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**COVID-19 REFLECTED IN EMOTIONAL  
JOURNALISTIC TEXTS**

**Abstract:** The article presents the results of research based on the analysis of media texts reflecting the impact of COVID-19 on the lives of people globally. As this impact is mainly negative, all these media texts (printed and digital) belong to the journalism of an emotional nature. The authors present the classification of journalistic genres, make the important subdivision into hard news and soft news, analyse the most popular emotions theories and approaches to their study. The pandemic reflected in media may be considered as hard news and is closely connected with news value, i.e. the impact of the publication on a wide audience. News values may function in the text as signals of addressee orientation. The definite impact may be evoked by emotively charged words in the media text; such words can be regarded from the perspective of emotive semantics. This approach leads us to media linguistics, a relatively new branch of linguistics which is based on the multilevel analysis of media text, namely text structure (each journalistic message has its own specific composition), vocabulary (texts belonging to journalism of analytical or emotional types have different vocabulary), and categories (structural and semantic text categories depend on journalistic genre). Media texts belonging to emotional journalism abound in different stylistic devices; in our essay semasiological and syntactic devices are prevalent.

**Key words:** COVID-19, journalism of the emotional type, emotions, emotive semantics, media linguistics, essay.

**Introduction**

The pandemic appeared like a bolt from the blue and radically changed the lives of many people across the world. Due to the mass media, information spread very quickly. COVID-19 was considered as a media-cum-language event and was

treated from different aspects: cognitive, communicative, cross-cultural (Panasenکو et al. 2020), medical (Hollimon 2020), linguistic (Gourseau 2020; Henderson 2020), etc.; was taken as a catastrophe (Horton 2020) and as the virus of fear (Andreoni & Nardone 2020). There appeared abundant fake news stories (*Coronavirus...* 2020; Višňovský et al. 2021) which deepened the negative atmosphere in many countries. These pieces of information that incited an emotional response in readers definitely belong to the journalism of an emotional nature.

Journalism of the emotional type, or literary journalism, is becoming more and more preferable amongst journalists since we live in an era during which it is evidently more challenging to keep media audiences captivated. Keeping in mind COVID-19 as the ultimate subject of our research, we want to proceed towards it making a short excursus into journalism in general, specifying its types and journalistic genres focusing on hard news and news values. Emotional journalism is inextricably linked with emotions. We intend to show how expressive and emotional writing is presented in today's newspaper journalism, what its typical attributes are; what emotional features and stylistic devices are employed by journalists in the text and how their combination can affect the reader's emotions. For our detailed analysis we have chosen an essay published in the newspaper 'The New York Times', in which the author describes events connected with the pandemic in the USA.

This text is studied within the scope of media linguistics using lexical, stylistic, and semantic analyses. In the essay, we identify lexical units and other textual elements that may be charged with emotional meaning. This meaning, either positive or negative, can be considerably enhanced by figures of speech, such as metaphor, simile, metonymy, figurative periphrasis, etc.

Let us start with the description of journalism and its types, taking into account different classifications of journalistic genres.

## **Journalism and its types**

Information may lead to changes in behaviour, perception and can have a great impact on societal issues like culture, politics, and their general development. It is no exaggeration to say that one of the major global driving forces is the amount of acquired information and its dispersion. The role of journalism in spreading information is immense. Though the basic subdivision of journalism into analytical (rational) and emotional (Panasenکو 2016: 54; Pravdová 2011: 70) is traditional in Slovakia, some scholars tend to disagree. Repková (2011: 131) states that this kind of division may be misleading to the audience, hence it is mixing fiction with fact. Primarily, she claims that emotions can also be rational, they all depend on the individual's perception of a certain situation. Secondly,

**universal genres** reject the use of fictional fragments which can be often found in the **belletrist genres**. In her opinion, all news should contain human interest, conflict, and anecdotes to make them newsworthy (ibid., 131). Correspondingly, news genres do not have to be necessarily 'dry' so there would be a need for **emotional genres** to make things more 'fascinating'. The universal journalistic genres in Repková's treatment are **news, analysis, and opinion** (ibid., 131).

Journalism of the rational type includes note, commentary, editorial, review, press report and analysis amongst others (Panasenکو 2016: 54). Journalism of the emotional type includes such forms of messages as investigative reportage, editorial, essay, feuilleton, feature, essay, gloss – comment, column, news report, book review, etc. Emotions, which play an important role in the lives of human beings, are named, verbalized and described. A special investigation and classification of emotive signs into types as well as the study of their functioning in emotive speech acts makes it possible to differentiate between three statuses of emotive semantics: 1) emotive meaning, 2) emotive connotation, and 3) emotive potential. The emotive meaning implies a strong semantic component of the word. The emotive connotation is connected with the logical component of the lexical meaning and connotes the corresponding emotion (Shakhovsky 1998). Emotively charged words form lexico-semantic groups united by positive or negative meanings.

In contrast to the traditional classification of news genres in Slovakia, British and American journalistic texts and their forms are determined by their "heaviness", i.e., the amount of newsworthiness the information contains and the level of proximity it has on the readers. Moreover, the messages can also be categorized according to the type and function of journalism to which they belong. These can be investigative reportage, news, review, column, and feature (*Different Types of Journalism, s.a.*).

### **Classification of journalistic genres**

Many experts regard the comprehensive classification of journalistic genres as a necessary subject, for it may serve as a guideline for writing reports. Jameson (2002: 92) states: "Genres are essentially literary institutions, or social contracts between a writer and a specific public, whose function is to specify the proper use of a particular cultural artefact". Considering the different development of journalism, the qualities, form and purpose of genres vary in different geographic regions. This is mainly due to the diverse socio-cultural, economic, and political conditions that were present throughout history. Therefore, no universally accepted classification has yet been established. However, regardless of differences, some specific principles are applied to and shared by many journalistic products. When

writing journalistic outputs, the publicistic style is applied which can be characterized as informative, descriptive, and addressing.

In the Slovak journalistic environment, many experts from the field of journalism and media linguistics studied the topic of journalistic texts appearing in print and produced more detailed classifications according to certain criteria. The two generally accepted classifications are the following: **dichotomic** and **trichotomic** (Tušer 2010: 125). The trichotomic categorization consists of **news genres**, **analytical genres**, and **belles-lettres genres**, whereas the dichotomic classification distinguishes **news journalism** and **publicistic journalism**. There is an opinion that since publicistic genres are further divided into the genres of emotional (belletristic) type and the genres of rational (analytical) type, the trichotomic and dichotomic classifications ultimately overlap (Rončáková 2019: 93).

We present the classification of genres belonging to the emotional type offered by Folrichová (Tušer & Folrichová 2001: 38): reportage, sketch, causerie, italics, essay, feuilleton, column, "besednica" (positively tuned feuilleton), column.

Repková (2011) introduced a new approach, the so-called **universal** genres and criticized the established Slovak classifications, indicating that it is the outdated legacy of the socialistic regime. These universal genres include stories, which may be in forms of **editorials**, **essays**, **comments**, **memoirs**, **profiles**, **reportages**, **obituaries** and so on. What distinguishes these forms of journalistic outputs is the level of subjectivity contained within, and how the stories are written both compositionally and stylistically. Many of these journalistic features in the period of the pandemic were devoted to COVID-19 and its impact on the lives of people all over the world.

## **Hard news and news values**

Another important subdivision of journalistic messages can be made between **hard news** and **soft news**. To decide which news stories belong to what category, one must examine and evaluate to what degree the stories correspond to the **news values** in print journalism.

Hard news can be primarily characterized as important events or issues that directly impact and may somehow cause a disruption in the everyday lives of people. The Encyclopaedia Britannica defines hard news in the following way: "Traditionally, so-called hard news relates the circumstances of a recent event or incident considered to be of general local, regional, national, or international significance" (Hard news, *s.a.*). It is always connected with some disaster, like murder, fire, flood, earthquake, kidnapping, bombing (Panasenکو et al. 2021: 115) and, of course, the pandemic.

To measure the newsworthiness of an incident the term **news value** was coined, which is mainly based on the reported news' impact on and relation to the general audience, i.e. readership. News values develop, change, and may even lose their validity synchronously with the progression of society and technology. Factors, such as the type of medium, ideology, cultural and economic environment influence the rise or decline of news values. Several studies that highlight the behaviour and needs of the members of the readership were conducted to disclose these factors and the following criteria were introduced (see Figure 1):

<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Threshold</b>	<b>Unambiguity</b>	<b>Meaningfulness</b>
<b>Consonance</b>	<b>Unexpectedness</b>	<b>Continuity</b>	<b>Composition</b>
<b>Reference to elite nations</b>	<b>Reference to elite people</b>	<b>Reference to persons</b>	<b>Reference to something negative</b>

**Figure 1. News values offered by Galtung and Ruge (after Niblock 2005)**

If we apply these news values to journalistic messages describing COVID-19, we will see that unexpectedness, (text) composition and reference to something negative have special significance.

In 2016 Harcup and O'Neill examined more than seven hundred lead stories in ten newspapers and reached the conclusion that the following news values appeared to be the most dominant (see Figure 2).

<b>Exclusivity</b>	<b>Bad news</b>	<b>Conflict</b>	<b>Surprise</b>
<b>Drama</b>	<b>Follow-up</b>	<b>Relevance</b>	<b>Magnitude</b>
	<b>Celebrity</b>	<b>Entertainment</b>	<b>Good news</b>

**Figure 2. News values (Harcup & O'Neill 2016)**

Comparing news values to most typical features of hard news (timeliness, conflict, proximity, and surprise) offered by Turov (2011: 305), we will see that some features coincide. Concerning the representation of COVID-19 in media, publications often have such news values as bad news, conflict, surprise, and drama. In this study, we will illustrate with examples how they function in the text.

## **Emotions and approaches to their study**

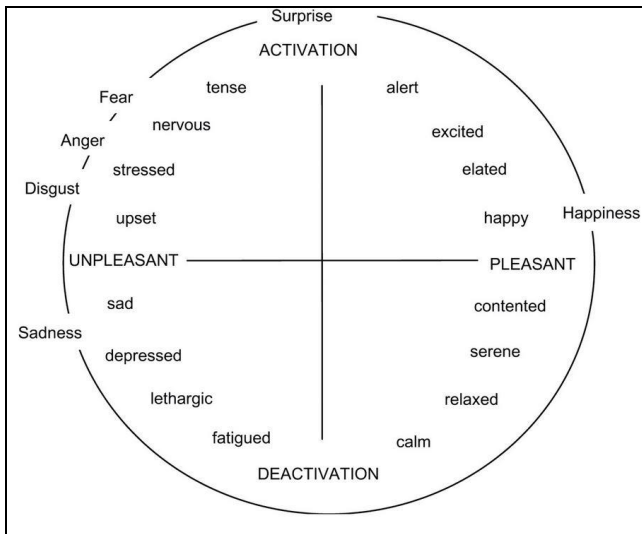
Journalism of the emotional type is, by its very nature, connected with emotions. Several theories have been put forward to explain its origin, function, and development that influence and are in relation to cognition and behavioural changes. In our paper, we rely on the theories that evolved into a shared consensus amongst scientists and introduce the phenomena of emotion according to the research of Scarantino and De Sousa ([2018] 2021) who speak about three traditions in the study of emotions: emotions as feelings, evaluations, and motivations. They also discuss **basic emotions theory**, **appraisal theory**, and **evaluation theory**.

According to **basic emotions theory**, which is broadly supported by researchers and scientists (Foolen 2022; Pinich 2019), such emotions as fear, anger, joy, sadness, disgust, and surprise form the core of the human emotional sphere. The other most prominent theory is **appraisal theory**, which concludes that humans interpret certain situations and stimuli via mental processes, and then on the interpretations or judgements emotional responses are created. It is important to state that emotional reactions and responses may differ from person to person even if the situation they react to is the same – this occurrence is referred to as emotional subjectivity. The three approaches in the study of emotions based on the theories mentioned above are the following: **emotions as feelings**, **emotions as evaluations**, and **emotions as motivations** (Scarantino and De Sousa [2018] 2021).

**Emotions as feelings** can be simply explained as bodily reactions to sensory experiences, i.e. "emotions do not cause their manifestations but rather emerge from them" (Scarantino and De Sousa, [2018] 2021). This approach is shared (see e.g., Fontaine & Scherer 2013: 129) mainly because emotions can be explained by reason which supports the statement that emotions play a significant role in decision-making, thus they cannot be plain physiological feelings or criticized, because depending on the situation feelings are expressed by definite emotions (Panasenکو et al. forthcoming).

**The evaluation theory** associates emotions with cognitive functioning and can be further divided into constitutive and causal. The third, **motivational approach** to emotions explores the reoccurring phenomena of how emotions are related to actions. Those who support the motivational theory try to explain the consequences that are a result of behaviours driven by emotions (Scarantino and De Sousa, [2018] 2021).

We must also mention the categorization of emotions. Psychologist Russell in his work "Culture and the Categorization of Emotions" concludes: "people of different cultures and speaking different languages categorize the emotions somewhat different" (1991: 444). Suggesting this, he agrees that emotions are not universal, only the drivers, which may evoke similar or typical reactions that induce them, are identical. The basic division of emotions that is more or less generally accepted creates the difference between positive (enthusiasm, attraction, surprise, joy, love) and negative (anger, anxiety, hate, frustration, discontent). He introduced the circumplex models of affect (Russell 1980) dividing the emotions into pleasant and unpleasant and specifying their activation and deactivation (see Figure 3).



**Figure 3. Division of emotion perception (Russell 1980)**

If we apply this classification to texts connected with COVID-19, we will see some of the activated and deactivated emotions offered by Russell. The negative emotions, which appear while processing this information, can be activated (nervous, stressed, upset) or deactivated (sad, depressed, fatigued). Only in the case when the disease has been defeated may we speak about activated positive emotions (elated, happy, etc.).

In so far as we analyse printed texts, we must discuss the relationship between language and emotion. When studying texts from a semantic perspective, various categories can be included and examined. According to Panasenko and Kryachkov (2021: 88–91), the relevant semantic categories are as follows: information value, modality, emotivity, intertextuality, time and text temporal structure, literary space, and evaluation. The category of emotivity is directly connected with emotive semantics.

The emotional key of a text contributes to the perception of different topics appearing in media. Based on the above-mentioned emotive categories we will analyse a media text in greater detail; we will examine both negatively and positively charged words and figures of speech that suggest emotional colouring in the essay on the impact of COVID-19 on the lives of many people.

### **Essay as a form of emotional journalism**

Although today it is one of the most common forms of journalistic writing, the roots of the essay are to be found outside journalism. The first use of this type of writing was seen in ancient Greece but the man who first used the term *essay* connected with writing was the French philosopher, M. de Montaigne in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Since then, the essay has established itself as a literary form – falling in the realm of prose – its types ranging from moral to philosophical, descriptive, narrative and many more in-between. Though it takes various forms, there are some typical characteristics of every essay. A subjective layer is always present, i.e., the author of an essay is free to express and discuss their opinions and arguments. The two main types of essays are the personal and the objective. In the personal – or autobiographical – essay the authors are inspired by and describe their own experiences. In the objective essay the author comments on factual data, i.e., the topic of the essay is not directly connected to the author. The structure and composition of the text of an essay is relatively free and depends on the author. It is not necessary to follow a logical line of storytelling and various stylistic devices can be applied to suit the purpose of the essay. In journalism, the essay can be characterized as a scientific-creative and mainly reflective journalistic product, which offers and highlights a new perspective on a topic (Rusňáková & Bučková 2017: 238).

For our analysis, we have chosen the essay entitled "We Must Learn to Look at Grief, Even When We Want to Run Away", which appeared in "The New York Times" in 2022, a newspaper which remains one of the most influential newspapers globally. Thanks to this newspaper literary journalism became popular. The author of this essay, Sunita Puri, is not a journalist. She is the American-born daughter of immigrants, a palliative medicine physician helping patients and their relatives to overcome cancer treatment and its consequences. But she is also a writer of memoir and nonfiction, an author of books and reviews. When the pandemic was spreading across the USA, she spent much time with the relatives of patients who suffered from this horrible disease often terminally.

As any other essay, it is lengthy and has specific features typical of this text format: the first person narrative, emphatic method of narration, abundance of emotively charged words and stylistic devices (SD). Combined with the title



of the essay, these features can be considered as signals of addressee orientation (SAO), an important feature of emotional journalism (Panasenko et al. 2021: 122). To make our analysis clear and comprehensible, we have implemented a colour code. Words with negative connotation appear in red, words with positive connotation are in green, blue means evaluation, and lilac stands for SD. Let us analyse the abovementioned text in the tradition of media linguistics by taking into account approaches popular in linguistics and media studies.

A doctor, the story-teller using the first person narrative shares her experience of communication with patients' relatives in an American hospital. She communicated via Zoom with a patient's wife whose husband was dying of COVID-19, because, due to visitor restrictions, she was not allowed to be at his bedside. The woman showed their photos, in which they sailed, cooked on the beach – enjoyed life. As far as the situation with her husband was crucial – "*Covid had destroyed his lungs*", "*a medical decision*" had to be made. Through a window the woman saw how her husband was injected and how "*the respiratory therapist removed his breathing tube*". She "*removed her latex gloves and pressed her palms against the glass*". She was deprived of the opportunity to say the last good bye to her husband. COVID totally destroyed her family and the only photos of their happy life remained in her camera or mobile and her palm prints remained at first on the glass window and then in doctor's memory.

Another case was given not in detail, but it is no less impressive. A teenager stopped the doctor outside the hospital and begged her to sit with her father because she wasn't allowed inside. The doctor had no time for this: there were too many patients, "*more than 930,000 Americans have died of Covid-19*" and there were "*body bags outside New York hospitals*". The teenager's father died alone.

This essay is written primarily from the first-person point of view and falls under the category of a personal memoir, thematically corresponding to a moral essay. This text is particularly interesting, especially when analysing it from a semantic perspective that searches for lexical units with negative and positive indications. Via the main topic, the experience of grief, the author is trying to emphasize how conventional attitudes toward grief are not always the best for us. 'Grief' can be considered as one of SAO; it is included in the title, which occupies a textually strong position and is used in the text four times as a noun and as a corresponding verb. The message of this essay is that COVID-19 brought much grief to many people but we must learn how to overcome the loss of our relatives and friends. 'Loss' and its corresponding verb is the next SAO, which is also used four times. Other words with strong negative connotations are connected with death (*More than 930,000 Americans have died of COVID-19; Delhi's skies darkened from mass cremations*); suffering (*he wouldn't want to suffer anymore*); pain; sick, risky, cry, pandemic, discomfort of seeing the pain; visitor restrictions; destruction (*COVID had destroyed his lungs*).

Emotions is not only negative, but also positive. In our case, they are few and do not influence the general sad thread of the narrative. Lexical units with **positive connotation** include the following examples: *his breathing tube in one graceful arc; to protect people; compassion; each of us must reach out, express condolences*. In most cases they are used as antithesis: a man had his *breathing tube* as a *graceful arc*, but it became useless and was switched off; people who lost relatives needed compassion.

Another important message in this essay is **the evaluation** of the unfolding events: *what is hard but necessary to see; Bearing witness is essential to everything; This approach is a powerful way to move through the pandemic together; I realized that it wasn't my job...*

If we come back to the **news values** presented in Fig. 1 and Fig. 2, we will see that this essay describes **unexpectedness**, because this pandemic arrived suddenly as an unpleasant **surprise**. The text has a specific **composition**. The author first grabs the attention of the reader by using vivid focalization of scenery (e.g., "*he needs a ventilator to breathe for him*"), then by describing her personal experience with death – the story unfolding in a cause-and-effect way for addressee orientation – she mediates the topic frequently using words like *pain, death, grief, tragedy*. All the **pieces of news** are **bad** and demonstrate **a conflict** between life and death, former happy life and loss. And of course, what is narrated in this essay is **drama**; the writing has a dramatic impression, with well-timed simple sentences that make the writing rhythmic, complemented with many stylistic devices, which we will describe below.

If we look at the categorization of negative emotions conducted by Russell (Fig. 3), we will see that most of them can be found in this text: people are tense, nervous, stressed, upset, sad, depressed, and fatigued. Some emotional states are easily reconstructed from the context, some are given directly: *Many survivors still suffer from breathlessness, mind fog and debilitating fatigue*.

All these news values and negative emotions are brilliantly enhanced by stylistic devices. Of the numerous examples, we have chosen the most impressive:

- *to guide her through the fog of grief* (metaphor);
- *Together, we wrestled with the burn of uncertainty* (metaphor);
- *The memory of palm prints on that glass door cut through numbers and statistics and allowed me to process the human scale of suffering that had overwhelmed me throughout the pandemic* (sustained metaphor);
- *This magnitude of suffering shook our world* (metaphor);
- *messy complexity of grief into tidy sound bites* (metaphor);
- *Her photos said what words couldn't* (personification);
- *She stared at him, her slight frame swallowed by a billowing yellow P.P.E. gown* (personification);
- *She dropped her head and folded forward like paper curling toward the fire that consumes it* (simile);

- *at this particular kind of pain was as blinding as looking at the sun* (simile);
- *the funeral pyres that burned like orange flowers* (simile);
- *At different points over the past two years, so many of us pressed our palms against a glass door* (figurative periphrasis).

These SD are disseminated throughout the text, but there are some blocks in which SD, lexical units, and news values are concentrated *ad maximum*. In such cases the whole block forms SAO, attracting the attention of the readers: *Can we instead move forward with grief? Can we find a way to integrate loss into life, to carry it with us? Can we feel tragedy together, without an artificial line between those who are ready to move on and those who can't see a way out?* In this paragraph we see aphoristic repetition combined with emotively charged words and rhetorical questions. If we extract negative emotions from the text – *grief – loss – tragedy*, we will see lexico-syntactic device gradation, in which each following word is stronger than the preceding one.

## Conclusions

Emotions form an inseparable part of human beings contributing to social phenomena, thus their expression is important in terms of media content. They can affect the way people make judgements and their conclusions about certain news stories. That is why they are important for journalism and therefore constitute a relevant topic for research.

Our study is based on the most popular theories: the theory of basic emotions, the appraisal theory, and the evaluation theory which found their reflection in the essay. In so far as we do not support emotions as feelings theory, it was ignored. We accepted the categorization of negative and positive emotions after Russell and showed their role in the emotional type of journalism. News values are also very important and may function in the text as SAO.

The New York Times' essay can be considered as hard news, since its topic is pandemic-related deaths. It is saturated with stylistic devices, such as metaphor, simile, figurative periphrasis, and personification enhanced by various types of repetition and gradation. From our observations, we can state that the essay in general and this one in particular are mainly descriptive and the purpose of these SD is to make the content of the texts more vivid, requiring imaginative thinking and conceptualization, thus leading to greater emotional engagement and the need to interpret and think again about the topic under analysis – COVID-19.

In this paper, we express only the point of view of the doctor of palliative medicine, for whom COVID meant more work, but what is more important for the readers is that the doctor's heart did not harden. She finds words of consolation for anyone; she thinks that the whole "*country can be united by seeing this*"

suffering", that "*We are all my patient and we are all his wife*" evoking warm feelings in the hearts of not only Americans, but all over the world. She offers to find something positive, which "*can bind them together.*"

We have not given attention to other opinions, those of people who deny Covid-19 pandemics as a problem. Such texts are also available in the media space and may be considered as a potential avenue for further research.

The implementation of plain objective reporting with media linguistics techniques makes factual stories more attractive to readers. It takes talent to write in a style that can evoke emotion; the writer has to know which topics are the most valuable to the reader. Journalism serves the public entity and much depends on the manner of the language via which it distributes information, and what the author intends to accomplish. When it comes to information exchange, understanding and processing of information, it is not so much the content of the story itself that is crucial, but rather the style of communication, the way in which it is formulated and conveyed.

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