

LNGT/WRPR 0206: Narratives in the News Media Spring 2022

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Meets: T/Th 1:30-2:45pm in Chateau 109

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Office Hrs: T/Th 3-4pm (in Carr Hall 201); Mon 11am-12pm ([Zoom](#)) (or by appt)

Course Description

In this course we will consider questions such as: What linguistic strategies do the news media use to craft compelling stories? What are the dominant narratives at play about national and global social issues, and how are some journalists working to counter those narratives? We will employ Critical Discourse Analysis as a central framework, reading theoretical and empirical work by linguists such as Teun van Dijk, as well as from sociologists and political scientists. We will engage with online media, podcasts, and other resources. Students will write for a variety of audiences.

Course Objectives

Students will...

- Critically examine their own relationship to news media
- Articulate relationships between language and power, as enacted in news media
- Understand the nature and purpose of discourse analysis as a research methodology
- Identify textual and multimodal features of news media discourse, and judge rhetorical effects of those features
- Read and critique empirical research employing various approaches to news media analysis
- Develop and facilitate their own empirical studies applying theories and methods from class, using relevant tools and technologies
- Write effectively for both academic and public audiences.

Readings/Resources

All required course readings and other materials will be available on Canvas (or elsewhere online, but with links posted to Canvas or sent via email). *You are strongly encouraged to print electronic readings, so that you can engage more closely in textual analysis.*

Two of the websites we will be referencing most frequently in the course are the American Press Institute and the Pew Research Center: News Habits and Media, but there are many others out there as well!

If you would like a good reference text, however, I would **recommend**:

Busá, M. G. (2013/2014). *Introducing the language of the news: A student's guide*. Routledge.
(This book should also be on reserve at Davis Library).

Course Expectations

Communication and Timeliness

Your presence and engagement are an important part of your learning, of your peers' learning as well! I expect you to be in class on time as much as possible, to complete all assigned readings, and turn in your work on time. **Communication is key!** There may be penalties for late papers, multiple absences, or lack of preparation for class, unless we have made arrangements in advance. If you do need to miss class, please notify me (via email or text message) before class that you will be absent. Extended absences may require approval from a Dean. I often send reminders and notes via email, so please check your email at least once every 24 hours. I attempt to return all phone calls and emails within 48 hours.

Your feedback on the course is very helpful to me. I will give you opportunities to reflect on how things are going, both in-class and anonymously. But I appreciate hearing from you at any point about your needs and experiences. If you encounter difficulties with any course material or assignments, please contact me **early and often**, so that I can help support you.

Engagement during Class

What does it mean to “participate” in this course? Course participation includes discussion (both speaking and active listening), as well as engagement in individual, pair, and small group activities. This means that **doing the readings for course is crucial to your ability to participate** (see more info at Grading Breakdown, below). Participation in class discussion is also important to your course learning, and for this class, that means both **speaking and listening**. Some agreements that can help us to have productive dialogue together include:

- ❖ Share airtime- step ‘up’ or ‘back’ as needed
- ❖ Avoid interrupting—allow others to finish their speaking
- ❖ Maintain confidentiality of students and stories.
- ❖ Attend to cell phones (and other technology) in ways that allow you and others to be as present as possible.

Being an **active participant** in class also requires you to be organized. This includes:

- Making time to do the readings before class, focusing in particular on terminology (see terms list on Canvas)
- Having a folder/notebook in which to keep course handouts and other materials
- Keeping track of your schedule, so that you meet deadlines
- Using multiple strategies (e.g., Google Drive, OneDrive, Dropbox) to back up your work (Note: Expect and prepare for a computer crash at some point this semester!)

While I do not have a specific policy about use of technology in the classroom, I expect you to be **mindful** about using devices in a way that promotes learning rather than distraction. I encourage working together outside of class—maybe finding a reading buddy!

Formatting for Written Work

Unless specified otherwise, written assignments should be double-spaced, 12-point font (Times New Roman), with 1-inch margins. APA citation style is preferred, but other formats may be accepted upon student request (NOTE: No cover page or abstract is necessary). All work should include an honor code statement: ***I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid on this assignment.*** If you have worked with anyone other than a tutor (or Prof. Shapiro) on an assignment, please note that as well.

In class, we will talk more about academic integrity, including ways use sources appropriately, as well as when and how to collaborate with peers on particular assignments. For now, please remember that **plagiarism** usually involves using someone else’s words or ideas as if they were your own. It can have very serious consequences, including academic suspension or even expulsion. For more information on plagiarism and how to avoid it, please see this resource from the University of North Carolina Writing Center: <https://writingcenter.unc.edu/tips-and-tools/plagiarism/> For a self-guided tutorial about academic integrity at Middlebury, visit [go/ait](#).

If you have a disability or learning issue **of any kind** that might impact your studies, please communicate with me as soon as possible. For formal accommodations, please be sure to contact the Disability Resource Center (formerly “ADA Office”): <https://www.middlebury.edu/office/disability-resource-center>

Although I will be available to support your learning, I hope you will also make use of support from:

- **The Center for Teaching, Learning, and Research (go/CTLR)** offers peer tutoring for nearly every academic subject, including drop-in writing tutors, prescheduled study groups, and professional staff.
- The **Writing Center (go/WC)** offers both peer and professional writing tutoring, online and in-person. They also offer conversation partners for students for whom English is an Additional Language, as well as other events and resources.

- **Oratory Now ([go/oratorynow](#))** is a group of peer coaches for oral presentations and other forms of public speaking.
- The **Office of Digital Learning and Inquiry—[go/DLINQ](#)** offers support with all sorts of technologies and digital tools.
- **Counseling Services ([go/counseling](#))**: Can help with emotional and social challenges, including stress, anxiety, and adjustment to Middlebury. There are often same-day in-person appointments available, in addition to 24/7 support via MidTelehealth.
- **Anderson Freeman Center ([go/afc](#))**: Intercultural Center in Carr Hall, designed to provide a ‘home’ for students who have been historically underrepresented or marginalized in higher education. Great place to relax, make new friends, cook, etc. My office is there as well ☺

Our professional librarians are also available to help as needed:

- Douglas Black (dblack@middlebury.edu) -for help finding secondary sources and other general library questions
- Ryan Clement (rclement@middlebury.edu) – for help with data analysis but can also help with other questions.

Grading Breakdown

- ❖ Participation and class preparation = 25% (includes readings and short HW assignments in preparation for class, in-class and some online discussion, drafts of papers, meetings w/ Prof. S.
- ❖ Short Papers= 30% total
 - News Consumer Autobiography (10%, 3-4 pages)
 - Headline analysis (10%, ~3 pages)
 - Discourse Analysis: Pilot Project (2-3 articles, 3-4 pages- 10%)
- ❖ Discourse Analysis Long Paper (7-10 pp., multi-draft)= 20%
- ❖ Letters to editor (drafted in-class and revised as needed)= 10% total (5% each)
- ❖ Multimedia project for a peer audience = 20% (5% presentation and reflection; 15% project)

OVERVIEW OF MAJOR ASSIGNMENTS

(more details on each assignment will be provided in class)

Short Papers

These papers function as reflection and skill-building opportunities, where you can practice doing various types of analysis we have been learning about. The skills in these papers will also be useful for your Discourse Analysis Research Project later in the semester. While I am grading these papers primarily on content, you will have the opportunity to revise them, if there is substantial room for improvement in the writing itself.

- A. News Consumer Autobiography (3-4 pp.):** In this paper, you'll reflect on your own experiences as a "consumer" of news media. In addition to describing some of your habits, preferences, and viewpoints, you'll consider the question: Am I a 'typical' Millennial/GenZ news consumer? You'll answer this by comparing your experiences with trends documented in research we'll be reading about in class.

- B. Headline Analysis (~3 pp.):** You will choose one news story and compile a list of 10-20 headlines on that story. (Make sure you're noting type of publication, audience, location, etc. for each headline. Also make sure the specific story is the same—not just the general issue/event!—i.e. compare 'apples to apples') You will then analyze those headlines, drawing on course readings and lectures, and your paper should advance a thesis about whether and how bias is present in the headlines about that particular news story. (If necessary, you may reference other features—e.g., lede/lead sentences, nut paragraphs, and images—to support your analysis). (NOTE: You are encouraged to build on this project for your larger, Discourse Analysis project.)

- C. Discourse Analysis: Pilot Project (3-4 pp.):** You will analyze 2-3 accounts of a particular news event/story, focusing on one or more of the following: (headline/lead, structure/layout, sourcing, framing, tone/attitude, word choice, etc.). Your paper should begin with an introduction that offers a rationale (both why you're focusing on this event and why you chose these 2-3 publications to analyze), as well as a hypothesis explaining what you expected to find. Your intro should reference course materials/concepts that are relevant to your analysis. The body of your paper will present your findings and suggest possibilities for further research, which you can (will, I hope!) pursue for your longer discourse analysis paper (see below).

Discourse Analysis Project (7-10 pp.)

For this project, you will (ideally) build on your pilot project (see above), putting together a larger data set (a "corpus" of at least 10 articles), in order to test a new or expanded hypothesis. We will have read studies in class that can serve as methodological models for your project. Your final paper will include an Intro/Rationale (~2 pp) that draws on secondary sources (both concepts/theories and a similar studies) to make the case for your analysis and offer an initial hypothesis; a Methods section (1-2 pp.) that articulates what you did and why (including how you put together your corpus, how you analyzed data, etc.); and an organized set of Findings and

Implications (3-5 pp), as well as Limitations and Suggestions for future research (~1p.). We will complete this project in stages, and you will have the opportunity for guidance and feedback at each phase:

- a. Proposal (written or via in-person meeting w/ Prof. S.)
- b. In-class data set compilation and analysis workshops with individual work time
- a. Presentations of work in-progress
- b. First draft, with peer review and possibly peer tutor feedback
- c. Revised draft, with feedback from peers and Prof S.
- d. Final draft, with Researcher's Memo

Letter to the Editor

Writing letters to the editor offers you the opportunity to think about how you could channel your course learning into real-world writing. Each letter will respond to a recent article in the *Campus* or another publication that you engage with regularly and should be written in a way that shows awareness of the appropriate conventions (content, style, tone, etc.) for this type of writing, including being concise, specific, and engaging. These letters will be drafted in class but can be submitted at the end of the day, if you need more time to finish them.

Multimedia Project

The **multimedia project** is your opportunity to educate your peers about something you've learned from the course (and to synthesize that learning for yourself). There are numerous options for this project, from creative nonfiction to an interactive website to a poster or other visual media. I encourage you to do something you will find enjoyable, and to consider how to share your course learning in a creative and engaging way. You will conduct peer review of this project both during and outside of class. The final draft/version of projects will be published within Middlebury or for a wider audience (We'll discuss options together). You will also write a reflection that explains what you wanted to accomplish with the project and discusses its strengths and weaknesses. Grading criteria for this project will be determined in consultation with each student. Sample student work will be examined in class.

COURSE CALENDAR (tentative)

NOTE: Readings will be in Canvas>>Files OR Canvas>>Pages>>Online Readings

Feb 15 (Tues)- Course introduction/overview, building a community of reflective news consumers. (topic: Why examine news media? Ourselves as news consumers). Preview readings for Thurs.

Feb 17 (Th)- read [Young, 2015](#) (American Press Institute study; PDF also on Canvas) (topic: Habits of news consumption in U.S.)

Optional additional readings (will be referenced in class):

1. Reuters Institute [Digital News Report for 2021](#) (has executive and video summary))
2. Pew Research Center's Journalism Project's [News Platform Fact Sheet](#)

In class: Compare data. Discuss News Consumer Autobiography (due Sun).

Due by Sun 2/20 or Mon by request (Canvas): News Consumer Autobiography (short paper, -3-4 pp.- see description in syllabus).

Feb 22 (Tues)- (topic: Intro to media basics). In class: Discuss headline analysis paper. Readings/resources:

1. [API's "Elements of Journalism"](#) (overview)
2. [7 News Values](#) (Walsh, 2017)
3. [Wikihow: Analyzing newspaper language](#)

HW, bring notes to class: Choose 1 recent new media story and take notes, looking for elements from list below. *Bonus challenge*: Look at web vs. print layout to see how they differ (e.g. [Newseum "front pages"](#)).

Terms to learn/review: *headline, lede/lead, puns/rhymes (word play), alliteration, passive vs. active voice, verb tense (uses in news reporting), hyperbolic/sensationalist language, sourcing, allusion, inclusive language, neutral/objective reporting, multimodality, newsworthy.*

Feb 24 (Th). (Topic: Analyzing news headlines). Read Bleich et al, 2018 (PDF- highlighted version available on Canvas). Also read [ThoughCo article on "headlines"](#) (Nordquist, 2017) and re-visit [Wikihow](#) from Tues as needed.

Terms to learn/review: *summary line/blurb, nut paragraph, headlines, ellipses/synthetic language, nominalizations/noun string/stacking, sentiment analysis, coding (of data).*

HW, bring to class: Collect 4-5 headlines for the same story and notice similarities/differences. Be sure to compare 'apples to apples.' (Bring notes to class). In class: Read sample Headline Analysis papers

Due by Sun Feb 27 (Canvas) or Mon by request: Headline Analysis (short paper, ~3 pp- see description in syllabus).

Mar 1 (Tues)- (Topic: Analyzing composition and structure of news stories).

Terms to learn/review: *Lead/Lede, nut graf/paragraph, inverted pyramid structure, hourglass structure,*

Readings (all short):

1. API's Journalism Essentials: What makes a good story? (and browse subsections)
2. API's Journalism Essentials: Organize a story (and browse subsections)
3. ThoughtCo's overview/history of inverted pyramid—and others (Rogers, 2018)
4. Poynter's overview/history of hourglass (Scanlan, 2003)

HW, bring notes to class: Take notes on the structure of 1 of the articles you have chosen for your Discourse Analysis Pilot Project (also consider looking at other elements—e.g., framing, sourcing—see below)

Mar 3 (Th): (Topic: Introduction to sourcing and framing). Read Emily & Brigett's Student Guide on Sourcing. Also read Thorbjørnsrud & Figenschou (2016) "Do Marginalized Voices Matter?" (Both at Canvas>>Readings).

Due Sun 3/6 or Mon by request: Post ideas for Discourse Analysis Pilot Project (3-4 pp., see description in syllabus) to online discussion, including links or attachments with text of at least 1 article (Canvas).

Mar 8 (Tues): (topic: Continued discussion of framing and sourcing). Read Citizen's Handbook-Framing (overview) and highlighted excerpts of Benson & Wood (2015) (PDFs at Canvas>>Readings).

Be able to: *Explain framing, Identify most common frames (e.g., victim, villain, conflict, responsibility, cause/problem/solution, law and order vs. health/safety), Notice framing strategies in headlines and nut graf.*

Optional resources (may be referenced in class):

Critical media blog- tutorial on framing. // "Framing Theory"- Mass Communication blog

Mar 10 (Th)- ASYNCHRONOUS ONLINE CLASS- Peer Review of Discourse Analysis Pilot Project (oral or written; in-person or online). Also post to online discussion about using technology (e.g., AI) to detect tone/sentiment in news coverage.

Due Sun Mar 13 (Canvas): Discourse Analysis Pilot Project (3-4 pp.).

Mar 15 (Tues)- (Topic: syntax/grammar analysis). Read Hale, 2012 (NY Times) and Busà Ch 7 (PDF on Canvas) Terms to learn/review: *nominalization, passive voice, grammatical agent, action vs. relational verbs, theme/rheme.*

HW, bring to class: Do Busà pp. 114-115, Activities 4 and 5. Also look for linguistic elements in headlines/articles from previous assignments).

Mar 17 (Th)- SYNCHRONOUS ONLINE CLASS

Read Busa Ch 9 (PDF on Canvas) and Hiltner, 2017 (NYTimes). (Topic: Word choice, also preparation for longer DA Paper)

Terms to learn/review: *Germanic vs. Latinate vocabulary, hyperbolic/sensationalist language, neologism,*

irony (in news), dichotomization, action verbs.

Optional resource: [Accuracy in Media blog post on word choice](#)

March 19-27 *SPRING BREAK*****

Due Mon Mar 28 (Canvas): Proposal for Discourse Analysis Project. (Include *rationale, research question(s), hypothesis, methods*, and at least 2 *other studies* you could use as rationale/background.)

OR sign up to meet with Prof. S. ASAP this week.

Mar 29 (Tues): Workshop for Letter to Editor #1 (1-2 paragraphs). (Bring computer to class, with article you're responding to- could relate to DA project). Also during class: Check-ins on DA research.

HW: By end of day (Tues): Post Letter to Editor #1 to online discussion. (Extra credit if you submit 'for real ☺- email screenshot to Prof. S)

Apr 1 (Th): (Topic: Asset Framing/Solutions Journalism). Listen or read transcript of *On Being* podcast [episode with Trabian Shorters](#). Also do some online exploration to learn about [Solutions Journalism](#). Also: Workshop for DA paper- create notetaking grid.

Due Sun Apr 3rd via Canvas (or in meeting w/ SS this week): Update on DA project *What is your revised research question? Which articles are you examining (and why), What are you looking for? What are you finding thus far? What are your next steps?* Optional: Include note-taking grid.

Apr 5 (Tues): (Topic: Bias in news media representation). **Jigsaw reading:** Choose 1 topic to focus on and present highlights in class to a small group:

1. **Gender:** [NBC article](#) about gender bias in political news; [HBR article](#) on promoting gender equity in journalism- including via [BBC's 50:50 project](#).
2. **Race:** [Equal Justice Initiative article](#) on racial bias in coverage of crime; *New Yorker* [article and video](#) on A. Bell's "Rewriting Racist Headlines." Possible additional.
3. **Rural vs. Urban:** [CU-CitizenAccess](#) article on perceptions of news bias against rural communities, and [DemocracyFund article](#) on "partnership vs. parachute journalism." Possible additional

Apr 7 (Th): Mini-presentations of methods and initial findings from Discourse Analysis projects. If time remains, discuss other critical approaches to news media analysis.

Optional by Sun 4/10: Over weekend, submit intro and/or outline for DA paper (via email).

Apr 12 (Tues): (Topic: Cable news and "Info-tainment").

Tentative readings: 1) Nieman Lab [2020 report](#) on use of "hate" in cable news; 2) [WA Post article](#) on bias at CNN.

Also learn about a recent case study that might be critiqued as less than newsworthy: (e.g., Biden's "hot mic" moment on 1/24/22 and Goldberg's Holocaust comments on "The View" on 1/31/22).

Apr 14 (Th)- (Topic: Resisting polarization in news media). Listen to (or read transcript for) On Being's podcast [conversation between Sally Kohn and Erick Erickson](#).
Optional additional: Watch [Sally Kohn TED talk](#) on "emotional correctness" (vs. PC).

Due Sun Apr 17: Draft of Discourse Analysis Paper, with Writer's Memo (*What's working well? What's left to do? What would you like feedback/support on?*) Option for written feedback only or meeting week of April 18-22

Apr 19 (Tues): In class writing workshop.

Apr 21 (Th): (Topic: Social media literacy and fake news). Visit from Dr. Amy Collier (DLINQ).
Tentative Readings (all fairly short):

1. [Info-Environmentalism: An Introduction](#)
2. [Why Students Can't Google Their Way to the Truth](#)
3. [Attention in the Scarcity](#)

Due Sun Apr 24: Proposal for final multimedia project, individual or pair. (Or sign up to meet w/ Prof S by Wed)

Apr 26 (Tues): Guest visit: Susan Greenberg, Professor of the Practice and former *Newsweek* reporter). (Topic: The real-world of news reporting—on polarizing issues).

Tentative Reading: ["I Smoked Weed with My Son"- WA Post](#).

Optional: [Why Colleges Should Ditch Honor Codes](#)

Apr 28 (Th): Letter to editor #2 (or possible alternative: social media post). Post to Canvas by end of day- EC if you submit/post "for real". Also check-in about multimedia projects.

Due Sat Apr 30 (Canvas): Final draft of Discourse Analysis paper, with Researcher's Memo (extensions available upon request)

Meetings w/ Prof S. available this week

May 3 (Tues): (Tentative topic: Analyzing multimodal aspects of news). Short readings TBD.
Check in re: final projects.

May 5 (Th): (Tentative topic: Satire/parody in/of news media). Short readings TBD.

Optional due Sun May 8 (Canvas): Submit draft of multimedia project for feedback, or sign up for meeting w/ SS this week.

May 10 (Tues): Showcase multimedia projects- get feedback (invite friends?).
(Tentative topic: Diversifying your news diet). Course response forms.

May 12 (Th): Showcase multimedia projects (cont'd). Course takeaways and wrap-up.

<p>Due Tues May 17 (extensions by request): Multimedia project, including author/group reflection</p>
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