of alcoholic beverages. As a direct result of these restrictions, the production of home-made moonshine ran rampant, leading to a shortage in the supply of ingredients used in the distillation process (e.g., sugar) and creating the environment for the birth of the modern day, alcohol-related criminal organisations (Nemtsov 2011, 109-110). On the other hand, however, it should be added that the driving force behind the implementation of the 'dry law' was the naive belief that the Soviet system could still be reformed from the inside without leading its citizens to inebriation. Moreover, it was expected that the loss of revenue from alcohol sales would have been balanced by a substantial increase in work productivity. It has indeed been claimed that the campaign led to a fall in the number of premature deaths and extended the average life expectancy by one to three years within its first month of application (Nemtsov 2011, 111-112; see however Jargin 2016 for a rebuttal). However, the unnatural haste officials displayed in the process of implementation, as well as their demagogic disregard for the psychological motivations feeding alcohol abuse in the country, alienated them the sympathies of the working class, which ended up rejecting the initiative altogether. For all these reasons, the law, which was significantly opposed within the same government (Tarschys 1993, 9-12), was abandoned in late 1988 when Gorbačëv's domestic policy had already taken a new course in line with *perestrojka* and *glasnost*'.

Unfortunately, the failure of the anti-alcohol campaign, which would precede the collapse of the USSR and the disintegration of its central bank in 1991, were to leave crippling scars on the country's economy in the following decade, also known as *lichie devjanostye* 'the wild Nineties.' At the beginning of 1992, the abrupt transition from a state-centred (i.e., planned) to a free market (i.e., liberalised) economic model caught the frail economic structures of the country completely unprepared. Both the purchasing power of the ruble and the total volume of output plummeted. This aggravated the still moderate effects of the long-term inflationary state which had been nagging former Soviet territories since Brežnev's times, leading to a runaway hyperinflation which soared over 200% between 1991 and 1992 (Filatochev and Bradshaw 1992, 756) and reached an alarming 841% in 1993 (Efremov 2012, 70).

Somehow contradictorily, according to official statistics, while the relative price of food and other goods was skyrocketing and the living standards of the Russian population were hitting new lows, between December 1990 and December 1994 the relative price of vodka and other strong drinks fell by 77% (Treisman 2010), with alcohol consumption estimated to reach pre-campaign levels in 1994—14,6 litres *per capita*, at least 70% of them being again hard liquors

or technical alcohol (Nemtsov 2011, 134).<sup>13</sup> The crude death rate for the same period grew by 15,7‰ (Treisman 2010, 283), with alcohol-related deaths representing 2,4% of all fatalities in 1994 and the average life expectancy reaching a dismal 57,5 years for men (Nemtsov 2011, 138; Ryan 1995).

A new drop in alcohol consumption for the period 1995-1998 (an estimated 9,3 litres *per capita* in 1996) was likely brought about by an interplay of factors, such as a fall in the imports of alcoholic beverages, the newly intensified government activity in the sphere of alcohol policy, and the prohibition on the advertising of alcoholic drinks in the mass media (see more details in Nemtsov 2011, 145-156). However, these positive figures were compensated by an upsurge in long-term alcohol-related deaths, which was to be expected given the disheartening statistics of the previous three-year period (Dmitrieva 2019). Finally, after the great devaluation of the ruble in August 1998 and the temporary plugging of the mortality emergency, alcohol production (+56% for 1999 only) and consumption experienced a new increase, with vodka topping 73,1% of the total share (Bhattacharya, Gathmann and Miller 2013, 42-43; Nemtsov 2011, 163).

### 3. Theoretical and methodological framework and dataset

The theoretical foundations of this paper, which analyses language from both an exploratory and a comparative perspective, lie within one of the four mainstream<sup>14</sup> approaches to Critical Discourse Analysis (henceforth CDA) identified by Hart (2010, 14),<sup>15</sup> i.e., the socio-cognitive approach, where textual, cognitive and social structures are connected and mediated by socio-cognitive models in relation to a specific social group (van Dijk 2002; 1995).

When analysing newspaper texts, at least three clusters of ideologically organised opinion-schemata about social issues (the so-called *attitudes*) are at play. They include the individual attitudes of the writer(s), the attitudes shared by the newspaper's editorial board, and a more external cluster of attitudes which are socially, culturally, and even politically shared at a national level. We have examined the linguistic representation of alcohol in Russian and British

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<sup>13</sup> This tendency, which is historically unusual given the gradual impoverishment of the population, has been explained both in terms of massive excise duties avoidance and a new boom in the consumption of technical alcohol (Bhattacharya, Gathmann and Miller 2013, 57; Nemtsov 2011, 130).

<sup>14</sup> Note that the adjective 'mainstream' is not to be taken here with any derogatory connotation, for it simply refers to the most frequently adopted approaches within CDA in scientific literature.

<sup>15</sup> The other three approaches, whose details will not be discussed in the following, are Critical Linguistics (Fowler 1991; Fowler et al. 1979), the socio-semiotic (Fairclough 1989), and the discourse-historical approach (Reisigl and Wodak 2001).

press as the outcome of this procedure covering several ideological positions. We have been concentrating on the study of specific predicational strategies, i.e., the linguistic process of assigning qualities to persons, animals, objects, events, actions, and social phenomena by presenting these in relation to specific recurring topics, such as quantity, quality, advantage, disadvantage, and the like (Reisigl and Wodak 2001, 54). There is a vast set of lexical, syntactic, and semantic resources available to realise these strategies, including prepositional phrases, relative clauses, adjectives, quantifiers, verbal predications assigning objects and events either negative or positive values, nouns carrying specific connotations, and a network of implicatures and presuppositions forcing specific inferences (Hart 2010, 66). All these strategies contribute to activating specific *argumentation schemata* (van Dijk 2000, 98) which, in our case, are ultimately used to build socio-cognitive models according to which alcohol is legitimised or delegitimised. Following these indications, we investigated the linguistic representation of alcohol in the language of newspapers, which, as it is well known, play an important role in setting public agendas (Fairclough 1989).

The language of newspapers stands out for a number of interesting linguistic peculiarities, one of them being the relatively high frequency of winged phrases and metaphorical expressions.<sup>16</sup> These strategies, which are of pivotal importance in the analysis following thereafter, have been tackled within the Critical Metaphor Analysis framework developed by Charteris-Black (2004), which brings together cognitive linguistics and CDA tenets in its aim “to reveal the covert (and possibly unconscious) intentions of language users” (Charteris-Black 2004, 34). Metaphors are thus interpreted under the light of their persuasive role in evoking emotional responses that may prioritise one interpretation over another (Charteris-Black 2004, 41).

The present study relied on a three-step methodology, comprising both a general data collection process (steps i and ii) and more specific CDA procedures (step iii): i) selection of the newspapers and compilation of the dataset (Sub-section 3.1); ii) selection of alcohol-related texts (Sub-section 3.2); iii) data analysis and categorisation (Section 4).

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<sup>16</sup> The use of metaphors and metonymies is far from being unique to newspaper discourse; rather, it is even more central in other kinds of semiotically complex specialised languages, such as commercial and social advertisements, where the interaction between verbal and iconic elements is meant to convey an array of different persuasive messages on a visual level. In her recently published cognitive study, Pinelli (2022) analyses a sample of anti-alcohol posters (*antialkohol'nye plakaty*) published during Gorbačëv's anti-alcohol campaign between 1985 and 1988, thus convincingly disentangling the various meanings stemming from the interplay of the verbal and pictorial use of the 'bottle.'

### 3.1. Dataset compilation

We compiled two newspaper datasets for our analysis—one for each language. The data were collected from two main digital archives, i.e., *The Guardian* and *Observer Archive*<sup>17</sup> for the UK, and the *Pravda* and *Izvestija Digital Archive*<sup>18</sup> for the USSR (Russia). This choice was guided by the following principles. For the UK, we initially considered the newspaper availability, format, and extent of circulation within the country. We selected two broadsheets, the *Guardian* and the *Observer* which, according to the Audit Bureau of Circulations,<sup>19</sup> were both highly influential in terms of circulation and readership between 1990 and 2000.<sup>20</sup>

The situation for the USSR (Russia) is more complex. Initially, the dataset comprised a sample of articles retrieved exclusively from the *Pravda Archive*, for the *Pravda* was historically considered to be the representative organ of the CPSU central committee. However, after the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the ban on the political activities of the Communist Party, the newspaper was sold off by then-president Boris El'cin to a private company as early as 1992, in the wake of the massive price liberalisation that took place that same year. The institutional role of the *Pravda* was instead resumed by the Petersburg-based newspaper *Izvestija*, which, during the rampant political crisis of the 1990s, would continue to represent what was considered the official direction of the new 'liberal' government, without clear ideological overtones. For all these reasons, the *Pravda Archive* was browsed only up to 1993, i.e., up to the transitional period immediately following the newspaper's change of ownership and at the inflation peak, in order to get a glimpse of the newspaper's shifting attitudes towards the government's alcohol policy. The dataset was then integrated with articles from the *Izvestija Archive*, which was browsed up to 2000, i.e., shortly after Vladimir Putin's first appointment as President.

In order to reduce background noise we defined a comparable set of search terms for both English and Russian as reported in Table 1.<sup>21</sup> These terms were then browsed in both NP pre- and post-modifiers variants.

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<sup>17</sup> The archive is available at <https://theguardian.newspapers.com>.

<sup>18</sup> The archives are available at <https://www.eastview.com>.

<sup>19</sup> Available at <https://www.abc.org.uk/data>.

<sup>20</sup> An anonymous reviewer has raised the issue as to whether a different political orientation of the two broadsheets could have an impact on the linguistic strategies used to represent alcohol. As a matter of fact, both newspapers, which tendentially lean to the centre-left political spectrum, are known to treat social issues with more balance than tabloids, where overtly biased opinions are more often voiced.

<sup>21</sup> The set was defined against a basic principle of linguistic economy, in order to capture as much information as possible with the lowest number of lexical entries. With respect to Russian

The following table summarises all the search terms used:

English search terms	Russian search terms
alcohol trade (/trade of alcohol)	torgov* alkogolem (/torgov* alkogol'nyimi napitkami)
alcohol consumption (/consumption of alcohol)	upotrebleni* alkogolja (/upotrebleni* alkogol'nych napitkov)
alcohol sale (/sale of alcohol)	prodaž* alkogolja (/prodaž* alkogol'nych napitkov, prodazh* alkogol'noj produkcii)
alcohol purchase (/purchase of alcohol)	pokup* (/zakup*) alkogolja (/alkogol'noj produkcii)
alcohol legislation (/legislation on alcohol)	alkogol'n* zakonodatel'stv* [/zakon* ob alkogole/ob alkogol'noj produkcii]

**Tab. 1:** English and Russian search terms

### 3.2. Text retrieval and categorisation

After the first term-based search, we separated articles that mention alcohol in passing from those clearly addressing alcohol and alcohol-related issues and thus suitable for our analysis. The total number of relevant articles, written between January 1st 1991 and December 31st 2000, amounts to 63 for UK newspapers, and 47 for Russian newspapers (33 for *Izvestija Archive* and 14 for *Pravda Archive*, respectively).

The selected documents have been qualitatively analysed and critically evaluated, seeking to define which predicational strategies and which arguments—among those previously discussed in Section 3—have been exploited in order to activate specific argumentation schemata for the representation of alcohol and alcohol-related issues.<sup>22</sup>

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search terms, the asterisks signal potential sensitivity to case inflection (i.e., the head of a complex NP need not be in the nominative case).

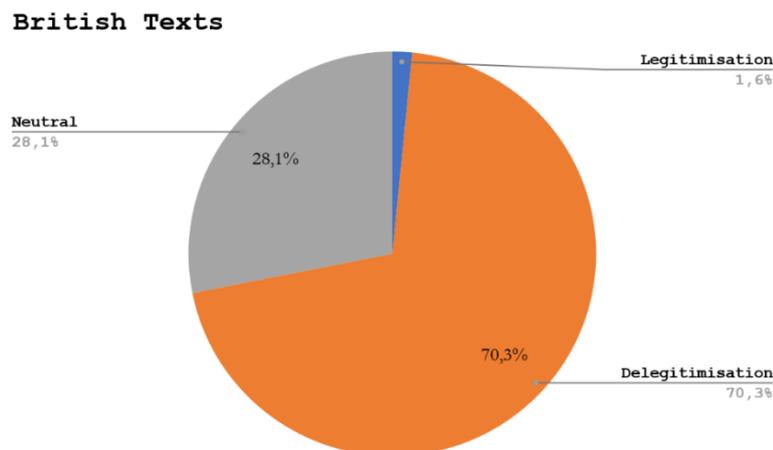
<sup>22</sup> In response to the multiple objections voiced by an anonymous reviewer, it should be pointed out here that, although in the end our analysis cannot but have a subjective character, both the linguistic strategies and the argumentation schemata accordingly triggered are derived from concrete, objective data, of the type discussed in Section 3.

#### 4. Data analysis

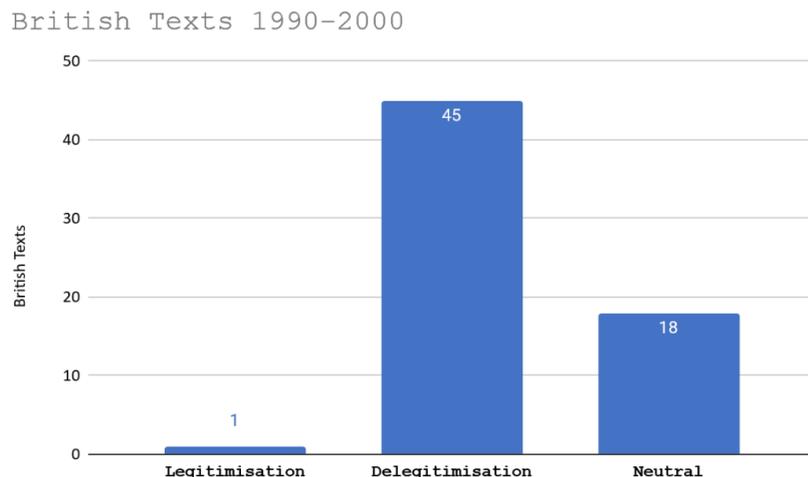
We have detected three main cognitive interfaces, labelled *models*, instantiating the attitudes of the writer(s) and linking ideological representations with discourse meaning (van Dijk 1995). For terminological practicality these models have been labelled ‘legitimation,’ ‘delegitimation,’ and ‘neutral.’ Although the concrete instantiation of ideological representations may reasonably vary in the lexical and grammatical characteristics of the single texts, depending essentially on the socio-economic specifics of the addressed country (compare Sub-section 4.1 and Sub-section 4.2), a core of shared meanings can still be identified for each model. The first two models are ideologically oriented. In the legitimation model, for instance, alcohol may be represented as having positive effects on people’s lives, society (e.g., because it promotes a stronger social cohesion among individuals) and, especially, the economy, despite the potentially detrimental effect on citizens’ health. In the delegitimation model, conversely, alcohol is predominantly represented as having a negative impact on both social order and health, thus overshadowing or putting a damper on the potentially positive repercussions it might have on a country’s economy. The neutral model does not impose an ideologically polarised representation upon alcohol. Typical discourse instantiations of this model may include a report on the increase in sales of cider beverages, the representation of alcohol as a cultural construct, or an ideologically low-key discussion about the impact of alcohol on a country’s economy.

##### 4.1 British examples

The analysis conducted on British newspapers yielded the results shown in the following Figure 1 and Figure 2.



**Fig. 1:** Distribution of British texts categorised in terms of models



**Fig. 2:** Number of British texts per each model

The overview presents a straightforward division among British newspapers. On the one hand, 45 articles out of 63 (70,3% of the total) are ideologically linked to the delegitimation model. Alcohol is deemed harmful for all the negative repercussions directly affecting those who experience its social pervasiveness directly or indirectly. On the other hand, 18 texts (28% of the total) are characterised by the absence of any ideologically flagged attitude. There is only one piece containing a not-overt alcohol promotion. The article, entitled “Pounds, shillings and pink pence” investigates the phenomenon of LGBTQIA+ and heterosexual events within clubs and bars in London in 1993. The journalist interviews different female club managers on the role that alcohol plays in a perfect night out:

- (1) Getting off with people usually involves drinking alcohol. According to Liz Godden, one of the managers of First Out bar and cafe, to pick someone up, men need to have a beer first. Coffee or mineral water doesn’t really have the same pulling over. (S. George, *The Guardian*, June 29th, 1993)

The argumentative scheme points to a specific inference in which alcohol is predicated as positive. In the premise, the topic of “getting off with people” and, more generally, ‘entertainment’ is posed. The phrasal verbs *to get off* and *to pick up* instantiate an informal register which might be instrumental in bringing the reader closer to the writer’s arguments by establishing a more inclusive relationship with them (Hyland 2004). Drinking alcohol is described as a ‘usual’—more than frequent—action which concerns “social entertainments.” Then, the journalist presents the act of drinking beer as being typical when someone wants “to pick someone up.” The main argument is further reinforced by a comparison between alcoholic

and non-alcoholic beverages (coffee and mineral water). Even though it is not easy to assess whether the journalist is intentionally promoting the act of drinking (the journalist herself seems not to take any position, leaving the floor to the interviewees instead), a logical inference seems to be surfacing in the text—if you want to have success in love, alcohol is better than any other drink. This implicit strategy is pursued by the combination of three semantic areas, i.e., entertainment, alcohol, and advantage: alcohol is predicated as an advantage for entertainment. Their textual interplay might be interpreted as an instantiation of the legitimisation model.

The occurrence of an isolated text is a somewhat surprising result, if we consider the well-established role of drinking in night culture at that time (see Sub-section 2.1). It might be the case that this result be interpreted as a one-off choice made by the individual writer's attitude rather than related to the newspaper itself.

The delegitimisation model is instantiated by 45 articles. In these articles, which are generally characterised by a plain and simple style in terms of lexical choices and the use of adjectives, alcohol is often linked to health problems or represented as the trigger of antisocial behaviours, following a consistent argumentative pattern articulated in two main rhetorical structures:

1. Alcohol is predicated as the main cause of health diseases (breast cancer, lung cancer, heart attack, sexual transmitted diseases, sterility) → diseases increase the probability of death → drinking alcohol lowers life expectancy → drinking alcohol is negative.
2. Drinking alcohol might cause a loss of inhibitions or skills (e.g., driving skills, social skills, civil skills) → the loss of inhibitions or skills might bring to socially dangerous behaviours and increase the possibility of having an accident (violent behaviours, brawls, sex harassment, car accidents) → drinking alcohol is negative.

The discussion concerning the quantity of alcohol recommended (alcohol units) to avoid harmful consequences plays a pivotal role in most of the texts ideologically linked to the delegitimisation model. The journalist often employs a plain style, where either ideological position is not overtly expressed. The main source of information for the data adduced in the articles is generally ascribed to the qualified opinion of professionals (or institutions), who are therefore attributed responsibility for the truthfulness of what is asserted. As discussed in Hart (2010, 93-100) and Bednarek (2006, 59-63), this argumentation scheme, which shares some basic semantic features with the textual construction of evidentiality (de Saussure 2011), can work as a delegitimising device; intertextual markers such as “a study says” or “the professor argues” are used, particularly in newspaper discourse, to acknowledge the presence of an influential third voice.

For example, in (2), while discussing the World Health Organization position, the journalist adopts the institution's criticism towards positions suggesting that a small amount of alcohol might reduce heart problems:

- (2) WHO rejects the notion that a glass of red wine a day improves health. Flying in the face of recent studies which suggest that moderate alcohol consumption can reduce the risk of heart problems, the WHO said that even a small daily intake of alcohol could be harmful. Even the maximum alcohol levels recommended by the medical profession are suspect, according to the WHO, because they do not take into account body weight, individual vulnerabilities, gender, or space between drinks. According to WHO, the safest policy is to desist from drinking. (E. Luce, *The Guardian*, November 2nd, 1994)

What emerges from the perusal of the text is that the closing sentence represents the position supported by the writer and/or the newspaper, i.e., alcohol is harmful and the healthiest option is to quit drinking. However, this delegitimising stigma on alcohol is achieved by contrasting two different sets of ideologically opposed attitudes, namely, those of 'medical professionals' and that of the 'World Health Organization.' The former is an indefinite group of professionals who publish studies whose details are left unclear. The latter is an officially recognised organism which is supposed to work in favour of worldwide healthcare and whose authority completely obscures ("flying in the face," as quite expressively stated) the positions of the first group.

The excerpt (3) is another example from the delegitimising model:

- (3) "Drinks riskier than drugs." Children's rising alcohol consumption poses a bigger problem than their involvement with illicit drugs, an expert on young people's attitude said yesterday. John Balding, head of the Schools' Health Education Unit at Exeter University, said boys and girls were drinking more and trying brews with higher alcohol levels. Alcohol makes people aggressive and destroys relationships. Our houses are awash with booze, we live with it, so no wonder kids want it and we give it to them. (J. Meikle, *The Guardian*, July 3rd, 1995)

Alcohol is condemned in terms of its harmful effects on social relationships and children's health. The argumentation scheme is built on a comparison between alcohol and drugs; the position which is supported from the beginning is that alcohol is even more dangerous than drugs. As in (2), evidence for the argument proposed in the article is provided by its attribution to an influential source, i.e., the head of the Schools' Health Education Unit at Exeter University. The use of the verb *make* transfers some degree of agency onto *alcohol* (van Dijk 1995, 261-262), which is seen as directly responsible for turning people aggressive and for

ruining relationships. Moreover, looking at the expression “our houses are awash with booze,” a comparison is drawn between the flood metaphor—which is linked to the semantic field of natural disasters (Charteris-Black 2006)—and the liquid state of alcohol. Houses are cognitively represented as containers overrun with alcohol, which might further conjure up the risk for their inhabitants to drown in them. This text might thus be the indicator of the fact that, in addition to the health concerns, the social implications of alcohol are also considered.

Following a similar ideological pattern typical of the delegitimisation model, in the excerpt (4) the discussion is focused on the need to introduce preventive measures for antisocial behaviour during cricket matches—one of the most popular sports in the UK:

- (4) A common policy to counter renewed outbreaks of drunkenness, rowdyism and racist abuse will be implemented at international matches in England next summer. The Test and County Cricket Board and the ground authorities of the six Test venues intend, “to eliminate all antisocial behaviour.” The TCCB also promises to monitor more closely the consumption of alcohol and to limit the amount brought into the ground. (D. Hopps, *The Guardian*, March 2nd, 1994)

The article mentions alcohol abuse as one possible type of antisocial behaviour. Two aspects are worthy of attention. The first one is the use of the metaphorical expression “renewed outbreaks of drunkenness.” According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the noun *outbreak* refers to the action of erupting or the rupture of a container. By using the metaphorical mapping THE REAPPEARANCE OF DRUNKENNESS IS RUPTURE OF A CONTAINER, the writer describes the appearance of cases of drunkenness as the rupture of a container that corresponds to a situation of social stability. Drunkenness stands as one of the reasons behind the interruption of the usual course of events. Thus, this mapping emphasises the centrality of control in conceptualising alcohol: if alcohol breaks a container, then it needs to be controlled.<sup>23</sup> The second one is that alcohol is predicated as problematic by its close association with rowdiness and racism. These antisocial attitudes, though corresponding to different degrees of gravity, are textually and semantically aggregated under the same category group of social and public disorder. In this sense, they are both isolated and grouped under the topic of *danger* and *problem*. From this, it is seemingly inferred that people who are devoted to one of these activities might be likely

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<sup>23</sup> This metaphor is also related to the appearance of epidemics or wars, as discussed, a.o., in Taylor and Kidgell (2021) and Dobrić and Weder (2016). This might suggest that there is a deep cognitive connection between pandemics and drunkenness as both are described as threats to social stability.

devoted to the other two. Thus, the ideological position of the writer and/or the newspaper is seemingly aimed at delegitimising alcohol (ab)use.

Lastly, ideologically biased attitudes towards alcohol and alcohol-related issues can be framed within the delegitimation model even in a more explicit way, as (5) shows:

- (5) A few too many. In the past 35 years our alcohol intake has shot up. More than 9m of us are now drinking at dangerous levels and our neighbours regard us as drunks. In fact the only people who don't think Britain has a drink problem are the British. (G. Younge, *The Guardian*, December 19th, 2000)

The writer discusses the problem of alcoholism in the UK and clearly expresses his ideological position on this argument. Notably, the use of the phrase “our neighbours” reveals that the concerns towards alcohol have already crossed the national boundaries and have become a matter of international politics. It should be remembered that the text was published at the end of 2000 when, as already discussed in Sub-section 2.1, the kind of heavy alcohol consumption that characterised the 1990s reached its peak. In this case, the international context is a powerful argument in favour of both an ideological and a behavioural change on alcohol-related issues. This strategy resonates with examples like (2); an external person is deemed the source of evidence for something regarding the in-group ‘us’ (to which both writer/newspaper and reader can relate) that is not able to recognise the issue. This delegitimation scheme seems to impact not only alcohol, but also the in-group ‘us’ which, using a synecdoche, stands for the whole society; English readers—who are not able to recognise the extent of a problem we all are deeply involved in—drink too much.

The analysis of unbiased news pieces (28% of the total) involved various challenges in terms of understanding which strategies or argumentative schemata were ideologically linked to the neutral model. Among the articles pertaining to this category, alcohol is neither legitimised nor (overtly) delegitimised. One of the most recurrent argumentative structures plainly assumes that alcohol—especially beer, gin, and whisky—is an important source of income for the national economy, regardless of its noxiousness. It is important to stress that this assumption is not corroborated by any further praise of the positive impact alcohol may have on society, which is a distinctive characteristic of the legitimisation model. For example, there is considerable debate regarding alcohol taxation loss due to illegal imports with a consistent reference to the statistics relative to the alcohol market, as the following example (6) shows:

- (6) Tax losses from the sale of alcohol and tobacco from cross-border shopping and bootlegging more than doubled in the last financial year to £340 million, according to a report today from the National Audit Office. (D. Henckle, *The Guardian*, February 2nd, 1995)

These texts are characterised by the use of vocabulary that generally belongs to the semantic area of economy, such as *losses*, *sale*, *shopping*, *bootlegging*, *doubled*.

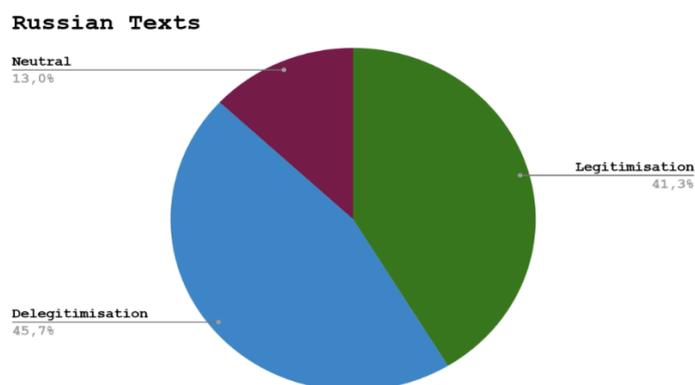
Moreover, alcohol can also be referred to as an important mechanism of socio-cultural unity across ranks and classes. Looking at (7), men and women in their 50s are compared in terms of their alcohol consumption, TV, video and reading habits. Most notable is the textual proximity alcohol displays to more casual habits, such as reading or TV bingeing:

- (7) The report suggested that for some over-50s “more self-focused, hedonistic attitudes will emerge as they imitate the lifestyles of the young.” Already surveys suggested that they had similar alcohol consumption, TV, video and reading habits, and DIY and gardening interests. (Editorial article, *The Guardian*, November 20th, 2000)

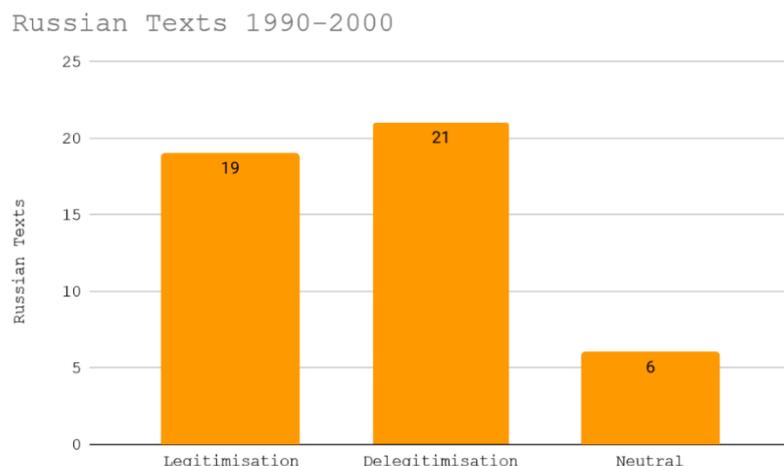
Even though only a minor part of the text can be ideologically linked back to the neutral model, these results might contribute to explaining the ever-oscillating nature of the different alcohol policies in the 1990s. The cognitive salience of the neutral model is therefore explained by the fact that alcohol, notwithstanding its harmful effects, remains an important part of the UK economy. Alcohol’s economic role, although far from playing a role as vital as it was for the USSR economy (cf. Sub-section 4.2), is thus given more ideological prominence, while its harmfulness is somehow downsized.

#### 4.2 Russian examples

The analysis conducted on Russian newspapers yielded the following results (cf. Figs. 3 and 4):



**Fig. 3:** Distribution of Russian texts categorised in terms of models



**Fig. 4:** Number of Russian texts per each model

Differently from British broadsheets, in Soviet (Russian) newspapers both the legitimisation and the delegitimation model, rather than linking oppositely polarised ideologies to texts, seem more so to instantiate two sides of the same discourse semantic gradient. In other words, the deep ideological schemata shared by either the *Pravda* or the *Izvestija* surface in the argumentative structure of the texts in subtler ways, e.g., in the way information is packaged and its flow channelled through different formal structures, which are in turn assigned definite semantic interpretations.<sup>24</sup> Such a detailed articulation is particularly apparent in the representation of one of the most recurrent ideological components both models seem to entertain, i.e., a sharp and generalised criticism of national domestic policy.

Within the delegitimation model, which is adopted in 21 articles out of 47 (40% of the total items), the government tends to receive blame either for the failure to control and regulate the production and the consumption of self-made, low-quality alcohol (mostly *samogon*, which has devastating consequences for citizens' health), for the lack of monitoring and sanctioning alcohol smuggling from the outside (e.g., from Finland) or for the rise of new criminal organisations that filled the legislative gap and seized the monopoly on alcohol production and sale. An

<sup>24</sup> Apart from lexical resources, which will be abundantly discussed in the following with special reference to their function as (more or less allusive) metacommentaries on a specific socio-economic and political conjuncture, the grammatical distinction between perfective and imperfective aspect for both finite and non-finite verb forms is another pivotal parameter which gives useful hints on how information is packaged and accordingly conveyed. The interplay of implicatures and presuppositions contextually entertained by each aspect, however, cannot be felicitously addressed within the scope of the present study.

example of such forceful rhetoric is reported below in (8), which features in almost full length the beginning of an article called “Nepobežděnnye gradusy” (‘Invincible alcohol content’):<sup>25</sup>

- (8) Nowadays there is hardly anyone who is surprised upon finding out that profiteers ask fifty rubles for a bottle of vodka, while in commercial stores prices are so high that not everyone who is sober can still stand on their feet once they see them. The curve of issuance and sale of alcoholic drinks has recently soared up. Speaking in the language of statistics, last year sales of pure alcohol—for the entire 1989—grew by 0.1 million decalitres. Unfortunately, statistics cannot precisely show to what extent the production of moonshine has grown. [...] No, we have definitely not given up heavy drinking after the same old campaign against drunkenness and alcoholism, which ended up in a fiasco. Now hardly can we remember this campaign at all. [...] Yes, increasing restrictions have been imposed, but the problem is that they are an inefficient weapon against the “green serpent.” Alcohol content does remain invincible.<sup>26</sup> (A. Černjak, *Pravda*, 41/1991)

The article has a peculiar argumentative structure insofar as the journalist—under the guise of an interview to the Chruščëvian Trade Minister Dmitrij Vasil’evič Pavlov—chooses instead to revisit decades of inefficient state policies against alcohol abuse, with a critical focus on the years of Gorbačëv’s ‘dry law.’ Černjak’s polemic, which is only apparently mitigated by his reliance on a more neutral argumentative scheme, has two main targets. The first is the covert rejection of the supposed ‘scientificity’ under which official data are concealed, which is unable to account for the actual patterns of alcohol production and consumption trending in the country. Reference is made particularly to moonshine, i.e., by extension, to illegal alcohol production, which had a detrimental impact both on the country’s economy (causing a shortage of sugar reserves) and its social stability. The subtext underlying this kind of scepticism is that

<sup>25</sup> All the translations from Russian, here and elsewhere, are the authors’.

<sup>26</sup> Russian original (transliterated):

Segodnja uže malo kto udivljaetsja, uznava, čto za butylku vodki spekuljanty trebujut 50 rublej, a v kommerčeskich magazinach ceny takie, čto ne každyj trezvyj ustoit na nogach, uvidev ich. Pošla vverch v poslednee vremja krivaja vypuska i prodazi alkogolja. Tak, v prošlom godu, vyražajas’ jazykom statistiki, v natural’nom isčislenii prodano na 0,1 milliona dekalitrov absoljutnogo alkogolja bol’še, čem v 1989 godu. K sožaleniju, statistika ne mozet točno pokazat’, naskol’ko vozroslo količestvo samogona. [...] Net, ničut’ ne stali my men’še pit’ posle pečal’no zakončivšejsja očerednoj kampanii po bor’be s p’janstvom i alkogolizmom. Segodnja ob étoj kampanii uže počti ne vspominaem. [...] Povyšeniya zaprety byli u nas, byli. Tol’ko eto maloëffektivnoe oružie protiv “zelënego zmija.” Gradusy ostajutsja poka nepobedimymi.

the government had always been concealing the severity of the national alcohol problem. Linked to this is the harsh criticism directed towards Gorbachev's anti-alcohol campaign which, despite its pervasiveness, is hardly remembered (*ob étoj kampanii uže počti ne vspominaem*). Its original aims are belittled or even dismissed with contempt, which is mainly reflected in the ideologically driven choices of lexical items; the restrictions introduced are called *maloéffektivnoe oružie* 'inefficient weapon,' while some of the adjectives referring to the campaign include *pečal'no zakončivšajasja*, lit. 'dismally ended' and *očerednaja* 'next in line,' 'ordinary.' This last adjective further evokes the neverending circularity of decisions made to cope with the issue of alcohol abuse, with a possible reference to the 'dry law' previously implemented in 1958 (cf. Sub-section 2.2). Conversely, alcohol is depicted as a formidable foe and prominently referred to as 'invincible' (*nepobežděnnij*) in the same headline; its referent undergoes a tabooisation process and can be conjured up only metaphorically via the infamous phrase (a possible Biblical allusion)<sup>27</sup> *zelėnyj zmij* 'the green serpent.'

Other texts belonging to the delegitimisation model, while voicing some concern over Russian citizens' health deteriorating due to alcohol (ab)use, do share some lines of reasoning with some of the most recurring arguments ascribable to the legitimisation model (e.g., whenever the role of state-owned alcohol production and sale is deemed crucial for the country to regain some form of financial stability). Such articles happen to be intentionally built along the discourse tier in quite complex ways: changing between registers, borrowing entire phrases and collocations from anti-alcohol posters to subtly communicate with their more informed readers, while also interspersing the narration of unadulterated facts with more publicly accessible remarks. The following example (9), which features an excerpt from an article bombastically called "Pochmel'ja ne budet, a grjanet pochoronnyj marš" ('There won't be any hangover; the funeral march is about to strike up instead'), perfectly encapsulates this style of writing that is strongly reminiscent of Soviet political discourse:

- (9) Sad but true, a wave of surrogate alcohol has literally swept the sales counters of the *oblast'* [a Russian administrative division, n.d. *Authors*]. The production of adulterated brew for traffickers who do not disdain any means for the sake of million-dollar vigs is becoming an extremely lucrative business. Yet consumers of such "products" would willy-nilly have to really wonder about the exact meaning of the popular adage: "The wine barrel is full of poison."<sup>28</sup> (I. Krasnovskij and V. Artemenko, *Pravda*, 216/1993)

<sup>27</sup> The (historically unclear) representation of alcohol as a green serpent became more frequent with the growing diffusion of particular types of graphic advertising, such as anti-alcohol posters of the type analysed in Pinelli (2022) and Piretto (2018, 537).

<sup>28</sup> Russian original (transliterated):

Krasnovskij and Artemenko's news piece, who advocate for the transparency of the country's alcohol production process, is most notably characterised by the dialectical juxtaposition of several expressive layers of language pertaining to different registers; cf., for instance, the linear alternation between the metaphorical phrase *volna... zachlestnula* 'a wave... has swept'—a local yet standardised variation on the flood metaphor already displayed in the British excerpt (3)—the semi-literary, old-fashioned form *baryš* 'income, vig' (which is given preference over the standardised *vygoda*), and the instrumental interpolation of an old rhyming saying (*Bočka vina jadom polna* 'The wine barrel is full of poison') as a final rhetoric point in order to solidify the logical consistency of the argumentative structure adopted in the article. Lastly, the general penchant for stylistic exaggeration is ideologically reflected in the frequent occurrence of the morphological element *sverch-* 'Über' which, almost in the spirit of early-Soviet newspeak, is productively attached to several adjectival compounds (e.g., *sverchdohodnyj biznes* 'extremely lucrative business').

The legitimisation model, which is still consistently adopted both on the *Pravda* and the *Izvestija* (19 articles out of 47, i.e., 37% of the total items), seems to substantiate two key ideological attitudes, both of economic nature, which are linked together by a basic causal relation. On the one hand, the need to capitalise on alcohol production, regulation, and sale, and on the other the necessity of depriving organised crime of this source of income and granting transparency of the entire process. Again, it is not unusual for Gorbačëv's anti-alcohol campaign to find itself at the receiving end of columnists' attacks, whose articles sharply criticise and deride the tragic dimensions and long-term consequences it had for the country. The argument supported in the news piece (10), an excerpt from an article called 'Vozvraščenie bludnogo akciza' ('The return of the prodigal excise'), exemplifies the strong belief that Russia had ought to regain its monopoly on alcohol production and sale—lost after the dissolution of the Soviet Union—in order to recalibrate the ever-plummeting prices of hard liquors such as vodka:

- (10) In our country of near-universal literacy and a national penchant for strong spirits vodka always played a fundamental role in replenishing the state budget. Initially, however, during the early-Perestrojka communist years, this invigorating source of

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'Pečal'no, no fakt: volna s surrogatom alkoholja bukval'no zachlestnula torgovye prilavki oblasti. Izgotovlenie fal'sivogo zel'ja dlja del'cov, ne brezgujuščich ničem radi millionnyh baryšej, stanovitsja sverchdohodnym biznesom. Nu a potrebiteljam "izdelij" ponevole prichoditsja zadumyvatsja nad prjamym smyslom narodnoj mudrosti: "Bočka vina jadom polna."

national revenue was heavily damaged by the anti-alcohol campaign. Yet after some years, already under monetarism, vodka has completely lost its mighty title of liquid cash, for it began to be worth dirt cheap and even the humblest of plumbers stopped accepting it as a form of payment.<sup>29</sup> (M. Berger, *Izvestija*, 27/1996)

Berger's article follows two parallel discourse strategies. A first line of argumentation focuses on the alarming slump in alcohol prices affecting the market in mid-1990s Russia; once again alcohol is represented as an autonomous entity—positively, although somewhat ironically referred to as *živitel'nyj istočnik bjužetnyh deneg* 'invigorating source of national revenue'—which happens to be impacted by the aftermath of Gorbačev's 'dry law.' The instantiation of this attitude is in turn strengthened by introducing an ordinary sample case of everyday life to which every reader can easily relate; most notably, the choice of the predication (*samyj poslednij santechnik* 'the humblest of plumbers') is driven by distinctive qualitative overtones that somehow seem to downplay both the agency and the freedom of choice of the subject. Unlike the delegitimation model, never in the context are the dismal consequences of long-term alcohol (ab)use mentioned; the focus remains on alcohol as a valuable economic good.

A second line of argumentation makes great use of Soviet political clichés—a caricatural strategy employed to discard the ideological legacy of the previous government and to debunk the long-term effects of the anti-alcohol campaign (Piretto 2018). For instance, in the opening formula of the article one of the boasts of the old communist regime, *pogolovnaja gramotnost'* 'near-universal literacy,' is associated with one of its most vicious downfalls, *ljubov' k krepkim napitkam* 'penchant (lit. 'love') for strong spirits.' This last predication is further parodied with the addition of the modifier *vsenarodnaja* 'popular, national,' one of the most recurrent mottos in the land of socialism in one country,<sup>30</sup> which in the given context takes on a wry meaning. Ideological attitudes are often made explicit through the adoption of different registers in the text, which, eventually, may enter a stylistic contraposition as well: cf., for instance, the contrast between the ceremonious phrase *gordoe zvanie* 'mighty title' and the colloquial expression *suščie*

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<sup>29</sup> Russian original (transliterated):

V našej strane pogolovnoj gramotnosti i vsenarodnoj ljubvi k krepkim napitkam vodka vseгда služila moščim istočnikom popolnenija bjužeta. Odnako snačala, pri kommunistach vremën rannej perestrojki, ètot živitel'nyj istočnik bjužetnyh deneg byl sil'no isporčen antialkogol'noj kampaniej. Nu a neskol'ko let spustja, uže pri monetarizme, vodka i povse poterjala gordoe zvanie židkoi valjuty, tak kak stoit' stala suščie kopejki, i samyj poslednij santechnik perestal prinitat' eë kak sredstvo plateža.

<sup>30</sup> One might mention, for instance, the infamous Leninist motto "Long live the socialist revolution of all people!" (*Da zdravstvuet vsenarodnaja socialističeskaja revoljucija!*).

*kopejki* ‘dirt cheap,’ lit. ‘real kopeks.’ An additional ideological layer can also be traced back to the demoticised use of the old-fashioned participial form *suščij*, typical of religious discourse, which resonates with the headline, i.e., a pun about the Biblical episode of the return of the prodigal son (cf. the similar ideological function of *zelěnyj zmij* in the previous example).

Finally, a few articles (6 out of 47, 11% of the total items) cannot be easily classified as adopting either a legitimisation or a delegitimisation model, since most of the linguistic strategies thereby adopted seemingly display mixed characteristics. Most articles featuring a mixed response to alcohol-related issues tend to be written in a more neutral manner that tactfully avoids the overuse of metaphoric references and favours objectively reporting the facts, without overt ideological overtones. In (11) it is presented an excerpt from an article called “Mužčina s krasnym nosom, no ne Ded Moroz” (‘A man with a red nose... but he is not Santa Claus’):

- (11) Our country has never really known and still to this day does not know how much its citizens actually drink. [...] Towards the end of the 1990s liquor consumption slowly began to lower and by 2000 amounted to 13 litres per capita on average throughout Russia [...]. During the period of alcohol-related supermortality, between 1992 and 1996, Russian chronic alcoholics simply died out. According to specialists, it takes at the very least 6 or 7 years for anyone to ‘turn into’ an alcoholic. That means that a new class of Russian assiduous consumers of vodka must already be on the verge of formation, heading into the new millennium.<sup>31</sup> (M. Nikiforova, *Izvestija*, 1/2000)

Nikiforova’s article is a detailed survey on the consumption of alcohol *per capita* in various regions of Russia shortly after the great devaluation of the ruble (with more than the 80% of the alcoholic beverages consumed exceeding the threshold of 40% abv). The main concern of the author is that the high mortality rate observed between 1992 and 1996 and triggered by the long-term, sustained alcohol consumption of the previous years could soon repeat itself and give rise to a new, younger generation of alcoholics. Although some expressive terms still appear at times (cf. for instance the perfective verb *vymeret* ‘to die out,’ which hint at the agentive nature of alcohol as the initiator of the extermination process—uniquely specific to Russian newspaper

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<sup>31</sup> Russian original (transliterated):

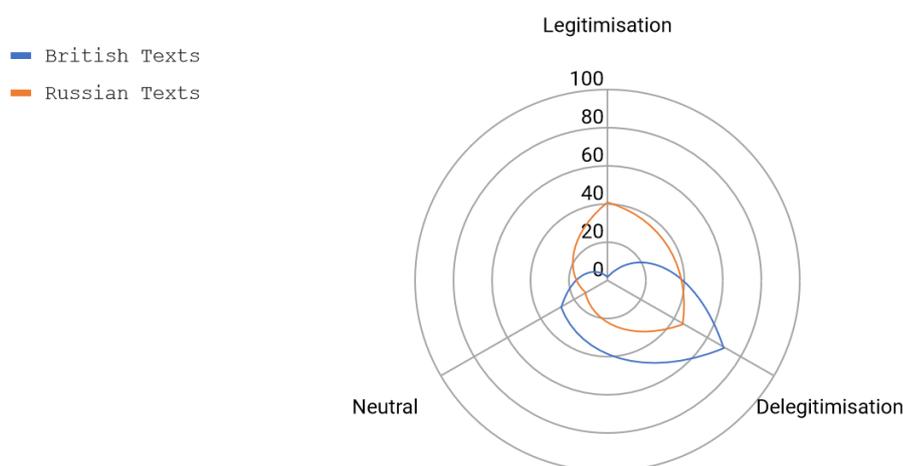
Naša strana po-nastojščemu nikogda ne znala i ne znaet ponyne, skol’ko že p’jut eë graždane. [...] K koncu 90-ch godov potreblenie gorjačitel’nogo načalo medlenno snižat’sja i k 2000 godu sostavilo 13 litrov na čeloveka v srednem po Rossii. [...] V period alkogol’noj sverch smertnosti—1992-1996 gody—rossijskie chroničeskie alkogoliki prosto vymerli. Kak sčitajut specialisty, na ‘stanovlenie’ alkogolika trebuetsja kak minimum 6-7 let. Tak čto novyj klass glavnyh rossijskich potrebitelej vodki vot-vot dolžen sformirovat’sja—v novom tysjačeletii.

discourse), the register adopted is plain and simple and the narrative tone—albeit (understandably) alarming—is not tainted by ideologically driven argumentation schemata.

## 5. Concluding remarks

This paper is a qualitative, socio-cognitive CDA study of alcohol-related newspaper discourse, comparing British and Soviet (Russian) broadsheets of the 1990s. In the following graph (Fig. 5) a comparison of British and Soviet (Russian) data is summarised with respect to the model adopted in alcohol-related news pieces:

### Newspapers & Alcohol 1990–2000



**Fig. 5:** Comparison of model in British and Soviet (Russian) newspaper discourse (expressed in %)

The analysis of British data shows a clear-cut outline. Alcohol, always used in general terms as drink(s) or alcohol, is mostly represented as one of the major causes of disease and antisocial behaviour, thus following the typical argumentation schema of the delegitimation model. Ideological elements of the legitimisation model are sometimes featured in the representation of alcohol as an important cultural construct (as part of a silent ‘drinking culture’) and a significant source of income for the national economy. This might help to explain the apparently contradictory British policy towards alcohol in the 1990s (as discussed in Sub-section 2.1), which is characterised, at first, by an increasing liberalised approach towards its selling, circulation and availability and then, at the end of the decade, by an increasing concern over the social, cultural and health problems increasing among the population.

Soviet (Russian) data show a different pattern. Alcohol (essentially vodka) is mainly seen as a major source of financial stability, on which the government needs to regain its monopoly; the illegal production and consumption of moonshine and surrogate alcohol is criticised from an economic perspective. State policies against alcohol (ab)use are also vividly scorned, relying on argumentation schemata which—unlike British broadsheets—are studded with metaphorical associations, political allusions, and subtler layers of ideologically-driven irony; potential physical and social detriment to Soviet (Russian) citizens is backgrounded in texts instantiating either the delegitimation or the neutral model.

Follow-up research on this topic might benefit from the following integrations, which have been sidelined in this paper for space reasons. In the first place, the qualitative analysis needs to be complemented by a more exhaustive quantitative approach to the data (including, for instance, a bigger sample of articles from more representative broadsheets), which could reveal interesting patterns in alcohol-related discourse across different countries. Secondly, the time span of the survey could be extended up to the present day, with the aim of capturing statistical patterns and differences with the socio-economic conjuncture analysed in this article. Finally, the role of linguistic and conceptual metaphors is to be explored in greater detail from a cross-linguistic perspective; this could also include an enhancement of the empirical basis of the present study to advertisement discourse, akin to Pinelli's (2022) cognitive survey of anti-alcohol posters, or to other types of semiotically complex texts (e.g. cookbooks).

**Acknowledgements:** A preliminary version of this study was presented at the 22nd Conference on Languages for Specific Purposes “Mediating Specialized Knowledge: Challenges and Opportunities for LSP Communication, Translation and Research” (Padova, July 10th-12th 2019) with the provisional title “Alcohol and/in the News. Alcohol perception and representation in newspapers and advertisements in England and Russia.” The Authors would like to thank the audience in attendance, the editors of *Iperstoria*, and three anonymous reviewers for their detailed and constructive comments.

**Note:** although the paper is the outcome of the close collaboration between the Authors, for academic purposes Dario Del Fante wrote Sub-sections 2.1 and 4.1 and Section 3, while Marco Biasio is responsible for Section 1 and Sub-sections 2.2 and 4.2. Section 5 is attributed to both Authors.

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