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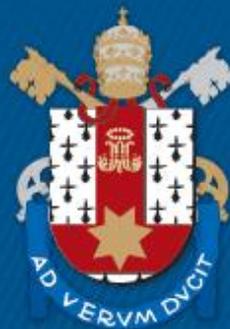
NATHÁLIA FRAGA CARDOSO

**MISCONSTRUCTION OF COVID-19**

An analysis of semantic concepts created by Fake News

Porto Alegre  
2021

PÓS-GRADUAÇÃO - *STRICTO SENSU*



Pontifícia Universidade Católica  
do Rio Grande do Sul

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SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES

MASTERS IN LINGUISTICS

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**Advisor:** Professor Ana Maria Tramunt Ibaños, PhD

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Approved on: \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_ of 2021.

EXAMINING PANEL

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Professor Ana Maria Tramunt Ibaños, PhD (PUCRS)

---

Professor Cristina Perna, PhD (PUCRS)

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Professor Jacques Alkalai Wainberg, PhD (PUCRS)

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For Anita,  
the one concept that I coin every day.

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## RESUMO

O fenômeno Fake News tem permeado e maculado grandes eventos em todo o mundo, afetando a compreensão da sociedade sobre o que é verdadeiro e o que não é. Durante a pandemia Covid-19, o mundo enfrentou não apenas dificuldades no combate ao vírus, mas também foi bombardeado com desinformação publicada em plataformas online. O presente estudo tem como objetivo demonstrar como foi veiculada a pandemia de Covid-19 em 2020 no Reino Unido, por meio de reportagens publicadas no site Politicalite.com. O tema é entender a linguagem do Fake News e como eles têm o poder de criar conceitos nas imagens do público. Apresenta-se inicialmente um referencial teórico sobre Jornalismo e Notícias Falsas, seguido dos fundamentos teóricos da semântica cognitiva, referencial linguístico desta pesquisa. Destaca-se a Teoria dos Conceitos do Protótipo, em especial a representação da rede radial, que inspirou os mapas mentais apresentados nesta dissertação. Na metodologia, são analisados sintagmas nominais de quinze peças recuperadas do site. Este material deve ser categorizado em três construções conceituais: China, Lockdown e Vacina. Após a seleção, os sintagmas nominais são constituídos em mapas mentais, a fim de permitir a visualização da forma completa da construção conceitual do que esses três componentes representam para o site. Em seguida, há uma avaliação dos resultados, e a conclusão aponta para a China como a vilã da pandemia, Lockdown como um conceito mortal e Vacina como a salvação para o Reino Unido.

**Palavras-chave:** Pandemia de Covid-19, *Fake News*, Semântica Cognitiva, Mapas Mentais

## ABSTRACT

The Fake News phenomenon has permeated and tainted major events worldwide, affecting society's understanding of what is true and what is not. During the Covid-19 pandemic, the world faced not only difficulties in fighting the virus but was also bombarded with misinformation published in online platforms. The present study aims to propose an outline of how the pandemic of Covid-19 in 2020 in the United Kingdom was displayed, through news articles published in the website Politicalite.com. The theme is to understand the Fake News language, and how they hold the power to create concepts in the audience's imagery. A theoretical background on Journalism and Fake News is firstly presented, followed by the theoretical foundations of cognitive semantics, the linguistic framework in this research. The Prototype Theory of concepts is highlighted, especially the radial network representation, which inspired the mind maps displayed in this dissertation. In the methodology, noun phrases from fifteen pieces retrieved from the website are analyzed. This material shall be categorized into three conceptual constructions: China, Lockdown and Vaccine. After the selection, the noun phrases are comprised in mind maps, in order to fully visualize the conceptual construction of what these three components represent for the website. Next, there is an assessment of the results, and the conclusion points to China as the villain in the pandemic, Lockdown as a deadly concept and Vaccine as the salvation for the UK.

**Keywords:** Covid-19 pandemic; Fake News; Cognitive Semantics; Mind maps

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## 1 THESIS OVERVIEW: AN ATTEMPT TO CONCEPTUALIZE COVID-19

The year of 2020 started out with an event that was impossible to foresee: the worldwide pandemic of the novel Coronavirus. The outbreak of the new disease, also called COVID-19 or SARS-CoV-2, is reported to have started in the city of Wuhan, in China, in December of 2019. On January 30<sup>th</sup>, the World Health Organization (henceforth WHO) had already declared the disease to be a Public Health Emergency of International Concern with 7,818 cases confirmed globally, affecting 19 countries in five WHO regions. On March 11<sup>th</sup>, after recording more than 118.000 cases in 114 countries and over 4200 deaths, the illness reached the status of a pandemic.

The symptoms of Covid-19 vary, and they can lead up to complications such as pneumonia and acute respiratory distress syndrome, which can cause death. Most people who get the Covid-19 recover well and without permanent side-effects. However, what makes the novel Coronavirus so worrisome is how fast and easily it spreads from one person to another – according to WHO (2020), COVID-19 spreads through direct and indirect contact among people that are infected by the disease. Infected people release the virus into the air by coughing, sneezing, scratching the eyes or even from breathing.

This aspect has brought up the concept of physical social distancing, in order to limit close contact among infectious people and, therefore, diminish the cases which require hospital care. The WHO recommends that the physical distance of at least one meter from other people should be kept, which means that places with COVID-19 circulation must not have crowds, close-contact settings and confined and enclosed spaces with poor ventilation.

The concept of preventive social distancing has affected the society worldwide in profound ways, especially because, given that crowds or big groups of people are not allowed in order to restrict the contact and dissemination of the virus. This led many countries, regions and cities to impose quarantines, bans, restrictions and even lockdowns. By March 26<sup>th</sup>, 1.7 billion people had been ordered by their government to stay at home. In the first week of April, the estimative was that 3.9 billion people were recommended to stay home, which accounted for half of the world's population<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> JONES, Sam; KASSAM, Ashifa. Spain defends response to coronavirus as global cases exceed 500,000. **The guardian**. Madrid, 26 mar. 2020. Disponível em: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/26/spanish-coronavirus-deaths-slow-as-world-nears-500000-cases>. Acesso em: 17 ago. 2020.  
SANDFORD, Alasdair. Coronavirus: Half of humanity now on lockdown as 90 countries call for confinement. **Euronews**. 14 abr. 2020. Disponível em: <https://www.euronews.com/2020/04/02/coronavirus-in-europe-spain-s-death-toll-hits-10-000-after-record-950-new-deaths-in-24-hou>. Acesso em: 17 ago. 2020.

With people at home, economic and social problems started to arise all over the world, generating a huge global crisis, which has even been called “The great lockdown”, in a reference to the Great Depression in the 1920’s. April World Economic Outlook’s forecast for global growth in 2020 is a decrease in 3%, and in 2021, in the best-case scenario, to rebound in 6.8%. This means that the cumulative output losses over 2020 and 2021 from the pandemic crisis can be around 9 trillion dollars<sup>2</sup>.

Because of the economic difficulties, there is a denier movement, which includes a parcel of the world’s population and even some politicians, eager to get rid of the social distancing restrictions and leverage the economy. This line of thought used fake news, among other means, as a rhetorical method to disseminate their conspiracy theories and other stories to discredit authorities and go against the established social distancing requirements. As mentioned by Casero-Ripollés (2020), the epidemics of Covid-19 is showing important and profound effects in different realms of our society – and one of the most important extensions is in the news media, journalism and the mainstream media in general. According to this author, this happened because in March of 2020, the emergency of a health crisis fell into the spotlight of all the countries in the world, and, therefore, information on the outbreak became one of the most valuable resources for those who worried about the disease and the response to the crisis from their home country or location. Casero-Ripollés (2020) also states that information and communication practices have one of the most important impacts in society not only because they help build the knowledge that people have of their immediate reality, but also because it influences in the management of democratic institutions and power.

In February 2<sup>nd</sup>, two days after the recognition that Covid-19 was a matter of public concern, the WHO issued a regular report saying that the spread of the epidemic was followed closely by an *infodemic*, an overwhelming amount of information about the situation that could even damage public health (SCHULMAN; SIMAN-TOV, 2020). Then, the issue of fake news – disinformation shared freely through online media – came into discussion.

Given the prominence of Fake News during the biggest political events during the past years all over the world – including the presidential elections in Brazil, in the United States and in the Brexit referendum – there was a concern on the matter of citizens believing blindly and non-questioningly in news that did not pass on fact-checking proof. Moreover, the language in

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<sup>2</sup>GOPINATH, Gita. **The Great Lockdown**: worst economic downturn since the great depression. Worst Economic Downturn Since the Great Depression. 2020. Disponível em: <https://blogs.imf.org/2020/04/14/the-great-lockdown-worst-economic-downturn-since-the-great-depression/>. Acesso em: jul. 2020.

these articles also arises as a concern. The heavy usage of noun phrases implies meanings that have the power to create concepts in the audience's mind, without them even noticing.

It is important to keep in mind that newspapers – and all the media that works with written journalism – tends to present facts in a way that is properly arranged to create interest in the audience, and, therefore, it is possible to use this language to influence the reader's view of the world (HIGGINS; SMITH, 2013). In a healthy democracy, it is fundamental that people decide freely from content that tells the truth and is unbiased, mainly because if people are not properly informed, they will not be able to choose wisely.

The way in which language works and builds concepts in journalistic content is the theme of this dissertation. Fake News, even though it goes against the very core of standard journalism, which is to be true and unbiased, is still considered informative content, and, therefore, will be the research subject of this dissertation. More specifically, the scope will be a website called Politicalite.com, and the aim is to understand how articles published by this conservative news portal produced concepts within the scope of the Coronavirus pandemic. According to Schulman and Siman-Tov (2020), the spread of fake news in the epidemic context is not at all surprising, due to the fact that this moment creates a wide set of emotions and fears, which are fertile ground to draw the attention from the public and encourage content sharing.

This research aims to understand and theorize the conceptual construction of fake news and the disinformation and misinformation that they create, mainly because it leads people to be deceived by organizations that claim to be news broadcasters. Democracy is one of the most important foundations of modern society, and accurate information is the only type of orientation that should be ensured to its citizens. Linguistics is important in this sense, mainly because it is a study field that concerns and studies language, and the concepts created by the word constructions used in fake news are of utmost importance in understanding language. The linguistic constructions used in Fake News content have changed the course of world history and this research aims to understand, explain and combat this type of practice.

One of the most pivotal moments in the world's history in the last decade in world's political history was the referendum organized by the United Kingdom to decide if the nation maintained the European Union membership. The process is known as *Brexit* and has divided the opinions of the nation as well as the politicians. The results of the Brexit referendum were a surprise in 2016 – the opinion polls showed a divided country, but a slight preference for remaining. One of the reasons that sparked the interest in leaving the EU among the brits was the misinformation that came during the campaigning process. A good number of websites were

responsible for disseminating news articles that were not true and that shifted the citizen's mind about the way they understand foreign policies and create preconceived concepts about things that affect their everyday life.

Politicalite.com is one of these websites, and has been chosen to be the source for retrieving the pieces analyzed in this study. The news portal has the slogan “by the people, for the people”, and in its logo, it holds the United Kingdom's flag. It claims to be an independent news portal that is concerned with broadcasting non-reported news, made for the people and by the people (JAMES, 2019). They also mention that, in order to support the working class of Britain, the portal remains free of charge, and, therefore needs financial contribution to keep working. Their biggest objective to cover British, European and American Politics “in a provocative and easy to understand tabloid style and back free speech, the forgotten working classes” (JAMES, 2019)<sup>3</sup>. The website is divided in six important content categories: *Exclusives, ShowBiz, Media, USA, Brexit, Tories and Labour*.

The present study aims to analyze news that cover the Coronavirus outbreak in the website, in order to outline the construction of concepts by the usage of noun phrases in articles published in the website.

Thus, given the influence that the Fake News has shown in disseminating content all over the world, and how misinformation helped in the rise of populism, does the language used in Fake News websites have the power to concepts in readers minds? If this is confirmed, what kind of concepts are coined to the society? Do they reinforce stereotypes or create imageries by their choice of words – especially by the usage of noun phrases?

The main objective of this research is to propose an outline of how the pandemic of Covid-19 in 2020 in the United Kingdom was displayed, through news articles published in the website Politicalite.com. In order to develop this, the present study analyzes noun phrases from fifteen pieces retrieved from the website. This material shall be categorized into three conceptual constructions: China, Lockdown and Vaccine, and, after the noun phrases are selected, mind maps are displayed, in order to fully visualize the conceptual construction of what these three components represent for the website.

In order to set the foreground for the analysis, the present study will convey a theoretical discussion on journalism and fake news, aiming to explain standard parameters to journalistic practice that is accurate and informative. Next, a theoretical background on cognitive semantics

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<sup>3</sup> JAMES, Jordan. About Politicalite. **Politicalite.com**. Access in 9 dec. 2019. Disponível em: <<https://www.politicalite.com/about/>>.

will be displayed, including a theoretical framework concerning the prototype theory of concepts, and the theorization of noun phrases.

Finally, in analyzing the news stories published in the website, the concept construction of China, Lockdown and Vaccine from the Politicalite.com will be built from noun phrases correlated to the concepts already pointed. The maps aim to better envision the concepts that are formed by the articles, also help to show how the discourse is formed in the reader's mind.

As a theoretical foundation, the present thesis will have two chapters to expose the background that supports the analysis on the fake news content and the concepts created by them. In chapter two, under the title **Journalism and Fake News**, there is a first discussion on how journalism was created, its principles and its main objectives (ZELIZER, 2004; HOHFELDT, 2001; TANDOC, LIM, LING, 2018; REAH, 1998, MCQUAIL, 2013) and there is a general understanding that news are supposed to inform, while presenting content that is accurate and unbiased. However, a movement of distrust in mainstream media companies can be perceived, which is a result of many decades in which the news outlets manipulated what got into the public's attention and what did not. With the advent of the internet and social media, there was a popularization of the publishers, because now anyone has the power to share whatever they deem important on their social media profiles – even if it is not fact-checked. In this sense, the study presented the guidelines of two relevant media companies – Reuters Agency and BBC – in order to look for standard principles that guide the journalists in their everyday practice. As a result, the thesis pointed out accuracy and transparency, claiming that responsible and trustworthy journalism should be true and unbiased (REUTERS, 2008; BBC, 2020; IRETON; 2018). Next, there was an overview on the Fake News phenomenon, pointing it to be an information disorder. Mostly, it is possible to say that it can be conveyed by means of misinformation – when someone shares something believing that it is true, when in fact it is not – and disinformation – knowingly inaccurate content that gets published, which configures a lie. If we consider articles, which is the case in the analysis of this study, it is possible to claim that it has three major characteristics that support its identity as Fake News – first, the content is low in facticity, second, it is conveyed in journalistic format, and third, it has the intention to deceive. There is also a discussion on what forms fake news can take and what are their biggest consequences in terms of democracy, economy and society (BAKIR, MCSTAY, 2018; WARDLE, DERAKHSHAN, 2018; TANDOC, LIM, LING, 2018; EGELHOFER, LECHELER, 2019; ROSE, 2017; ALLCOTT, GENTZKOW, 2017). Last, if fake news takes on form from real news articles, it is imperative to contemplate the very base of stories in news

articles: the language. There is a discussion on the discursive and rhetoric created by the language of newspapers. One of the biggest assumptions is the idea that the audience is both affected and influences the meanings retrieved by the content they choose to read. Moreover, this language, absorbing the ideology from its writers, can also ensure and petrify certain stereotypes within the society's mentality (CONBOY, 2010; SMITH, HIGGINS, 2013; ZELIZER, 2004, FOWLER, 1991).

Moving on from this point, the next chapter presents a linguistic overview on cognitive semantics and the noun phrase. The section starts discussing the communication process in the mind of the speaker of a language, and presents structures that are native to communication, such as the core, the context and the modificational process (TALMY, 2000). After this debate, the chapter presents some views on meaning of the words, stating that the meaning – and, therefore, effective communication – comes from choice. Cognitive semantics then comes to light, which takes a maximalist view because it considers language as in the context of cognition. The language is then flexible, goes beyond the boundaries of a word and accepts contextual clues to draw its definitions. If the meaning is cognitive – in the head – it is concluded that constructions have a symbolic facet, which enables the speaker to create concepts within the mind, based on his or her experience of the world (GÄRDENFORS, 1999; LANGACKER, 2009; GEERAERTS, 2010). According to prototype theory, concepts are clusters of words that revolve around a standard member – focal salient points – of said concept. And then, given that the study considers grammatical constructions in the light of prototypicality, radial networks are the best choice of representation, based on the characteristics of this type of cognitive concept. After discussing the multifaceted prototypicality, the next section on this chapter assesses the noun phrase, considered indefinitely complex, but taking on nouns and adjectives as constituent parts, which will be the grammatical structure used to build the conceptual maps in the analysis of Politicalite.com fake news content. After some distinctions are made concerning the nature of nouns and adjectives, the noun phrase is scrutinized in a cognitive point of view, expressing that the nominal expression tends to be comprehended fully synchronized, combining both their meaning and functions (QUIRK, GREENBAUM, LEECH, 1985; MURPHY, 1990, POTTER; FAULCONER, 1979; LANGACKER, 2008).

In the following chapter, the study intends to analyze the conceptual creation of news published in Politicalite.com, using articles that concern the Coronavirus Pandemic in the news portal. In terms of methodology, the three themes – China, Lockdown/Quarantine and Vaccine - are separated in a section and every section contains a brief summary of each piece used,

alongside a chart displaying all the noun phrases retrieved to build the mind maps, created through the platform Coggle, and are presented in the end of each section. In the end of this chapter, the noun phrases compiled in each section will be further discussed, in a more general assessment of what conceptual construction was created by each one of the maps.

In the final part of the thesis, the conclusions from the chapters before will be brought back to the discussion, in order to offer a more thorough reflexive exercise on the power of media, fake news and language.

## 2 JOURNALISM AND FAKE NEWS

One of the main ways to describe and define the happenings in the world are through news. According to Zelizer (2004), journalism is related to the set of actions associated with news work, and references the collection, preparation and distribution of news. The author also points out journalism represents a specific method of organizing and recounting facts that mark the world's history, which differs from other types of registering the happenings of the world – such as rumours and hearsay – especially because of the expertise involved in the process. In the modern world, journalism presents reports, storytelling and commentaries in the public media, but the most important contribution of the field to society is the news.

The word *news*, says Reah (1998, p.4), comes from Middle English and the meaning refers to “tidings, new information of recent events”, and, literally, invokes the action of describing something new. In the search of a more accurate definition to modern times, the author claims that news is “information about recent events that are of interest to a sufficiently large group, or that may affect the lives of a sufficiently large group” (REAH, 1998, p.4).

It is important to highlight that, if we stick to the “recent event” part of the definition, there is a second problem, considering all the events that happen every day in the world, who decides what goes to the newspaper? Technically, newspapers cannot publish all the happenings in the world; therefore, there is a selection and a choice of what gets published and what does not. According to Zelizer (2004), drawing from Stephens (1988), news can be considered new information about someone of public interest, and this information is shared with a portion of the public. The referred sharing reflects on what is on the mindset or culture of a society.

The word *news* can be perceived both as new information about something and also as the report of certain happenings, characterizing, at the same time, the material being reported and the report itself. In a journalistic sense and for this study, the focus is in the latter, aiming mainly to understand the language used in certain pieces of a material classified as news. Zelizer (2004) points out that this duality in the word *news* can reinforce the authority of journalists in a way that the reality that the person writing the piece of news becomes the reality itself. This fact can change the whole perception of the world from the reader's point of view.

News is, as stated by Tandoc, Lim and Ling (2018), the output of journalism, which, as a field, is expected to deliver information that is independent, reliable, accurate and comprehensive. Moreover, it is expected from journalism to document, broadcast and inform the truth, as a result of its main objective which is to give the society the information it needs

to be free and self-governing. And, for that, it is imperative for journalistic content to be truthful. As a consequence, the authors mention that journalists hold an influential position within the society, which confers and broadens the legitimacy of what they report.

Just as it was previously instantiated, according to the authors, news is a social construction. This means that journalists have a subjective judgment when composing an article, deciding what information gets in and what does not, which sources are going to be interviewed and who is not, and which words are going to be used to build the report (TANDOC; LIM; LING, 2018).

According to Hohlfeldt (2001), the newsmaking hypothesis explains some media scheduling procedures, and exactly why some subjects receive more relevance than others. The theory emphasizes that the production of information ends up turning everyday events into news. The journalist, from this perspective, is a gatekeeper of the information conveyed, filtering what reaches the citizen in a concise way – not being understood as a censorship, for not having an explicitly ideological bias, but for characterizing a movement carried out during the routinely production of information. In this way, there are professional norms that overcome subjectivity in the selection of what becomes news and what does not reach the public.

One of the reasons pointed out for such a movement to happen is the fact that the communication processes assume the function of social control based on nationalized and socialized practices among its professionals. Thus, the role of gatekeeper for the journalist is established, still dependent on certain perspectives and influences such as the institutional authority where he or she works, feelings of fidelity to the company and its superiors, their aspirations for social mobility and pleasure with what he does. As a consequence, the news has become a concept, coined in and by society (HOHLFELDT, 2001).

It should be noted that the distorted gatekeeping is not explicitly voluntary, since it does not arise from a conscious desire by the journalist, but from an institutionalized intervention based on the journalistic function. They are called inferential structures, which do not necessarily mean manipulation, mainly because they are involuntary and unconscious distortions, the result of all the factors mentioned above, which end up interfering in the content that reaches the general public. Despite not being intentional, these distortions can reach radical and dangerous levels, as stated by Hohlfeldt (2001), since journalists can omit or even neglect certain events that can be important and significant, such as social movements of the most diverse strands.

It thus denotes a specific logic of the mass media that disregards the interests of the receiver and meets a certain requirement for informational production from the atmosphere created by journalists, which, in turn, is predetermined by concepts that do not meet the greatest needs in society's interest. The journalistic praxis, explains Hohlfeldt (2001) in the light of the Newsmaking hypothesis, must be based on these phases:

- a) Enable the recognition of a hitherto unknown fact as something remarkable to be reported;
- b) Produce reports that manage to take the event from the particular level to a generalized (contextualized) level;
- c) Analyze the fact in space-time, thus explaining the events reported in a rational and planned way.

Thus, a professional culture is formed, which the author places as “a tangle of rhetoric and tactics, codes, stereotypes and symbols related to the mass media, which create and maintain professional paradigms and self-images” (HOHLFELDT, 2001, p. 208). Therefore, the author concludes, the news is what the journalist – guided by all his precepts already unraveled – defines as such. Moreover, an event only becomes news when it enters the agenda of the audience that will receive it. The journalistic practice is also governed by news values, which are elements and principles used by journalists in the media to transform a potential event into something worth notifying the masses. These values are a set of practical rules that end up justifying operational and editorial procedures, determining what goes to the consumer and what does not. They allow the construction of a journalistic narrative or complete historical oblivion.

Journalists respond to entities bigger than themselves – the means of communication for whom they work – and it is up to the professional to write an event in history. Nevertheless, there is the old challenge about how media companies – responsible for mainstream journalism – end up hiding certain subjects from public debate, generating dissatisfaction among different segments of the population. Social networks appear as a herald for the unheard, with potential tools for broadcasting an organic event, without the intermediation and investigation that characterize the practice of a journalist. However, when talking about the process of creating the news that goes into the audience's awareness cognition, some aspects are imperative – accuracy and impartiality, which are very important values to mainstream news outlets, such as Reuters and BBC, as it will be discussed next.

## 2.1 REUTERS AND BBC: A VIEW ON MAINSTREAM JOURNALISM STANDARD VALUES

The principles of journalistic performance should be a concern of all those who engage in communication activities – showing what is happening in the world should respect certain boundaries. McQuail (2013) points out the principles of journalistic practice: truth, freedom, solidarity, order and cohesion. These aspects, the author says, are guidelines to be followed by journalists and confer potential contribution to the society and public interest. In the first one, *the truth*, the author points out that there is a general expectation that the journalists, in their practice, shall provide a trustworthy recounting of the relevant aspects of the happening. This value, according to McQuail (2013), has its roots in the fifteenth to seventeenth century, in which the humanistic and scientific renaissance became prominent, and the truth was established by scientific evidence and theories. The author mentions that the meaning of truth as an accurate report of reality is reinforced by law, government and commerce and, as journalism was born in the midst of this, it reflects a new society, in which every act must be verified to be considered true and have value.

In the current society, McQuail (2013) says, truth in journalism represents neutral, reliable, verifiable reporting, with interpretation and analysis from prominent experts. The truth in a journalistic sense is also identified with the idea of objectivity, in a sense that it is important to emphasize neutrality and balance from the point of view of the reporter. Besides, the truth is the fundament of social responsibility of the press, in a way that journalism has the mission to tell only accurate facts to the public.

The making of a news article is a dire reflection from the journalist's course of action. If we consider that a newspaper – or even news digital portals – has to deliver an account of what, where, when and with whom something happened, the very least readers expect is that the published content before their eyes is true. Therefore, a paramount aspect of journalistic practice relies on accuracy.

In this section of the chapter, two big news organization's values are examined. First, there is a view on Reuters Agency handbook (2008) and this company was chosen because they are the holders of a reputation that proceeds worldwide, with broadcasters and news companies hiring and publishing their stories and news articles, which configures a symbol of well-made journalism. They claim to be a stateless global news organization, and they claim to believe it is exactly because of this inherent feature that they are enabled to report impartially from all sides of a conflict or general happening.

The other organization to be featured in this part of the study is the state news company British Broadcasting Corporation, the BBC, from the United Kingdom. They are established by a Royal Charter – a constitutional basis signed by the Queen, created by the Secretary of Culture, Media and Sport and passed by the parliament and funded by a license fee paid by the British people. Because of their commitment to the British society, they declare to be impartial and independent, aiming to create recurrent content of the highest quality, that informs, educates and entertains millions of people in the UK and around the world. Moreover, as it is going to be more thoroughly explained further, their biggest mission is to broadcast impartial news in order to make people better informed to deal with the world.

As stated in the Reuters' handbook of Journalism, it is supposed to be the heart of their everyday praxis – and they even consider to be more important to publish something right than to publish something first. Considering their reliable reputation in news broadcasting all over the world, they consider to be their professional responsibilities the accuracy, the speed and exclusivity of their news. Moreover, they sustain that the utmost important aspirations of journalists – or content creators, for that matter – is to “search for and report the truth, fairly, honestly and unfailingly” (REUTERS, 2008, p. 1).

Their most important value, as it was presented before, is indeed the accuracy – which they claim to entail mainly honesty in sourcing. When writing a news article, a journalist should preferably use named sources, given that they are responsible for the information used in the news. Even when using the most suitable and reliable sources, the journalist must cross-check the information received, and two sources are better than just one. Also, in order to better sustain the accuracy, the writer of the piece must be honest about their sources and about the way they get the information. Context and details are of fundamental importance, especially about the sources used, mainly because they authenticate the information provided by said sources. Furthermore, accuracy always trumps being the first when broadcasting an event to the world – beyond companies, journalists are held accountable for what they write and publish, so, if it is not true, they shall face questioning about their actions and motivations. (REUTERS, 2008).

Another important aspect that is mentioned as one of their foundation values is *freedom from bias*. In the guidebook, Reuters (2008) claims to invite diversity within their doors, whilst asking the employees to remove national and politic interests from their journalistic practice. They consider the neutrality to be a hallmark of their news brand, but it is also something that holds a journalistic practice trustworthy and believable, enabling journalists to report all sides of an issue “without any agenda other than accurate, fair reporting” (REUTERS, 2008, p.11).

As it was mentioned in the handbook, the text and visual stories need to reflect on all sides of an event, which they claim to lead to better journalistic practice, because it requires the writers of the story to constantly ask themselves what they already know about the event and what they still need to learn. In this sense, the guidebook recommends the journalist to consider carefully their choice of words, because the lexical choices can convey and root certain views on a source – some verbs can create doubt, take sides or even deliver implications of editorial judgement. “Thinking about language can only improve our writing and our journalism” (REUTERS, 2008, p.11).

According to Newman (2019), in the Reuters’s Digital News Report of 2019, the world is facing rising populism, political and economic instability, along with the concern towards gigantic tech companies and their impact on society. The report shows that one recent trend among news consumers is that people are beginning to question whether the news media are fulfilling their basic mission of holding important people accountable and also being helpful with the world around them. There’s an overall idea, says the report, that the mainstream news companies do a better job in breaking the news than actually explaining what happens – and this shows the general distrust in the mediatic power. This builds room to distrust of mainstream mediatic channels – that have their own problems and reasons to be criticized, but still offer a more serious option in informing the world.

In a more British view on journalism, the state news company BBC aims to “act in the public interest, serving all audiences through the provision of impartial, high-quality and distinctive output and services which inform, educate and entertain” (BBC, 2020). Besides, they declare to have established independence from the government, with editorial and artistic freedom. This freedom enables the company to provide impartial news and information, with the main goal of helping the society to understand and engage with the world. Another important objective in BBC’s mission is to “reflect, represent and serve the diverse communities of all of the United Kingdom’s nations and regions and, in doing so, support the creative economy across the United Kingdom” (BBC, 2020).

Their guidelines state that they have a right to freedom of expression, which is bound by the Human Rights Act of 1998. They also mention that this freedom is essential to their independence, given that they believe their audiences have a right to get content without external interference. This stance must be balanced with the responsibilities to audiences and contributors. In terms of accountability, they claim to operate in public interest when they report, publish or broadcast stories of significance to the audiences whilst also being held

accountable by their actions. In this sense, in terms of journalism practice, they seek to establish the truth, combining the highest standards in order to produce a coverage of facts that is fair and accurate. In a more complete sense, they are committed to achieve “due accuracy in all its output” (BBC, 2020). The word *due* is used in a sense that this said accuracy must be adequate and appropriate, while considering carefully the content’s subject and nature and the probable audience. “The BBC must not knowingly and materially mislead its audiences. We should not distort known facts, present invented material as fact or otherwise undermine our audiences’ trust in our content” (BBC, 2020).

Moreover, they highlight the importance of the impartiality in their processes, while also reflecting the views and experiences of the audiences. They also state their belief that the commitment to impartiality is the basis of their reputation, their values and the overall trust of audiences. According to their guidelines, the due impartiality has to consider more than just a balance between points of view. On the contrary, it is vital to be inclusive and to take on a broader perspective of different views, which does not necessarily mean absolute neutrality. Their main commitment, they say, is to offer a wide range of perspectives on the matter as a whole, serving an appropriate timeframe that best presents every significant line of thought or defense, not leaving anyone under-represented.

We can draw the conclusion, based on both of the guidelines presented in the section that both accuracy and impartiality are vital and fundamental values to journalistic or content-creation practice, mainly because of the power that global news organizations hold whilst gatekeepers of democracy in modern society. In addition to these views, Reah (1998) also states that newspapers are to present facts in a way that they attract the interest and also curiosity from the audience. Through language, the author states that newspapers can indeed present facts in a way that affects the readers’ views on a happening. While asking the question whether newspapers should be impartial, Reah (1998) accesses that bias is not necessarily a problem – and the UK press itself has some clear examples of newspapers having an open left/labor or right/conservative inclination – but the problem is what system is supported, and, more significantly, how this process happens. In her words: “A mature, healthy democracy needs a system that will allow members of that democracy to decide freely and in an informed manner by what system they want to live. If people are not given the information, it is difficult for them to exercise their choices appropriately” (REAH, 1998, p.10).

As a result of the analysis on guidelines and values on journalism and content creating practices of two big news organizations, it is possible to assess that both of the companies aim

to deliver accurate and impartial pieces of news to their audiences, providing them the best possible information. Ireton (2018) says that journalists have, for a long time, held a position as support players in democratic and open societies. And, even though it is important to highlight that journalistic practice is not completely free from bias – which can display ideological ideas for gender, ethnicity, linguistic grouping or even class –, it also does not completely leave behind the guidance for systemic view of institutional concerns, such as business models or audience interests.

As the world entered the 21<sup>st</sup> century, a shift in the media that conveys the news was noticed – now, the society has the internet, with its endless possibilities for communication. With the world wide web, everyone in the world is connected, and the access to production and distribution of news content is now easier to access (McQuail, 2013). And, even though this is not exclusive to online methods, now anyone can distribute content online to a big public and low cost, and the media loses its identification with ‘mass public’, and becomes concerned with a more individualized audience, that is free to create their own personalized packet of news. Putting the reader in the central point of an axial relationship, participation is boosted, with more active exchanges and facilitation of the information flow. According to McQuail (2013), the decentralization of the media leads to more diversity and equality, removing the monopoly and control from the established market forces that commanded the past eras of communication. However, warns McQuail (2013), the fragmentation and deprofessionalization of journalistic practice can lead to the obstruction of the accountability in news, and can also raise doubts about the reliability and credibility of news on online sources.

Editorial ethics, like the ones that have been assessed in the previous pages, are indeed a reference for other journalists all over the world, leading them to reflect about how to create content without being blinded by their own worldviews and contexts. The author states that we should remember that journalistic stance and practice does not come from nowhere. Further, it needs to be transparent to raise compliance from the public, presenting high standards of verifiability and public interest, no matter what is covered or what are the perspectives. From the ethical guidelines – which entail accuracy and impartiality – the news organizations’ reputation is built and the trust on these companies relies on the fact that they will deliver accurate, complete, impartial and truthful content.

In this sense, Ireton (2018) mentions, trust in journalistic practice has been a problem for a long time, which was accelerated by the growing audience engagement with social media. According to the author, even though the rapid advance in digital technology and internet

enabled personal devices has interfered with the society's view on journalism, it would be a wrong view on a long ongoing process of distrust on newspapers. There is an inherent relationship between trust and journalist capacity, Ireton (2018) says, and the decline on media trust has followed a trend on a similar worldwide declining trust in governments, businesses and institutions. Moreover, the structural changes on how journalism is made, published and broadcasted have also exposed the news industry in terms of quality of news coverage. In sum, even though the digital transformation has, indeed, changed positively the storytelling of happenings in the world, bringing on new methodologies to make the audience even more engaged with the content, this approximation to the public has also proposed bigger challenges for the producers (IRETON, 2018).

In terms of accuracy, Ireton (2018) mentions that the pre-digital journalistic practice and method had professional standards and different levels of checks and controls to make sure the broadcast content was qualified and fair before it got to the public. There was a focus on a gatekeeper model – where field reporters had a newsroom team to verify the content before it was published – ensured a sense of professionalism in journalists. And while they had the mission to cover community issues, investigations, commentary and analysis, the journalists were responsible to hold politicians to account, and therefore they assisted the community to make the choices of how they were going to be governed or ruled.

After sometime, however, with changes on how people get informed, and also how empowered they are by digital tools, such as computers, tablets and smartphones, the newsmaking process has been shifted – now the society not only witnesses the happenings, but also records, comments and publishes content on social media platforms. This has led to making people believe that they can produce journalistic content themselves, especially given the easy access to technological apparatus that the general public now holds in the palm of their hands (IRETON, 2018).

This trend also came to meet the decay of overall trust in media, as a result of the process in which some media institutions have not met the standards for quality journalism. Moreover, with social media being such an open space for sharing information, it represents, as Ireton (2018) states, key infrastructure for public and political discourse, which are forced into cybernetic public-square debates. As a result, the author mentions, modern societies have been challenged, receiving questions about a democratic deficit.

Since compliance to the norms that should rule the creation and dissemination of news is not mandatory for these new content producers, Ireton (2018) claims that the platforms have

not declared any support or even accountability towards the normative obligations that abide journalistic practice. Furthermore, she says that these producers do not usually employ journalists, alternatively curating and editing content, which makes them not only intermediaries on the publishing of news, but responsible for what gets to the public.

Therefore, social networks end up assuming a role of contesting mainstream media narratives. As Castells (2007) points out, the media – and journalism - do not influence an audience solely by the discourse it conveys, but also by what it ceases to convey. In addition to that, the author assesses that, if something does not exist in the media, it also does not exist in the public knowledge. Accordingly, a political message will always be a message in the media, encoded in the specialized media language.

In terms of dangers to democratic societies for not complying to the accurate, accountable and ethically produced news content, these websites have been “affecting the citizens understanding of reality and undermining trust, informed dialogue, a shared sense of reality, mutual consent and participation” (IRETON, 2018, p.36). Yet, social media can be a transformational force in terms of providing powerful tools to engage citizens with information and promote debates, values and participation, in an environment that encourages knowledge and informs about human rights, diversity and science.

Pursuant to the view of rebuilding the trust in journalistic practice in digital environments, Ireton (2018) presents five principles that were coined in the World Editors Forum, recommending the editors to:

- Value the professional ethics, credibility, independence, accuracy, transparency and pluralism in order to ensure a relationship of trust with the public;
- Question and verify material that circulates in social media is what distinguishes next-level journalism from other types of content;
- Serve society no matter what, concerning it as the biggest and most important mission of journalism, and journalists do so by providing high quality information, ensuring news companies as trusted sources for such content;
- Require in-depth analysis of the facts, going beyond the event and encouraging investigative reporting, which puts journalistic practice as more than provision of news, as a tool that empowers their readers to make sense of the world;
- Be driven mostly by trust and to be guided by the principles of social relevance, legitimate interest and truthfulness.

Ireton (2018) also states that, as news organizations comply with these editorial principles, there are some guidelines to journalists and newsrooms as well. These recommendations aim to improve the content published, broadcast to the audiences by:

- Showing accountability and ethical journalistic practice, guided by evidence-based reporting;
- Fact-checking and contest disinformation and misinformation;
- Verification of data, sources and images
- And engagement with the communities, making sure that the news agenda comprehends the society's needs.

This last point concerns one of the facts by which the population in the United Kingdom has shown so much rejection and discredit towards mainstream press in the last decade, mentions the author. There was a disconnection between the news organizations and the public, and this was particularly brought into attention during the election to decide if the UK would leave or remain in the European Union. Because of said detachment of news coverage, the information that circulated in social media was more interesting and centered in the public's needs. Direct engagement is one of the biggest strengths of social media content, and, in addition to that, it is necessary that media companies explore how they can better serve their audiences, building trust in the process and reinforcing their relationship. One of the most important results of this process is the exploration of new ways of how well done and reliable journalism can ensure an accurate informed decision-making process, and therefore, democracy as a whole.

## 2.2 FAKE NEWS – DISINFORMATION AND MISINFORMATION

Based on the facts presented in the previous section, it is possible to point out that the content classified as fake news poses a threat to the democracy and rejoices on growing mistrust on mainstream media. But before even analyzing fake news articles – which is the main aspect of this thesis – it is important to first answer the question: what is Fake News?

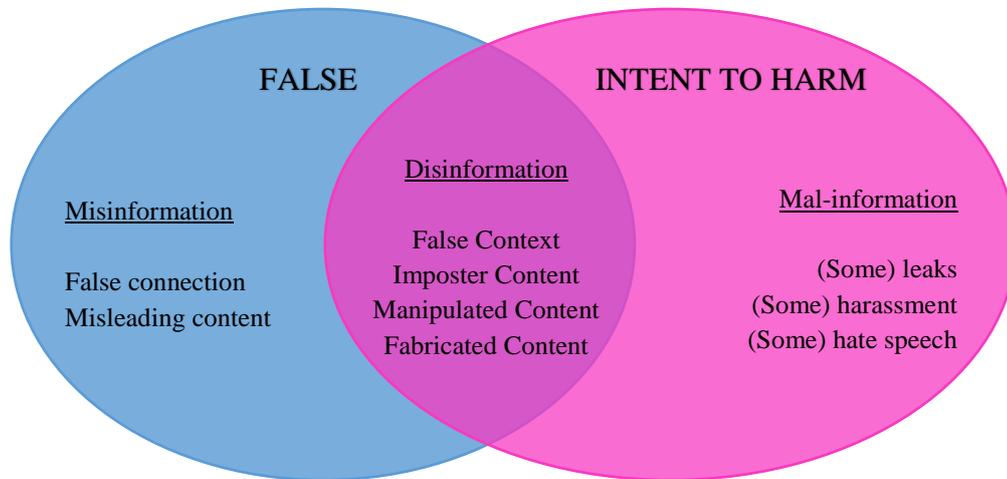
Even though the phenomenon of Fake News has been brought to attention recently, Bakir and McStay (2018), claim that it is not particularly new. The issue, they claim, has to be understood as a branch of long standing systematic, political and commercial efforts to bring propaganda to the society, manipulating their views within the safety of being in a liberal democracy. The authors point that this propaganda can also comprehend public relations and political marketing.

Before even considering a more thorough discussion on fake news itself, it is important to think about it as an information disorder. Additionally, in line with what Wardle and Derakhshan (2018) mention, the phenomenon can be politicized and used against the entire news industry, aiming to hurt the reputation of reporting from news organizations that politicians in power do not like or want to see discredited.

Tandoc, Lim and Ling (2018), in their work to define fake news as a typology of scholarly definitions, agree on the fact with the usage of this term is used to discredit the critical reporting developed by certain news organizations. In conformity with this view, Egelhofer and Lecheler (2019) state that the fake news terminology can stand for two different meanings and usages – what the authors call two-dimensional phenomenon. The first one sees fake news as a *genre*, and it refers to misinformation published with the specific intention of misleading the reader. The other view is *a label*, which is put on certain news pieces that are not favorable to particular political actors. Therefore, said actors recognize the article as fake, even though it is true and it damages their reputation. The aim is to use the term to hurt the news vehicle's reputation and delegitimize any information that taints their political agenda.

In this sense, one of the first distinctions which are made to start discussing the fake news phenomenon is to build up the ideas of misinformation and disinformation. As stated by Wardle and Derakhshan (2018), misinformation is the sharing of false or incorrect information, but the person who is sharing does not know that it is fake, and believes it to be true. On the other hand, when people know that they are sharing content that is untrue, the phenomenon is called disinformation – and it is considered a deliberate and intentional lie, making the actors involved in the process as malicious and deceiving audiences. The authors also present a third facet, called malinformation, which is the information that is indeed true but is used by their publishers as a weapon to hurt the reputation of a person or an organization.

As the authors say, separating what is true from what is false – when considering the whole fake news ordeal, and taking into account that sometimes they can indeed be true or false – is important. But even more so is to understand the intention from the author of said content. It is vital to understand why he creates, produces and distributes this content with the intention to undermine a reputation rather than to serve the community in which it is inserted (WARDLE; DERAKHSHAN, 2018). Some of the news articles to be analyzed further by this thesis can be considered a mixture of the three facets presented by the authors, which are best viewed in the scheme below, also proposed by Wardle and Derakhshan (2018):

**Figure 1 – Information disorder**

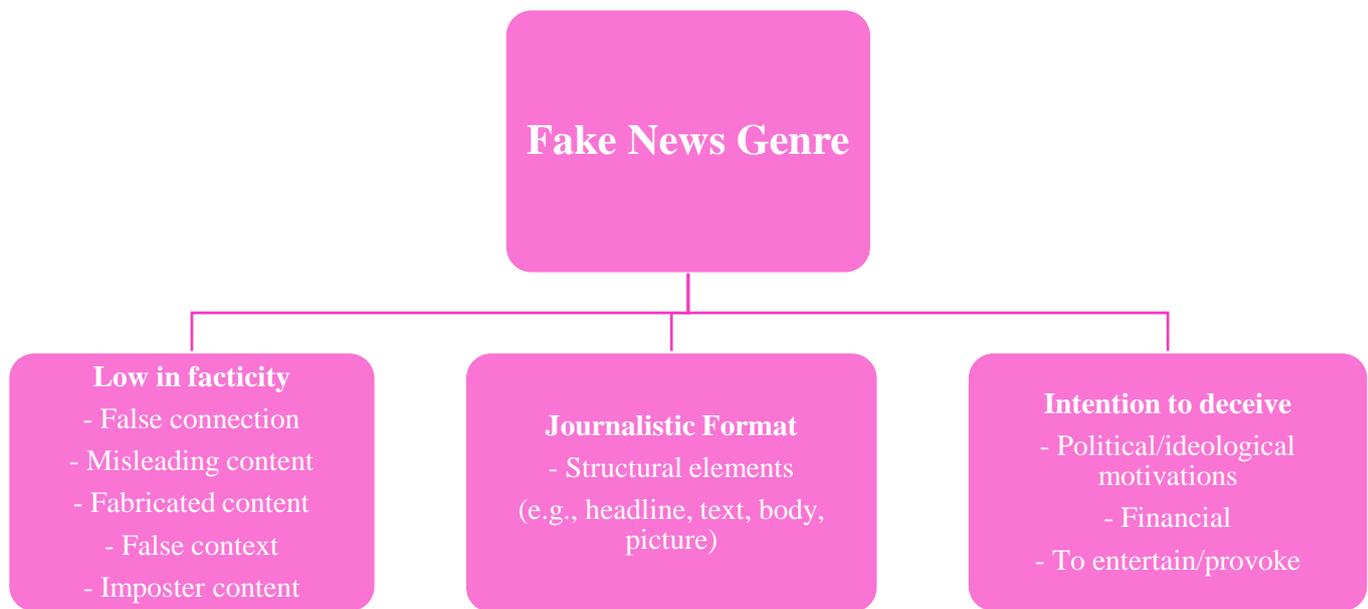
**Source:** WARDLE; DERAKHSHAN, 2018, p.44.

Egelhofer and Lecheler (2019) agree on the fact that false news should be studied according to the concepts of disinformation and misinformation. They say that both forms are often used interchangeably, but misinformation – just like the word *Mistake*, in English, means unintentional error – represents the sharing of incorrect or misleading information unintentionally and without knowing that they do not match. Disinformation, on the other hand, encompasses the production and sharing of content deliberately disclosed, with the intention of lying. Although both facets often selected present in content determined to be false, and have imprecision as a decisive factor for their characterization, they end up divided by the intentionality of the messenger.

On their studies, Egelhofer and Lecheler (2018) define Fake News as a label, as presented before, but their most meaningful assessment on the phenomenon is their view on it as a genre. According to the authors, Fake News are “deliberately created pseudo-journalistic disinformation” and as a label “a political instrument to delegitimize news media” (EGELHOVER; LECHELER, 2019, p.98). Moreover, the authors define that a piece of news, in order to be considered ‘fake news’, should correspond to three fundamental aspects. The first one is to consider the piece low in facticity; the second is to be presented on a journalistic format; and third, but not least important, the piece was created with the intention to deceive. A central idea conveyed by the authors is that fake news has false information, including manipulated content, wrong contexts, poor connections or even misleading texts.

Moreover, in keeping with Egelhofer and Lecheler (2019), even if there are real facts inserted in the context of the article in question, the article is not disqualified from the position of false news, and it does not matter if its content is completely manufactured or only partially untrue, connected to true information. Check below a diagram that the authors present as a mapping of the characteristics of the fake news.

**Figure 2** – *Characteristics of the Fake News genre*



**Source:** EGELHOFER; LECHELER, 2019, p. 99

One of the central points in the characterization of false news according to Egelhofer and Lecheler (2019) is the fact that it presents itself in a way that refers to the journalistic format. In other words, at the same time that these websites deny the relevance and importance of journalistic companies, they still somehow recognize their position as gatekeepers of power institutions. Therefore, the fake news creators follow the stylistic legacy left by mainstream journalistic companies, since these producers seek to imitate media content through form. Even if false news does not necessarily mean lies, it must be seen at least as an imitation of news. By bringing a stylistic presentation with a headline, body of text and an image, the information has a journalistic guise, giving the impression that it has gone through all stages of news production, such as research, investigation, selection of suitable sources and fact checking. As Egelhofer and Lecheler (2018) describe, Fake News are pseudo-journalistic articles.

In terms of structure, scholars point out that fake news articles tend to be smaller than the ones published by classic news outlets. Even though the fake articles occupy a lot of space on a page, when they are analyzed in number of characters, they are still smaller in content – and less informative – than articles published in mainstream vehicles. They also tend to use a less complex and more personal language – seeking emotional connection – and presenting very long headlines, which in theory should bring a main statement to be conveyed content.

The third structure of the triad shown in the chart refers to the fact that the false part of the false news is always intentional, since nobody produces inaccurate information in a journalistic format without being aware of the lack of truth about it (EGELHOFER; LECHLER, 2018). Among the most relevant reasons for this intentional deception is the fact that the creation of false news is always intentional, even though its dissemination and sharing may be unintentional. This facet of fake news also concerns motivations about the reasons that lead someone to set up a fake news site – after all, if all the shared fake content has a purpose, what motivates people to want to produce and share lies?

According to the authors, most fake news comes from websites that are developed specifically to spread this kind of content. Generally, the articles are pseudo-journalistic and are short-lived, precisely because they fail to build a good reputation in the long term. The main goal of these producers is to become very famous very quickly, then experience a peak of hits, and, as a result, generate a lot of income from clicks on shocking news that go viral. Given that they are named similarly from news portals, and are also organized visually and stylistically in a way that resembles them, it is possible to say that in the very conception of these sites can be identified the purpose to at least confound their readers (EGELHOFER; LECHLER, 2019).

In their search for defining a typology for fake news, Tandoc, Lim and Ling (2018) propose six operations of fake news, which have been curated from previous studies. The first of them is the news satire, and they refer to mock news programs, taking up humor or exaggeration to inform the audiences. The second proposal is the news parody – even though they share a lot in common with the satire, the parody presents non-factual information to the audience, in order to create humor but also to serve as watchdogs of the press. Next, they discuss photo manipulation, which is the manipulation of real images and videos to create a false narrative about an event or a person. There is also what they call a misappropriation, which happens when a picture was not changed by any means, but is taken from its original context, in order to build or illustrate a different narrative. In the fourth place, they bring the Advertising or Public Relations, in order to describe news articles published which are actually press

releases in disguise. Propaganda, the second to last fake news type coined by the authors, refer to news stories produced by a political entity in order to influence public perceptions, which may benefit a public figure, organization or government.

The last and most concerning form created by the authors is the **news fabrication**, representing what is understood as fake news. This mode refers to articles that hold no accurate foundations but get published in news article style, therefore being considered legitimate. In this form, Tandoc, Lim and Ling (2018) claim that there is no implicit understanding between the author and the reader that the content conveyed is fake, therefore, the producer intends to create the disinformation. Moreover, it is very hard for the audience to distinguish fabricated fake news from what is real, especially when it gets a political character. In instances in which partisan organizations publish these stories, taking on an objective and balanced reporting facet, it is particularly hard for readers to understand that the content is false.

An important point, according to the authors, is that these items are usually shared organically in social media, and they get the readers' attention because the content was conveyed by people the reader know and trust. The authors also bring into light another relevant motivation for the creation of false news. They claim that the success of false news is closely related to pre-existing social tension, such as serious political, sectarian, racial or cultural differences. In terms of the news fabrication form, the financial motivation that drives the producers of fake news is worthy of attention. According to the authors, the interest into broadcasting fake news goes beyond political reasons. It concerns attracting clicks and accesses to the website, which, consequently, attracts advertisers and money to the picture (TANDOC; LIM; LING, 2018).

Following this idea, Egelhofer and Lecheler (2019) point to the advent of the internet and social networking sites present in modern democracies among the causes that generate false news. In modern society, we are all able to speak what we want and to broadcast it as absolute truths, which enables citizens to break with the establishment of power. This process empties the content of meaning, fostered by the mainstream press, and creates fertile soil for the proliferation of false news.

Rose (2017) supports this by stating that a relevant motivation for producers of this type of content is the large number of views to their websites, given that they profit from online marketing advertising, which pays accordingly to the number of clicks a website gets. In sum, the more access a website receives, the most money its owners get, which makes them create more content that attracts the audience's attention. According to Rose (2017), this generates a

vicious cycle, because news is increasingly consumed online and, as a result, goes viral, making fake news a growing challenge:

However, in order to reach the highest levels of user engagement, and therefore generate the most money, fake news often tries to reinforce sincerely held beliefs while providing a supplementary narrative that “the authorities” or “the mainstream media” do not want you to know about it. It appears that politics has provided fertile ground for such fake news, possibly because of the existence of well-demarcated “sides” standing in opposition to each other. As news increasingly becomes something that is consumed online, and also increasingly shared virally, the challenge posed by fake news will surely grow rather than diminish. (ROSE, 2017, p. 555)

As stated by Allcott and Gentzkow (2017), in a study about the impact of fake news and social media in the American presidential elections of 2016, the democracy and society tend to be constantly remodeled by changes in technology. In the 19th century, newsprint finally became cheaper and there was an explosion of partisan newspapers. Radio and television shows transformed the way the audience perceived electoral runs and specialists became concerned that the debates would privilege more charismatic candidates. In beginning of the new millennium, the world of digital news was in the center of worries. One of the most recurring was that the excess of viewpoints would create an echo chamber, in which citizens who had similar views about certain subjects would stick together, and, therefore, be excused from contact of different perspectives.

The consequences of fake news to the society mostly concern social and private effects, as Allcott and Gentzkow (2017) mention. Even though this type of content appears to be useful to some consumers, it makes it harder for a parcel of the audience to make sense of the truthful conditions of the world. Moreover, the authors state, when we consider the market insertion of fake news producers, there are even bigger risks. For instance, consumers who do not differentiate fake from real outlets of news have less-accurate views and beliefs of the world.

As a result, these less-accurate beliefs lead to the reduction of positive social externalities, making the democratic process less capable of selecting high-quality representatives. Another consequence – which can be even considered a cause, as we have presented before – is that, because of the difficulty in discerning what are legitimate news portals and which are not, the audience can become even more doubtful of the mainstream journalism companies. Combining all of these effects, there are supply-side responses: “a reduced demand for high-precision, low-bias reporting will reduce the incentives to invest in accurate reporting and truthfully reporting signals” (ALLCOTT; GENTZKOW, 2017, p. 219).

Finally, some common points among all of the definitions presented are the appropriation of look and feel of real news, which include the overall appearance of the websites, the writing of the articles and how the pictures are distributed. Most importantly – the fake news “hides under a veneer of legitimacy as it takes on some form of credibility by trying to appear like real news” (TANDOC; LING; LIM, 2018). As both a consequence and a cause, there is the recognition of distrust of general mainstream news outlets, and as a result there is a general undermining of journalistic legitimacy.

As it was already explained above, one of the canonical characteristics of fake news is the fact that they are structured stylistically as journalistic content, so that it attracts the reader in his search for the information that he would find on a news portal. Therefore, assumptions about the use of journalistic language apply to fake news content, such as those that will be analyzed in the next section, alongside a discussion on the language of newspapers, concerning how journalistic discourse takes place, and in what way words and structures can build narratives.

### 2.3 LANGUAGE OF NEWSPAPERS

When we come to think about the prominent role of language within the journalistic field, it instantly brings to mind a core position, mainly because it indeed serves a rightful privileged position in the construction of journalistic discourse. Conboy (2010) reported, adjusting to view postulated by Bell (1984), newspapers had to, throughout history, adapt their format in order to adequate their narrative according to social, political and technological changes. Starting from the point of journalism as an exercise in audience design, it is assumed that the language conveyed in journalism has always followed a pattern of what would be most interesting to the people who would read – and buy them.

This is true for every printed media since the invention of printed press – when Johannes Gutemberg created the device, in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the first book to be produced was a copy of the Bible. Given the status – in terms of money and ideology – power of the catholic church during this period, this fact is not so surprising. Before the invention of the movable type machine, one would have to be very rich and erudite to own and use a handmade bible, because it cost a lot of money and time to make it, and most of the population was actually illiterate. But ever since the invention of the printing press, other books and written forms of communication were made possible within accessible means.

Conboy (2010) mentions that, after the 15<sup>th</sup> century, information was not controlled by central political and ecclesiastical powers anymore, because the possession of extensive information about the world was considered a commodity capital, even getting the status of political and economic survival. Easy, fast and affordable printing made the flow of official and unofficial news feasible. This means that the application of news technologies was responsible for the inversion of social hierarchies of control over communication, because now, the printers were able to challenge the political intentions of the elites. As a result, the editors of the informational pamphlets had to mix the popular appeal – which characterized oral literature – in the construction of the news essays.

Thus, we can infer, language has always been a certain point of power in the journalistic practice. Conboy (2010) also states that language is a social activity, which journalists take beyond the individual interaction and make it an extended imagined discourse, so that the readers' identities can be materialized into the pages. Furthermore, as it has been mentioned before, newspapers have always been more interested in creating readers, not news. This means that, lying within the informational function of the newspaper, it is possible to identify ideological implications in the news conveyed to particular audiences, and point out that newspapers in general create public identities for social groups and also individuals through the chosen range of textual strategies. Drawing on Carey's (1989) theory of the ritual view of communication, the author claims that the media's biggest concern is indeed the re-creation and reconfirmation of social groups. This ritual counts on language as the foundation of the ritualization created by the media, which means that each group holds the ability to spot their own vernacular. A consequence, thus, is that the newspapers – or any kind of media broadcaster, which includes the news portal analyzed by this study – in order to maintain their social, geographical, demographic and political readership, have to keep up with a certain kind of language that speaks to this public.

In addition to this, the author then makes use of the semiology theory, from the linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, in order to denaturalize the everyday language use. Conboy (2010) uses one of the most common dichotomies by Saussure (1966) to explain how certain binary oppositions from his famous theories can help make inferences in a newspaper's language analysis. The dichotomy presented is the *langue/parole*. According to this theory, *langue* stands for the structure of a certain language, whereas the *parole* is the actual malleable use of this said language. In a more thorough sense, the first item is to be understood as the systematic structuring of a news language, including its ideal grammatical rules and institutional norms of

news value (what is important and what is not). In terms of *parole*, the vernacular echoes of the publication have to be considered, which means understanding the socially targeted and idealized audience. When contemplating an analysis on texts published by news agencies or portals, Conboy (2010) says that there has always been a presupposed negotiation in the dynamic between the intended structure and what the reader looks for in a news article. As a result, these perspectives have guided the newspapers since the earliest of times, because their main attempt is to keep their view using the language of everyday use – with excellence – in their news.

Reah (1998) theorizes that, more than presenting the society with the facts that happened during the day, including some analysis and comment, the newspapers have a commercial and political role in the society. In western democracies – such as the United Kingdom, the audience of the website analyzed in the present study – there is a view of free press, which configures a matter of ideological importance. The author claims that, even though this issue is not stated by the national constitution, this is an aspect of the democracy that is seen as inherent: “something that we pride ourselves on, but perhaps do not examine too closely” (REAH, 1998, p. 3).

According to the author, these decisions about what gets to the newspaper and what does not make the pages are entirely editorial, due to the fact that there is one person that chooses the news that are worthy of publication from the point of view of the reader. Furthermore, if they remove an item based on the belief that the readers will not be interested in this content, it does not necessarily and automatically mean that the information is not worthy of wide knowledge or necessary. This selection of items can indeed affect the way the general society understands and interprets the world, and certain decisions can indeed happen in order to hide or conceal information from the public, and others are shown to benefit certain groups in relation to other groups. This happens, claims Reah (1998), because the owner of a newspaper holds the power to influence the content of said paper, including also its political point and its editorial perspective. Moreover, there is a general problem concerning the concentration of ownership of newspapers in the United Kingdom – by 1995, seven companies own 21 newspapers – which is a problem for the ideal of press freedom.

In the simplest sense of communication, the idea is to carry a message from a sender to a receiver. This serves for daily exchanges of signs but also for the complex and intricate discursive networks observed in journalism, with his articles and reports. A common denominator in journalistic reports – may them be on newspapers, TV, radio or even online – is the fact that the journalist needs to use the language to convey its message. According to

Smith and Higgins (2013), the practice of journalism goes beyond looking for stories that are suitable for reporting. However, they have to be able to reconstruct these events in a way that highlights the worthiest characteristics of the events to become news.

In terms of linguistics, says Zelizer (2004), we have to consider language as the heart of journalism, mainly because news articles emerge from the combination of formal features of language, including grammar, syntax and vocabulary. Other aspects, which are related more closely to a creative stance, include storytelling frames, textual patterns and narratives.

In this way, understanding the language of journalism is fundamental for the general understanding of a society that is governed by it. The analysis of the language used in news articles allows us to observe how the construction of a story takes place and how each linguistic construction ends up shaping the content in the way that the public will understand it. More than investigating an event, a journalist is responsible for working with the language that will guide the reader's emotional understanding (SMITH; HIGGINS, 2013).

According to these authors, language is a determining factor of the human race, and, because of its dynamic and mutable character, the social context of language is decisive in its operation within the news. More than the words used, the reader's linguistic input – his knowledge of the world, what he thinks and what ideology he identifies with – is defined by a common sense of social identity, which journalism will be responsible for fostering in its practice.

Language, still according to Smith and Higgins (2013), is highly identity and, for this reason, gives power to those who hold it in society. Journalistic language confers certain powers, in addition to influencing society's decision-making. The hierarchical distribution of the idea of social prevalence creates a dependency within the scope of journalistic content. Therefore, the opinions of certain people are more important and credible than others.

Moreover, Smith and Higgins (2013) state, language is political, exactly because it can be used to persuade, argue, inform and expose, which makes it impossible to be neutral. This happens due to the fact that the journalist speaks to different communities of understanding and, therefore, all the lexical choices have layers of meaning that cross points of view. These choices end up rejecting the partiality of the producer of journalistic content in their daily praxis.

The language is still configured as an instrument modulated according to the circumstances in which the journalist is placed, serving certain proposals that need to be fulfilled. Because it is a media – means, if we go to the root of the word, from Latin – it can be

used to legitimize inequalities and maintain unjust social relationships. It can empower or even take away the power of an institution (SMITH; HIGGINS, 2013).

The linguistic construction of a news piece is also responsible for the way in which groups of people are represented and how their relations with power are measured. According to Fowler (1991), the discourse is configured in a constructive practice, since events and happenings do not have a neutral communication, given that whoever reports these facts makes semantic choices within a set of available options. The language allows us to place objects in space-time, classifying them according to certain categories that are known as common sense.

This common sense, however, becomes very dangerous, as it can create constructions that will originate socially and institutionally based ideologies. As Fowler (1991) states, we place and infringe sense on the world by characterizing phenomena, including people. Once we understand a person as the personification of a type, our personal relationship with him or her is simplified, since they are reduced to pre-existing categories in our mind.

These categories, Fowler (1991) mentions, contain people with different characteristics of behavior and attitudes, which can become a stereotype – an extremely simplistic mental model that does not allow us to understand people by their singularities, but by the values appropriate to the type that the person belongs.

Also commenting on language, Reah (1998) states that language can be a powerful tool, mainly because its most prominent responsibility is to present the world to an audience, and this mission has to be non-explicit. Moreover, she argues, it is particularly hard to keep from a particular ideological point of view when the audience is not aware of it.

If we consider that all the content on a newspaper takes form in words, the language used to write it represents the biggest transmitter of an ideology. If we consider a message – in a communicational sense – transmitted through a language, it is possible to say that this message will have encoded values, which are conveyed from the usage of the language. For instance, the author says that if within a social context, a group of people or a belief is a target for cultural reasons, the language for expressing these ideas will reflect the negative attitude about them. As a result, Reah (1998) claims, when this ideology finds space in written words – a lexicon from a language – in a newspaper or an article in a partisan news outlet, the audience will have their own ideological attitudes reinforced by the way language presents the fact to them.

According to Reah (1998), language can operate in different levels, which include a visual or graphological level, as well as the lexical and syntactic level. Moreover, these levels occur within a cultural context – which means that they not only are born within this culture,

but also operate their discourse within the value system of this culture. This view is corroborated by Fowler (1991), who claims that representation in the press is a constructive process. This happens because, as the author mentions, events cannot be transmitted freely from a medium, given that they need means to build a concept or an idea. This medium holds its own inherent structures, permeated with social values that create a potential perspective on the event.

Fowler (1991) then states that each medium – photography, film, language – has possible choices of usage, and each option is taken with a systematic regularity which will follow circumstances, conveying conventional meanings. When we look for this in a medium like the English language, it is important to consider a social and economically varied culture, and the chosen words – which is represented by the semantics field, to be analyzed more thoroughly in the following section – make up concepts designated by social semantic settings, from their origins. In her theory, Fowler (1991) explains that newspapers hold onto a linguistic characteristic style, which not only marks a group but also illustrates a characteristic representation of an experience. The vocabulary, she states, maps out the concerns of a register and its users, and also accentuates the usual worries of the readers – as a result, the language projects values on the subjects of discourse.

Most importantly, when we consider a journalistic text – or the subject of this study, the fake news content – we have to consider the reader as going through an active and creative practice. As it will be better explained in the next chapter, mental schemas are actively deployed when the audience is exposed to journalistic content, and processing strategies are put into place. These structures are already positioned in the reader's repertoire, and, when they encounter the journalistic object, they project this previous knowledge in order to make sense of the narrative. Its relevance and communicational success depend strictly on context and mental structures from the audience. "Perspective is a cultural, historically, delimited schema" (FOWLER, 1991, p.43). This previous context makes it possible for a news outlet to share a common discursive competence – when relevant mental models or schemas are confirmed during the act of reading a report. The author claims, then, that the newspaper and its readers compose the meaning of the text together, concerning the stipulations of the appropriate discourse, which were released by the writer of the story using significant linguistic options.

This chapter presented an overview on the principles of journalistic practice, taking on examples from respectable news outlets – the Reuters News Agency and the BBC, both important media companies in the United Kingdom. The highlighted characteristics from responsible journalistic practice were accuracy and impartiality. Next, the Fake News

phenomenon was examined, pointing out important structures to be further analyzed in chapter 3. According to the authors, this kind of pseudojournalistic content aims to look like legitimate news articles, but with the intention to deceive the readers with untrue or out of context information. Lastly, the journalistic format and language was examined, and the most relevant conclusion pointed out that words in stories aim to create a relationship with the audience, and they represent and are coined from the ideology based in the author's perspective. This part leads on to the next chapter, dedicated solely to the linguistic framework, aiming to explain cognitive semantics and how concepts are created in a person's mind.

### 3 COGNITION, SEMANTICS AND THE NOUN PHRASE: A VIEW ON THE LINGUISTIC CONSTRUCTION OF NEWS

Given the last discussion on how journalism is made – or at least supposed to take form – it is possible to infer that, because of the fact that journalism uses some form of language to present the facts to the society. Every time a news article is published, it is possible to analyze it linguistically. Most importantly, due to the focus on fake news content, the present study aims to prove that certain choices of constructional language used on these forms of informational content build concepts in the minds of the readers. In order to better explain this hypothesis, we present an overview on semantics, the part of linguistics that studies the meaning of words, how they are constructed and also the way they relate to the real world. But first, the idea of communication is presented, in a cognitive view, that has the responsibility to present the line of study in this chapter.

Journalism – and even more importantly, newspaper journalism – is considered a vital part of social communication studies. The very idea of communication – a producer that sends a message to a receptor – is widely used to understand mass media as a whole, the sense intended by the producers, the actual sent message and the effects on the receivers.

The production of communication, claims Talmy (2000), is, from the psychological point of view, a “vector resultant” of a set of simultaneous conditions within the producer, including what is the communicative objective correlated to what expressions are available. So, when one wants to engage on a communicative action, the outcome will comprise what expressions one has in their repertoire combined to what one aims to say. According to Talmy (2000), the communication-producing system has structural properties that make it possible to deal with possible internal discrepancies, always respecting the priorities of the communication – what is the information that I want to pass on to a receptor? – and using what means are available to piece all the constructions together to meet the goals set in the first place.

Talmy (2000) presents then the Nature of communication, which includes three levels of inclusivity, which shall be important to understand the analysis on the articles in the following chapters.

The first part pointed out by the author is **the communicative core**, which is a psychological operative process. All humans have this from a very early age, and it is conceived as a need, a desire or an urge to replicate to others whatever is experienced, apprehended or felt.

The second point is **the larger context**, which is the aspect that conditions the core by one’s awareness of oneself and the addressee, and also of the entire situation where the

communicative action takes place. This happens because the communication is not limited only by its successful comprehension, but it is extended to having interpersonal effects or to avoid certain interpersonal effects. In this sense, “the basic core of communicative functioning is both responsive to and creative of – or, in short, is integrated within – the larger context” (TALMY, 2000, p.339).

The third part is the **modification process**, which assumes that the components of the core in the communicative process do not share an inviolate collective unity together, given that every day we omit parts of discourse, transform others, resume others in a larger system or even appropriate certain parts to service in another function. One of the most important modifications, in the scope of this study, is the omission of a component. As Talmy (2000) claims, one of the standard components of the core of communication is the intention: the fact that a person intends to communicate certain contents. These contents usually follow the information that one is open to share about oneself and one’s thoughts and behavior, and these aspects are conveyed through unintended aspects of the message itself.

The cognitive system of communication also involves other factors, which include evolution, impairment, cultural differences, development, individual differences and language typology and diachrony. The present chapter highlights the idea of *Individual differences*, in which as per Talmy (2000), the balance in the communication system – the three aspects discussed previously – tends to change in accordance with differences in the goals, means and capabilities that occur in different people. As a result of this, one person differs from another not only in strengths and priorities of goals, but also in the facility that he or she has in fulfilling these communicational goals. Also, communicators differ from one another in their aptitude of using expressive means. For instance, given the goal of expressing a certain idea, a person has to recur to ideas in speech, use the most apt vocabulary items in order to form complex constructions out of common words.

In terms of communication goals, Talmy (2000) describes a few goals that refer to the communicative functioning, complying with individual communicative goals. He claims that the list does not concern any psychological reality as a discrete unit, nor are the goals listed in it understood as a non-overlapping, gapless, and exhaustive coverage of purposive communication. He states that the list has a heuristic character, whose main objective is to map out the extent and try to contour the domain of purposive communication. Most importantly, the main goal of communication, according to him, is: “To get certain phenomenological

content existing within oneself (ideas, feelings, perceptions, and so on) replicated within certain addressees” (TALMY, 2000, p.343-344).

**Chart 1** – Goals in communication

<u>Goals of communication per se</u>	To get certain phenomenological content existing within oneself (ideas, feelings, perceptions, and so on) replicated within certain addressees.
Goals pertaining to the content of a communication	To manifest (or to project an image of) one’s character, mood, or attitude (toward the topic, addressee, situation and so on);
Goals pertaining to the content of a communication	To conform to “felicity”: a communication system’s preferences among expressive means (relative to a particular style;

Source: Adapted from Talmy (2000), p.343-344.

Considering the chart, which is fully displayed in the attachment 1 of this thesis, the goals d and g are going to be further discussed. The last one concerns a cognitive view on the process of holding a communication process, and will be presented first. As related by Talmy (2000), the production of a communication follows a two-stage process – therefore, a schema.

The first stage regards the communication’s overall formal and contentful structure in the individual. This part is generated by unconscious processes that unite the moment’s communicative goals and conditions. In this stage, the person communicating assesses a small set of “target structures”, which have been previously learned and he or she will choose from the preferred or the most common for the particular context. In the next stage, the person produces the communication, following the schematic outline and detailing the general aspects with items such as lexical choices, syntax and so on. In many cases, the second stage actually merges with the first one, and the schema is filled in before the communication’s production.

The author claims that this schema concerns all kinds of communicative actions, including speaking and writing. So, it is possible to say that a journalist – or any kind of content creator for that matter – when writing an article, creates a general idea on his or her head, based on what he or she wants to say, reflecting their ideas and perceptions of the world. Next, this writer combines this content to be put into words and constructs a structure that will be sent to the reader. In order to be fully understood, the structure has to occur within a context in which the communication has the specific intended meaning, using particular communication means.

As Talmy (2000) says, every expressive means of a communicative system – whose content is also presented in a chart in the attachments section – holds arbitrary gaps and subsequent limitations, and it is the communicator’s responsibility to work in various proportions to piece all of them together in order to fulfill the communicative goals. One of the most relevant means of communication for the purpose of this thesis is the Systemic, which

conveys the particular language/communication system used in a communication. The Ideational is also important, which comprises lexical items, other morphemes and lexicalization. The third features Structural and Relational means, more specifically the nominal's grammatical relation within the utterance.

**Chart 2** – Expressive means of communication

Systemic	The particular language/communication system
Ideational	Lexical items/other morphemes/lexicalization
Structural and relational	A nominal's grammatical relation

Source: Adapted from Talmy (2000), p.346.

Moving backwards a little, there will be some discussion on the goal on letter d, from chart 1. When we talk about the influence of the communicator's character, mood or attitude, it is important to highlight that this characterizes a momentary style. So, the person will select language items – such as vocabulary and syntax – that involve the whole social and psychological context in which the communicator is situated in. Therefore, via style, one can express one's character as the working class, as feeling vulnerable or as approving or disapproving of a situation.

This aspect conforms to goal g, that states the felicity of a communication. Here, Talmy explains that words and constructions – means described in chart 2 as c and j – are not entered in a person's mind like in a dictionary or a grammar book. These ideas enter with various additional qualities and relative weights, and they bear the responsibility of constituting an intrapreferential dimension among the means of a communication system. The felicity aspect is what makes a communication – such as a news article – something intelligible and well-constructed in a person's mind.

It is well known that language is an instrument to communication – and Lyons (1977) even claims it to be a complete truism. In addition, he presents the fact that there is an inherent connection between meaning and communication, basically because we cannot pass on information without using words. He conceptualizes communication as the intentional transmission of information by the means of established signaling-system and, according to him, the most important and recurrent form of this transmission is the language.

A signal – the message sent from the sender towards the receiver – is only communicative (and therefore, effective) only if the outcome information is intended by the sender, and after getting it, the receiver is aware of something that he or she did not previously know. Hence, the communicative feature of a signal lies on the possibility of choice and selection by the sender. The selection of a lexical alternative among different possibilities of

words as a condition to meaningfulness (effective communication) is one of the foundations of semantics. “Meaning, or meaningfulness, implies choice” (LYONS, 1977, p.33). The field that concerns the study of meaning is called semantics.

According to Gärdenfors (1999), there are two main approaches to study formal semantics – the realistic and the cognitive. The difference between them is based on what kind of entities are the meanings of the words. In the first theory, the realistic, the meaning of an expression is something out in the world, whereas cognitive semantics identifies meanings of expressions within mental entities.

The realistic formal semantics is divided into two flavors – the extensional and the intensional. In the extensional sphere, claims Gärdenfors (1999), the speaker starts out from language L, and maps the constituents of this said L onto a world. The main objective of this field of semantics is to determine the truth conditions for the sentences in L, and one of the most prominent consequences of this approach is that the meaning of an expression turns out to be independent of how users understand it.

The intensional semantics understands the language L configured onto a set of possible worlds, instead of a single world. Therefore, the objective is to provide truth conditions for the sentences in L. In this case, Gärdenfors (1999) says, the meaning of a sentence is comprehended as a proposition, identified with a set of possible worlds in which the sentence can be true. These are the most classical and formal approaches of semantics, and now the cognitivist view will be presented; and it will be the one chosen in this research to fundament the news articles’ analyses on.

### 3.1 COGNITIVE SEMANTICS – AN APPROACH ON THE MIND

The core of Cognitive Semantics lays on the notion that the meaning of expressions is mental and that the semantics field is a mapping from the linguistic expressions to cognitive structures (GÄRDENFORS, 1999). In this sense, cognitive semantics sees language as a part of an independent standing, with an emphasis on the lexical meaning rather than on the meaning of sentences.

Conforming to this idea, Geeraerts (2010) describes the cognitive semantics as a maximalist line of study within the semantic field, especially because a distinction among pragmatics and semantics is not needed. Here, the author explains, the language has to be understood in the context of cognition – with language use as the methodological basis of linguistics.

According to this author, there are three main ideas of a cognitive linguistic conception of language. The first one is a belief in the flexibility of meaning (contextual and pragmatic), which inspires an investigation on how language use leads to change; moreover, the dynamism of meaning manifests on the structure of categories. The second one concerns the conviction that the meaning is a cognitive phenomenon that goes beyond the limits of the word, which points to a description of meaning structures and semantic mechanisms that outpaces the lexical level. And the third and last one claims that the meaning of a word depends on perspectivization, which explores the fact that each word meaning relates one thing in terms of another – new concepts only exist because they relate to already existing ones.

Gärdenfors (1999) then maps out six main tenets that give a programmatic presentation on cognitive semantics, basing his work in Lakoff (1987), Langacker (1987), Jackendoff (1983, 1990), Fauconnier (1985), Talmy (1988), Sweetser (1990) and others. The first tenet presented claims that “meaning is conceptualization in a cognitive model (not truth conditions in possible words)” (GÄRDENFORS, 1999, p.21). In sum, this tenet is related with the very famous cognitive semantics’s maxim *meanings are in the head*. In line with this, Gärdenfors (1999) claims that the semantics for a language represents, in this field of study, a mapping from the expressions of the language towards some mental entities, with no necessary form of truth conditions to determine its meaning. This is a consequence of the fact that the truth is secondary within this theoretical framework, since it concerns the relation between the mental structure and the world. The author states simply that meaning comes before the truth.

The second tenet states that the “cognitive models are mainly perceptually determined (meaning is not independent of perception)” (GÄRDENFORS, 1999, p.21). With this postulate, the author presents the concept that since the cognitive structures in our heads are connected to our perceptual mechanisms, meanings have to be at least partially grounded. This means that we can only talk about what we see and hear, and we create pictures – mental or real – of what we read or listen to. A consequence, is that whenever presented with language, we must translate the visual form of the representation into the linguistic code. A central hypothesis of cognitive semantics claims that we store perceptions in our memories in the same way as the meanings of the words.

A third tenet according to the author states that “Semantic elements are based on special or topological objects (not symbols that can be composed according to some system of rules)” (GÄRDENFORS, 1999, p.22). In this sense, the mental structures hereby used represent the meanings of the linguistic expressions, and there is nothing else besides the mind when it comes

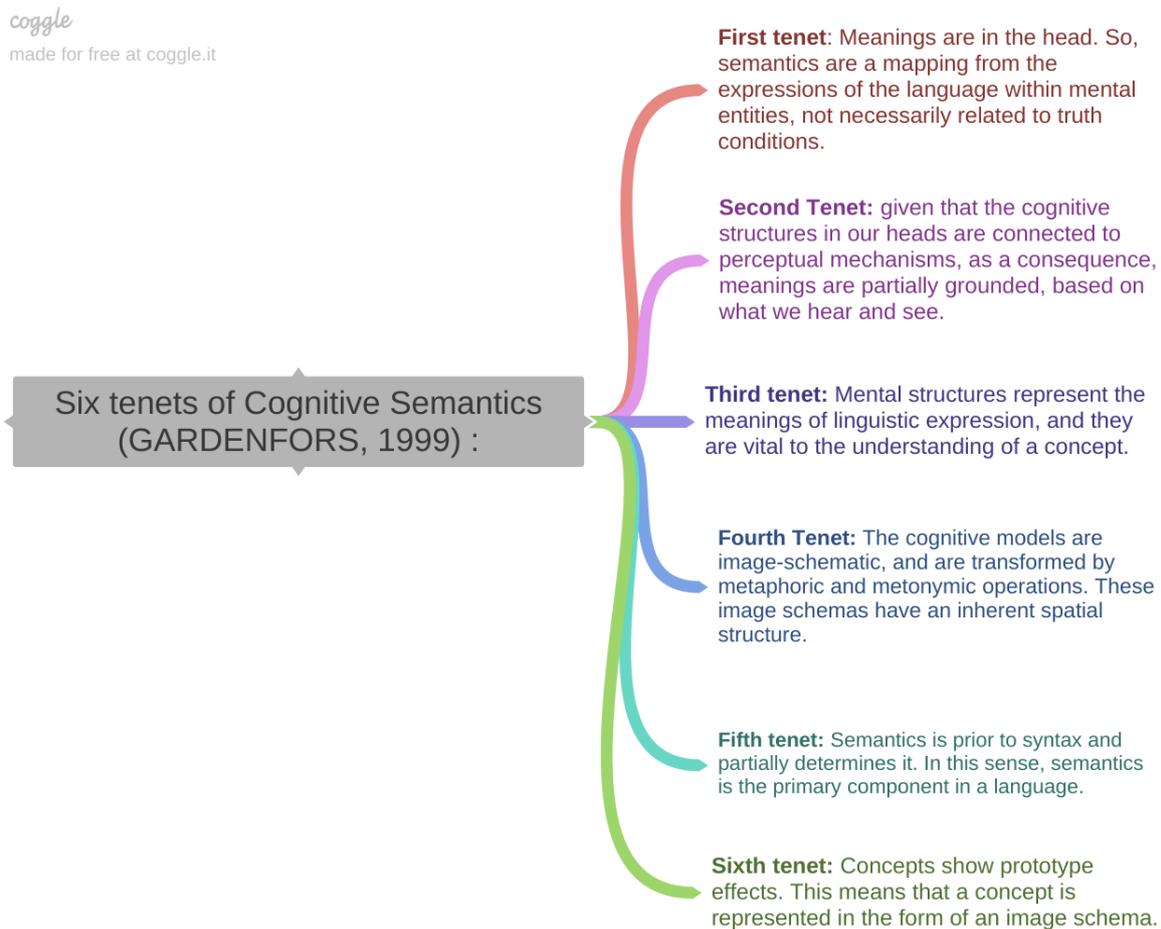
to conceptual structures to something outside the mind. The author then presents the idea of a conceptual space, which consists of a number of quality dimensions, such as color, pitch, temperature, weight, among others. According to him, some of these features appear to be inherent and are already hardwired in our nervous system, whilst others are presumably learned. The process of learning new concepts comprises an expansion on the conceptual space with new quality dimensions.

The fourth tenet regards what the author sees as the most important semantic structure in cognitive semantics and says that “Cognitive models are primarily image-schematic (not propositional). Image-schemas are transformed by metaphoric and metonymic operations (which are treated as exceptional features in the traditional view)” (GÄRDENFORS, 1999, p.23). In this sense, we are presented with the image schema, which has an inherent spatial structure.

The fifth tenet concerns the structure and function of language, and says that “Semantics is primary to syntax and partly determines it (syntax cannot be described independently of semantics)” (GÄRDENFORS, 1999, p.24). This view goes against the Chomskyan tradition in linguistics, that sees grammar as a formality that can be described as a system of rules which are built independently of the meaning of the expressions used. According to the tenet presented, in cognitive linguistics, semantics is the primary component in a language, and, if we are talking about the form of perceptual representations, it is believed that the meaning of words existed even before language was completely developed.

The sixth and last tenet says that “Concepts show prototype effects instead of following the Aristotelian paradigm based on necessary and sufficient conditions” (GÄRDENFORS, 1999, p.25). The theoretical framework of prototype theory (which shall be discussed next), appears as a consequence of a dissatisfaction with the classical theory of concepts. It first appeared in the cognitive psychology theory and states that a concept is represented in the form of an image schema, and these schemas can have variations just like concepts. Therefore, when analyzing a concept, one must look for prototype effects of concepts.

**Figure 3** – Six tenets of Cognitive Semantics according to Gardenfors (1999)



Source: the author (2020).

### 3.1.1 Constructions in grammar and prototypes

As mentioned before, cognitive semantics proposes a different view on grammar, getting away from the meaning-free view theorized by the generative grammar, a groundbreaking work done by Chomsky. According to Langacker (2009), it is not a matter of questioning the existence of grammar, but rather to question what it is like. Next, the author asserts that the grammatical constructions within cognitive grammar diverge from the standard assumption mainly because it believes that grammar is symbolic by nature and it focuses on constructions as the primary object of description. The present study will present mind maps made from noun phrases – a construction very well described within Langacker’s work.

The refusal of the autonomy of syntax (and grammar, for that matter) comes in a sense that Langacker (2009) claims it to be fully predictable in terms of meaning and other factors. This is what he calls weak autonomy, and it entails that grammar just does not emerge

automatically, given that children still have to learn it and it is described by linguists over time. However, it is important to note that this has nothing to do with the nature of grammatical structure, which is the theme of the second part of his postulates. He calls this strong autonomy, and claims that grammar is indeed autonomous because it is different from the lexicon and semantics, establishing a second level of representation that demands a special set of irreducible grammatical primitives.

Cognitive Grammar understands that the lexicon, morphology and syntax build a continuum, divided only into discrete components. Hence, it presents that lexicon and grammar are **assemblies of symbolic structures**. These are symbolic structures made from a pairing between a semantic pole and a phonological pole. One of the most important consequences of this framework is that grammar is not seen as distinct from semantics, but formed by it, given that it incorporates semantics as one of its constituting poles. Other possible conclusions hold that the grammatical description is not based on special and irreducible grammatical primitives, but on symbolic structures, which can be reduced from form-meaning pairing. One last consequence is the fact that every construction hypothesized in grammatical description admits a semantic pole and is meaningful, even though the meaning is schematic.

When presenting basic semantic notions, Langacker (2009) explains that, generally speaking, within the cognitive framework of semantics, meaning is connected to the idea of conceptualization. And, fundamentally, it is vital in semantics to be able to point the construction the same situation using alternate ways (mean the same thing with different words). In order to construe different structures, one must comprise different dimensions.

One of them is the level of specificity or schematicity in which a situation is featured. It refers to the amount of precision and detail that characterizes a structure. For example: Person -> European -> British -> Englishman -> Smart Englishman. It is possible to have the same entity as a referent for all of the words enlisted, but there is a hierarchy to coarse-grained to fine-grained concepts.

The second aspect is the multifaceted perspective, which has to be adopted by the person announcing the sentence, and it is a matter of viewpoint. Let's take a look at these sentences: go on up to the attic/come up to the attic. Given that no kind of place adverbials appear in the sentences, the verb is the word that shows the place where the speaker is, and it will change based on the location of he or she.

The third one is prominence, it is highly related to semantic terms, and it is one of the most important aspect in order to discuss prototypical constructions. It concerns a degree of

salience that a word holds within a construction. This aspect is divided into two categories: profiling and trajector/landmark.

When we consider an expression, a conception is recalled from our memory, may it be simple or complex, and it serves as the foundation of its meaning. Inside its conceptual base, the speaker chooses and separates a profile, which is a particular substructure to focus the attention in. This substructure is considered the conceptual referent of the expression. For example, when we say the words wife or daughter, the profiles female arise, because gender is the profile for these expressions. If we compare daughter to son, for example, we have a semantic contrast not based on a conceptual content – because both refer to offspring of humans – but of choice on profile.

A profile can be a thing or a relationship, claims Langacker (2009), and the first one is not constrained to only objects or physical entities and relationships do not always involve multiple participants. For instance, adjectives tend to serve a one-participant relation, mainly because they situate a participant on a scale – a *stupid* person is someone located downwards in a scale of intelligence.

Furthermore, in the case of profile relationships, it is necessary to present a second kind of prominence that comprises the degree of prominence that each participant holds in the profiled relation. The most important participant is called the Trajector, and this is the participant that is characterized by the expression. The secondary participant is the Landmark.

Word classes that comprise relationships – such as verbs, adjectives, adverbs and prepositions – take different forms of it. In the cases of verbs, for example, they usually have an evolution through time, so they are usually considered processes. But adjectives, for example, are non-processual, which means that the relationship is seen from a holistic view, and they are not sequentially comprehended by the cognitive system.

According to Cruse (2002), creating concepts is one of the most important aspects of language, mainly because they keep the efficient functioning of human beings. When we assess the meaning of a word, they are usually kept in bundles of stored knowledge, that combine events, situations and other experiences that form our knowledge of the world. The experimental aspect of a person's life constitutes a prerequisite to communication, mainly due to the fact that we can put elements of experience into categories, which enables the person to recognize the action as happening before and then we can choose on how to act now.

Based on this, the author presents a word concept mapping, which shows concepts together using linguistic forms that are conjoined in a multi-dimensional network. Cruse (2000)

states that each full lexical item activates a concept and indirectly links concepts, based on the strength of the link, and it is assumed that words that make the same contribution to the truth conditions of each map in which they appear. They do not have to necessarily hold identical meaning, in fact, the differences that they have actually enrich the concept mapping in which they are involved.

When you build a concept, it is necessary to concern experiences and also provide access to knowledge that comprehends entities that fall within that category. There are multiple approaches to understand the idea of concepts and one them is the classical – which goes back to Aristotle – and defines a concept as a set of necessary and sufficient criteria. Another approach is supported by prototypes, and items are comprehended in a category if they fairly resemble the prototype.

In order to build the concepts, it is also important to contemplate the semantic relation between units of meaning. One of the most significant sense relation is built on recurrence, mainly because of the fact that we tend to form concepts based on regularizing and structuring tendencies, which means that sense relations that recur frequently tend to be more prominent. This is why it is important to see how the same words are frequently conveyed in the Politicalite.com news stories, and also to understand how some discourses are created mainly due to repetition of certain adjectives characterizing the same nouns repeatedly. If a reader finds four different news articles that say “violent immigrants” and “weak economy on EU”, they will assume inherently this sense relation as true and standard.

Still considering concepts that are relevant to the discussion of prototypicality, Geeraerts (2010) presents Rosch’s (1969, 1975, 1978, 1981) views on the tendency of defining categories. The author says that it is not possible to define categories with rigid boundaries because it contradicts the psychological and cognitive situation of how we perceive said categories. Categories – which make up prototypes – are not sharply delimited with clear demarcations, and that happens because, in our minds, we hold marginal areas between categories that are defined by their focal points. This idea was developed in a sense to understand the naming of natural objects in natural language categories.

Also, this theory claims that these categories are concentrated around a focal point, which, in its turn are represented by prototypical members of the said category. The characteristics of the focal members are considered to be the most salient – corresponding to the prominence factor already discussed – and a particular member of the category has to hold a focal position given that it exhibits the most salient features of the term. In his quest to present

a view on prototypical concepts, Geeraerts (2010) points out that prototypicality is in fact a prototypical concept, because it arises different clustered features. First of all, when we aim to build a concept, including definitive features and referents, it is important to rely on the fact that said categories will show themselves different degrees of typicality.

Firstly, Geeraerts (2010) mentions, not every member will be equally representative of a category. Secondly, the prototypical categories shall have a family resemblance structure – such as radial networks – or mind maps – which shows clusters of words but enables us to understand and envision the concept fully. The third rule defines that all the categories presented are blurred at the edges, and not sharply defined. And the fourth and last tenet of prototypicality says that the categories cannot be described by the means of a single set of criterial attributes. All of these categories, affirms Geeraerts, are not necessarily co-extensive and they do not always co-occur.

Furthermore, it is important to note that all the tenets presented above are aligned into two dimensions of semantics. The first and the third rules are extensional, and deal with the referential structure of a category. They comprise a look on the members of the category and the main conclusion from these tenets is that not all members of a category are equal in representativeness and the referential boundaries are not always 100% decisive. The second and the fourth rules are materialized on the intensional level, where the focus is on the definitional structure of a category. A conclusion from the second tenet, non-discreteness, shows that there is no single definition in terms of necessary and sufficient attributes for a prototypical concept. On the other rule, it is established that the clustering of meanings from a radial set causes the fact that not every reading is structurally equally important.

So, this view divides the concept even more: Non-discreteness involves the idea of demarcation problems (which are not relevant to this study) and the flexible applicability of these categories. On the other hand, the non-equality involves the fact that categories have themselves an internal structure, given the fact that normally the categories have a dominant core area surrounded by a less salient periphery.

**Chart 3 – Four types of prototypicality effects**

	Extensional characterization (on the level of exemplars)	Intensional characterization (on the level of definition)
Non-equality (Salience effects, core/periphery)	Differences of typicality and membership salience	Clustering into family resemblances
Non-discreteness (Demarcation problems, flexibility)	Fuzziness at the edges, membership uncertainty	Absence of necessary and sufficient definitions

Source: GEERAERTS, 2010, p.189.

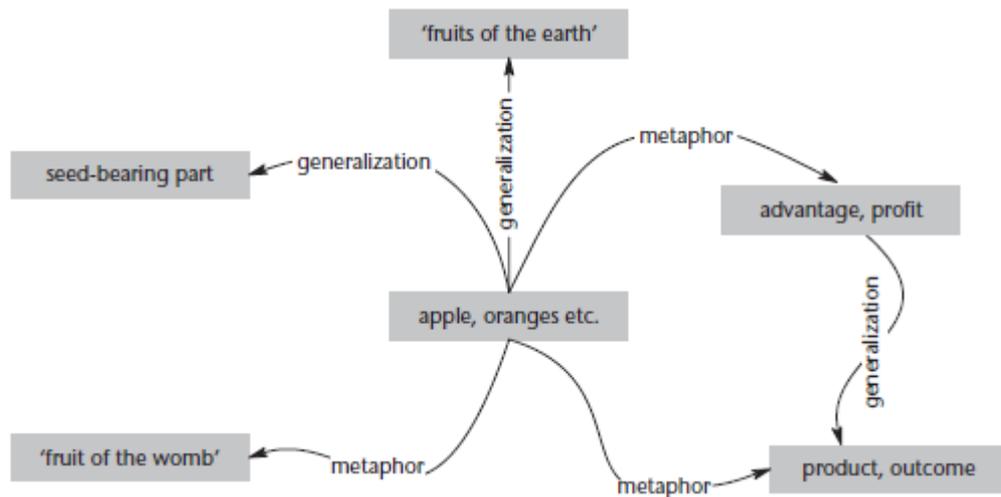
On the matter written representation, Geeraerts (2010) points out the importance of family resemblance structures, illustrating the clusters of different senses rather than pointing out the structure of a single meaning. Given that meanings cannot exist in a vacuum, isolated, it is necessary to understand them as related in various ways to the central sense but also, they have to make sense to one another. There's also an acceptance on technical terms, as well as this reading takes on figurative usages, which can sometimes take biological terms. In a radial network, the senses are related to the prototype, and to one another by individual links. These connections show the type of semantic relation that coordinates them.

One of the most important advantages of this kind of representation, says Geerearts (2010), is that we can include metonymic links. Metonymies are figures of speech in which a concept is reference to by the name of something that is very similar – from the view of the speaker – to the enunciated concept. Radial networks enable this kind of representation because the other types of prototype-based categorial structure comprise relations of literal or figurative similarity, and if we stick in a single meaning, metonymies do not appear because all of the instances of language are bound by some kind of similarity aspect, expressed by shared characteristics. When polysemous items are brought into the picture, metonymies are presented as well and drawn into to radial sets in order to represent their – figurative – relation to the rest of the categories related to the concept.

A drawback presented by this type of representation is the fact that brings out the meanings as isolated entities. Some of the complex and subtle interrelations among the meanings are left behind when we look directly into the set, mainly because this method evokes a more atomistic view of meanings within a polysemous cluster. Furthermore, the radial set first presents the dynamism of polysemous structures in a way that it firsts appears as individual

extensions from one sense to another. From this aspect, we cannot properly see the dimensions that make up the polysemous cluster can connect in different ways and senses at the same time.

**Figure 4** – Radial Network analysis of ‘fruit’



Source: GEERAERTS, 2010, p. 195

It is important to highlight the contextual flexibility of meaning, which is a natural component of a cognitive semantic conception of lexical semantics, according to Geeraerts (2010). And this can assume different and even more radical forms, once it does not just involve a context-guided choice among preexistent meanings or even an instantaneous creation of a new one. In fact, the contextual flexibility blurred and dynamized is what keeps polysemy and vagueness apart.

One relevant aspect that comes into discussion when discussing context in prototypical constructions is the meaning when analyzed within the realm of culture and society, especially with factors concerning the role of social factors in linguistic meaning and how cognitive semantics understands the sociohistorical situatedness of meaning. The image schemas, for example, are not understood only by inherent mental connections, but they are constructed out of culturally governed schemas. In a more contextualized understanding of image schemas, the experience by the body is situated in a sociocultural environment, and the social setting is a co-determining bodily experience as well.

Geeraerts (2010) mentions that, more generally, in order to understand the motivation behind cultural phenomena in general and language in particular, one has to take into account a diachronic dimension. This happens because cultural models are not reinvented every new age; on the contrary, they are defined as a part of their cultural nature in their proper historical

dimension. In terms of prototypicality, the relevance of the cultural aspect relies on the role of convention in the constitution of lexical categories. This means that every category holds a convention that people construct on and from, with implicit link to particular social customs. Geeraerts (2010) draws on the theory built by Putnam (1975), exposing the three concepts of her designation theory, pointed out as authoritarian.

The main concern of this theory is to dismiss the intensionalist view on meaning, and it is divided into two main tenets. The first one claims that knowing the meaning of an expression is a particular psychological state, and the second says that the intension – its meaning – determines its extension – its referent. There is a strong point on the fact that it is not the intension but the internal essence of a category that will determine the expression that refers to said category. Moreover, the author suggests that not all members of a linguistic community are required to know and understand the hidden structures of an expression of their language. And, even though they are not familiar with the expert language in use, they have to be aware of the stereotype connected with a category if they want to be considered full-fledged members of the linguistic community.

A stereotype, says Geeraerts (2010), is a socially determined minimum set of data referencing the extension of a category. For example, the words *tories* and *loony left* are lexemes used in Politicalite.com to describe with warmth and mockery towards the people who identify as supporters of the conservative (right-wing) and labor (left-wing) parties in Great Britain, respectively. They are only fully understood by members of this community, or at least by people who are familiar with this kind of language used to name and describe these groups of people. Notwithstanding, the term *loony left* assumes a rather offensive portrayal of people, casting them into a bad light and assigning them in an unfavorable stereotype. It is important to highlight also that the informational content of natural language does not only derive from the state of affairs in science, but also from the communicative and cognitive requirements of the linguistic community at its own rights. Thus, the prototypical model of category structure can comprise social variation over individuals rather than just psychological variation in different contexts.

A more individualized point of view comes from Bartsch (1987), and she starts her theory from a more communicative approach, claiming that the norms of language comes from the necessity from the very language to have some form of coordination and guidelines. So, in order to transfer information efficiently, speakers and hearers have to follow and abide by certain rules. These rules coordinate the activities of a speaker expressing himself, and the

receptive activities from the hearer, and, in order to have efficiency in the communication, they share an agreement about the communicative value of the linguistic means of expression.

In this sense, the speaker encodes the information he wishes to transmit in the most suitable format that he believes the hearer will best interpret from. On the opposite way, the hearer will only be able to decode the information fully and completely if he is familiar with the intended value by the speaker, attached to the means of expression he or she employs. Hence, the specific agreements brought up before involve the meanings that may be attached to individual words, and therefore, are considered “lower linguistic norms”.

This theory agrees with the idea of the semantic flexibility of the language, because lower linguistic norms can be broken in order to establish the higher norm of communication. This means that employing a word flexibly, with new nuances, is possible exactly because of communicative exigencies. So, when speakers need to express attitudes, evaluations or points of view, it is possible that they communicate with different words following new norms. Geeraerts (2010) mentions that, according to Bartsch, the semantic flexibility described by prototype theory is a necessary feature of the sociosemantic function of categories. Therefore, the prototype-based semantics production of linguistic categories appears to have a normative background, once it is assumed that it derives from the hierarchy of communicative norms and the communicative contextual necessity to overcome the lower linguistic norms.

Also discussing the social facet of meaning, Gardenfors (1993) explains that it is mandatory for speakers of a language to share more than syntax and vocabulary – they must have a common semantics, which means that they have to mean the same things. Language is only conventional in a sense that the connections among the linguistic signs and their meanings are arbitrary, and, therefore, the semantics of a language has to be learned by the speaker. So, how is it possible that even though speakers respect the rules of language and use conventionalized lexical choices, they still have to learn the mapping between words and their meanings? He then explains the assumption of a well-behaved relation between individual uses of language and the social meaning, in a way that the second emerges from the individual meanings. There is a general idea, according to this author, that linguistic power structure determines social meaning, which, by its own right, functions as a regulating ideal for individual assignments of meaning. “Just like money, language is a social good” (GARDENFORS, 1993, p.285). So, in this sense, it is possible to infer that the content of journalistic institutions hold an important and prominent power position and can support and even consolidate certain

aspects within the society. This is one of the reasons why fake news intend to reproduce journalistic format, as it has been pointed out before.

Also sticking to the cognitivist paradigm of semantics, Gardenfors (1993) claims that meanings are mental entities, and semantics represents a mapping from linguistic expressions to cognitive structures. One of the consequences of this approach is the fact that meaning becomes independent of truth. Given that meanings are in the head, the way that someone grasps the meaning of an expression cannot be separated from the process of assigning meaning to said expression. Thus, the semantic mapping remains arbitrary, as a sense that any speaker can designate any sense to any particular linguistic form to represent any cognitive structure, but it is important to highlight that all of these choices and constructions are ruled by social conventions.

But what kind of structures can be used to build said radial networks, and, as a result, build up a bigger concept? Given that a construction, according to Langacker (2009) is an assembly of symbolic structures – connecting the semantic and phonological poles –, their integration is achieved by correspondences that assimilate particular elements shared by the two composing structures. In this sense, there will be a double effect, resulting in composing elements that are derived from the merger.

Next, the author brings out an example of the examination of *Smart Woman*, a noun phrase made from a head noun combined to an attributive adjective. Very similar structures will be used to analyze the concepts coined from the articles published in Politicalite, thus the importance to understand how the theory explains the cognitive composition of noun phrases according to the prototypical model of constructions.

So, Langacker (2009) uses the noun phrase *smart woman* to explain the concept. According to him, in the semantic pole we have the adjective *smart*, which has a relationship profile, and situates the trajectory within a scale of intelligence. On the noun part, we have *woman*, which profiles a thing. The integration happens when a correspondence is needed between the adjective's trajectory and the noun's profile. According to the author, because the head of the construction is the noun, the composite expression profiles the woman. The semantic association of *smart* and *woman* is symbolized then by the integration of these lexemes at the phonological pole – so, when we communicate them.

In Langacker's words: "The components structures are integrated to form the composite structure by superimposing and merging corresponding elements" (LANGACKER, 2009, p.11). But all this idea does not mean that, when it comes to actual processing, the component

structures are pre-existent in relation to the subsequent composite structure. Even the idea that the composite structure being something constructed out of component structures, taking out all the content from them, is refutable. It is important to conceive that the composite structure is an independent entity in its own right, and may show properties that are not derived from either component.

Again, the author understands a construction as an assembly of symbolic structures that are conjoined by correspondences and categorizing relationships. Moreover, he claims that, within the realm of the construction, one component structure tends to serve to elaborate a salient schematic element from the other component, in a symbiotic manner. The schematic element – which, by its turn, corresponds to the profile of the other component – is called an elaboration site. In the case of *smart woman*, the e-site is the trajectory of *smart*. Also using this example, the two component structures as wholes have the responsibility to categorize the composite structure. This happens because, when it comes to constructions, the composite structure holds a special status mainly because it stands in the foreground as the first option for a structure used for higher-level purposes, whereas the component structures are not recalled unless needed, and serve mostly as means which enable the speaker to get to the composite structure. These channels are not to be considered simple building blocks, but to work mostly to bring up or motivate features of the composite structure, which means that the relation between them is closer to one of classification than to strict composition.

Langacker (2009) related that, in the example described before (*smart woman*), the categorizing relationship between the component structure *woman* and the composite qualifies as an elaboration, because both of them are consistent in their specification. In the case of *smart*, profiles a non-processual relationship, and the idea of the component towards the composite is of extension. This is largely natural for constructions, given that the composite structure profile corresponds to the profile of a component structure – and this component is called the profile determinant. In the analyzed case, *woman* stands for the profile determinant, due to the fact that *smart woman* gives a finer-grained characterization of the profiled entity, which is *woman*, because one is talking about the person, not the relationship of being intelligent.

It is important to highlight, through the constructional schemas, that speakers of a language use patterns that languages themselves make available for the production of complex expressions. Said schemas are symbolic assemblies, therefore meaningful, even though their meanings are generally abstract. In this sense, the schema's semantic pole holds a constructional meaning, which is its most important contribution to the overall meaning of composite

expressions. This compositional meaning, claims Langacker (2009), is constricted to the specification of the grammatical category of the symbolic elements, as well as organizational properties: how each element relates to one another in terms of correspondences, categorization and profile determinance. In terms of Cognitive Grammar, the constituency of hierarchies dwell only on symbolic structures, each comprising a semantic and phonological pole.

Going back to the example given before – smart woman –, the constructional schema portrayed is considered to be a specific symbolic assembly (an expression) that exemplifies a constructional schema describing a general syntactic pattern for noun phrases constituted by adjectives and nouns. A schematic representation of and adjectives assumes it to profile a non-processual relationship of an unspecified nature, whose trajectory is a thing and no focused landmark. The schematic representation of a noun profiles a thing. Therefore, the adjectival trajector operates as the elaboration site and responds to the nominal profile. In its turn, the noun is profile determinant, and, as a consequence, the composite structure ends up profiling a thing, that as an unprofiled part of the conceptual base, engages in the relationship the adjective encodes.

In terms of grammar, some notions are still relevant and brought from the formal grammar structures, such as the head, that in cognitive semantics, can be defined as the profile determinant at a given level of organization, and it comprises the component structure whose profile is inherited at the composite structure level – e.g woman, in smart woman. Cognitive Grammar also understands the canonical notion of complement or modifier in the terms of a component structure that elaborates or is elaborated a salient substructure of the head.

### 3.2 THE NOUN PHRASE – THE NOUN AND THE ADJECTIVE

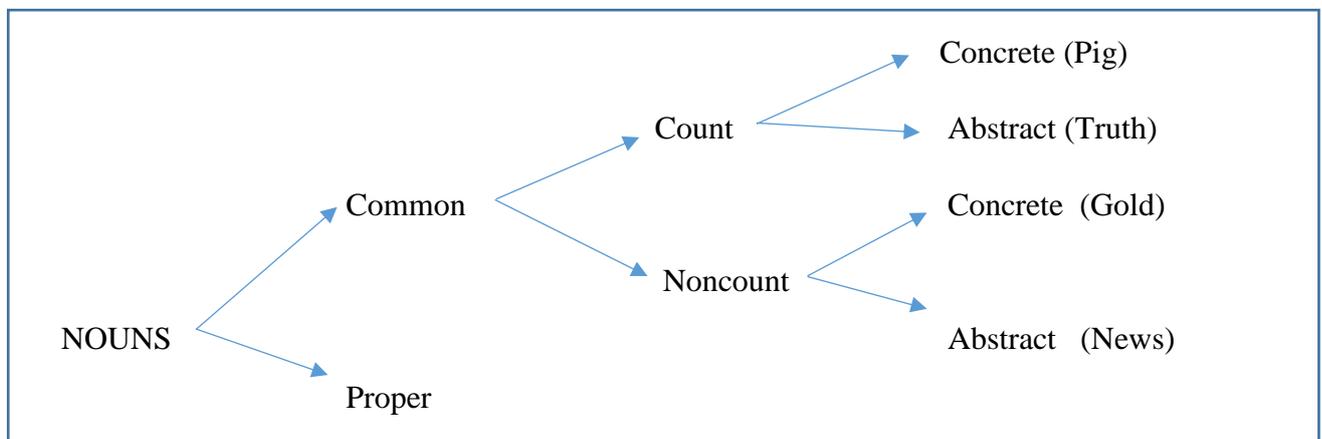
Just like Quirk et al (1985) have defined, the noun phrase is indefinitely complex, as sentences are, with various nuances and aspects to be considered when carefully analyzing it. In the simplest sense, the noun phrase will typically function as a subject, object and complement of clauses, and also as complement of prepositional phrases. As maintained by Murphy (1990), noun phrases usually assemble coherent semantic units that describe an entity or an event, and, in order to describe said entity fully and in detail, the noun can be modified by other elements such as preceding adjectives.

According to the authors, the noun phrase can be just as complex as sentences, in a sense that some sentences themselves can be reshaped to take the noun phrase structure. These structures include the following constituent parts:

- The Head, usually the noun, around which the other constituents are clustered and the part that will define the concord with the other parts of the sentence.
- The Determinative, which includes grammatical items such as predeterminers and articles, such as *all*, and central determiners, for instance *this* and *some*.
- Postdeterminers, like numerals and quantifiers, which are placed after central determiners and precede premodifiers.
- The Postmodifiers, where adjectives are comprised, and include all the items appearing before the head that are not determinatives.

The nouns, in the English language, can be divided into the following categories:

**Figure 5** – Categories for the noun phrase



Source: QUIRK et al 1985, p. 247.

The noun morphological category exists in order to nominate things in the world. *Common* nouns are names that are not distinctive or that are conventionalized forms, such as table, pens or mug. Proper nouns start with a capital letter and are names given out to certain objects in the world, such as people and places, e.g. Anita or Porto Alegre. Inside the category of common nouns, there is the subdivision of count nouns – countable entities – and noncount – undifferentiated mass or continuum. Both of them comprise two other classes: the concrete nouns – which are accessible to the senses, are observable and measurable, and the abstract nouns are nonobservable or nonmeasurable.

The modification can appear in two ways, as reported by Quirk et al (1985). The first form is the restrictive – when the reference of the head is a member of a class that can only be understood through the modification that comes along, i.e. the tall girl in the corner is Mary Smith (in a context in which there are other girls in the same physical space, or other girls in the corner that are not tall). The restrictive modification concerns the referent of said head, restricting the possible references in a context. Moreover, they are usually placed after the head,

and, because they have a built-in contrast, restrictive modifications also show a prosodic emphasis. The second type is the nonrestrictive, and indicates a word that classifies a head that does not need restricting and refining information in order to place it in with a correct referent. Any information is additional and not essential to identification. This kind of modification is usually in the prehead position, and the authors claim it to be unstressed.

Another possible distinction for when we talk about modification has already been previously discussed – the temporary and permanent and they relate to the progressiveness of the predication. The permanent modification in the noun phrase is understood as characteristic features and are placed in the premodification position. The ones in the postmodification position have a notably temporary reference.

As mentioned by Murphy (1990), drawing from Gross, Fischer and Miller (1989), the lexical organization of adjectives recognize the fact that predicative adjective meanings typically represent values or a dimension, and this is a property that compels them to be highly fit for modifying noun concepts. On the contrary, nouns express such complex concepts which usually do not have one single dimension to stand out above all the rest. Using *smart woman*, for example again, the adjective *smart* intensifies the intelligence of a being, highlighting a value, whereas *woman* can refer to multifaceted female human being.

The modifiers mostly belong to the adjective class. As said by Quirk, Greenbaum and Leech (1985), we cannot identify adjectives by looking at them in isolation or merely from their potentialities for inflection. The authors characterize four features to make up the category of adjectives. The first one is the fact that they can occur in the attributive function, premodifying a noun, the second is that they can appear in the predicative function, given that they can be a subject or an object complement. The third tenet relies on the fact that they themselves can be premodified by the intensifier *very* and they can take comparative and superlative forms. It is important to notice that not all lexemes considered adjectives are going to regard all four features completely.

Moreover, Quirk et al (1985) also present three semantic subclassifications of adjectives. Moreover, they state that, in this sense, the semantic categories of adjectives are to be seen as scales rather than present or absent features. The first one, the **stative/dynamic** dichotomy, declares that adjectives are mostly stative, even though some of them can be categorized as dynamic. However, a general semantic feature of dynamic adjectives concerns the fact that they present characteristics that are to be controlled and restricted temporally, such as *nice* and *violent*.

Another tenet is the **gradable/nongradable** feature. Whereas most adjectives fall into the first category, they can be manifested through comparative and superlative forms or through intensifiers, e.g. she is the tallest woman here or she is very tall. The third tenet presents the innateness of certain characteristics through the **inherent/noninherent** dichotomy. Again, most of adjectives fall into the inherent feature, which means that they are applied to the referent of the object directly, e.g. A red flag is a flag which is red. A noninherent adjective presupposes an extension of the basic sense of this noun – a perfect boyfriend is a male human which whom a person has a perfect relationship with.

In terms of cognitive semantics, as stated by Gärdenfors (2011), the main difference between adjectives and nouns is the fact that the first tend to refer to a single domain and represent properties, whereas nouns tend to be related to several domains. Besides, a noun is usually tied to a phenomenon with correlations across a big number of domains. In sum, nouns are represented by clusters in Gärdenfors's conceptual space, given that they not only denote physical objects as located in a limited special region, including a big variety of different more abstract nouns.

As reported by Murphy (1990), while studying how people comprehend the combination of prenominal modifiers – attributive adjectives – with head nouns. According to this author, listeners have to convey two different processes in order to understand a referential noun phrase. The first one is the construction of the noun phrase – *smart woman* is a female human who has a characteristic concerning cognitive intelligence – whereas the second process is to assign a referent to the noun phrase – whatever referent of a smart woman came to your mind when you read the phrase. Therefore, for listeners to attach a referent to a noun phrase, they have to interpret it at least partially. This is not the same for when we encounter only a noun, for example, because this comprehension requires only the retrieval of the meaning of the word from the lexicon and then applying it to the context.

In his psychological studies, Murphy (1990) drew from older linguists, such as Potter and Faulconer (1979), whose studies suggested that adjectives function by activating conceptual structures that were also activated by the nouns. The main result is an immediate facilitation by both the adjective and the noun. This is what this author calls the psychology of concepts, by which the word meaning is represented in the conceptual system. According to him, in order to understand structures like *green table* or *smart woman*, the listener had to combine word meanings to form phrases and, moreover, sentence meanings, requiring he or

she to add the features of the adjectives *green* or *smart* to the characteristics of *table* and *woman*, hence obtaining a richer and more complex concept.

Murphy also discusses the theory of schemas, in order to explain that concepts can be described as structured sets of slots and fillers. This means that an adjective modifies a noun by altering the schema in a certain way – for example, when we qualify a woman, it is possible to say that she is smart or stupid, because this specific noun can be characterized in a sense of intelligence. On the other hand, it is not possible or plausible say green or metal woman, because this noun cannot be qualified in colors or material, but we can say green table or metal table, because they have the specific slots for this characterization. Therefore, the noun holds an important prominence in defining the type of adjective that it will receive: “The difficulty of understanding an NP is probably related to how well the adjective and noun schemata can be related” (MURPHY, 1990, p. 261).

The most important aspects of a schema theory applied to conceptual noun phrases are divided into three tenets. The first one claims that the noun phrase will be better understood depending on how well placed is the modifier in a particular slot within the noun schemata. The second one assumes that the interaction between the noun and the adjective is highly important, specially in sensible phrases which transforms the whole process into context-sensitive. The third tenet points out to the fact that when no appropriate slot can be pointed out, the noun phrase will be characterized as nonsensical. Another important finding by the author in a four-part experiment he conducted with students showed that, like Potter and Faulconer (1979) had theorized, the adjective and noun both have the power to influence the resurgence of each other’s meanings, rather than just assessing their senses separately and combining them after.

As claimed by these authors, there is indeed a possibility that, when presented with a sentence, a speaker aims for the meaning of each word separately, retrieving senses independently of context, and then, after this process, he or she will combine the senses with the preceding words of the sentence. A second view, they point, attributes influences to the preceding words within the retrieval of a word, in a way that the context is highly appropriated towards the context. The first approach is well suited in order to understand the productivity of language comprehension, given that a *green table* is a table that is green. The second approach understands the senses of words as influenced by the context. There is a suggestion that the understanding of a sentence is usually followed closely by the conceptual selection or elaboration of it.

After a study in which they monitored the answer of college students after being exposed to sentences probed in pictures, the authors concluded that a prenominal adjective indeed influences the retrieval of a noun's meaning. In addition to this finding, the results showed that the meaning of a noun phrase is retrieved as a single unit. The authors mention that there are two ways in which this context-dependent holistic retrieval of a noun phrase's meaning could happen. The first one contains the possibility that people have single lexical entries for a very big number of utterances, whereas they have single entries for compounds like hot dog. The feasibility of these compounds recognition occurs exactly because variations are not possible.

The second hypothesis may be more likely, because it sees the adjective and noun as activate separate lexical entries – recognized independently – but they interact when they are retrieved. In this sense, a word's meaning is not represented within the lexical entry, whereas it is located in a conceptual system addressed by the lexical entry. According to them: “In the conceptual system (which can be regarded as a network of links between nodes), a word's meaning is not a fixed entity that is activated as a whole, but meaning is given by the pattern of activation produced in that occasion” (POTTER; FAULCONER, 1979, p.517).

To support this theory, the authors refer to Quilian's (1966) model of sentence comprehension, in which the activation starts out from the content words until there are intersecting pathways. These pathways have to be checked for their consistency with the syntactic information in the sentence. Here, the pathway that connects the concept nodes of a noun phrase becomes the priority, in a way that the activation of both nodes located in the adjective and noun are linked together in what the authors call a syntactically appropriate manner. As an alternative, the activation of nodes that converges from both the adjective and noun can create another node that represents the whole phrase, for example a new node to understand the construct *smart woman*. As a conclusion, the authors restate that when a listener is exposed to a noun phrase can indeed present a unitary meaning for the whole phrase, in a process that apparently does not include the retrieval of separate meanings for each the adjective and the noun, combining them afterwards. According to the authors, given that adjectives do not suffer from unitary comprehension when they are separated from the noun, the interactive retrieval is under the control of both syntactic and semantic structure. Thus, it is demonstrated that a context-dependent interpretation of a noun meaning can be confined in phrases that express certain ideas which are already in the memory of the speaker. In sum, this means that it is possible to infer that the whole idea of a spreading-activation model of comprehension accounts for the collection of complex but familiar concepts in a holistic manner, whilst still

aiming for the computation of new ideas that do not follow an independent retrieval of individual word meanings.

Conforming to this idea, Langacker (2008) presents the concept of a noun as all the expressions that profile things – which can include lexical nouns and any kind of fixed or novel nominal forms. Moreover, a full nominal expression incorporates grounding and separates a discourse referent. In terms of structure and function, he claims that a nominal is another given name for a noun phrase, even though he believes that this very classification is one to be revised, mainly because these structures are not always phrases and they do not always bear nouns.

Meaning and function are the imperatives when defining a nominal. Drawing back from the already proposed cognitive semantics structures presented in the previous section, this author mentions that the schematic characterization of a nominal references to grounding, instantiation and type specification, which are considered semantic functions. In terms of a canonical structure, the author states that a lexical noun is selected from a rather large inventory in the speaker's mind. Also, it is typical for grounding to represent the initial element in terms of the linear order and the outermost layer in terms of constituency. It is important to highlight that each language has its own variety of specific nominal structures, and each one of them attend to different purposes and respond to different functional pressures.

The term head, is metaphorical in a sense that it is a structure to be identified as a controlling or a chief element in terms of importance and relevance. In Cognitive Semantics, however, the idea of a head in the nominal refers to the profile determinant at any level of organization – e.g. *those with the good ideas* is a NP in which *those* is not a noun but it is the grounding referent and the profile determinant in this construct. It is also interesting to follow the more traditional notion to use the nomenclature *head* to refer to the central component of a nominal (the part which describes the type description). Generally, in the English language, the minimal components of a nominal include a head noun – the type description – accompanied by a separate grounding element (which are usually pronouns). There are also other converging properties which include modifiers that make up a more complete and thorough explanation of nominals. Below, a global organization of the English nominal is presented (LANGACKER, 2008, p.312):

[Grounding [(Modifiers) [Head noun] (Modifiers)]]

In terms of modifiers, the author claims that they can vary in terms of grammatical category and nature of semantic contribution. Generally, the class of noun modifiers tend to profile

nonprocessual relationships (processual relationships are usually portrayed by verbs). This means that, as a result, modifiers are apprehended in relation to the modified noun – which, by its own means of profile determinant – imposes its own summarized view on the composite expression.

Moreover, Langacker (2008) says that, in the English language, there is a tendency for modifiers that directly precede – as we have previously mentioned, attributive adjectives – portray an intrinsic or permanent property of the entity, whereas post-head modifiers tend to portray a contingent or temporary character. In addition to this view, the author also mentions the subject of stative participles to describe a property, claiming that it depicts the resulting state coming from an action, usually a change caused by an event – e.g. a burned hand.

Reinstating the prototypicality theory, the adjectives most prone to contribute to prototype categories are the ones which belong to inherent characteristics of indefinite duration – therefore, the ones in attributive position, such as *smart woman*. In the case of post-head modifiers – the predicative – there is a tendency that they will be used for contingent circumstances, such as locations, events and temporary situations.

Next, the author turns his attention to the fact that even when analyzing only adjectives as modifiers of nouns within the nominal sphere, it is possible to recognize a big semantic variety and different ways to approach and create prototypes when describing their inherent properties. A very prominent class is formed by the adjectives which specify **position in a sequence or location in time** (my **first** teacher). Another relevant class are the ones which confer **validity of the nominal (real gold)**. Besides those, another very important category for this study expresses how a particular entity is **experienced by others** (**scary** movie, **comfortable** chair, **excellent** choice). These adjectives can be especially complex and delicate mainly because they rely on an entirely subjective basis of assessment – a **great** teacher for one person can be a **terrible** teacher to another.

How to choose and why a person chooses to communicate using a certain adjective in order to describe a certain entity, shows, as a conclusion, their own view of a situation, generally not taking into consideration the assessment of others. Moreover, the choice of a certain word in some contexts can even lead to the conditioning of the building of prototypical concepts in the reader's cognitive process. As Langacker (2008) related, a big inventory of constructions and constructional schemas, with different levels of specificity, serve to capture and create global generalizations. Significantly, given that units differ from degrees of entrenchment and ease of activation for the ratification of new expressions, the proposed model takes in

exceptions and regularities that are not necessarily categorical, but rather presents tendencies with varied strengths.

Using the already mentioned canonical terms, Langacker (2008) then moves on to explain how canonical constructions happen within the cognitive semantics scope. In a very simple way to explain: “the complement **elaborates** a salient substructure of the head, while a modifier contains a salient substructure **elaborated by** the head” (LANGACKER, 2008, p.321). This means that the noun profiles an entity in the world, and represents its most basic type, whilst the modifier brings into light an atemporal relationship, which, typically, describes a property to the trajector. The integration happens in a correspondence among the schematic trajector and the profile of the noun, elaborating it. In this sense, the noun is the constructional head, with its profile retrieved from the composite-structure level. Moreover, the composite expression is to be understood a complex noun exactly because it too profiles an entity.

It will be the modifier’s job to make the profile entity more thoroughly characterized, using greater detail. This means that starting from the basic type of a given entity – retrieved from the noun – the modification produces a more elaborate form of this entity. Thus, a mental construction is associated with the type at a more cognitive level, and it is the maximal extension of that type. This includes the set of all contextually relevant instances.

In terms of discourse and semantical contribution, nouns characterize the profiled thing, establishing a type of a certain entity in the world. Then, because generally speakers need to express different varieties within this entity, we resort to modifiers. This happens because standard and lexically coded types can be inadequate or simply not detailed enough depending on the communicative task the speakers need to fulfill. Therefore, when they are presented to a different description that references nonstandard properties or wholly contingent circumstances.

It is important to highlight as well that modifiers contribute semantically to a nominal in many different ways, and not just by adding a property to a basic type. Some of them include suspending aspects of a basic type, commenting on its validity or even by indicating a restricted scope of evaluation. In all of those cases, the construction of the basic type takes place in a broader scenario that allows these kinds of assessments.

In this section, some views on cognitive semantics were presented in order to better substantiate the following chapter of this dissertation. In the beginning of the chapter, there was a discussion on the communication and cognitive process within the mind and how it is responsible for creating and using linguistic structures. Next, the very idea of cognitive

semantics was discussed, and there was a conclusion that a speaker from a language draws on meanings from their mind. These meanings are clustered around a prototypical being creates the structures that enable their representation in radial nets, using words that build on the concept within the mind. Next, the noun phrase was assessed, expressing their discursive and recursive features and how important this structure is in terms of constructing concepts in the mind of language speaker on. In the next part, the analysis of the present study will be conveyed, presenting the concepts created from the fake news website Politicalite.com. The first part of the chapter will present the methodology of the dissertation, which is based on the radial representation of prototypical concepts, which was conveyed in this chapter, in section 3.1.1.

## **4 FOR THE PEOPLE, BY THE PEOPLE: THE DISINFORMATION FROM POLITICALITE.COM**

### **4.1 METHOD PROPOSAL: RADIAL NETS BASED ON PROTOTYPICAL CONCEPTS**

The present study aims to build radial nets using noun phrases conveyed by articles published by the website [politicalite.com](http://politicalite.com). Firstly, there will be a covering of the chosen pieces, including the date of publication and authorship, with a small summary of the content. Next, the selected noun phrases will be presented in a chart. As it was previously mentioned, the content is divided into three sections: Lockdown, China, Vaccine. All of these sections will build a bigger concept, which is the Coronavirus Pandemic in the United Kingdom.

As the study has previously stated, the radial nets – or mind maps – were chosen to represent these concepts mainly due to the cognitive semantic approach used in this thesis. According to this line of thought, one of the most important foundations of the cognitive semantics is the idea of conceptualization. The way people construe prototypes take into consideration different experiences of one's life, and, therefore, all the concepts in our minds are kept in bundles, centered around a focal point. It is important to highlight that these concepts do not have sharp delimitations – they are constantly open for new additions, which can make the radial network even bigger and more complex.

Moreover, the radial net representation considers meanings' existence within a context, and this model enables and facilitates the envisionment of said concepts as related in various ways to the central sense, also enriching their senses in relation to one another. When considering the socio-historical context of a prototypical concept, the biggest part held by the cultural aspect is the power of convention in constitution of lexical categories. Given that the speakers of a language share more than just grammatical structures – they have to have a common semantics as well – meanings are apprehended during life but they are also mental entities, mapping linguistic components to cognitive structures. Therefore, the method used by this study intends to visually represent the concepts created by news articles published in [Politicalite.com](http://Politicalite.com), which, according to the cognitive framework of semantics, build and embed prototypical concepts in the minds of the website's audience.

### **4.2 METHODOLOGY**

This thesis selected 15 articles published in the website, from the period of March 19<sup>th</sup>, 2020 to December 14<sup>th</sup>, 2020. Given the nature of their themes, these pieces will be divided into three sections: China, Lockdown and Vaccine, and this order also roughly corresponds to

the timeline in which these subjects were most discussed in the website. In the order of events, in the beginning of the pandemic in the United Kingdom – which comprises March, April and May – not much was known besides that its first outbreak was in China. Hence, it is natural that the attention of media outlets – including websites such as Politicalite – is turned to discussing how this virus started, where it came from and how it got so out of control so quickly. Then, the content is turned to the measures taken by the United Kingdom government in order to control the disease – which was to put the population in quarantine, and subsequently lockdown.

#### 4.2.1 China

One of the most prominent concepts constructed by Politicalite is the origin of the virus, which refers to the city of Wuhan, in China. The present study collected and analyzed six articles published in the website which bring information on Chinese attitude towards the beginning of the epidemic. According to an article published by The Guardian, based on a study published by the Covid-19 Genomics UK consortium aiming to sequence the genetic code from the virus, the introduction of the virus in the UK peaked in the middle of March, before the borders were closed. The research also suggests that the virus was introduced in the country in at least 1300 occasions, and the vast majority came from travelers from Spain, France and Italy<sup>4</sup>.

The first article analyzed dates from March 19th, 2020, under the heading “*KUNG FLU: Chinese COVER-UP of Coronavirus has brought the WORLD to its knees*”. The piece discusses an alleged cover-up by China of the first cases, as well as accuses the Chinese government of censoring doctors who tried to alert the world about the disease. The biggest issue brought by this article is the calling Covid-19 as Chinese or Wuhan Virus, which, according to Howard (2020), the writer of the article, is seen as racist by some people.

**Chart 4** – List of phrases taken from the March 19th article

Kung Flu
Chinese Coronavirus
Chinese virus
Wuhan Virus
Communist State
Biggest Pandemic

<sup>4</sup> DEVLIN, Hannah. No 'patient zero' as Covid-19 came into UK at least 1,300 times. **The Guardian**. Londres, 11 jun. 2020. Disponível em: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jun/11/british-clampdown-on-non-essential-travel-came-a-week-too-late>. Acesso em: 2 jan. 2021.

Chinese cover-up
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Source: The author (2020)

The second article in this section does not have a named author and was published on April 21st, 2020. It discusses a survey, and it goes by the heading “*POLL: Most Brits Blame China For Coronavirus Crisis*”. As the own heading mentions, they present the results of a poll conducted by the news portal outlet MailOnline. According to the article, 56% of British citizens believe that the Chinese government is responsible for the Covid-19 pandemic. Besides, 54% of the participants believe that it is appropriate to name the disease the “Wuhan virus”.

**Chart 5** – List of phrases taken from the April 21st article

Stay-at-home orders
Wet animal markets
Wuhan Virus

Source: The author (2020)

The third article analyzed by the present study also takes up the origins of the virus. It was published by Jordan James, the editor-in-chief of the website, on May 1<sup>st</sup>, and its heading says “*CHINA LIED, PEOPLE DIED: Coronavirus ‘Came From Wuhan Lab’ Says U.S.*”. In it, James (2020) presents that the President of the United States, Donald Trump, stated that the country has strong evidence that the virus emerged from a lab in Wuhan, even though the mainstream media does not comment on it. This article shows a classic maneuver from fake news outlets, as it was mentioned in chapter 3, which is the undermining of the classic media as trustworthy institutions. When the editor-in-chief and founder of Politicalite Jordan James writes a story seriously discussing unfounded and ungrounded declarations from one of the most influential and powerful leaders in the world, whilst accusing the mainstream media of complying with dictatorships by not mentioning the declarations of Trump, he creates a new understanding and sense of belonging among its readers.

**Chart 6** – List of phrases taken from the May 1<sup>st</sup> article

Dictatorship Chinese Communist Party
(the WHO) PR-Agency for China
Wuhan Virus
Corrupt Chinese Communist Party

History of covering-up outbreaks
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Source: The author (2020).

The next piece analyzed has a similar content to the one previously discussed. It was published on May 5th, by Jay Beecher, and its headline says: “*WUHAN WOES: Experts Say Evidence Coronavirus Escaped From Wuhan Lab ‘Increasing By The Day’*”. If the previous article mentioned only an interview with president Donald Trump, this piece cites reports produced by US intelligence agencies, as well as quotes by the American secretary of state Mike Pompeo, who affirms there is evidence on the fact that the coronavirus was leaked by a laboratory. At the ending, the article brings out a timeline of events that go back from January. No actual sources were interviewed for the piece, neither the mentioned reports and studies were linked to the piece.

**Chart 7** – List of phrases taken from the May 5th article

Wuhan Woes
China’s mishandling of the Coronavirus
China’s guilt
True origin of the virus
Shocking findings
Wuhan wet market
Unsecured laboratory
Accidental release
Intentionally manipulated (viruses)
Serious shortage of appropriately trained technicians

Source: The author (2020)

Still discussing the beginning of the outbreak, another article was published by Jay Beecher on May 15th, under the headline “*LIARS: First Coronavirus Cases Recorded In NOVEMBER, Chinese Government Data Now Confirms*”. According to the article – based on information retrieved from The Guardian – the first covid-19 cases were recorded in November 17<sup>th</sup>, and, as reported by the South China Morning Post, there were 266 people who contracted the virus in 2019, and were left in quarantine and medical surveillance. Using an expert source interviewed by the “left-wing” (as the own article says) Guardian, the piece says that there were three causes for the existence of the early cases: they were not detected, they were detected but not seen as a new disease, or they were detected as a new disease but they were suppressed by

the government. The article also brings into light an accusation from the foreign ministry spokesman, Zhao Lijian, who said that the US Army may have brought the virus into China. This accusation, they highlight, is supported by no evidence at all – which is something they say for the first and only time within the pieces analyzed in this study.

**Chart 8** – List of phrases taken from the May 15<sup>th</sup> article

Liars
Deceit
Tip of the iceberg
Damning revelation
Shocking news
Severe flu-like symptoms
Medical surveillance
“Cover-up” period
China’s communist government
Widespread crackdown
SARS-like virus
Invisible enemy
Secretive Communist regime
Early suppression of reports of cases
Ignorance of mounting evidence
Extensive propaganda campaign
Official narrative

Source: the author (2020).

The last article concerning China analyzed by this study dates from July 14<sup>th</sup>, and it also does not disclose who the author is. Under the heading “*WUHAN VIRUS: Scientists From Chinese Lab ‘Defect’ To West, Claims Bannon*”, the piece says that important scientists from the lab which is claimed to have started the outbreak of Covid-19 have left – or defected, as it is written in the article – the country. The allegations come from Steve Bannon, a former advisor of Donald Trump, and the content was retrieved from an interview given to the newspaper The Mail – which once more shows a dissonance with the opposed view to mainstream media that they claim to have.

**Chart 9** – List of phrases taken from the July 14<sup>th</sup> article

Epicenter of the Covid-19 outbreak
Lab leak
Subsequent cover-up
Brutal authoritarian regime
Shocking news

Source: the author (2020)

Comprising all of the phrases from charts 4 to 9, the radial map for the concept *China* follows<sup>5</sup>:

**Figure 6** – Mind map for the concept *China*



Source: The author (2020).

<sup>5</sup> The Mind map for the concept *China* is also available through the link: <https://coggle.it/diagram/X-eBKFQdf258P37-/t/china/5f3fee831201efa2c515b4ecd3125a1af307b815fa208899ba0f0c6e5b5eef8a>

#### 4.2.2 Lockdown

In the United Kingdom, the first cases of Covid-19 were reported in the end of January and in 28<sup>th</sup> February the first British person – a passenger on a cruise – died from the disease. On March 20<sup>th</sup>, all schools were closed in Great Britain, as well as public venues such as pubs, restaurants, gyms, nightclubs and cinemas, and the Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, urged the population to stay home in voluntary self-isolation, in order to “flatten the curve” and ensure medical care for everyone who needed. Only six days later, other non-essential activities, including public gatherings and social events, besides many categories of retail businesses were closed. By the date of May 5<sup>th</sup>, the British death toll was the second highest in the world and on May 10<sup>th</sup>, some relaxations on the lockdown restrictions were allowed, such as exercising outdoors, and in June, the non-essential retail was allowed to reopen.

After summer ended, the countries saw the infection rates exponentially grow and, on October 12<sup>th</sup>, a new legal framework to help stop Covid-19 infections was presented to the population: the three tier regulations. Up until then, the rules were local and the numbers and figures were analyzed in each city, which was proved unsuccessful in controlling the spread of the virus. With the new system, the areas receive a Tier – T1 is medium alert, T2 is high alert and T3 is very high alert. Each Tier brings different sets of restrictions, which include public gatherings and businesses. On October 31<sup>st</sup>, Boris Johnson announced a 4-week lockdown, and in the end of November, with the vaccination trials complete and the medication proven successful, the countries prepared for the immunization programme, which started on December 8<sup>th</sup>. In this very brief overview of how the British government dealt with the epidemic, in a line of action that aimed to protect both the population and the national healthcare system.

In this sense, the first article analyzed in this section was published on March 16<sup>th</sup>, by Jordan James, under the title “*CORONAVIRUS: Government could use special powers to SHUTDOWN Pubs and Restaurants*”. This article is a fairly short one, and, as it was previously explained, it dates from when the first lockdown was in discussion, and it shows concern from the Britons. The piece discusses the possibility that the UK could close pubs and clubs, following a decision from Ireland. Even though James (2020) is clearly concerned with the measures, he ends the piece with a quote from the UK’s chief medical officer, Chris Whitty, reinforcing that the measures are not going to be for only a couple of weeks. Also, there is an interesting choice of words here, recalling to the British imagery, which is calling the Covid-19 pandemic the *darkest days since the Second World War*. This phrasing recalls to the famous quote “The

darkest hour is just before the dawn”, and it refers to a moment when a situation gets as bad as possible before it can get any better. The phrase “darkest hour” is also commonly referenced to Winston Churchill, even though there is not any evidence that he actually said that<sup>6</sup>.

**Chart 10** – List of phrases taken from the March 16<sup>th</sup> article

Special powers
Draconian powers
Coronavirus outbreak
Darkest days (since the second world war)
Real difficulty
Prolonged period

Source: the author (2020).

The next article analyzes dates seven months after the first analyzed here, published on October 16th, by Jordan James, the editor in chief of the website. It is a longer piece, an exclusive, and it comes with the three-tier system in the background, entitled “*LOSING IT ALL: Working-Class Restaurateur Reveals ‘Failure’ of Tory Lockdown and FIGHTS to Stay Open*”. In it, James (2020) tells the story of a restaurant in his home town, Bolton, that he visited in order to “support the local economy” and also interview the restaurant owner. According to the piece, a new lockdown would be devastating to the local economy, especially when considering small British businesses. Moreover, he claims that the government does not offer sufficient support, also showing concern with a possible lack of staff once the hospitality sector goes back to business. In addition to that, James also brings out some political actions done in this area, mainly by the mayor of Greater Manchester, Andy Burham, who, according to the author of the article, is fighting for the working class. In the end of the article, James (2020) says it is time for Boris Johnson to back down on all the restrictions and lockdowns.

**Chart 11** – List of phrases taken from the October 16<sup>th</sup> article

Working-class restaurateur
Failure of Tory Lockdown
Hospitality industry
(Virus with a) recovery rate of 99.5%

<sup>6</sup> **The meaning and origin of the expression:** The darkest hour. Available in: <https://www.phrases.org.uk/meanings/darkest-hour.html>. Access on December 29<sup>th</sup> 2020.

Tough Tier 3 lockdown
Local economy
Devastating effect
Tory flip-flops on Lockdown
Tough local lockdown
Huge knock for the town centre
(Footfall) virtually non-existent
Major lack of support
Lack of support for owner directors
Life savings
Circuit-breaker lockdown
Nationwide problem
Voices louder together
Mental health
Struggling businesses
Low-paid workers
Lockdown war
Night-Time economy
(Night-Time economy) anxious, fearful and worried.
Breaking point

Source: The author (2020).

Still discussing the second national of lockdown, a questioning piece was published on November 1<sup>st</sup> without the name of the author, under the heading “*SOUR TASTE: MP’s in low Covid Hit Areas Feel They Are Being Punished*”. In this piece, there is the discussion on the unsatisfaction of leaders of areas in UK that are not suffering with high rates of Covid-19 infections. the piece brings on statements of authorities from Cornwall and Plymouth, which are against the lockdown because of economic restrictions. An interesting point about this article is that they mention Brexit – on a quote from Cornwall’s council, Tim Dwelly -, but not in a very favorable light, as the pieces on the website usually do: “Additionally, how on Earth are businesses going to cope with Brexit a month later?” (POLITICALITE, 2020). The usage of the verb “cope” – which means that it will be a hard moment for non-essential retail and

hospitality, the most affected sectors by the restrictions – is responsible for building a “Brexit” concept as a hardship, something that has to be tacked. As it has been previously discussed in this study, Politicalite.com sides very openly with the leavers, and this article puts the concept in a different light.

**Chart 12** – List of phrases taken from the November 1<sup>st</sup> article

Sour taste
Bitter pill to swallow
Blanket restrictions
Damage to local economies
Economic impact of a four-week lockdown
Extremely challenging winter
Urgent financial hardship support
Price for insouciance elsewhere
Government’s failure
Businesses devastated
Lack of funding for local authorities
(track and trace system) completely broken

Source: the author (2020).

The next report was published on November 23<sup>rd</sup>, without authorship, under the heading “*LOCKDOWN CLOWN: Boris Opens Stadiums, But You CAN’T Go For a Pint*”. The piece addressed the decision of opening sports stadiums for a 4000 people crowd in Tier 1 areas, whereas pubs are closed in Tier 3 areas. As context for this article we have the second national lockdown coming to an end, and Christmas – and the social gathering that comes with it – just a month away. The article is a long one, and it starts discussing the confusing Tier system, which in the article is deemed as unsuccessful. However, even if it portrays lockdown restrictions in an unfavorable light, there is some hope ahead: for the first time, there is a mention on the “successful vaccine trials” from Oxford-AstraZeneca labs. Therefore this article will provide two charts – Chart 10 will concern the phrases to be used in the Lockdown mind map, whereas phrases to appear in the Vaccine mind map will compose Chart 11. Another point worthy noticing in this article is the amount of sources: in total, quotes from six people are comprised in the article.

**Chart 13** – List of phrases concerning *lockdown* taken from the November 23<sup>rd</sup> article

Lockdown Clown
Fury among working-class Brits
Tough new Three Tier Lockdown system
Winter or New Year Surge
Tougher measures
Hard winter
Tory Unrest
Impact of the restrictions on economy and civil liberties
Huge gaps
Huge Uncertainties
Huge risks
Fury in the hospitality and arts industries
Purgatory
Limbo
Christmas out of work
Possible relaxation of the rules
Next to impossible

Source: the author (2020).

**Chart 14** – List of phrases concerning *vaccine* taken from the November 23<sup>rd</sup> article

Latest successful vaccine trials
Route out of the pandemic
70% effective
Progress on vaccines
Rapid mass testing
Tougher measures
Greater freedoms
Positive news
Ray of light

Source: the author (2020).

The last article analyzed in this section once more does not have a clear author, and it was published on December 14<sup>th</sup>. This piece, under the heading “*TURNING TIERS! London set for Tier 3 Lockdown, Despite Economic Damage*”, discusses the change of tiers for the capital of the country, and how difficult the lockdown is going to be for London during the Christmas and New Year holiday. The main focus is again on the Hospitality Industry that, by that date, had only been allowed to reopen for two weeks. Even though this piece is considerably smaller, it also has six different sources, all from this sector, showing their sides on the story.

**Chart 15** – List of phrases taken from the December 14<sup>th</sup> article

Tougher Covid-19 restrictions
Another nail in the coffin
Hammer blow
More financial support for pubs and brewers
Cruel on hardworking publicans
All the required safety measures
(pubs) Lowest places for transmission
Illogical
Unfair burden
Mixed messages
Disaster for London’s theatres
Safe environments for audiences
No fault of their own
Enormous financial losses

Source: The author (2020).

Comprising all of the phrases from charts 10 to 15, except for 14, the radial map for the concept *Lockdown* follows<sup>7</sup> in the next page:

<sup>7</sup>The Mind map for the concept *Lockdown* is also available through the link: <https://coggle.it/diagram/X-wUYsrTPqppEVqx/t/-/79d338d9ba2fcf1af35af18ee59f5647e1fc1e6c8ed0e4cef151b4b94b292d90>

Figure 7 – Mind map for the concept *Lockdown*

coggle  
made for free at coggle.it



Source: The author (2020).

### 4.2.3 Vaccine

The last concept to be analyzed in the present study is the concept for the *vaccine*. Although many different medications and treatments were tested all over the world in order to try and stop the pandemic and the high death toll that it caused worldwide, none proved to be 100% effective. Therefore, labs from different countries and continents started a race to develop vaccines that could protect the population and try to eradicate the virus. The United Kingdom was the first Western country to give emergency authorization a Covid-19 vaccine: the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine. The development of the first one started in January, 2020 and in May of the same year the companies launch a phase 1 and 2 trial. In July, phases 2 and 3 of the trial start with 30 thousand participants in the USA, Argentina, Brazil and Germany. In December 2<sup>nd</sup>, the UK government gives the approval for emergency vaccination and on December 8<sup>th</sup>, the immunization programme actually begins, and the first phase of vaccinations destined for health care workers and people over 80.

In order to reach the 95% effectiveness proven in the clinical trials, it requires two injections 21 days apart, and, according to an article published by BBC, more than 130 thousand people were vaccinated in UK during the first week. As stated in press release by the UK government, the national immunization programme has already secured more 40 million doses of the Pfizer/BioNTech in order to secure the whole population in UK during the next semester. On December 30<sup>th</sup>, the vaccine developed by a British institute, from Oxford/AstraZeneca was also approved for use in the UK and the first 530 thousand doses will be available in the first week of 2021. This drug also requires two doses, and the second has to be injected 12 weeks after the first one. The authorization for the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine is, as per an article published by The New York Times, a new path for the rest of the world, mainly because it is a cheap and easy-to-store shot, in comparison to the Pfizer/BioNTech one. The strategy for now is to inoculate the first dose in as many people as possible rather than to hold supplies for the second dose. According to the government, the objective is to “vaccinate as many people as quickly as possible” (JOHNSON, 2020).

Within this background, the first article to be analyzed in this study was published on November 9<sup>th</sup>, without clear authorship, under the *heading* “*BREAKING: Markets Soar as 90% Effective Covid Vaccine Unveiled by Pfizer*”. The article aims to discuss the Pfizer/ BioNTech Vaccine, which had just announced the successful results in the end of the trials, and the UK government announced the purchase of 40 million doses to inoculate in the subsequent month. Then, the article moves on to explain briefly all the phases included in the development of the

vaccine, what was the type of it, and how the medication worked in the system. Next, they portray the guidelines from the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation, which groups should get the vaccine first and then in which order the rest of the population would follow. In the end of the article, there is a discussion on how the financial market reacted to the vaccine announcement, and, according to the piece, the news was very beneficial for British stock market, showing the best results ever since March.

**Chart 16** – List of phrases taken from the November 9<sup>th</sup> article

Effective Covid Vaccine
Free from Covid-19 Restrictions
Pharmaceutical giant Pfizer
First agreement
No safety concerns
Virus’s genetic code
Rapid solution
Safer for the patient
Safe and effective
Safety and long-term outcomes data (from participants)
Market boom
London Financial markets
Best day
Potential vaccine breakthrough
Fire under traders
Positive signs from a vaccine trial
Economy closer to normal
Major new step

Source: The author (2020).

The next article was published almost a month later, in December 2<sup>nd</sup>, and as the previous one, does not disclose its writer. The heading for this article is “*VACCINE VICTORY: Britain Beats EU in COVID-19 Vaccine Race*”, and, even though shows a clear rivalry tone towards the European Union, it is an optimistic and celebratory piece. They start reviewing on what the pandemic caused to the world, and next they present de vaccine as “a ray of hope”

amidst the chaos. Next, the piece presents a quote from an EU regulator questioning the speed of British approval of the vaccine, which they claim to be jealousy because Europeans are not moving fast enough.

**Chart 17** – List of phrases taken from the December 2<sup>nd</sup> article

Vaccine Victory
Covid-19 vaccine race
Brexit Britain
The most crucial mass inoculation programme in history
Shot tested in wide-scale clinical trials
Global win
Ray of hope amid the pandemic
Emergency use approval
Fantastic news
World’s big powers
EU ‘jealousy’
Brit Speed
(MHRA) great job
World-class regulator
Safety checks
Race between countries
Trust and confidence in this authorization
Rigorous analysis to international standards
Benefits of vaccine approval
Safe and effective for use
Result of a scientifically rigorous and highly ethical research and development programme
(no part of culture) vaccines mandatory

Source: The author (2020).

The next article analyzed shows some of the difficulties faced in the vaccination programme. It was published by Jacob Smith on December 3<sup>rd</sup>, and it got the heading “*PFIZER VACCINE: Rollout To Present ‘Logistical Challenges’ As UK Gets First Covid Jab*”. The piece

discusses the logistic setbacks in transferring the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine from Belgium where it is stored. Just a week before the vaccination started, the article mentions some downsizing on the quantity of doses received, mainly due to issues concerning storage, temperature and the amount of time that the vials can be transported without suffering damage. these issues were what caused problems for one of the priority groups for immunization – elderly people in care homes – will face a delay in receiving the vaccines.

**Chart 18** – List of phrases taken from the December 3<sup>rd</sup> article

Immense Logistical Challenges
First Covid Jab
Approved Coronavirus vaccine
First country in the world
Production scaleback
Storage Temperature issue
Low temperatures
Priorization list
Mass vaccination centers
Flexibility (priority list)
List of priority in terms of vulnerability
Very small degree of patience
Other vaccines in the pipeline
World-class regulator

Source: The author (2020).

The last piece analyzed in this study was published on December 6th, once more by Jacob Smith, and it covers an interview with Dr. June Raine, chief executive of the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA), agency responsible for approving the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine. Under the heading “*NO DOUBT: Covid Vaccine Completely Safe Says Regulator*”, the article discusses not only the importance of the drug, but also aims to demystify the high-speed of the development process, which is a matter of concern for the general public. Therefore, this piece comprises reassurance for the reader, and reinstates that the jab will not only protect people’s health but also the economy.

**Chart 19** – List of phrases taken from the December 6<sup>th</sup> article

No doubt
Completely safe
The largest scale immunization programme in UK's history
Real confidence in the rigour of their approval
V-Day
Quality Control checks
Specially installed coolers
Vitally important
Highest standards of scrutiny, of safety and of effectiveness and quality
International standards
Very safe and highly effective vaccine
Logistical issues
Fully prepared for any possible outcome
No disruption to the vaccine
Many contingency plans in place

Source: The author (2020).

Comprising all of the phrases from charts 16 to 19, including chart 14 in the previous section, the radial map for the concept *Vaccine* follows<sup>8</sup> in the next page

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<sup>8</sup> The Mind map for the concept *Vaccine* is also available through the link: [https://coggle.it/diagram/X-4YO2icW5PsO\\_Zu/t/vaccine/c05957a83a680c382ea0c3a40a8b3bf654e44c32c48d75d4bfbceb2fee7d0463](https://coggle.it/diagram/X-4YO2icW5PsO_Zu/t/vaccine/c05957a83a680c382ea0c3a40a8b3bf654e44c32c48d75d4bfbceb2fee7d0463)

**Figure 8 – Mind map for the concept *Vaccine***

coggle  
made for free at coggle.it



Source: The author (2020).

### 3.4 ASSESSMENT OF RESULTS

As this study had previously presented, the representation of concepts in the format of mind maps is useful in a sense that we can understand the said concept in a prototypical form. Moreover, given the very basic cognitive semantics maxim “meaning implies choice” (LYONS, 1977), it is necessary to highlight that, one communicates based on the repertoire they have in combination to what the objective is. This means that when writing a piece, the content creator bases himself on a general idea in his head, which reflects into the article.

As a matter of fact, one can visualize exactly what is the standpoint from the website Politicalite.com just taking a quick look on the mind maps constructed in this thesis. The first one, taking noun phrases from six articles from March to May, displayed noun phrases related to China, where the disease started. This theme was the least ‘scientific’ and the most prone to conspiracy theories. Additionally, as a reflex of the beginning of a pandemic, this mind map proposes more general terms towards the virus, such as **Severe flu-like symptoms, SARS-like virus, Medical Surveillance, Stay-at-home orders and Biggest Pandemic**. Another point that should be focused is how the website creates an extremal narrative, with phrases like **Invisible enemy, shocking findings, shocking news, damning revelations and tip of the iceberg**. Based on these phrases, it can be said that politicalite.com creates an extraordinary atmosphere in their pieces but not on the actors portrayed – the focus is in the event, not in who did it.

Politicalite.com points China as responsible not only for the outbreak because it started there, and but also on how they dealt with it in the early stages of the epidemic. The phrases **China’s guilt** and **China’s mishandling of the Coronavirus** convey this meaning, and there is even an accusation for the WHO. There is even a discussion – which includes mainstream media<sup>9</sup> – on whether it is appropriate or racist/xenophobic to call Covid-19 as the Chinese Virus, mirroring the naming of Spanish Flu, the epidemic in the last century. It is possible to infer, based on the mind map, that the concept of Covid-19 includes many forms of calling it by its ‘birthplace’, including phrases like **Wuhan Virus (three times), Chinese virus and Chinese coronavirus**. In addition, the website even plays with words in the expression **Kung Flu**, mixing Kung Fu, a Chinese martial art, and the word influenza. This usage of words confers a very stereotypical – and disrespectful – sense to the concept of Covid-19, and stereotypes, as it

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<sup>9</sup> ROGERS, Katie, et al. Trump Defends Using ‘Chinese Virus’ Label, Ignoring Growing Criticism. **The New York Times**. New York, 18 mar. 2020. Disponível em: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/18/us/politics/china-virus.html>. Acesso em: 2 jan. 2021.

was mentioned in chapter 2, is a very simplistic way of making sense of the world, which blinds the views of society to singularities and values.

Another recurring point in the analyzed articles is the communist regime. Some phrases – such as **Communist state**, **China’s communist government** and **Chinese Communist Regime** – can be understood as references to the government, but some of them are even more aggressive and offensive – **Secretive communist regime**, **Brutal authoritarian Regime**, **Corrupt Chinese Communist Party** and **Dictatorship Chinese Communist Party**. The usage and reoccurrence of these phrases combined to not very favorable content leads to the creation, in the minds of the readers, of an intimidating and overall negative concept of who is in charge of the biggest and one of the most powerful countries in the world. Moreover, they never name or characterize the UK and USA governments as “Capitalist” or “Democratic”. If the writers do not feel the need to highlight these formative characteristics, it is possible to say that – to them – they are inherent and not worthy to mention. However, in the case of the communist regime that rules over China, based on both the frequency and the adjectives that they got phrased with, is seen as strange and not good.

One of the focal points of this section is the claim that China lied about the beginning of the outbreak – with phrases such as **Cover-up period**, **Chinese Cover-up**, **Deceit**, **Liars**, **Subsequent cover-up**, **History of covering-up outbreaks**, **Early suppression of reports of cases** and **widespread crackdown**. More than that, the writers on Politicalite.com support a theory that the outbreak – even though they claim that it was indeed unintended – came from labs in Wuhan very close to the wet market, and that, because of incompetent and insufficient staff, released this virus and could not contain it. The phrases included **intentionally manipulated (viruses)**, **unsecured laboratory**, **serious shortage of appropriately trained technicians** and **accidental release**.

On the whole, the mind map that constructed the concept of China brings to the reader a country that lies and deceits, is governed by a corrupt communist dictatorship and is fully responsible for the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, which brought major distress for the UK. Moreover, it is a nation that, because of incompetence, faced a lab leak of this dangerous virus and, on top of that, hid the origin of the virus with the help of the World Health Organization (WHO). And, like it was previously discussed in this study, even though not all of the information analyzed here is necessarily untrue, the language – noun phrases specifically – create the concept of a country that is the antithesis of the United Kingdom.

The next mind map concerned *lockdown*, and it is safe to say that this was a theme that, out of the three analyzed, crossed boundaries of time, with pieces published from end March to the middle of December. In this concept, one adjective is repeatedly used: **tough – tougher measures, tough new three tier lockdown system, tough tier 3 lockdown**. Some more general terms were also selected, such as **circuit-breaker lockdown** (which describes a lockdown for a specific period of time), **local economy, low-paid workers, nationwide problem, real difficulty, prolonged period**. We can point, as well, to the phrase **coronavirus outbreak**, and, if in the previous section the pandemic was an *invisible enemy*, now, that the solution for the problem intersects with economic interests, the analysis gathered the phrase **(virus with a) recovery rate of 99,5%**. There is also one single noun phrase that summarizes the view politicalite.com has on the lockdown decisions: **lockdown war**.

When it comes to a more general theme when referring to lockdown, phrases referring to economy problems leap into view: **Impact of the restrictions on economy and civil liberties, damage to local economies, devastating effect, business devastated, urgent financial hardship support, enormous financial losses, struggling businesses, and economic impact of a four-week lockdown**.

Even though these effects are felt in all parts of the UK entrepreneur community, the analysis found a special interest on the arts and hospitality sector of economy, which includes entertainment sector, like theaters and cinemas, and restaurants, bars and pubs. Some of the phrases that the analysis comprised in this section are **hospitality industry, Night-time economy, (Night-time economy) anxious, fearful and worried, lack of support for owner directors, life savings, (footfall) virtually non-existent, safe environments for audiences, disaster for London's theatres, cruel on hardworking publicans**.

We can also point out a *pub* sub-section is also interesting, because, according to the articles from politicalite, some noun phrases referring to it as **lowest places for transmission, more financial support for pubs and brewers, all the required safety measures and safe environments for audiences**. The owners of the businesses are also classified as a part of society who is suffering a lot with the restrictions from lockdowns, and are always portrayed not as rich businessespeople, but working-class, and completely desperate for empathy. The phrases are: **Working-class restaurateur, no fault of their own and price for insouciance elsewhere**. There are some phrases that refer to extreme emotions as well, all of them from the people who work in these environments: **fury among working-class brits, fury in the hospitality and arts industries, mental health and huge uncertainties**.

Phrases that question the government decisions are also prominent. Among them there are some surprising ones, given the websites ideological inclination to the right-wing conservative party. The Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, for example, gets the noun phrase **lockdown clown**, and his decisions towards lockdown comprise the phrases **Tory flip-flops on lockdown, (track and trace system) completely broken, government's failure, special powers, huge risks, huge gaps, failure of Tory Lockdown, Lack of funding for local authorities, illogical, and mixed messages**. However, when the pieces mention actions from other politicians from the same party, the noun phrase that they use is **Tory unrest**.

These pieces also contained a lot of metaphors, such as **hammer blow, darkest days (since WWII), Bitter pill to swallow, Draconian powers, Purgatory, Limbo, another nail in the coffin, sour taste, breaking point** and **unfair burden**. These denote extreme feelings towards death, which is something that Covid-19 can cause, and lockdowns aim to prevent. It is interesting to note that one of these articles mentioned the death toll as something else than a number – all of the articles have a total case and death count in a small paragraph at the end of the piece –, but none interview medical care essential workers or even people who lost relatives to Covid-19. All the death inferences made by these metaphors concern businesses.

The final concept coined by this mind map shows a lockdown that is highly harmful for the economy and not completely necessary, given the non-destructive nature of the virus. The government is displayed as a structure that abuses its powers in order to impose laws that are extremely harmful to hardworking Britons. These Britons are small business owners, who are thriving not only to maintain their businesses, but also their mental health. Moreover, a metaphoric imagery is built, based on phrases that draw from death concepts that end up creating a sense of worrisome and dread on the reader.

If lockdown means death and economic failure, in the end of the year the United Kingdom's population finally sees a light at the end of the tunnel: the vaccine, which allows people's lives to go back to normal and economy to improve. If lockdown was tough, we are safe to say that the adjective for vaccine is **safe and effective**. Other noun phrases that reinsure this characterization were **safe and effective for use, effective Covid vaccine, approved Covid Vaccine, 70% effective, safer for the patient, very safe and highly effective vaccine, no safety concerns**. In two very similar metaphors used in the articles, **ray of light** and **a ray of hope amid the pandemic**. Moreover, other phrases directly refer to the vaccine are **first Covid Jab, vitally important, rapid solution, potential vaccine breakthrough, no doubt, virus's genetic code, fantastic news and positive news**. Still drawing from the WWII

metaphors, in this section a happy one was found: **V-Day**, which draws from D-day, which was the date in which the allied forces – the UK included – started to liberate the German-occupied France. Here, it stands for Vaccination day, the date in which the immunization began.

On the other hand, the rapid approval from the UK caused some controversy and even questioning from British people and other parts of the world. However, politicalite.com invested a lot of effort to publish content that dissipated these fears. As the study previously mentioned, this section shows a lot of scientific knowledge, mainly because the pieces comprised intend to inform the audience and convince them to get vaccinated.

Therefore, they had to reassure that the British agency responsible for authorizing the new drug was trustworthy, and the phrases that display this reassurance are: **fully prepared for any possible outcome, highest standards of scrutiny, of safety, of effectiveness and quality, international standards, benefits of vaccine approval, emergency use approval, (MHRA) great job, world-class regulator, emergency use approval, trust and confidence in this authorization, rigorous analysis to international standards, quality control checks, safety checks and real confidence in the rigour of their approval.**

Alongside the British agency for approval, there were also phrases that concerned the development of the vaccine, such as **result of a scientifically rigorous and highly ethical research and development programme, latest successful vaccine trials, safety and long term outcomes data (from trial participants), shot tested in wide-scale clinical trials, positive signs from a vaccine trial.**

The vaccine was also used as a political weapon by politicalite.com, avid protester for the leavers. Given that the UK was the first western nation to approve the vaccine, moving ahead faster than the European Union, that made the decision as a group, the general stance from the website is that they won an invisible race. The expressions comprised here include discreet nationalist phrases such as **the most crucial mass inoculation programme in history, first agreement, (UK) first country in the world, the largest scale immunization programme in UK's history, (no part of culture) vaccines mandatory and mass vaccination centers.** However, more competitive and provocative phrases such as **brit speed, Brexit Britain, EU jealousy, world's big powers, Covid-19 vaccine race, global win, Vaccine Victory and race between countries.**

Phrases related to economy are also important in this concept because vaccines meant, for politicalite writers, a way out of the lockdown restrictions – **greater freedoms, free from**

**Covid-19 restrictions, economy closer to normal, route out of the pandemic, London financial markets, market boom, fire under traders and best day.**

However, because of initial setbacks, the vaccines faced some difficulties as it was expected. Most of them were related to the availability and logistics of the first approved vaccine, which required special and expensive storage. The phrases included in this part are **logistical issues, no disruption to the vaccine, storage temperature issue, specially installed coolers, low temperature, production scaleback, pharmaceutical giant Pfizer, immense logistical challenges, very small degree of patience, many contingency plans in place, prioritization list, list of priority in terms of vulnerability, Flexibility (on priority list) and other vaccines in the pipeline.**

Based on this mind map, it is possible to say that the vaccine concept is indeed a life jacket for all the troubles brought by the Covid-19 pandemic – which, if we consider only the analysis from politicalite, said troubles are mainly economic. Moreover, the early approval of a vaccine is seen as a British achievement – almost a conquest over the rest of the world but most importantly, over the European Union – given the efforts complied by the national agency which was responsible for the acceptance. Moreover, the vaccine is indeed safe and effective, even though it showed some logistic challenges.

## 5 FINAL WORDS

The present study aimed to outline how the pandemic of Covid-19 in 2020 in the United Kingdom was displayed, through news articles published in the website Politicalite.com. In order to fully comprehend it, noun phrases from fifteen pieces retrieved from the website were analyzed, and, from it, three mind maps were built, concerning three conceptual constructions: China, Lockdown and Vaccine.

The analysis was done after two chapters that proposed a theoretical framework on the themes of this dissertation: Fake News and Cognitive Semantics. The first chapter presented guidelines from two important news outlets – Reuters, an international agency which provides news all over the world – and BBC, a British state company, responsible for broadcasting content for almost a century. Both of them considered as pillars of their actions – accuracy and impartiality. It was secured that accurate and free from bias journalism is vital and fundamental, mainly due to the fact that global news organizations are gatekeepers of democracy in modern society. However, in the past few years, the world witnessed a loss of trust in mainstream journalistic companies, which, combined to easy popularized internet access, led to the dissemination of inaccurate content in specialized websites and social media. From this, Egelhofer and Lecheler (2019) proposed a tripod which sustains the fake news genre: to be low in facticity, to display journalistic format and to have the intention to deceive. The last part of this chapter brings the importance to discuss the language of newspapers – mainly because it is identitary, and confers power to the people who tell the stories in our society. Journalistic discourse – and, as it was discussed, Fake News pieces aim to mimic journalistic format – is responsible for the way groups of people are represented and how each relation to power is measured. Moreover, according to Fowler (1991), we make sense of the world by categorizing phenomena, and this means that once we put a concept – such as China, Lockdown or Vaccine – in a box inside our minds, the personal relationship we have with those structures are much simplified, which can lead to stereotyping.

This discussion then gave space to the importance of cognitive semantics. Given that one cannot create textual content without using words, it is impossible to separate meaning from communication. In addition to that, as Lyons (1977) says, meaning implies choice, and, according to the framework of semantics used in this study, speakers of a certain language chose a lexical alternative among different possibilities. This process, defined as cognitive, identifies the meaning of expressions from mental entities. Those mental entities enable the existence of

prototypical effects, which are connected to the very idea of conceptualization, one of the most important potentialities of language. In this sense, prototypicality is important because human beings assess meanings which are kept in bundles of stored knowledge, all connected through situations from everyday life that make up our knowledge of the world. The study then presented the radial nets representation of prototypes, which displays concepts using linguistic forms conjoined in a multi-dimensional network. The last part of this chapter discussed the noun phrase – semantic units that describe an entity, which can be characterized or not. Langacker (2008) mentions that a lexical noun is selected from a large inventory in a speaker's mind, and when someone chooses to use an adjective with a noun, the phrase is processed as one, mainly because it becomes a specific entity, and also facilitates prototypical constructions.

The last part of this dissertation presented an analysis of 15 pieces taken from the website *politicalite.com*, dividing them into three sections: China, Lockdown and Vaccine, and, at the end of each section a mind map was built using the noun phrases retrieved from each article. In the assessment of results, it was possible to notice that China was portrayed as the overall villain of the Covid-19 pandemic. The characterization of the eastern nation portrayed it as a corrupt communist dictatorship, filled with incompetent scientists who leaked the virus from lab and did not notice until it was too late and the world was infected. The website did not display any evidence to back their allegations. It is possible to infer that the readers of *politicalite.com* get a negative concept construction, based on the noun phrases used to characterize this entity.

*Politicalite.com* also fought a battle with the lockdown restrictions, which imposed economic difficulties for small business owners from Great Britain. As it was possible to see from the mind maps, the website heavily criticized the decisions made by the Prime Minister Boris Johnson, and considered the imposition of lockdown a failure for the country and for the economy. There were not any pieces interviewing sources from the health system or families who lost relatives to coronavirus. The next constructed concept was the vaccine, which was seen as a life jacket for the UK. The noun phrases comprised in the mind map reassure the readers of its safety and effectiveness, as well as pose it as a way out of the lockdown restrictions and a step towards economic recuperation. As a plus, the fact that the UK was the first western country to approve the immunization is portrayed as a victory in relation to the European Union.

We cannot fully attest that *politicalite* writers have the intention to deceive – mainly because we cannot offer evidence of such an action. However, it is possible to say that, based

on the chosen noun phrases– and bearing in mind that meaningfulness implies choice – that they aim to construct prototypical concepts concerning these three themes, which make up the view for the Covid-19 pandemic in the UK. By using repeated noun phrases – or even strong ones, like **liars** for China, **failure** for Lockdown and **completely safe** for Vaccine – it is possible to say that their objective, beyond informing their audiences, is to build a prototypical concept in the minds of their readers. Unfortunately, just as predicted by the model discussed, they are low in facticity, publishing pieces which lack evidence or present facts that are untrue, and this stance cannot offer an accurate news outlet for the readers. This compromises the democracy of the UK and even in other continents, based that they also cover issues from the United States.

As a suggestion for development for future studies, it would be interesting to offer a longitudinal study towards the pandemic, using data from Politicalite and from another news outlet from another country, comparing the focuses on each case. Other themes could be used to understand Politicalite rhetoric even further, such as their coverage on Brexit, for example. Additionally, a study on the verbs used and their semantic impact, which was another fact that came to my attention during the analysis, and further studies may be conducted in order to analyze how actions are portrayed in this website.

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## ATTACHMENT 1

**Chart 20 – Goals in communication (complete)**

<u>Goals of communication per se</u>	To get certain phenomenological content existing within oneself (ideas, feelings, perceptions, and so on) replicated within certain addressees.
Goals pertaining to the content of a communication	a) To convey a particular propositional content or component notion;
	b) To set the degree of specificity and salience of a whole proposition or component notion;
	c) To organize the sequencibility of the contents (so as to direct how the ideational whole develops temporally in the addressee);
	d) To manifest (or to project an image of) one's character, mood, or attitude (toward the topic, addressee, situation and so on);
	e) To signal the nature/type of the present communication.
Goals pertaining to the structure of a communication	f) To conform to "grammaticality", a communication system's structural "design" properties;
	g) To conform to "felicity": a communication system's preferences among expressive means (relative to a particular style);
	h) To conform to "aesthetics": one's own sense, or canons, of what is pleasing in communication's form.
Goals pertaining to the transmission, reception and comprehension of a communication	i) To accommodate a communication's temporal/physical manifestation to external temporal/physical exigencies, or vice-versa;
	j) To accommodate one's communication to the characteristics of the addressee's receptivity;
	k) To ease (or, more generally, to control) the addressee's processing task.
<u>Communication in a larger context</u>	To condition the nature of one's communication, before and during its production, on the basis of one's assessments of one's self, one's addressee, and the remaining total context To have, with one's communication, certain further interpersonal effects or noneffects
	l) To make one's communication content appropriate to the immediate or long-range context (and to the "metacommunication")
	m) To make one's communication satisfy some more general interpersonal intention or program pertaining to the addressee
	n) To adjust one's communication with attention to its potential effect outside the direct communicator-addressee linkage
	o) To initiate/maintain/terminate/avoid communication or some aspect thereof (such as a topic)

	p) To engender, via one's communication, certain actions/states in the addressee (or others)
<u>Goals pertaining to generativity</u>	q) To conform to each moment's schema for the realization of one's communicative goals that arises in one by unconscious processes
<u>Evaluative and remedial goals</u>	r) To maintain/repair one's communication on the basis of an ongoing monitoring of its adequacy in realizing one's communicative goals

Source: TALMY, 2000, p.343-344.

## ATTACHMENT 2

**Chart 21** – Expressive means of communication (complete)

Systemic	a) The particular language/communication system
Ideational	b) Phraseology
	c) Lexical items/other morphemes/lexicalization
	d) Lexical-derivation processes
	e) Omission/deletion
	f) The syntactic structure of a constituent or sentence
Structural and relational	g) Order (of words/phrases/prepositions)
	h) Repetition
	i) The verb's case-frame setup
	j) A nominal's grammatical relation
	k) Segmental "phon"ology
Sonic or other physical medium	l) Suprasegmental "phon'ology
	m) Other nonsegmental characteristics
	n) Flow Management
Temporal	o) Other temporal characteristics
	p) (non-systemic) gesture
Kinesic	q) Physical action

Source: TALMY, 2000, p.346.