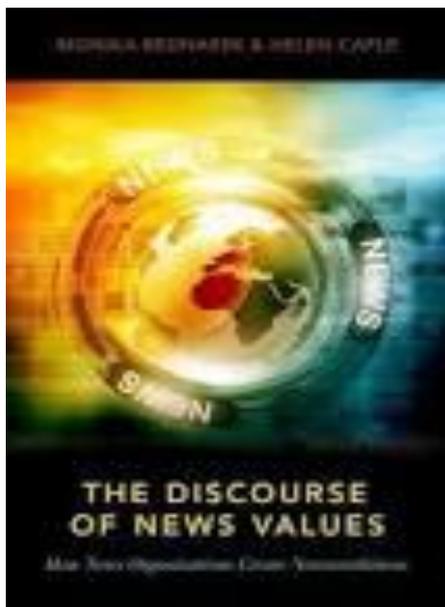




## The Discourse of News Values. How News Organizations Create Newsworthiness

Monika Bednarek & Helen Caple

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Review by Paola-Maria Caleffi\*

In an era in which the astonishingly rapid development of digital media has arguably produced major changes in the way news is disseminated, it seems of the utmost importance to (re)consider how newsworthiness is constructed, and what ideological implications the discourse of news values may have within a social and cultural setting that has been transformed radically.

This is exactly the aim of Bednarek and Caple, whose volume offers a cutting-edge perspective on how to carry out the study of news discourse. In fact, the challenge posed in the ten chapters comprising the volume is the promotion of a combination of approaches that takes into account the multimodal character of today's news discourse. Indeed, in a world that has gone digital, the construction of news discourse is more than ever the result of the interplay between a range of semiotic modes, each participating in the representation of the world that news discourse does 'sell' to a variety of audiences. Building on their ongoing research, Bednarek and Caple illustrate the relevance of *Discursive News Values Analysis* (DNVA) to the study of news reporting, and propose a new methodology, which they term *Corpus-Assisted Multimodal Discourse Analysis* (CAMDA) for its being a multimodal approach that "brings together multimodality, discourse analysis and corpus linguistics" (8). The approach is proposed as a means to provide a framework for the systematic analysis of how news values are constructed through the semiotic resources that are employed for the presentation of certain vents as newsworthy. Specifically, Bednarek and Caple's focus in the volume is on the linguistic and

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visual resources (words and images respectively) that contribute to the construction of newsworthiness. Interestingly, in their application of the suggested approach, Bednarek and Caple are more concerned with what constitutes the newsworthiness of reported events for the audience, and with how such newsworthiness can be artificially construed by news workers through the manipulation of linguistic and visual resources, than they are with how events are selected as news. In other terms, what the proposed multimodal approach aims to investigate is not so much the way in which news organizations select specific events or issues as newsworthy, but rather the way in which news workers can potentially present any event or issue as worthy of being published as news, and therefore worthy of the audience's attention.

The book successfully combines theory with practice, whereby in-depth theoretical discussion is constantly supported by empirical evidence through the extensive analysis of authentic news discourse and the investigation of empirical case studies. The authentic data set is comprised of print, online, and mobile news stories from "News" or "World News" sections, or in news bulletins/podcasts, dating from 2010 to 2015, plus 99 headlines and opening paragraphs from online news items.

The reader is led *in medias res* from the very beginning by means of three illustrative examples of how words and images can be manipulated to persuade the audience of the newsworthiness of the reported events. Besides setting out the aims and scope of the volume, and describing the techniques, tools and affordances of the methodologies employed in CAMDA, Chapter 1, "Introduction," also provides a detailed definition of key terms as they are used in the book, including a "topology" (9) which shows four 'zones' within which analysis can be carried out, each corresponding to choices as for the focus of investigation.

Particularly interesting is the perspective from which news and newsworthiness are analysed within the framework of CAMDA. Such perspective emphasises both target audience and contextual factors as 'active' parameters against which the newsworthiness of a piece of information can be assessed. More than that, it is argued that if it is true that news values are recognized in the relevant literature as defining newsworthiness, it is also true that news values themselves are constructed at the very moment when a piece of information is presented as news by means of a specific way of using semiotic resources, rather than existing *per se* as selective criteria based on which an event is to be regarded as intrinsically newsworthy or not. In this sense, Bednarek and Caple do not take news values as a starting point, but look at newsworthiness as the result of news workers' practices, specifically, their use of linguistic and visual resources. Which is what the title and subtitle of the volume itself explicitly suggest.

The theoretical part is developed in the two chapters following the "Introduction," and of which Part I, "Theory," is comprised. Chapter 2, "News Values," provides an overview on research concerning news values, and deals with the potentially confusing shifting of the meaning that has been assigned to the term each time. Indeed, as the overview highlights, news values have been conceived both as a set of selection criteria that journalists are trained to use – in other words, something external to the news – and as specific event properties – that is, something inherent in the news item. The conceptualisation of news values provided by Bednarek and Caple, instead, acknowledges the material, cognitive, social, and discursive dimensions that are at play when it comes to defining what is meant by news values. It is based on the assumption that material events do have *potential newsworthiness*, and that a news value is "a value that is socioculturally assigned, rather than 'natural' or 'inherent' in the event" (42); hence, it is constructed *through* discourse – that is, through the use of semiotic resources.

The concept of 'construction' is dealt with in greater detail in Chapter 3, "Discursive news values analysis." The constraints and affordances of both linguistic and visual resources (specifically, photographs) for the representation of material events and the construction of newsworthiness are brought to the fore. In providing their own list of news values, the authors suggest that there should be a limit to the proliferation of terms, and that the label used to identify each single value should be one that allows the inclusion of any embedded values. As a result, Bednarek and Caple's list of news values only contains, albeit under a different naming convention, those that have been generally recognized by the literature "across the board." Interestingly, the proposed list also offers a (re)conceptualization of each value, whereby the very definition of the value presents it as the product of the discursive construction of the event. News values, in other words, are content- and audience-sensitive rather than intrinsically displayed by the material fact, whose potential newsworthiness is realized through the exploitation of the meaning potential of the semiotic resources that are used to report the event itself. Therefore, they are discursively constructed.



Part II, “Analytical Frameworks,” is specifically devoted to the semiotic resources that can be used as an analytical framework for the analysis of news discourse. As said, the focus in the volume is on linguistic and visual resources, and it is exactly with language and visuals that the two chapters comprising this part deal. In Chapter 4, “Language and News Values,” a very interesting *open-ended* inventory of the linguistic resources through which news values can be established is provided. For each one of the news values on the authors’ list, a number of linguistic resources that could participate in the construction of the value itself are identified, and the way in which such linguistic resources can be analyzed within the framework of DNVA is clearly exemplified through the careful analysis of authentic material. In the examples, the linguistic items (whether they be lexical, grammatical, or rhetorical) serving the purpose of constructing a particular value are highlighted, either in bold or underlined, which makes the examples extremely reader-friendly.

Moreover, each example is thoroughly commented on. The same happens with Chapter 5, “Visuals and News Value.” Due to the major role they play in news storytelling, photographs are the visual resource on which the authors focus, although the chapter also includes a brief section in which other visual resources are dealt with, namely typography, framing, colour and layout. As with linguistic resources, images are considered for their potential to contribute to the construction of newsworthiness. Again, for each of the listed news values, the way in which images participate in discursively constructing the news story so that it portrays that specific value is extensively exemplified and commented on. Interestingly, the final section in the chapter provides an illustrative example analysis of how language and images can combine and interact in the co-construction of newsworthiness in a specific media space, namely the newspaper front-page.

Part III, “Empirical Analysis,” is comprised of three chapters, each presenting an empirical case study where DNVA is applied with the aim of examining whether “particular topics or news actors are associated with specific news values” (137) and, ultimately, whether such possible association may have any ideological implications. The topic and the news actors of the case study presented in Chapter 6, “What is newsworthy about cyclists?,” are cycling and cyclists respectively. The case is analysed with a focus on language (linguistic patterns and collocations), and through the application of the corpus linguistic methodology, whereby the corpus – whose compilation is thoroughly illustrated – is made up of news stories about cycling and cyclists published in several newspapers in three different English-speaking countries.

Chapter 7, “Images, News Values, and Facebook,” presents a case study concerning Facebook news feeds used by established news media organizations in various English-speaking countries to direct audiences from Facebook to the news organization’s website. The focus, this time, is on visual resources, while corpus linguistics is applied again for the collection and analysis of the samples, namely news images used in social media posts (Facebook in particular) published by news media organizations.

The third empirical case study is analysed in Chapter 8, “All the news that’s fit to share. News values in ‘most shared’ news.” Unlike the analyses of the case studies in the previous chapters, which are mono-modal, the third case provides an example of how the way in which two different semiotic modes, namely language and image, work together to contribute to the discursive construction of news values in “most shared” online news items. To this aim, the third case study is approached by means of corpus-assisted multimodal discourse analysis, whose application is well illustrated in the chapter. Indeed, the contribution of each mode is first analysed separately, and then the results are compared across the two modes to assess whether they construe the same values, complementary values, or even opposing ones.

The last part, Part IV, “Extensions,” offers further insights in the investigation of the relevance of DNVA to the analysis of news discourse. Chapter 9, “Discursive news values analysis as an opportunity for diachronic and cross-cultural research,” provides very useful (and practical) suggestions for further applications of DNVA. The authors identify two main areas of research, namely diachronic and cross-cultural research. For both areas, a number of valuable ideas are examined about the direction that such research might take, alongside relevant information about the tools that could be employed, namely available databases, corpora and archives that could be drawn on. Again, for both areas concrete examples of applications are illustrated and commented on. Chapter 10, “Reflections,” is a concluding outline of the main topics covered in the previous chapters, the outline being accompanied by further ideas on possible applications of the proposed framework of analysis.

Although the book only examines newsworthiness in contemporary English-language news, albeit across different cultures, the stimulating ideas provided in the volume appear to be broadly applicable, as the authors themselves suggest, for diachronic research on news values both within the same English-speaking countries



and across countries around the world, where news is disseminated in languages other than English. This would certainly require, the authors agree, the compilation of relevant inventories of the linguistic and visual resources that each language employs, but it would allow an extremely challenging cross-cultural and cross-linguistic investigation into what counts as news values in different parts of the world, and how these are linguistically and visually construed. The volume is especially precious for its richness in illustrative practical examples, which provide invaluable authentic material for researchers, and even more for both educators and students in Media Studies and Journalism.