Emotion, lies, and "bullshit" in journalistic discourse: The case of fake news

Laura Alba-Juez & J. Lachlan Mackenzie
UNED (Spain), VU Amsterdam (Netherlands)
lalba@flog.uned.es, lachlan_mackenzie@hotmail.com

Abstract

Emotion is part and parcel of all kinds of human experience and as such plays an important role in all discourse types, including professional discourse. In the 21st century more than ever, the proper channeling and expression of our emotions at the workplace has come to be considered a sign of emotional intelligence, powerful leadership, and (harmless) persuasion skills. However, persuasion can also be used as a weapon to lie and manipulate people's emotions. Meibauer (2018) notes that lying and deception play an important role in business and trade, and this is obviously the case in the business of fake news. In this article we analyze the genre of fake news within professional journalistic discourse. We carry out a qualitative sociopragmatic analysis of samples of political and scientific fake news in English, and show how this kind of journalism aims at manipulating readers' emotions not only through the use of prototypical lies (i.e. assertions whose content the speaker believes to be false, uttered with the intention of deceiving the hearer), but mainly by means of complex discourse-pragmatic strategies such as the skillful manipulation of the three chief evaluative subsystems, ATTITUDE, ENGAGEMENT and GRADUATION (Martin & White, 2005), the triggering of false inferences and the display of misleading images, thus playing with the *scalarity* of lying. This in turn leads us to some important conclusions showing that the fact that the linguistic expression of falsity can be scalar is intimately connected with the concepts of "bullshit" (Frankfurt, 2005) and "post-truth" (Keyes, 2004): A good story that somehow touches readers' emotions, even if it is deceiving, prevails over a true story, because the readers choose to accept as true what makes them "feel good".

Keywords: emotion, persuasion, manipulation, fake news, post-truth, bullshit, scalarity of lying.

Resumen

Emoción, mentiras y "bullshit" en el discurso periodístico: el caso de las noticias falsas/falseadas o "fake news"

La emoción forma parte de todas las formas de la experiencia humana, y, como tal, juega un papel importante en todos los tipos de discurso, incluyendo el discurso profesional. En el siglo XXI más que en ninguna otra época, la canalización y expresión apropiadas de las emociones en entornos laborales se ha convertido en un signo de inteligencia emocional, gran liderazgo e (inocuas) habilidades de persuasión. A pesar de ello, la persuasión se puede usar también para manipular las emociones de las personas. Meibauer (2018) explica que la mentira y el engaño juegan un papel importante en los negocios y el comercio, lo cual es obviamente el caso del negocio de las noticias falsas (o mejor dicho, *falseadas*) o "fake news". En este artículo investigamos el género de las noticias falseadas a través del análisis cualitativo sociopragmático de ejemplos de este tipo de noticias en inglés, y mostramos cómo esta forma de periodismo apunta a la manipulación de las emociones de los lectores, no solamente mediante mentiras prototípicas (es decir, aseveraciones cuyo contenido el hablante cree falso, pero que son producidas con la intención de engañar al oyente), sino también y principalmente con estrategias pragmático-discursivas complejas, tales como la manipulación hábil de los tres subsistemas evaluativos principales, ACTITUD, COMPROMISO y GRADUACIÓN (Martin y White, 2005), la activación de inferencias falaces o el uso de imágenes engañosas, jugando así con la *escalaridad* de la mentira. Esto, a su vez, nos lleva a sacar conclusiones importantes que muestran que el hecho de que la expresión de lo falseado puede ser escalar tiene una conexión estrecha con los conceptos de "bullshit" (Frankfurt, 2005) y "posverdad" (Keyes, 2004): una buena historia que de alguna manera toque las emociones de los lectores, aun si es engañosa, prevalece sobre la historia verdadera porque los lectores eligen aceptar como verdadero aquello que apela a sus pasiones y, por tanto, los hace "sentir bien".

Palabras clave: emoción, persuasión, manipulación, noticias falsas/falseadas, posverdad, bullshit, escalaridad de la mentira.

"The decision to tell the truth or to lie is a pragmatic decision."
Jörg Meibauer (2018: 370)

1. Introduction

It has now been established (see Mackenzie & Alba-Juez, 2019, for examples of recent work) that emotion permeates all discourse genres, from everyday

conversation to journalistic discourse (cf. Alonso Belmonte, 2019) or even scientific discourse (cf. Sancho-Guinda, 2019). Emotion is inextricably linked to persuasion, as can be clearly perceived in journalistic discourse, where persuasion can be used to heighten readers' sensitivity to a given issue, or on the contrary, to manipulate their emotions, stances and beliefs. The first kind of persuasion works with what Cockcroft et al. (2014: 85) refer to as the "emotion which deepens and illuminates our understanding", and the latter with "the emotion that clouds an issue", what Cicero referred to as *perturbatio*.

Journalists who are good persuaders are also skillful instigators of emotion because they know that the way we feel about something influences our rational judgement (Alba-Juez, forthcoming). The relation between persuasion and emotion is double-edged, however: on the one hand, we cannot think properly unless we also *feel* as a prior condition (Damasio, 1999), but on the other, as Cockcroft et al. (2014: 85) have pointed out, "there is also the contradictory assumption that emotion tends to distort the truth of our perceptions". This emotionally driven distortion of truth is precisely what seems to be happening when certain journalists produce what has been called "fake news".

In this study we will examine fake news on the web as a discourse genre[1] which has its own distinctive linguistic and sociopragmatic features, given not only by the genre itself but also by the medium through which it is spread (in this case, the Internet). As we will show, a key identifying feature of fake news is its lack of concern with the truth, so what makes this genre distinctive has much less to do with the literal meaning of the language used than with the discursive-pragmatic strategies deployed in order to cheat or mislead the reader, such as the manipulation of the different sub-systems of Appraisal (Martin & White, 2005) or the triggering of deceptive inferences by means of fallacies and the like.

A distinction needs to be drawn between fake news that (like a counterfeit banknote) appears to be genuine and what is nowadays called *infotainment*, which blatantly makes no effort to tell the truth or give objective information, but which aims above all to entertain the audience, irrespective of ethics or reliability. However, with the rise of social media as the principal source of both information and amusement, for many members of the public the distinction between malicious and merely entertaining communication has become blurred. The most salient feature of the texts

that result from this blend of apparent seriousness and unabashed flippancy is that their creators are playing with shared cultural knowledge, the information and emotions conveyed in the text, the emotions triggered in the audience, and the consequent emotional implicatures (*e*-implicatures, Schwarz-Friesel, 2010, 2015) that are sparked off. Regarding the latter, it appears to be the case that infotainment-style fake news triggers e-implicatures of the "You'll like this news and feel good about it" kind, in certain cases appealing to some of human beings' basest instincts, such as feeling good when somebody else fails or suffers (in German, *Schadenfreude*),[2] or feeling good because one is different from someone who is supposedly corrupt or evil. Readers' emotional response to this kind of text may render them susceptible to the confirmation bias fallacy[3] (Barclay, 2018), which leads them to accept some information as good and true simply because it aligns with their own thoughts and beliefs, without first considering whether it may be false or fake. This kind of manipulation of the truth is very much connected to such concepts as *bullshit* (Frankfurt, 2005) or *post-truth* (Keyes, 2004; Harari, 2018: 231-244). The manipulators, in producing their deceptive discourse, are playing, as we shall see, with the scalarity and imprecision of lying (Meibauer, 2018).

The corpus used for our analysis consists of samples of fake news, both in English and in Spanish, from different online newspapers, magazines and social networks. In our analysis of emotion in this news, we have looked into its linguistic manifestations, paying special attention to the discourse and sociopragmatic aspects because both the expression of emotion and the decision to tell the truth, lie or deceive are intersubjective in nature and therefore constitute pragmatic phenomena. We have taken our own definition of "emotion in discourse" as our point of departure:

> […] we view emotion as a (dynamical) system of language which interacts with the system of evaluation but whose main function is the expression of the speaker's feelings, mood or affective experience. It is a multimodal discourse process, which permeates all linguistic levels but also manifests itself in non-verbal ways, presenting different stages and forms (influenced by variables such as pragmatic expectations or common-ground knowledge) according as the discursive situation and interaction changes and evolves. (Alba-Juez & Mackenzie, 2019: 18).

Thus, in our corpus we have examined not only the literal meaning of the texts but also the different kinds of inferential meaning triggered by the words used,

as well as the macrostructure of the text, the pictures included, and any other accompanying semiotic variables, all of which contribute to the fulfilment of the writers' intentions to manipulate the readers' emotions and stance for their own (political, financial, etc.) benefit. This eventually has led us to reflect upon and then taxonomize the different kinds of manipulation deployed in the genre of fake news, as will be shown in section 5.

In the remainder of this article we shall first present some theoretical considerations about the genre of fake news (section 2) and the deployment of emotion, persuasion and manipulation in journalistic discourse (section 3), to be followed by an account of the methodology adopted (section 4), the analysis of two samples of fake news in English (section 5) and finally, our conclusions.

2. Journalistic discourse, fake news, lies, bullshit and post-truth

2.1. Journalistic discourse

At the end of the 20th century, Norman Fairclough (1995) was already warning his readers about the great power of the mass media to influence knowledge, beliefs, values, social relations and social identities, and because of this conviction he advocated for the recognition of the analysis of media discourse as an important element within contemporary research. Fairclough also called our attention to the fact that reporter/audience identities and relations are more complex than might seem at first sight for, among other things, "in addition to the knowledgeable reporter informing the interested citizen, there is an element […] of the media artist entertaining the viewer as consumer" (1995: 4). This element has brought about a tension between information and entertainment, which is indicative of the tendency for the media to become increasingly conversationalized[4] and "marketized" (1995: 10), a phenomenon that nowadays is associated with the above-mentioned notion of "infotainment". For these reasons, Fairclough argues in favor of the idea that the analysis of texts cannot be treated in isolation from the analysis of discursive and sociocultural practices, an idea to which we adhere in the research presented here. Indeed, we see the discourse genre of fake news as a sociocultural practice which in the 21st century presents specific features that are affected and influenced by the explosion of social media

and Internet communication in general. Ethical norms of objectivity and impartiality are paramount in good journalism, but the explosion of the Internet has paved the way for a kind of journalism that is prone and sometimes even compelled to deviate from these norms, and which therefore has developed its own distinctive features. In consonance with Genre Theory, then, we understand that "texts which are doing different jobs in the culture will unfold in different ways, working through different stages or steps" (Eggins & Martin, 1997: 236). Our aim in this work is to unravel those different "jobs and ways" in the genre of fake news.

2.2. But… what is fake news?

Is fake news just news which is false? The answer is not simple: fabricators of fake news play with variables such as human emotions, the shared knowledge between journalists and audiences, and the different dimensions of language and discourse. In most cases, fake news is not totally false, but rather a distorted version of something that really happened or a manipulated account of true facts.

In his study of the role of lying in the evolution of language, Dor (2017: 46) distinguishes between what we could call "bad lying" (i.e. lying with the exploitative intention of making a profit at the expense of other individuals) and "good lying" (i.e. lying with non-exploitative, pro-social intentions, normally connected with politeness). Even though, as we shall see, fake news does not always involve a complete lie, it can be said to belong to the former kind of linguistic interaction, and it is therefore a subgenre characterized by deceitful communication. Dor does not write about fake news, but his reflections on lying and human language are largely applicable to the role that lying and cheating play in fake news. Interestingly, he argues (2017: 44) that "every system of honest communication also allows for cheating, which from the point of view of natural selection seems to be a more advantageous strategy than honest communication". There must exist, indeed, certain payoffs to the production of fake news at both ends of the communication process. Dor explains that "language is deceivers' heaven" (2017: 50), and when the participants' interests converge, there is normally no need for honest signaling, and therefore they will work together, disregarding the possibility that their coordinated action may involve partial or even rampant lying. Again, this is what seems to happen in the fake news situation: the reader may or may not know or suspect that the news is fake, but if it aligns with her political/philosophical/personal views and makes her "feel good",

she will accept it and tune into it: "What is required is a good story: an object for imagination" (Dor, 2017: 50), regardless of its veracity.

As Asr and Taboada (2019a) point out, one of the most recent incarnations of fake news was is to be found in the articles that favored or attacked either Hillary Clinton or Donald Trump during the 2016 US presidential election, but in fact present-day fake news is not only about politics, but also about health (notably the supposed dangers of vaccination), celebrities or practically anything else that could interest the public at large. Lazer et al. (2017: 1094) accordingly define 21st-century fake news broadly as "fabricated information that mimics news media content in form but not in organizational process or intent".

Fake news comes in different forms, but there is no universal agreement as to which these forms are. Barclay (2018) divides fake news into three broad categories, namely:

1) Mercenary Fake News: This has no political agenda and is created for the purpose of making money (in the digital market owners of websites that include paid ads receive a certain amount of money each time someone clicks on one of their pages). Clickbait articles with sensationalistic headlines which have a flimsy connection with the actual content of the article also belong to this category.

2) Fake News with an Agenda: This category includes propagandistic fake news which has been intentionally created to promote a specific agenda (political, social, etc.). Conspiracy theories are found within this type of fake news.

3) Satirical Fake News: This is an entirely different subgenre of fake news, which consists of satirical, humorous stories, in many cases including a political or social commentary. Among several current websites, *The Onion* (www.theonion.com) in the US and *El Mundo Today* (www.elmundotoday.com) in Spain are leading sites of satirical fake news. The danger of this kind of news is that despite being satirical, it can be misunderstood as "serious" by certain readers.[5]

This third category will not be discussed in this work, because in line with Dance (2019), we believe it cannot be considered as "authentic" fake news. Dance defines fake news as "intentionally factually incorrect news that is published to deceive and misinform its reader", and he points out that a) it

is the component of intentionality that separates fake news from misreported news, which is a normal phenomenon in journalism and is corrected once the error is detected; b) the "factually incorrect" component of the definition is the essence of fake news, and c) the third component, "deceive and misinform", is what separates fake news from parody and satire, as neither of these intends to deceive their reader nor do they intend to be treated as fact.

As for the themes of fake news, Golbeck et al. (2018) identify the following:

1) Hyperbolic position against one person or group (e.g. Trump, Clinton, Obama, Islam, refugees).
2) Hyperbolic position in favor of one person or group (e.g. Trump, Clinton, Obama, Islam, refugees).
3) Discrediting a normally credible source.
4) Racist messaging.
5) Paranormal theories.
6) Conspiracy theories.

Golbeck et al.'s (2018) list of themes, however, is not exhaustive. In our own investigation we have found that nowadays any topic can be subject to distortion in a piece of fake news.

The practice of fabricating information, however, is nothing new from the historical point of view. People have been inventing stories ever since human beings appeared on planet Earth, but what makes the problem most serious nowadays is the great speed with which fake news spreads through the internet and the social media, as shown by recent research such as that of Vosoughi et al. (2018), who in their study of the spread of stories through Twitter found that fake news diffuses and goes viral significantly faster and with a wider reach than true stories. Their results show that a false story was 70% more likely to be retweeted than a true one. One possible explanation for this is that fake news tends to be more striking or shocking and therefore appeals to the human tendency to pay more attention to sensational negative events (cf. Sachsman, 2017). Also, as Harari (2018b) wittily states,

> The truth is, truth has never been high on the agenda of *Homo sapiens*. If you stick to unalloyed reality, few people will follow you. False stories

have an intrinsic advantage over the truth when it comes to uniting people.

2.3. Bullshit

All of the above considerations have led us to believe that the practice of fabricating news has indisputable connections with the practice of *bullshitting* (Frankfurt, 2005). In some significant way, fabricators of fake news are trying to bullshit their audiences. In his philosophical approach to the theoretical study of bullshit, Frankfurt bases his definition of the term on Black's (1982) definition of *humbug*, which he considers to be a politer synonym of bullshit. Black (1982: 23) defines humbug as "deceptive misrepresentation, short of lying, especially by pretentious word or deed, of somebody's own thoughts, feelings or attitudes". And Frankfurt (2005) adds that apart from sharing all these characteristics with humbug, the concept of bullshit involves the following additional features:

- Bullshitters have a lack of concern with truth: it is not that they fail to get things right, they in fact do not even care about getting them right.
- Bullshitting involves a kind of bluff.[6]
- The essence of bullshit is not that it is false, but that it is fake and phony.
- People tend to be more tolerant with bullshit than with lies: the bullshitter may not deceive us about the facts, but what s/he necessarily attempts to deceive us about is his/her enterprise, what s/he is up to.
- In the work of the bullshitter there is a kind of laxity which resists or eludes discipline and rigor.

Frankfurt (2005: 6) observes that "The realms of advertising and of public relations, and the nowadays closely related realm of politics, are replete with instances of bullshit so unmitigated that they can serve among the most indisputable and classic paradigms of the concept". And we would like to add that the realm of fake news, too, can be considered a paradigmatic case of bullshit, for it is clear that it meets all the above requirements: it shows a lack of concern with the truth, it involves some kind of bluff, its essence lies in the fact that it is fake (not necessarily false) and therefore lacks rigor, and it allows the bullshitters to hide their real intentions, given the fact that

people are more tolerant of bullshit than of plain lies. As Frankfurt points out, the words of one of the characters (Mr. Simpson) in Eric Ambler's *Dirty Story* (Ambler, 1967) illustrate this point:

> Although I was only seven when my father was killed, I still remember him very well and some of the things he used to say.... One of the first things he taught me was, "Never tell a lie when you can bullshit your way through."

The very essence of bullshit lies in the lack of a commitment to being truthful, in an indifference to how things really are (Frankfurt, 2005: 8-9), both of which are distinctive features of fake news. Rather than having an interest in deliberate lying (which would involve an intentional violation of truth), manufacturers of fake news feel themselves to be exempt from the constraints of the truths surrounding the point in question, and therefore are prepared to fake the context and whatever else in order to deceive their audiences, which, according to Frankfurt, "is less a matter of craft than of art. Hence the familiar notion of the 'bullshit artist'" (2005: 13).

For all of the above reasons, bullshit can be a greater enemy of the truth than lies. Frankfurt warns his readers about the implications of the contemporary proliferation of bullshit, reflected in various forms of post-modernist skepticism which deny that we can have any reliable access to an objective reality. And here is where the concept of *post-truth*, which has widely been associated with fake news, comes to the fore.

2.4. Post-truth

Harsin (2018: 1) points out that post-truth "is sometimes posited as a social and political condition whereby citizens or audiences and politicians no longer respect truth (e.g. climate science deniers or *birthers*)[7] but simply accept as true what they believe or feel". Although this condition has been identified by ethicists for millennia, the specific contours of post-truth are a 21st-century phenomenon whose recent origins can be found in "the anxious elite negotiation of mass representative liberal democracy with proposals for organizing and deploying mass communication technologies" (Harsin, 2018: 1). Like many other concepts, post-truth presents definitional problems: it is paradoxically not interpreted as a kind of truth, but rather as something that is beyond truth; truth is left behind as a phenomenon of the past. Experts and, in particular, scientists who are committed to rational argumentation, are dismissed as irrelevant and possibly obstructive.

Post-truth communication is usually divided into two types: *disinformation* and *misinformation* (Stahl, 2010). Misinformation refers to the spreading of inaccurate or false information while one mistakenly thinks one is sharing accurate information, while disinformation involves the deliberate spreading of false or inaccurate information. However, both concepts are closely linked, for "disinformers may produce misinformers" (Harsin, 2018: 7). Fake news is a subcategory of disinformation which in many cases differs from false information or lies in the sense that its core propositions may be contextualized by real facts.

Harsin explains that *promotional culture* is another factor in the post-truth cultural ambience, arguing that

> culture and social relations have been powerfully transformed by the role of communication in new forms of consumer capitalism – the latter's hyper-promotional stage, with no small effects on perceptions of honesty, truth claims and trust-granting (Harsin, 2018: 12).

He, too, associates post-truth with Frankfurt's (2005) notion of bullshit, given the observation that bullshit-friendly communication has become accepted in a broad array of human practices. Harsin also points out that the synergistic agencies of post-truth favor highly emotional communication, in that the participants in the post-truth culture put their trust (i.e. an emotional commitment) in what is being communicated. The promotional industries, politics and now even some forms of journalism (by means of fake news) are taking advantage of this trust/truth identification to target their audiences emotionally and thereby to attain their political or financial aims.

Müller-Thyssen (2018) pertinently extends the definition of post-truth to put the focus on its recipients. He argues that all definitions of post-truth leave aside the fundamental aspect of the openness of consumers of news to being influenced (= bullshitted) even when they know consciously that reality is being faked. "In this crazy world", Müller-Thyssen points out, post-truth manufacturers

> appeal directly to the philias and phobias of their audiences, who are bored and confused by data and statistics, and who are even thankful for a good story that transforms the truth of the facts into a manipulated truth of the passions [our translation] (Müller-Thyssen, 2018: 65).

In the light of the connections between fake news, bullshit, post-truth, emotion and persuasion, let us in the next section turn more specifically to the implications for journalistic discourse.

3. Emotion, persuasion and manipulation in journalistic discourse

Sancho-Guinda (2019) notices that although emotion has traditionally been associated with the arts, it is nowadays linked to other fields such as architecture, politics, science and journalism, a phenomenon which can be characterized as a change of paradigm: there has been an *emotional turn* in the professions.

Within the journalistic profession, the use of persuasion and the appeal to readers' emotions are not limited to fake news but are acknowledged characteristics of journalistic discourse in general. Newsworthiness has many aspects, eight of which have been recognized by Bednarek (2019): eliteness, personalization, impact, recency, consonance, positivity, negativity, and proximity, but one of the most important is the extent to which the news can impress, surprise or shock readers. Good persuaders are normally skillful instigators of emotions: they know that the way their audiences feel about something will influence their rational judgements and even the decisions they make. But how does the persuasion used in "true" and serious journalism differ from that used by fake news manufacturers? Cockcroft et al.'s (2014: 85) account of the distinction, mentioned in section 1, between the "emotion that tends to distort the truth of our perceptions" and that "which illuminates and deepens our understanding of it" seems to be key to answering this question. Alongside the positive kind of persuasion which tries to build credibility by using logical arguments and appealing to emotions that will clarify an issue rather than cloud it, there is also persuasion that depends on emotions that undermine reliable understanding. The negative character of the latter's appeal to emotions puts it on a par with the practice of *manipulation*, a discourse/rhetorical strategy that we view as an essential component of the characterization of fake news as a genre.

From a discourse-analytical sociopragmatic perspective, in order for a discourse to be considered "manipulative", it is of the utmost importance to examine the different types of context surrounding the communicative event in question, including the broad cultural, personal, cognitive, social,

and emotive contexts. It is therefore crucial to contemplate, among other things, the socio-emotional relationship between speaker and audience, the different footings or roles taken by each of them at different moments, the purpose of the event, the shared knowledge of the participants, and the cognitive frames within which their interaction is being carried out. From a cognitive (relevance-theoretical) perspective, Maillat and Oswald (2011: 7-8) view manipulation as "an attempt at controlling the context selection process of an utterance *U* by making a set of assumptions *C* so salient as to make them inescapable from a cognitive point of view". The so-called "flashbulb contexts" (Brown & Kulik, 1977) are very pertinent here: these refer to highly salient memories which are extremely emotional and subjectively permanent in nature (e.g. the 9/11 attacks on the USA in 2001) and which are used by skillful manipulators in the knowledge that they are overwhelming and thus inescapable. In her lesson about the elements of persuasion, Díez-Prados (2019, Module 9) warns us about this when she points out: "Make sure that emotion is used ethically", and "Beware that a speaker may use your emotions for his/her own profit, not yours".

Maillat and Oswald (2011) present two main kinds of fallacies or rhetorical devices used for manipulative purposes: 1) the *ad verecundiam* fallacy and 2) the *ad populum* fallacy. The former consists in resorting to the voice of an individual deceptively introduced as an "expert" to present an argument as indisputable, and the latter in presenting an argument as strong just because "everybody says so". Manufacturers of fake news have recourse to both these fallacies, as we will show in our analysis when, for instance, a piece of fake news about climate change hinges on the testimony of supposed experts to rebut and discredit serious scientific articles on the matter, or when a piece of fake news is repeated, republished or retweeted numerous times (e.g. the news that associated Hillary Clinton with the murder-suicide of an FBI agent in 2016) on the assumption that if "everybody says so", it must inevitably be valid. Barclay (2018: 92) includes several other kinds of fallacies present in the discourse of fake news, such as the *ad hominem* fallacy (which focuses on some flaw in a person rather than on his/her opinion or arguments), *confirmation bias* (i.e. the above-mentioned tendency to focus only on information that supports what you already believe) or the *divine* fallacy (which involves attributing anything that cannot be readily explained to some supernatural power).

There are cognitive explanations for people's susceptibility to being deceived by these fallacies. In researching the phenomenon of misinformation, Schwarz

(2004) and Ecker et al. (2014) have observed that metacognitive attributes such as "ease of retrieval" or "familiarity of information" are used by individuals as heuristics to assess likelihood. This implies that, for instance, when some news is tightly integrated into the network of a reader's beliefs, it is likely to be easily accessible and have greater subjective plausibility. In the same light, Wolfe and Griffin (2018: 297) show the importance of understanding "belief influences", because "they introduce a number of potential factors that can influence processing and mental representation of information" (2018: 298), and they suggest that beliefs and the knowledge, emotions and goals they trigger could have their greatest impact in situations where readers choose which texts to read and when to read them, as well as how they will elaborate on and think about those texts, as is the case with fictional narratives or – we deem it appropriate to add – (fake) news.

4. Methodology

The study presented here is qualitative in nature, attempting to examine the social practice of fake news and to elucidate the discourse-pragmatic features that characterize it as a journalistic subgenre within the broad context of 21st-century mass and social media digital communication. As such, our approach is complementary to other methodologies in the area of fake news, such as computational detection (e.g. Shu, Sliva, Wang, Tang & Liu, 2018), data-mining (e.g. Asr & Taboada, 2019a) or initiatives like the training of journalists and other stakeholders to combat fake news (e.g. Rehm, 2018; Peters, Rider, Hyvönen & Besley, 2018).

4.1. Research questions and main hypothesis

This article should be seen as our first attempt to find answers to the following research questions:

1) What are the discourse-pragmatic strategies used by the writers of fake news and the contextual elements that characterize it as a genre?
2) How is emotion expressed, handled and manipulated in the discourse of fake news?
3) How are the different subsystems of Appraisal (Martin & White, 2005) used and combined in fake news?

4) What is the relationship between truth, post-truth, lies and "bullshit" (Frankfurt, 2005) in the discourse of fake news?

5) What types of manipulation are found in the discourse of fake news?

In tackling these questions, we have noticed that the answers will be more complex than might have been expected, for our results show that fake news is a multifarious genre that not only includes news that is merely false. In most cases it cannot be said that the journalist is simply lying or not telling the truth, for the engineered discourse-pragmatic strategies go in many more complex directions than that, extending from the manipulation of true facts in order to trigger false implicatures or presuppositions, to the skillful combination of the different subsystems of Appraisal (where manipulated affect and emotion play an important part) and the different variables involved, and the use of misleading images or videos accompanying the headline or body of the news.

Our working hypothesis, derived from the above questions, is the following:

> The identifying features of the social discursive practice of fake news are mainly found in a combination of textual and contextual variables, such as the management and manipulation of the stance and emotion systems, the alignments (footing) of the participants within their frame, the (cultural/social/political/emotional) expectations of these participants, and the inferences triggered from and drawn out of this news.

4.2. The corpus used

As Asr and Taboada (2019a) point out, the first question we need to answer in addressing fake news is what we consider to be a representative instance. Taking into account the above definitions (Lazer et al., 2018; Dance, 2019) of fake news in which the aspects of intentionality and deception are crucial, when sorting out the news to be analyzed in this study we considered only fake news that belongs to Barclay's (2018) first two categories, i.e. *mercenary fake news* and *fake news with an agenda*, because although his third category (satirical fake news) may also be misinterpreted as true or serious news by some readers, it lacks the "intention to deceive" component which, in our view, is essential to this kind of social practice.

One significant issue related to fake news is the problem of sourcing. As Bråten, Stadler and Salmerón (2018: 141) point out, "professional

gatekeeping is essentially lacking on the Internet, with posted documents often lacking explicit review policies and quality control". Other studies, such as Andreassen and Bråten (2013) or Gottlieb and Wineburg (2012), suggest that people's prior values and attitudes play a role in the critical evaluation of source information, which was a particularly important issue in our search for fake news to build our corpus. When engaged in this endeavor, we found two main obstacles: First, it was somewhat problematic to distinguish fake from true content, and second, it was not easy to trace the origin of the news or to find instances of "authentic fake news" on the web or social media, given that in many cases (as for example when the news was published on Facebook) it was deleted very shortly thereafter, once it had been identified as fake.

Considering all of the above, we resorted to fact-checking sites such as www.snopes.com or egregious fake news sites such as www.whatdoesitmean.com. In addition, we collected several pieces that we received via WhatsApp or found on Twitter and other social networks. We also considered the now defunct fake news site *The Denver Guardian*. Another source has been Asr and Taboada's (2019b) corpus of fake news (containing a total of 1,380 news articles), which includes articles from different sites, such as the US election dataset, the Buzzfeed dataset (collected from nine Facebook pages), and a great amount of news from the above-mentioned www.snopes.com as well. In their search for this news, Asr and Taboada (2019a) explain that –as we had also noticed in our own explorations– some of the links on the Snopes site do not actually point to the source article; they just provide contextual information for fact-checking the claim in the fake news, without making the original source available. For the sake of testing our hypothesis, however, we did not analyze all the news in the Asr and Taboada corpus, for such an enterprise would exceed the purposes of this study.

4.3. Assessing the validity of our hypothesis

In order to test our hypothesis, we performed a discourse-pragmatic analysis of many samples of fake news from the corpus covering different themes (e.g. politics, climate change, the gossip press) and different formats (e.g. online newspaper, WhatsApp video, Facebook post). We looked into the different types of manipulation and distortion of the truth and the way *bullshit* (as described in section 2.3) was 'administered' by means of discursive and (socio-)pragmatic resources. The following were the main aspects scrutinized (though not the only ones):

- the way emotion is expressed at the different linguistic levels in persuasion of the negative type, be it in an invoked (i.e. covert) or inscribed (i.e. overt) manner;
- the use and combination of the various dimensions of evaluation/appraisal (Martin & White, 2005) and the emotion processes (Alba-Juez & Mackenzie, 2019) expressed and intended to be awakened in the readers;
- the alignments or footing (Goffman, 1981) taken by the journalists and other participants;
- the different ways in which facts and people's stances and emotions are manipulated by means of linguistic and sociopragmatic strategies (e.g. the use of logical fallacies, or the triggering of misleading implicatures).

5. Sample Analysis

5.1. Total fake: The 'Denver Guardian' Clinton article

A prototypical instance of a conspiracy theory within the type of fake news that has a political agenda was the very popular untrue story posted on the now no longer existent *Denver Guardian*[8] site on November 5, 2016, three days before the US presidential election of that year. The article, which was entitled "FBI Agent Suspected in Hillary Email Leaks Found Dead in Apparent Murder-Suicide", went viral on Facebook (with more than half a million shares) and alleged that an FBI agent investigating Clinton had been found dead in a house fire in Maryland. (See the whole text of the article in Appendix 1.).

The *Denver Guardian* site was registered anonymously and built using *WordPress*, but it was later found out that the site was operated by Jestin Coler (the founder and CEO of *Disinfomedia* and owner of several other fake news sites), who on his personal website (http://jestincoler.com) openly admits doing morally questionable but legal things, such as writing and publishing fake news articles for payment. The article scrutinized here thus is not only "fake news with an agenda", but also belongs to the "mercenary" type described in section 2.2. Despite being totally fake, this news is believed to have strongly influenced the election and to have been one of the main causes of Clinton's failure and Trump's consequent success. Among other things, Coler himself acknowledges on the first page of his site that the FBI

agent was a fictional character. Furthermore, the news quoted "Walkerville Police Chief Pat Frederick" in Maryland, and it was later confirmed that there is no town called Walkerville in Maryland, but *Walkersville,* and that this town did not have a Police Department. As can be seen, Coler was here playing with the cognitive fact that when we read we go for the general meaning and do not stop to check every single letter, and that even if the readers noticed that there was a missing 's' in the name, the normal deduction would have been that this was a typo.

The first thing that stands out in the eyes of a discourse analyst when reading the headline is that the writer of the article is trying to bullshit (Frankfurt 2005) the reader by making use of the pragmatic mechanism of inference. And we use the term "bullshit" and not "lie to" here because the journalist is not saying directly that Hillary Clinton was implicated in the (supposed) murder but guides the reader towards inferring that this must have been the case. As we saw in section 2.3, the bullshitter may deceive us about the facts, but their main aim is to deceive us about their enterprise, something that Coler has also clearly accomplished here by hiding his identity, the political agenda and the financial aims behind his writing.

Coler thus resorts to several misleading strategies that affect both form and meaning such as:

- Misspelling of words.
- Use of capital letters in the headline.
- Use of strong emotional words (e.g. *murder-suicide*), thereby creating a negative semantic prosody associated with Hillary Clinton.
- Deceit of the readers by making them believe some fictional characters (the FBI agent) or places (the town) are real.
- Inclusion of false or misleading photos accompanying the headline (in this case the picture of a house on fire and two firefighters).
- Use of "sub-headlines" in the middle of the text, also in capitals, with sensational words and in a different color (*BREAKING: PRESIDENT OBAMA TO ISSUE HILLARY A "BLANKET PARDON" TO AVOID FUTURE PROSECUTION*).
- Use of a "flashbulb context" (Brown & Kulik, 1977) like that of a murder-suicide and a fire.

- Manipulation of language, people and facts: In order to influence the readers' emotions and stance towards the topic in question, the following kinds of manipulation are found in the article:

  a) Manipulation of the Appraisal systems: In what pertains to the general intended meaning of the article, it is clear that Coler manipulates the ENGAGEMENT system to issue an indirect JUDGEMENT, so that he cannot be accused of having made the judgement himself and thus indirectly implying that the Clintons may have been behind all this. Thus, as seen in the excerpts below, he resorts to heteroglossic ENGAGEMENT ("Investigators believe" use of inverted commas, attribution of the belief to *conspiracy theories*, etc.) to let the audience make the judgement themselves. This is of course very ironic, considering that Coler himself is the conspirator who made up the whole story. Notice the negative prosody as well (in the terms between quotes):

> Investigators believe FBI agent, Michael Brown, 45, "shot and killed" his 33-year-old wife, Susan Brown, late Friday night before "setting the couple's home on fire and then turning the gun on himself".
>
> Conspiracy theories are running rampant throughout many alt-right media outlets, leading many to believe this was another "hit job" by the Clintons in "retaliation" for the FBI email leaks so close to the presidential election. Media outlets like Alex Jones' Infowars and WND are running with the theory that globalist "assassins", working for the Clintons, had the Brown family "murdered" and their home "burned to destroy" any possible evidence.

  b) Manipulation of footing: The way ENGAGEMENT is handled has a close relationship with the footing or alignments of the participants in the article. Coler does not commit himself to saying this really happened and therefore cannot be said to be the *principal* (i.e. the participant responsible for talk in Goffman's 1981 terms) because he is not asserting that the Clintons are behind this but rather attributing this thought to "conspiracy theories" or what other people believe, thus

making use and abuse of the *ad populum* fallacy, in the knowledge that most people will not verify whether this is true or not and will therefore spread the news and make it sell. Thus, the *principal* role here is attributed to an unreliable source which may not be identified as such by the common reader, who will therefore simply accept this news as true. In addition, the *author* role (i.e. the one who creates talk) is hidden, for at the time the article was published, Coler's name was not included in the news. The only role that could be (partially) identified was that of the *animator* (i.e. the participant that produces talk), which in this case was the *Denver Guardian* online newspaper, which as we know, was also fake.

c) Manipulation of the source of information: Fake quotes are frequently accompanied by false source information in order to make them appear legitimate (in this case, the writer refers to *Infowars* as a reliable source of information, when in fact *Infowars* is itself a producer of fake news; see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/InfoWars). By using the *ad verecundiam* fallacy, Coler is here literally making fun of his readers.

d) Manipulation of the pragmatic meanings inferred: As Taboada (2019, personal communication) has confirmed, it is very difficult to characterize fake news by its "purely linguistic" features only. The characteristic which we have found common to all the instances analyzed is not so much the language used, but the fact that its authors play with the cultural knowledge shared between them and the readers, the inferences triggered, the emotions conveyed in the text and those triggered in the audience, and the consequent emotional implicatures sparked off. In this case, as we have seen, the writer plays with the indirect meanings that are deduced from the text of the article and the negative emotions that will be aroused in the readers after thinking that the Clintons could have been the instigators of this (fake) murder-suicide. Thus, Trump's followers will be more convinced to vote for their candidate, by means of the *confirmation bias* fallacy, and some undecided people will probably be influenced to at least position themselves against Clinton, which leads us to the next kind of manipulation found in this article and in fake news in general.

e) Manipulation of stance: The manipulation of the inferences triggered by the text aims at a subsidiary kind of manipulation, namely manipulation of the readers' stance. There is a constant invoked negative evaluation of Clinton's reputation which attempts to manipulate the readers' stance in a negative direction.

f) Manipulation of frame: Goffman's (1974) concept of *frame* (i.e. the way in which social actors organize their experience in terms of recognizable activities) is also useful for the present analysis, for it pushes beyond the simple speaker/hearer dyad and explores a deeper reality which includes multi-party talk and multi-party audiences. Indeed, Fairclough (1995: 39) points out that in media discourse we not only have reporters and their audience, but "various categories of public domain 'third party' who may be involved" (politicians, trade unionists, scientists and experts of various other types, academics and so forth), as well as ordinary people who may act as witnesses or represent typical behaviors or reactions, commonly referred to as "vox pop". A key question is how these participants' identities are constructed within their frames of action. As we have seen, some of the activities of the different social actors involved in the Clinton news are hidden or distorted. First of all, Cole hides his identity (it was only after the elections that he came to be known as the *author* and *principal* of the news), and the real activities of the *Denver Guardian* are hidden as well. In addition, many of the activities described in the article are not simply distorted but entirely made up, including their social actors (the FBI agent, the town, the Police Department). Hillary Clinton is however a real social actor, but the inferences triggered about her activities are totally misleading.

Having considered a particularly gross example of manipulative fake news, let us now turn to a rather different and more subtle type of manipulation, in which the news is presented as though it were scientifically justified.

5.2. Fake science: An attack on valid climate change research

The online article shown in Appendix 2 was published on the Breitbart site, described on Wikipedia as "a far-right syndicated American news, opinion

and commentary website founded in mid-2007 by conservative commentator Andrew Breitbart", and is available at http://archive.is/vsRuS. The standard far-right viewpoint on climate change is that it is a hoax devised by forces in society whose aim is to undermine the free operation of industry and markets. These anti-capitalist forces, it is contended, are aided and abetted by influential scientists who conspire with them because of their own political leanings. The author James Delingpole can thus be seen as defending a *conspiracy theory* which explains scientists' warnings about unbridled global warming as deriving from a sinister attempt to undermine the welfare and comfort we currently enjoy (or are supposed to enjoy).

Firstly, before progressing to analyzing the different types of manipulation present in the article, let us consider its linguistic properties. It is worthwhile observing that the author betrays his lack of scholarly credentials in his mixing of style levels and in his inability to handle complex sentences grammatically. Consider the sentence *In fact, the magnitude of their historical data adjustments, that removed their cyclical temperature patterns, are totally inconsistent with published and credible U.S. and other temperature data.* Here the author not only fails to use correct subject-verb agreement or the correct relative pronoun for a non-restrictive relative clause (*which*, not *that*) but also is illogical in comparing the consistency of a "magnitude" with "data", i.e. a comparison of like with unlike. Just as 'spam mail' is often given away by the poor use of grammar and spelling, so fake articles – which have not gone through the rigorous processes of peer-reviewing and editing to which all scientific papers are submitted – often inadvertently reveal their spuriousness to the critical reader. As mentioned above, however, many readers do not have the time or interest to read with this degree of discernment. Poor writing, it seems, does not detract from an article's power to manipulate its readers. Let us now consider how this is done.

a) Manipulation of stance, the source of information and the subsystems of Appraisal:

The stance adopted by the author is already apparent in the title, which states that "much of" recent global warming is a "fabrication", i.e. intentionally invented disinformation. This is typical of current exchanges in which the purveyors of fake news are at pains to accuse honest communicators, e.g. scientists, of being fake: in this way, the fakers wish the readers to draw the inference that they are in fact providing genuine and correct information. The stance taken by the writer thus aligns with the overall goals of the website where the article appeared, and the piece is designed to inflame the

emotions of the average consumer of the Breitbart site, who is expected to reject "establishment" warnings about the devastating effects of climate change and indeed to ignore the increasingly obvious ongoing extreme weather events. What the author is doing here, then, is to manipulate the stance of the reader in this respect.

b) Manipulation of genre:

The tone of the article is generally serious and is entirely lacking in the obvious trappings of infotainment-style fake news. What the author is doing is to manipulate the discourse genre of popular-scientific articles: Several aspects of the text are reminiscent of genuine, emotionally neutral texts designed to make scientific findings accessible to a lay audience. Among these are the use of a graph, the repeated references to data, the claim that the article is derived from a "peer-reviewed study", the provision of a hyperlink to that study, as well as a scholarly style of writing that involves nominalizations and abstractions (*adjustment*, *magnitude*, …) as well as technical expressions and their abbreviations, as in *global average temperature datasets (GAST)*.[9]

c) Manipulation of the readers' emotions:

The author also seeks to manipulate the emotions of the readership. Under the veneer of scientific objectivity, various emotions make themselves manifest to the reader, both inscribed (i.e. explicit) and invoked (i.e. implicit, but palpably present). This is apparent in the author's strategy of personalizing the debate, pitting three individually named scientists on the climate change denial side, with whom he aligns, against what is implied to be the mighty orthodoxy of three large organizations, in this way characterizing the two sides of the debate in emotionally charged heroic and anti-heroic terms (invoking our emotional solidarity with the underdog in a David and Goliath situation). One of these "heroic" scientists is described (inscribed) as "a veteran statistician" (with all the positive valence of the word *veteran* in the US), and positive invoked emotion attaches to the suggestion of interdisciplinary cooperation among experts from different fields, a "meteorologist", a "statistician" and a "climate scientist". The scientists are said to have achieved "conclusive findings", with the positively valenced implication that these are unimpeachably true.[10] In all these ways, the author uses e-implicatures to align the reader with the cause he supports.

d) Manipulation of frame and the semantic-pragmatic meanings inferred:

Delingpole uses the negative semantic prosody associated with the words he chooses to provoke unfavorable feelings towards climatologists and the organizations they work for by not dignifying them with the neutral title "scientist" but dismissing them as "alarmists", highlighting with this choice of word their supposed appeal to citizens' emotions, in particular imputing to them an ignoble desire to make the population unnecessarily afraid. In this way, the author also disguises his own emotional strategy, since by ascribing emotional motivations to his opponents, he can position himself as neutral and reliable. There is also an element of *ad hominem* in the author's mockery of their imagined speech patterns ("hottest evah"), where the implied pronunciation of *ever* is designed to suggest a lack of seriousness, like spoilt Valley Girls whose response to everything is "whatevah". Even organizations that generally have been held in high regard, like NASA (whose scientific and engineering credentials are second to none), NOAA (the [US] National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration) and the UK's Met Office, are bundled together and again categorized as "alarmist", i.e. as organizations with a subjective rather than objective message. They are accused of using "adjusted" or "corrupted" data, as opposed to what is objectively true of the data they use, which is that, in keeping with the best scientific practice, they are "corrected" or "updated" as new information becomes available. The words *adjusted* and *corrupted*, as well as *fabricated* in the headline, have negative connotations, especially the latter because of the association with *corrupt,* possibly suggesting immoral or illegal influence on their work, and their use will spark off negative emotions among the readership. In these ways, the framing of the entire article is such that it bespeaks a Manichean us-and-them mentality, in which "we" (the climate change skeptics) are pitted against "them" (the establishment with its supposedly nefarious agenda).

e) Manipulation of source:

The article has been analyzed for its accuracy at the above-mentioned fact-checking site Snopes (https://www.snopes.com/fact-check/climatology-fraud-global-warming/) and a number of falsehoods and falsifications have emerged: (a) the "study" referred to in the article was in fact never peer-reviewed in the sense that is standard in science (see (d)) and was never published in a journal but was simply a post on the personal blog of the "meteorologist" ; (b) the "meteorologist" in question does not have a PhD but an 'honorary doctorate'; (c) "Cato Institute climate scientist Craig Idso"

is an adjunct scientist at the libertarian Cato Institute, but the Institute has not published the "study"; (d) seven scientists are mentioned in the report itself as 'agreeing with' the conclusions of the paper, but only one answered an approach from the fact-checking site, stating that he had only peer-reviewed the paper in the sense of discussing it with the first author (and anyway it should be recalled that "peer reviewing" does not mean "approving" or "agreeing with"); (e) the article interprets the graph as showing adjustments to raw data (where "raw data" has the connotation of "true data" – which again is scientifically incorrect), but the graph in fact shows changes brought about by updates to already corrected data as a result of scientific advances and the addition of ever more data from disparate sources, including better coverage of the entire planet, not just the US or the northern hemisphere. The fact-checking site shows that the overall effect of the many corrections has actually (and ironically) been to reduce the figures for "dramatic and unprecedented" climate change.

What we have seen here, then, is an example of how particular views of economic interests and the associated emotions, principally fear of losing certain luxuries, drive certain authors to dress up those views and emotions as apparently objective science, while in fact manipulating the readers' knowledge and feelings toward rejecting properly sourced and peer-reviewed science.

6. Conclusions

Our examination of a corpus of fake news, exemplified in section 5 with regard to fake news in politics and in science, has revealed that the authors' persuasive intention in this subgenre of journalistic discourse is strongly linked to the manipulation of readers' emotions, although this manipulation is to some extent disguised by the authors' use of language that does not differ markedly from more honest, objective reporting. As a result, we have been forced to consider the pragmatic strategies at work in the composition of these texts, analyzing them in their sociocultural contexts. What we have found is that the news does not so much contain falsehoods as fallacies and distortions, subtle blends of truths and lies, often designed more to entertain than to inform. This has led us to invoke the concept of "bullshit", as theorized by Frankfurt (2005), as well as that of "post-truth" (Harari, 2018a: 231-244), with its blurring or even dissolution of the dividing line between reality and fiction.

The data we have briefly considered here have borne out our hypothesis that fake news flourishes thanks to the deliberate rigging of the various systems that underlie communication, notably the system of emotions, and especially such negative feelings as fear, envy and hatred. The defining characteristics of fake news lie less in the linguistic properties of the texts than in the subtle exploitation of alignments and expectations in order to induce inferences that resonate with the perspectives and prejudices of the anticipated readership. We have accordingly observed how fabricators of fake news do not hesitate to abuse not only language, at all levels of analysis, but also other semiotic resources such as images, photos and videos – often presented outside their original context – as well as typography. However, the deepest effects arise from the manipulation of what Martin & White (2005) have identified as the subsystems of Appraisal, notably by misrepresenting ENGAGEMENT to make a JUDGEMENT, but also by tampering deceptively with footings and framings in sense of Goffman (1974, 1981). Purveyors of fake news are also not honest or clear about the sources of their alleged information. They rely heavily on (e-)implicatures to spark off inferences for which there is no literal evidence in their words, for example capitalizing on semantic prosodies to do the work for them. If we are to understand the hold that fake news has on us, we will have to admit that our cognitive and emotional vulnerabilities are being exploited, and it is only by using the tools of pragmatics to unmask this deliberate manipulation that we can hope to combat its nefarious effects.

And to conclude, one of Harari's witty reflections:

> As a species, humans prefer power to truth. We spend far more time and effort on trying to control the world than on trying to understand it – and even when we try to understand it, we usually do so in the hope that understanding the world will make it easier to control it. Therefore, if you dream of a society in which truth reigns supreme and myths are ignored, you have little to expect from Homo sapiens. Better try your luck with chimps. (Harari, 2018a: 242).

Acknowledgements

We want to give Maite Taboada our heartfelt thanks for sending us her Excel file of the MisInfoText corpus, as well as her 2019 article, co-written with Fatemeh Torabi Asr, on the topic of fake news. We would also like to thank

the Spanish journalist Carlos García-Hirshfeld for providing us with samples of 'authentic' Spanish fake news and for guiding us in the decision to classify a piece of news as either fake or true. And last but not least, we owe a debt of gratitude to Carmen Sancho Guinda and Ruth Breeze for their valuable and insightful comments on the first manuscript of this article.

Article history:
Received 15 July 2019
Received in revised form 8 October 2019
Accepted 11 October 2019

References

Alba-Juez, L. (forthcoming). "Chapter 7: Affect and emotion" in M. Haugh & M. Terkourafi (eds.), *Cambridge Handbook of Sociopragmatics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Alba-Juez, L. & J.L. Mackenzie (2019). "Emotion processes in discourse" in J.L. Mackenzie & L. Alba-Juez (eds.), 3-26.

Alonso Belmonte, I. (2019). "Victims, heroes and villains in newsbites: A Critical Discourse Analysis of the Spanish eviction crisis in *El País*" in J.L. Mackenzie & L. Alba-Juez (eds.), 335-355.

Ambler, E. (1967). *Dirty Story*. London: Ipso Books [Kindle version 2017].

Andreassen, R. & I. Bråten (2013). "Teachers' source evaluation self-efficacy predicts their use of relevant source features when evaluating the trustworthiness of web sources on special education". *British Journal of Educational Technology* 44: 821-836.

Asr, F.T. & M. Taboada (2019a). "Big data and quality data for fake news and misinformation detection". *Big Data and Society* 6(1): 1-14.

Asr, F.T. & M. Taboada (2019b). *MisInfoText: A Collection of News Articles, with False and True Labels*. Dataset. URL: http://fakenews.ngrok.io/#parseWebs [08/10/19].

Barclay, D.A. (2018). *Fake News, Propaganda and Plain Old Lies: How to Find Trustworthy Information in the Digital Age*. Lanham MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Bednarek, M. (2019). "Newsworthiness: A corpus linguistic approach". Plenary lecture to ICAME 40, Neuchâtel (Switzerland), June 2019.

Black, M. (1982). "The prevalence of humbug". Article 4. *Philosophic Exchange* 13(1).

Bråten, I., M. Stadler & L. Salmerón (2018). "The role of sourcing in discourse comprehension" in M.F. Schober, D.N. Rapp & A. Britt (eds.), 141-166.

Brown, R. & J. Kulik (1977). "Flashbulb memories". *Cognition* 5(1): 73-99.

Casado Velarde, M. (1995). "El lenguaje de los medios de comunicación" in M. Seco & G. Salvador (eds.), *La lengua española hoy*, 153-164. Madrid: Fundación Juan March.

Chen, R. (2001). "Self-politeness: A proposal". *Journal of Pragmatics* 33(1): 87-106.

Cockcroft, R., S. Cockcroft, C. Hamilton & L. Hidalgo Downing (2014). *Persuading People: An Introduction to Rhetoric*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Damasio, A. (1999). *The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness*. London: Heinemann.

Dance, W. (2019). "Defining fake news". Research post on his blog, March 13, 2019. URL: https://fakebelieve.blog/2019/03/13/defining-fake-news/ [08/10/19].

Díez-Prados, M. (2019). "Persuasion: Ethos, pathos and fallacies". Lessons 2 and 3 of Module 9 in the MOOC *Emotion 'at Work'*. Madrid: UNED. URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IMg0A81vJQQ [08/10/19].

Dor, D. (2017). "The role of the lie in the evolution of human language". *Language Sciences* 63: 44-59.

Ecker, U.K.H., B. Swire & S. Lewandowsky (2014). "Correcting misinformation: A challenge for education and cognitive science" in D.N. Rapp & J.L.G. Braasch (eds.), *Processing Inaccurate Information: Theoretical and Applied Perspectives from Cognitive Science and the Educational Sciences*, 13-18. Cambridge MA: MIT Press.

Eggins, S. & J.R. Martin (1997). "Genres and registers of discourse" in T. van Dijk (ed.), *Discourse: A Multidisciplinary Introduction. I: Discourse as Structure and Process*, 230-256. London: Sage.

Fairclough, N. (1995). *Media Discourse*. London: Arnold.

Frankfurt, H. (2005). *On Bullshit*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Goffman, E. (1974). *Frame Analysis*. New York: Harper and Row.

Goffman, E. (1981). "Footing" in E. Goffman, *Forms of Talk*, 124-159. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Golbeck, J., M. Mauriello, B. Auxier, K.H. Bhanushali, C. Bonk, M.A. Bouzaghrane, C. Buntain, R. Chanduka, P. Cheakalos, J.B. Everett, W. Falak, C. Gieringer, J. Graney, K.M. Hoffman, L. Huth, Z. Ma, M. Jha, M. Khan, V. Kori, E. Lewis, G. Mirano, W.T. Mohn IV, S. Mussenden, T.M. Nelson, S. Mcwillie, A. Pant, P. Shetye, R. Shrestha, A. Steinheimer, A. Subramanian & G. Visnansky (2018). "Fake news vs. satire: A dataset and analysis". *WebSci'*18, (May 27-30): Amsterdam, Netherlands.

Gottlieb, E. & S. Wineburg (2012). "Between *veritas* and *communitas:* Epistemic switching in the reading of academic and sacred history". *Journal of the Learning Sciences* 21(1): 84-129.

Harari, Y.N. (2018a). *21 Lessons for the 21st Century*. London: Cape.

Harari, Y.N. (2018b). "Are we living in a post-truth era? Yes, but that's because we're a post-truth species". *Ideas.ted.com* September 7, 2018. URL: https://ideas.ted.com/are-we-living-in-a-post-truth-era-yes-but-thats-because-were-a-post-truth-species/

Harsin, J. (2018). "Post-truth and critical communication studies" in D. Cloud (ed.), *Oxford Encyclopedia of Communication and Critical Studies.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Keyes, R. (2004). *The Post-Truth Era: Dishonesty and Deception in Contemporary Life*. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Lazer, D., M. Baum, N. Grinberg, L. Friedland, K. Joseph, W. Hobbs & C. Mattsson (2017). "Combating fake news: An agenda for research and action". Final report. URL: https://shorensteincenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Combating-Fake-News-Agenda-for-Research-1.pdf

Mackenzie, J.L. & L. Alba-Juez (eds.) (2019). *Emotion in Discourse*. Amsterdam/ Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

Maillat, D. & S. Oswald (2011). "Constraining context: A pragmatic account of cognitive manipulation" in Christopher Hart (ed.), *Critical Discourse Studies in Context and Cognition*, 65-80. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Martin, J.R. & P.R.R. White (2005). *The Language of Evaluation: Appraisal in English*. Houndmills/New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Meibauer, J. (2018). "The linguistics of lying". *Annual Review of Linguistics* 4: 357-375.

Müller-Thyssen, J. (2018). "La posverdad somos nosotros". *Ethic* 36: 64-65.

Peters, M.A., S. Rider, M. Hyvönen & T. Besley (eds.) (2018). *Post-Truth, Fake News. Viral Modernity and Higher Education*. Singapore: Springer.

Rehm, G. (2018). "An infrastructure for empowering internet users to handle fake news and other online media phenomena". *GSCL* 2017, *LNAI* 10713: 216-231.

Sachsman, D. (2017). *Sensationalism: Murder, Mayhem, Mudslinging, Scandals, and Disasters in 19th-Century Reporting*. New York: Routledge.

Sancho-Guinda, C. (2019). "*Promoemotional* science? Emotion and intersemiosis in graphical abstracts" in J.L. Mackenzie & L. Alba-Juez (eds.), 357-386.

Schober, M.F., D.N. Rapp & A. Britt (eds.) (2018). *The Routledge Handbook of Discourse Processes*, 2nd ed. New York: Routledge.

Schwarz, N. (2004). "Metacognitive experiences in consumer judgment and decision making". *Journal of Consumer Psychology* 14(4): 332-348.

Schwarz-Friesel, M. (2010). "Expressive Bedeutung und E-Implikaturen – Zur Relevanz konzeptueller Bewertungen bei indirekten Sprechakten: Das Streichbarkeitskriterium und seine kognitive Realität" in W. Rudnitzky (ed.), *Kultura Kak Tekst (Kultur als Text)*, 12-27. Moscow: SGT.

Schwarz-Friesel, M. (2015). "Language and emotion: The cognitive linguistic perspective" in U.M. Lüdtke (ed.), *Emotion in Language*, 157-173. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Shu, K., A. Sliva, S. Wang, J. Tang & H. Liu (2018). "Fake news detection on social media: A data mining perspective". *SIGKDD Explorations* 19: 22-36.

Stahl, R. (2010). *Militainment, Inc.: War, Media, and Popular Culture*. New York: Routledge.

Vosoughi, S., D. Roy & S. Aral (2018). "The spread of true and false news online". *Science* 359(6380): 1146-1151.

Wolfe, M.B. & T.D. Griffin (2018). "Beliefs and discourse processing" in M.F. Schober, D. N. Rapp & A. Britt (eds.), 295-314.

J. Lachlan Mackenzie is Emeritus Professor of Functional Linguistics at VU Amsterdam. He moved with his Edinburgh PhD to the Netherlands, ultimately devoting himself to the development of Functional Discourse Grammar. Editor of *Functions of Language*, with research interests ranging over Grammar, Pragmatics and Discourse Analysis. Key publications: *Functional Discourse Grammar* (2008) and *Pragmatics: Cognition, Context and Culture* (2016).

Laura Alba-Juez is Full Professor of Linguistics at the UNED in Madrid, Spain, with academic experience in five different countries (Argentina, Mexico, USA, UK and Spain) and research interests in Discourse Analysis, Pragmatics and Functional Linguistics. She has been the Principal Investigator of several funded projects, and has published fourteen books and numerous scientific articles. Latest books: *Evaluation in Context* (2014), *Pragmatics: Cognition, Context and Culture* (2016) and *Emotion in Discourse* (2019).

NOTES

[1] Fake news may be considered a variant of journalese, and it could also be said that it somehow "hijacks" the conventional news genre in order to hide certain mercenary or ideological intentions. What is beyond doubt for us is that these facts do not invalidate its character as a distinctive discourse genre.

[2] *Schadenfreude* is a complex emotion, where rather than feeling sympathy towards someone's misfortune, the experiencer feels pleasure, joy, or self-satisfaction that comes from learning about or witnessing their troubles, failures, or humiliation.

[3] *Confirmation bias* describes the (very human) tendency to focus only on information that supports what you already believe. while ignoring information that contradicts your beliefs (Barclay 2018: 94).

[4] Fairclough (1995: 14) explains that the conversationalization of media discourse has helped to democratize technology and the language of specialized genres in general by making them more accessible to people, thereby creating more "people power", even if this power is systematically manipulated by the media.

[5] By way of example, in March 2017 several Chinese publications reported as serious news a satirical story about President Donald Trump that was originally published as humor in the *New Yorker*.

[6] Lying and bluffing are both modes of deception, but while the liar is someone who deliberately promulgates a falsehood, the bluffer is typically devoted to conveying (by means of inference) something false. Bluffing is more a matter of fakery than of falsity, and hence our certainty of the importance of analyzing fake news and its bullshit from a discourse-pragmatic perspective.

[7] People who subscribe to or promote the incorrect belief that former US president Barack Obama was born outside the United States and was therefore ineligible to be president under the provisions of the US Constitution.

[8] The *Denver Post* (https://www.denverpost.com/) later uncovered a series of lies found in the *Denver Guardian* site, such as the fact that it claimed to be the "oldest" news source, when in fact it was discovered that it had been registered only a few months before (in July 2016). Also, the address listed for the *Denver Guardian* newsroom was actually a parking lot (https://www.denverpost.com/2016/11/05/there-is-no-such-thing-as-the-denver-guardian/).

[9] This should be *Global Average Surface Temperature (GAST) datasets*.

[10] It scarcely needs adding that science is not concerned with "conclusive findings" or "unimpeachable truth", although this is arguably what a lay readership is hoping to find. In contending that this is what is offered by the three "experts", the author is, possibly disingenuously, undermining his own claim to scientific validity.

Appendix 1

https://web.archive.org/web/20161115023815/http://denverguardian.com/2016/11/05/fbi-agent-suspected-hillary-email-leaks-found-dead-apparent-murder-suicide/

FBI AGENT SUSPECTED IN HILLARY EMAIL LEAKS FOUND DEAD IN APPARENT MURDER-SUICIDE

Photo by Ada Be (CC BY 4.0)

Walkerville, MD – An FBI agent believed to be responsible for the latest email leaks "pertinent to the investigation" into Hillary Clinton's private email server while she was Secretary of State, was found dead in an apparent murder-suicide early Saturday morning, according to police.

BREAKING: PRESIDENT OBAMA TO ISSUE HILLARY A "BLANKET PARDON" TO AVOID FUTURE PROSECUTION

Investigators believe FBI agent, Michael Brown, 45, shot and killed his 33-year-old wife, Susan Brown, late Friday night before setting the couple's home on fire and then turning the gun on himself. Brown was a 12 year veteran of the Washington D.C. Metropolitan Police Department before spending the last six years in the FBI.

Neighbors saw smoke coming from the Brown residence and called 9-1-1 at approximately 11:50 p.m. By the time fire crews arrived on scene minutes later, the entire house was engulfed in flames.

"Mrs. Brown's death was caused by a gunshot wound prior to the house fire," Walkerville Police Chief Pat Frederick said, "while Mr. Brown's single-bullet head wound appears to have been self-inflicted."

"The totality of the evidence leads us to believe this is a murder-suicide. We believe he killed her, set the house on fire and then took his own life," Frederick said.

The findings support conclusions by investigators Saturday that the couple perished in a murder-suicide during which the 4,000-square foot house was intentionally set on fire. Authorities outlined a likely scenario based on interviews with neighbors and comments posted on Mr. Brown's Facebook page.

Brown is believed to have started the gasoline-fueled fire but spared the life of his beloved beagle, Dixie. "Prior to the fire, he dropped off the dog at a neighbor's house," Frederick said. "He put the dog in a neighbor's backyard."

A neighbor told WHAG that Brown appeared "panicked" though it is unclear whether his wife was dead before or after the dog was removed from their home.

The motive behind the killing is still being investigated, but police say Brown was a highly respected agent with the FBI and very well liked in the community. "What leads someone to this level of anger and violence with your wife, your loved one, who knows," said an FBI official who knew the Brown family.

Conspiracy theories are running rampant throughout many alt. right media outlets, leading many to believe this was another "hit job" by the Clintons in retaliation for the FBI email leaks so close to the presidential election. Media outlets like Alex Jones' Infowars and WND are running with the theory that globalist assassins, working for the Clintons, had the Brown family murdered and their home burned to destroy any possible evidence.

FBI Director James Comey refused to comment at this time but asked for privacy and prayer as the bureau comes to terms with losing "two very close friends."

This is a developing story.

Appendix 2

http://archive.is/vsRuS

Breitbart 9 July 2017

by JAMES DELINGPOLE

DELINGPOLE: 'NEARLY ALL' RECENT GLOBAL WARMING IS FABRICATED, STUDY FINDS

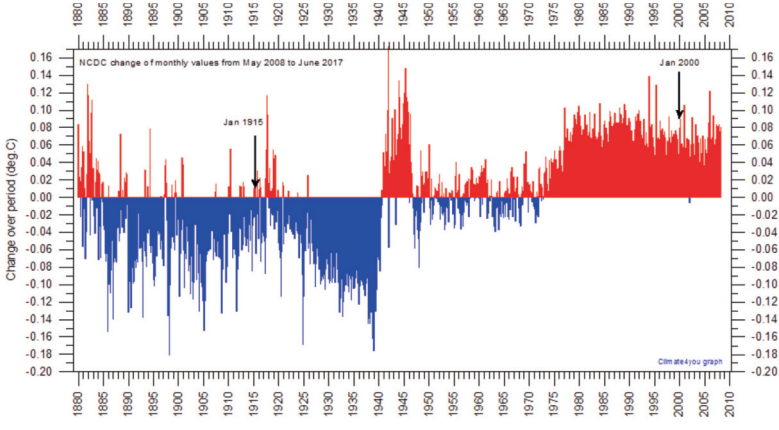
Much of recent global warming has been fabricated by climate scientists to make it look more frightening, a study has found.

The peer-reviewed study by two scientists and a veteran statistician looked at the global average temperature datasets (GAST) which are used by climate alarmists to argue that recent years have been "the hottest evah" and that the warming of the last 120 years has been dramatic and unprecedented.

What they found is that these readings are "totally inconsistent with published and credible U.S. and other temperature data."

That is, the adjusted data used by alarmist organizations like NASA, NOAA, and the UK Met Office differs so markedly from the original raw data that it cannot be trusted.

This chart gives you a good idea of the direction of the adjustments.



The blue bars show where the raw temperature data has been adjusted downwards to make it cooler; the red bars show where the raw temperature data has been adjusted upwards to make it warmer.

Note how most of the downward adjustments take place in the early twentieth century and most of the upward take place in the late twentieth century.

According to meteorologist Joe D'Aleo, who co-authored the study with statistician James Wallace and Cato Institute climate scientist Craig Idso, this has the effect of exaggerating the warming trend:

"Nearly all of the warming they are now showing are in the adjustments."

"Each dataset pushed down the 1940s warming and pushed up the current warming."

"You would think that when you make adjustments you'd sometimes get warming and sometimes get cooling. That's almost never happened."

What this means, the report concludes, is that claims by NASA, NOAA, and the UK Met Office that the world is experiencing unprecedented and dramatic warming should be taken with a huge pinch of salt: they all use the same corrupted global average temperature (GAST) data.

The conclusive findings of this research are that the three GAST data sets are not a valid representation of

reality. In fact, the magnitude of their historical data adjustments, that removed their cyclical temperature patterns, are totally inconsistent with published and credible U.S. and other temperature data. Thus, it is impossible to conclude from the three published GAST data sets that recent years have been the warmest ever – despite current claims of record setting warming.