

## THE USE OF VIDEO MODALITY IN BBC AND CNN TOP NEWS

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### Summary

The article highlights the main peculiarities of the videos which are an integral part of the contemporary online news articles and offer a fertile ground for the exploration of meaning making processes. The majority of top news articles analyzed within the scope of this study make use of videos as their key structural component. News videos are designed to deliver information quickly and effectively in a short and engaging format. The main pragmatic functions of the video abstracts are to illustrate the events, to support evidence to the facts, to explain or interpret the data, to appeal emotionally, to persuade the audience, to encourage some actions, etc. From a compositional perspective the videos as texts are a combination of visual, audio and textual elements. The relations between different modalities within the videotext reveal the correspondences between the verbiage (words, phrases, sentences) and visual depictions of the information transmitted via video modality. The descriptive qualitative approach was employed to analyze the data presented hereby.

**Key words:** online representation, information, videotext, multimodality, overlaid text.

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### 1. Introduction

The study of news has long been on the top of scholars' attention due to the exclusive mission of news in society – to inform timely about the latest events happening worldwide. Given this role, it is hardly surprising that the news is considered to be an autonomous, self-contained type of discourse. In linguistics, news discourse has become an object of intensive research more than 35 years ago, starting with early classics, such as van Dijk (1988), Bell (1991), Fowler (1991), moving further with the works of Montgomery (2007), Richardson (2007), Cotter (2010), Bednarek & Caple (2012), Busa (2013) to name a few, and proceeding with the myriad of current inquiries in versatile news discourse fields.

The leading medium of news dissemination still remains the internet due to technical capabilities of which the transmission of information becomes more efficient, continuous and dynamic. That is why today's online news is typically spread in a multimodal form which can exploit the web resources to the best possible degree. The multimodal perspective of modern meaning making process is of great interest for many scholars – Kress & van Leeuwen (2020), Jewitt (2014), O'Halloran & Lim (2014), Bateman et al. (2017, 2023), Wildfeuer (2020), Yefyemenko (2024), Serafini (2024), Martinec & Salway (2005), Stöckl et al. (2019), Cheema et al. (2023) etc.

The online news is instantiated via various presentation modalities including text, image, audio and video. The object of this study is the video modality represented through videos used in BBC and CNN online top news.

## 2. The role of videos in a meaning making process

Video materials are indisputably an integral component of most BBC and CNN news. Wide range of modern recording, processing, and transmitting processes, new technologies of storing and reproducing visual and audiovisual content allow video recordings to be of the highest quality, timely, informative, educational, etc.

The main advantages of videos in comparison to other presentation forms are as follows:

- they can simultaneously combine visual, auditory, and verbal resources;
- they can provide the most reliable facts by showcasing and documenting events, phenomena, etc.;
- they can create a dynamic product that has the potential to engage large audience.

Videos also have a significant pragmatic effect over the viewers. They reveal new channels of influence at various levels including emotional, argumentative and manipulative ones. While watching video content, the viewers immerse into the flow of events, experience the things they see, travels in time and space, visually acquire new knowledge, and gain a deeper understanding of the surrounding world. Moreover, the current visually-dominated digital reality confers videos with this almost exclusive role of perceiving information.

The vast majority of videos accompanying BBC and CNN news are short, typically lasting two to five minutes. Therefore, they are not burdensome, relatively easy to comprehend, and users can even choose whether to watch them or not.

## 3. The main video types

All the BBC and CNN top news videos represent informational and analytical genres. Here we suggest distinguishing three common types: newsroom videos, video reports, and video interviews/discussions.

**Newsroom videos** significantly resemble television news broadcasting; the news is delivered by anchors in the studio supported by live reports covering the events. Also, the direct speeches of people affected by the news are included to these videos. This video format is often found in CNN articles, where condensed video information is further presented in the article itself in a more detailed form. The videos used in the following articles illustrate the above mentioned – Poland-Belarus: Tensions high on NATO's border with Belarus after Wagner troops move closer | CNN; Travis King: US officials try to piece together why soldier crossed into North Korea | CNN Politics; Manipur state, India: Shocking video emerges of sexual assault amid ethnic violence | CNN; Inside efforts to avert environmental 'catastrophe' in the Red Sea | CNN.

Video reports hold a special place among other video fragments due to their exceptional dynamism, achieved through the step-by-step disclosure of events. In addition to it, video reports reveal the information in a deeply engaging way by attracting attention to such details as facial expression, gestures, clothing, people's behavior, etc. It produces the "effect of presence and involvement," allowing viewers to feel as if they are actively participating in the events being broadcast.

The standard composition of a video report includes:

- Introduction where the events, phenomena or other important issues are generally described, providing the viewer with background information.
- Main part where a detailed presentation of events takes place; key facts, specific aspects, arguments, etc. are provided.
- Conclusion which is the author's summary of the covered events.

Based on the presentation style, BBC and CNN video reports can be categorized as follows:

**1) Event-based reports.** Here a video narrative showcases the events in a timeline order. Reporters depict the actual events selecting the most striking elements and tense moments to enhance the impact. They portray people's behavior, describe the surrounding environment, provide context, show a lot of compelling details, etc. This type of video content is widely represented in BBC and CNN news materials, as the primary function of news is to inform and visually support the facts (e.g. Israeli lawmakers to vote to weaken Supreme Court amid protests, as Netanyahu leaves hospital | CNN; Pittsburgh synagogue gunman gets death penalty – BBC News).

**2) Informative-thematic reports.** These are the reports based on a thorough and comprehensive investigation of a specific topic. This type of report goes beyond merely describing events; it delves into the subject matter in depth, providing analysis, expert opinions, background information, and context. Such reports are designed to educate the audience, to show another perspective of the situation by offering a broader interpretation of complex issues rather than just covering breaking news (e.g. Niger coup: Junta shuts airspace citing military intervention threat – BBC News; Donald Trump faces further charges in Mar-a-Lago documents inquiry – BBC News; Moscow drone attack: Zelensky says war 'returning to Russia' after Kremlin accusations | CNN; Moscow drone attack: Zelensky says war 'returning to Russia' after Kremlin accusations | CNN ).

**3) Analytical reports** present not only factual data but also seek to analyze, provide commentary, and determine its underlying causes by interpreting, evaluating and drawing conclusions from the data. This involves incorporating relevant facts, statistics, case studies, expert opinions to offer a deeper and well-structured comprehension of the issue. Analytical reports go beyond mere observation, aiming to explain the significance and implications of events (e.g. William Lai: Taiwan will 'never back down' to China threats, presidential candidate says during US transit | CNN).

**4) Documentary reports** combine elements of both an informative-thematic report and a cinematic storytelling. Their aim is not only to inform, explicate or interpret, but also to fully immerse the viewers into the subject by appealing to their emotions, feelings, perceptions, etc. The cinematic storytelling includes sharing personal experiences, showing everyday life, mixing music, sound effects and voiceovers (e.g. BBC Africa Eye: Elderly caned at Kenya's PCEA Thogoto Care Home for the Aged – BBC News, Inside a secret bunker, hear what soldier noticed about Russian soldiers | CNN ).

Video Interviews/Discussions provide viewers with the opportunity to watch a conversation between the anchor person and invited studio guests. These guests are typically experts of versatile fields, renowned public figures, or political leaders. The discussion revolves around one or several key statements, which the guests comment on, express their own opinions; or the discussion takes a form of an interview and guests are asked questions. This video format may have quite a positive impact on the audience, as expert opinions enhance the credibility and value of the news. By offering informed perspectives and in-depth analysis, such discussions help viewers better understand complex issues and form their own opinions based on authoritative insights (e.g. Why Trump's latest indictment will reverberate for years to come | CNN Politics; Trump set to return to Washington for monumental court date – but a national catharsis is unlikely | CNN Politics).

It is also suggested to define video materials reflecting direct footage from the scene of events into a separate group. The primary goal of such videos is to show the event as it unfolds, capturing the most significant moments of the news story.

A key feature of these videos is the absence of special effects; the focus is placed purely on raw footage. They may include reporters' or eyewitnesses' commentaries, on-screen statements to provide context, but the emphasis remains on authentic, unaltered visuals that allow viewers to experience the event as realistically as possible (e.g. Ukraine war: Wheat prices soar after Russia threatens ships – BBC News; Hawaii wildfires burn historic town of Lahaina to the ground – BBC News; China floods hit 'northeastern granary,' fueling food security concerns | CNN; Chandrayaan-3: Historic India Moon mission sends new photos of lunar surface – BBC News).

So, the main functions of video materials used in BBC and CNN online top news are as follows:

- 1) To demonstrate/illustrate the events by providing visual representation to complement news reports.
- 2) To corroborate the events by capturing and verifying real-time occurrences as evidence.
- 3) To explicate/interpret the concepts, facts, and phenomena by offering context, background, and expert insights.
- 4) To analyze the events by examining causes, consequences, and implications through expert discussions and investigative reports.

#### **4. The ways of constructing online videotexts**

All the BBC and CNN videos could be regarded as multimodal texts due to rich variety of semiotic resources employed to create specific meanings via video modality.

Further on we will be elaborating on those semiotic means and their cross-modal interrelations.

It goes without saying that the moving image, as a series of frames played rapidly to create the illusion of motion, is the fundamental element of the "videotexts". All the other components are added to it such sound, music, wording etc. As a result of this combination, a richly varied and complex multimodal ensembles are created, the holistic perception of which depends on the communicative and cognitive settings of the sender and the recipient's ability to interpret them.

The following models for constructing online videotexts can be distinguished:

##### **1) Images + overlay text (simple phrases or simple sentences).**

The video to the article Ukraine 'hits Russian missile boat Ivanovets in Black Sea' captures the moments of Ukrainian sea drones destroying Russian warship in the Black Sea. The video itself does not include anchor's commentaries or any audio effects, just an overlaid text that helps to interpret the moving image:

The video to the article Firefighters battle huge blaze near Los Angeles as winds pick up depicts the mammoth blazes spreading near Los Angeles, and the overlaid text indicates the location and explicates the change of video frames.

##### **2) Images + music + overlay text.**

The video footage in article Boats, planes and armoured train: How Kim Jong Un travels abroad shows the exclusive time-honoured train of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un. The train consists of 21 bulletproof carriages, equipped with luxury items, representing the traditions of their dynasty. The content of the video is conveyed through the rapid change of relevant images accompanied by music, along with full text divided into separate syntagms displayed on the screen in a large font size, allowing the viewer's eye to instantly grasp the essence of the text and integrate it with the moving image.

These two models of videotexts creation are characterized by equal interdependence of verbal and non-verbal modes, with the verbal component being in semantic "connection" with the non-verbal.

### **3) Images + music + aural representations of anchor person/reporter/news correspondent/commentator/protagonist of news events/layperson + overlay text.**

Within this model the verbal overlaid component performs following functions:

- Identifies “people in the news”.

The overlaid verbal text is often the only way chosen by video creators to convey a person's name, field of occupation, or area of expertise.

In the article video Ukraine offensive could have only 30 days left – US Army chief the heads of the UK Armed Forces and the U.S. Army are discussing the Ukrainian counter-offensive. The verbal inscription helps to identify these individuals. The inscription is rendered in a large font size, while the job title is capitalized and marked with a red line.

- Generalizes the main points of the video story.

In the video to the article US airlines' 16-year safety record ended with tragedy. There were warnings ahead of the crash | CNN Business the key item of the video message is summarized and displayed on the screen in the form of a simple syntactic construction, written in bold with the letters capitalized to emphasize the presented text.

Sometimes, the additional information is given below the main one, unfolding further with the primary idea. This additional information is displayed in a smaller font size, which visually reinforces its subordination to the main thesis as demonstrated in the video to the article Exclusive: Russia producing three times more artillery shells than US and Europe for Ukraine | CNN Politics.

Since all the video reports are grouped according to some particular topics, this overall thematic focus is also reflected in the video materials by means of the overlaid verbal text. The articles videos exemplify it: Russia-Ukraine war: Blinken looks to reassure Zelensky as he visits Ukraine | CNN; Biden administration privately warned by American diplomats of growing fury against US in Arab world | CNN Politics. The video snapshots demonstrate the onscreen text where the general topic is presented in capital, white letters on a red background. Meanwhile, the specific theme of each report is displayed in capital, black letters on a white background. Thus, the font and color differentiate the structural elements of the written texts.

- Announces the upcoming events.

In the videos to the articles Fulton County DA acknowledges personal relationship with lead prosecutor on Trump case, but says it doesn't disqualify her | CNN Politics; Sergei Shoigu: Putin replaces Russia's defense minister with a civilian as Ukraine war rages and defense spending spirals | CNN the overlaid texts is advertising the events that will soon be featured on news websites.

- Transmits the meaning.

The verbal component acts as a “meaning transmitter” in situations when direct protagonists, laypeople, or bystanders affected by the events communicate in their native language to preserve authenticity and enhance the pragmatic impact of the video messages. The overlaid text provides the English version of the speakers' words allowing the audience to understand their responses (e.g. Nagorno-Karabakh: Fuel depot blast kills 20 as refugee count rises ).

- Duplicates the audiovisual content.

There are many BBC and CNN videos where the text displayed on the screen fully matches the anchor person's words. The overlaid text illustrates the oral message, intensifies it or enhances its comprehension (Narges Mohammadi: Iranian woman jailed for rights work wins Nobel Peace prize)

The interrelation between the verbal and audiovisual components within the third model of the videotexts construction could be described as those of “additive synergy” where the overlaid text provides additional aspects to better video message perception.

#### **4) Images + direct speech of the video narrative individuals + overlay text + marking of the object/subject.**

The video from the BBC article Canada's House Speaker apologises for praising Ukrainian who fought for Nazis illustrates this model: while the speaker is mentioning a person, a red circle appears pointing this person out of the numerous members of parliament. Additionally, the name of the person is displayed on the screen in a bright white rectangle. It endows the news followers with the opportunity to receive the information using versatile modes.

### **5. Conclusions**

In this paper we have shown 4 main models of constructing multimodal videotexts used in BBC and CNN news coverage. Overall, each of the video stories features one of those models, the choice of which primarily depends on the news communicative and cognitive strategies, thematic focus and purpose of the specific news report.

All the constitutive components of the video materials (moving images, sound effects, speeches of “people in news”, written texts) come in close interaction. Verbal and visual modes integrate, overlap and merge to form a cohesive multimodal videotext. The meaning conveyed through one mode can be supplemented, repeated, or represented differently by another mode while still preserving the intended message.

The verbal component is present in most of the videos in the form of an overlaid text. Ranging from single lexemes to complete sentences, these verbal inscriptions often play a pivotal role in content creation. Their chief functions include identifying “people in the news” indicating locations, presenting key messages, structuring the information, announcing the upcoming events.

The perception of verbal elements is significantly influenced by their mode of representation. The use of typographic techniques such as font variations, letters size, formatting, and color usage allows to capture the audience’s attention, emphasize specific words or entire statements, and intensify the conveyed meaning.

Thus, all these elements together contribute greatly to the dominant goal of the news production – to effectively communicate messages to a colossal number of news readers.

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