

Graduation System Analysis of Russia-Ukraine War News in New York Times and Russia Today: Evaluative Language Use in Media Discourse

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Abstract

Graduating meaning, up-scaled or down-scaled, by using *force* (i.e., intensification and quantification) and *focus* (i.e., sharpening and softening) is a linguistic aspect indispensable in conveying attitude. This study is concerned with investigating such graduating formulations adopted by New York Times (NYT) and Russia Today (RT) as part of the Russia-Ukraine media war. The study makes use of the graduation system of Appraisal theory by Martin and Rose (2003) and Martin and White (2005). The data consist of (8) texts, (4) from each newspaper. These representative samples are analyzed qualitatively to show how writers employ graduating strategies to convey their attitudes regarding the Russia- Ukraine conflict. The findings obtained from the analysis show diversity in using these graduating formulations. The writers of both newspapers (NYT and RT) employ different graduating strategies, such as force: intensification and quantification, and focus: sharpening and softening. The significance lies behind this study is that strengthening and weakening the degree of meaning is an essential part of media discourse that authors employ to make their style more effective and more powerful.

Keywords: Graduation System, Force, Focus, Appraisal theory, Russia-Ukraine war

تحليل نظام تدرج المعنى في اخبار الحرب الروسية الاوكرانية في صحيفتي نيويورك تايمز وروسيا اليوم: دراسة لغوية تقييمية في الخطاب الاعلامي
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المستخلص

إن تدرج المعنى، سواءً بالتشديد أو التخفيف، باستخدام قوة المعنى (التشديد والكمي) وتركيز المعنى (أي الشدح والترقيق)، هو جانب لغوي لا غنى عنه في نقل الايدولوجيا، وتهتم هذه الدراسة بدراسة صيغ تدرج المعنى التي اعتمدها صحيفة نيويورك تايمز (NYT) وقناة روسيا اليوم (RT) بوصفها جزءاً من الحرب الإعلامية بين روسيا وأوكرانيا، وتستفيد الدراسة من نظام تدرج المعنى لنظرية التقييم التي وضعها مارتن وروز (2003) ومارتن ووايت (2005). وتتكون البيانات من (8) نصوص، (4) من كل مجلة. وقد حُلَّت هذه العينات نوعياً لإظهار كيفية استعمال الكُتَّاب لاستراتيجيات التدرج في المعنى لنقل مواقفهم بشأن الصراع بين روسيا وأوكرانيا، وتُظهر النتائج التي تم الحصول عليها من التحليل تنوعاً في استعمال صيغ تدرج المعنى هذه. استعمل كُتَّاب كلتا المجلتين (نيويورك تايمز وروسيا اليوم) استراتيجياتٍ مختلفةً في تدرج المعنى، مثل قوة المعنى: التشديد والتخفيف والتحديد الكمي، والترقيق: الشدح والترقيق. تكمن أهمية هذه الدراسة في أن تقوية المعنى وتخفيفه جزءٌ أساسيٌّ من الخطاب الإعلامي الذي يستخدمه الكُتَّاب لجعل أسلوبهم أكثر فعاليةً وقوةً.

الكلمات المفتاحية : نظام تدرج المعنى، قوة المعنى، تركيز المعنى، النظرية التقييمية، الحرب الروسية- الاوكرانية

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1. Introduction

Media plays a crucial role in shaping and influencing public opinion on most central issues of the world, including politics, social issues and cultural trends. This constant and systematic role of media in affecting people's views may change their attitude of a certain issue. That is, through images, language, and other semiological means, media invokes fear, anger, patriotism, enthusiasm, or empathy. Over the time, such feelings may develop, to a lesser or greater extent, to enmity toward a certain culture or a nation, as with the conflict among people on a religious or racist basis. Media, however, ideologically follows certain agenda, like focusing on certain issues as more important and more central than others (e.g., terrorism, inflation, elections, etc.).

Newspaper is a particular type of media categorized under the broader term of *print* media, including magazines, books, brochures, pamphlets, etc. Newspapers are characterized by their regular daily or weekly publication of news and other items, such as comments, analysis, advertising, and entertainment. Newspapers are either printed, and thus, delivered to readers by mail or by local distribution, or online newspapers, existing on the World Wide Web (WWW). This type of newspaper is an alternative version of the printed newspaper with all the characteristics of news media (Manoj, 2018). The growth of news production, the massive spread of newspaper reading, and the political positions adopted by some particular newspapers are all main factors that have led to the ideological diffusion of the press (Fowler, 1991). Newspapers do ideological practices more effectively by circulating ideas, representations, and portrayals of social reality. Writers, however, feel free, particularly in opinion articles, to convey the ideas and attitudes of the

ruling class (Richardson, 2007). Historically, newspapers played a significant role in reporting or declaring World War I and World War II, and in influencing public opinion about the two wars and their results. This role of newspapers is emphasized by Piñas and Gubert (2016):

This is important since it was precisely with the Great War that the potential of propaganda as a weapon was conceived and magnified by new means of communication such as daily newspapers. The governments of the warring countries made ample use of them in order to reinforce the patriotic spirit both at home and abroad, with the aim of undermining the moral resistance of the enemy populations or of defending its own actions to Allied and neutral states. In the case of Italy there was the very interesting case of Giuseppe Antonio Borgese, a noted writer and journalist for the paper *Corriere della serra*, who was sent to France by the special Office of the Royal Italian Navy in 1917 to record French public opinion towards Italy and to measure the results of the Italian propaganda abroad- a role that combined journalism with activities of espionage, which, (...), throws important lights on relations between Allied states (para, 9).

More specifically, newspapers have occupied this particular position in affecting public opinion about “Russia-Ukraine War” (as NYT calls it) or “special military operation” (RT calls it for ideological purposes). Following the world journalism, we shall call it *Russia-Ukraine* war. Media in general and newspapers in particular have influenced the consequences of the Russian-Ukraine war indirectly but significantly. One instance is the positive or negative images of either

side, which can affect the morale of soldiers and civilians, and this potentially has the impact on how long these soldiers and civilians can fight. The other instance is the number of casualties and losses that either side has tried to increase or decrease, if not hide from the public. Writers, for instance, employ intensification, such as intensifiers, lexical attitude, and metaphor, to strengthen their own attitude, and quantification, such as number, extent, and distribution, to exaggerate the number of casualties and losses of the other side.

The purpose of this study is to consider the graduation system of the Appraisal theory (2005) in the NYT and RT. The primary focus of the study is to uncover how writers of both newspapers employ the graduating strategies to convey their ideas and attitudes to their readers. The questions the study poses are:

1. To what extent does the graduation system of the Appraisal theory play a role in uncovering graduating attitude?
2. What are the graduation formulations exploited by writers of NYT and RT to graduate their attitude?

2. Appraisal Theory

Ndhlovu et al. (2024) defines Appraisal theory as “a new evaluative discourse-linguistic framework which has been developed out of Halliday’s (1977) Systemic Functional Linguistics’ (SFL) three metafunctions: Textual, Ideational and Interpersonal” (p. 105). The theory is an extension to the SFL’s interpersonal metafunction to carry out the authorial voice’s association or dissociation with actual events or individuals through authorial stances or positionings (Martin & White, 2005). Appraisal theory, as described by Thompson

(2016, pp. 169-70), is “the most fully developed model of evaluation,” which has opened the gate to significant advances in the exploration of interpersonal meaning that had been relatively neglected within SFL. The Appraisal framework encompasses three evaluative semantic areas: *attitude*, which deals with feelings, judgments of behavior, and evaluation of things; *engagement*, which is concerned with sources of attitudes and voices expressing opinions in discourse; and *graduation*, which has to do with grading attitudes whereby feelings or judgments are amplified and categories are focused (Martin & White, 2005).

Overtime, the Appraisal theory has been refined by some linguists such as Bednarek (2008), who develops a framework for analyzing the language of emotion, focusing on emotion words, evaluative expressions, and syntactic structures; White (2012), who explores how insight of attitudinal meanings, central to Appraisal framework, can contribute to translation and contrastive linguistics; and Ngo and Unsworth (2015), who propose some additional refinements to Appraisal framework, particularly to the system of attitude, to account for the evaluative language used by the Vietnamese students living in Australia to discuss their topics, including their personal, academic and professional experiences. Over the years, Appraisal framework has evolved, providing comprehensive descriptions of academic language, film reviewers, business discourse, etc. (e.g., Carretero & Taboada, 2014; Fuoli, 2012; Hood, 2010).

2.1 Previous Studies on the System of Graduation

A few studies have focused on the graduation

system of Appraisal theory, either alone or together with the other systems of *attitude* and *engagement*. For clarity and relevance, we mention here only those studies that address the graduation system independently of attitude and engagement. Hood and Zhang's (2020) primary focus is on the role of graduation in the enactment of social relations and the constructing of affiliative communities. Their data are obtained as videos of live lectures in the fields of Health Science and Law. They consider how expressions of paralinguistic graduation can support students in constructing the values of their disciplinary fields. In context of news texts, Novita and Nirwana (2020), for example, investigate the graduation system on the crime news in The Jakarta Post. Xia (2021) investigates the graduating instances in political news obtained from BBC News and China Daily. Extracting their data from spoken language, Putri and Cahyono (2021) analyze the graduation system in the Virtual Press Conference about Covid-19 held in 2021. In contrastive linguistics, Carretero and Taboada (2014) study evaluative language in English and Spanish consumer-generated reviews on books and movies, focusing on the graduation system embedded in spans of attitude of 64 reviews.

2.2 Graduation System

Graduation is the third system of the Appraisal theory proposed by Martin and White (2005). Together with the other two systems of *attitude* and *engagement*, it forms a complementary framework to analyze the language of evaluation. Martin and Rose (2003) point out that one important feature of attitudes is that they are gradable. This feature enables us to say how strongly we feel about people or things. To express their feelings or convey their opinions, people can

choose from a set of a grading scale of linguistic choices arranged thereby in terms of their strength and weakness. Macken-Horarik and Isaac (2003) argue that authors construct their social or individual identities as more or less authoritative and confident, depending on the intensity and the type of resources they employ in their texts.

Oteiza (2017) identifies two primarily types of graduating subcategories, force and focus. *Force* is concerned with formulations that intensify or diminish the value of attitudes. *Focus* includes words that sharpen or soften the boundaries of meanings or the attitudinal value, using words like *kind of*, *sort of*, *real*, etc.

2.2.1 Force

Force, as stated by Hood (2019, p. 389), encompasses up-scaling or down-scaling that modifies the *intensification* of a value, for example, from *important* to *very important* or to *not so important*. Attitude, in this example, is a *quality*, and its intensity is adjusted up or down. Attitude can also be realized as a *process*, and in this case, the verb of process is modified by an intensifier, as in *rigorously investigated*. The choice between quality and process is often described as one between "degree" and "vigor." Entities are evaluated by *quantification*, which provides imprecise measure of number (e.g., *few/ many* streets) and imprecise measure of mass of entities (e.g., *small/ large* amount; *nearby* building, *distant* building).

Martin and Rose (2003) argue that the force of attitudes is amplified by a certain set of choices or meanings, such as *very/ really/ extremely*. These kinds of intensifying formulations are known as *intensifiers*. Through intensifiers, it is often possible to compare things or to say how strongly we feel about someone or something. Quirk et al.

(1985, p. 590) distinguishes between two kinds of intensifiers, *emphasizers*, which reinforce effect on the truth-value of the statement (e.g., *actually, certainly, clearly, indeed, really, surely, simply*, etc.), and *downtoners*, which have a lowering effect, usually moving downwards from a certain point (e.g., *almost, more, less, partly, hardly*, etc.). The degree of intensity is also graduated by vocabulary items. This type of intensification is often termed *infused intensification*, where no separate lexical item conveys the sense of up/down-scaling. The scaling is, rather, conveyed as one aspect of meaning, for example, *contented, happy, joyous* (Martin & Rose, 2003, p. 43). These kinds of words are referred to as *attitudinal lexis*. In contrast with intensifiers, which are grammatical items, and include a closed set of words, content words are technically known as *lexical items*, or simply *lexis* (Martin & Rose, 2003, p. 44). Such lexical items are sometimes modified by other isolated lexical modifiers, e.g., *ice cold, crystal clear, reasonably happy, ridiculously easy*, and the like (Martin & White, 2005, p. 143).

Metaphor and *swearing* play an important role in intensifying attitudes. Martin and Rose (2003) mention some examples, including metaphors and simile, like “*ice cold in a sweltering right*,” “*dull like the dead*” (p. 45). *Swearing*, as assumed by Stapleton (2010), achieves some particular functions that are not easily achieved by other means of language. Swearing is considered a large area of study, usually labeled under the term *strong language*, and is often associated with sociolinguistics. One example of swearing is “*Damn! What else can this abnormal life be than a cruel human rights violation?*” (Martin & Rose, 2003, p. 46). There are other areas that include the meaning of graduation. One active area is that of

modality, in which the degree of intensity is conveyed in a sequence of semantically related terms, for example, *possible, probable, certain*. Up-scaling or down-scaling is also achieved via *adverbs of manner* which graduate by a reference to a notion of vigor, as in “*She held it loosely, She held it firmly*” (Martin & White, 2005, p. 146).

As indicated above, *quantification* is a term used to refer to the assessment of entities. Martin and White (2005, pp. 150-51) divide quantity resources into three main categories: *number* (e.g., *few, many*), *mass* (e.g., *small, large*), and *extent*, which comprises two subcategories: *proximity* realized in terms of *time* (e.g., *recent arrival*) or *space* (e.g., *nearby mountain*), and *distribution* realized in terms of *time* (e.g., *short battle*) or *space* (e.g., *long-lasting hostility*).

2.2.2 Focus

Focus, as stated by Hood (2019), is “the relative sharpening or blurring of categorical boundaries” (p. 389). Martin and Rose (2003) point out that focus is concerned with sharpening or softening of experiential categories. Martin and White (2005, p. 139) argue that graduation applies according to *prototypicality* to categories that are not gradable. Instances of sharpening present a positive attitude (e.g., *a real husband, a true husband*), whereas instances of softening present a negative attitude (e.g., *jazz of sorts, sanctuary of a kind*).

Sharpening or softening is carried out by *focusing adjuncts*, which, as stated by Quirk et al. (1985), “draw attention to a part of a sentence as wide as the predication, or as narrow as a single constituent of an element,” such as, a premodifying adjective in a noun phrase as subject, or an auxiliary within a verb (p. 604). Focusing adjuncts are composed of a limited set of items, typically adverbs, but including also some prepositional phrases.

According to Quirk et al. (1985, p. 604), focusing adjuncts include: First, focusing adjuncts of *restrictives*, which are associated with utterances true only with regard to the part focused. Restrictives are of two subtypes: a. *exclusives*, which are associated with the application of a particular utterance exclusively to the part focused, such as, *alone, exactly, exclusively, just, merely, only, precisely, purely, simply, solely*; and b. *particularizers*, which restrict the utterance in

advance mostly to the part focused, such as, *chiefly, especially, largely, mainly, mostly, notably, particularly, primarily, principally, specifically, at least, in particular*. Second, *additive subjuncts*, which convey the idea that the utterance expressed are additionally true with respect to the part focused, such as, *again, also, either, equally, further, likewise, neither, nor, similarly, too, as well, in addition*.

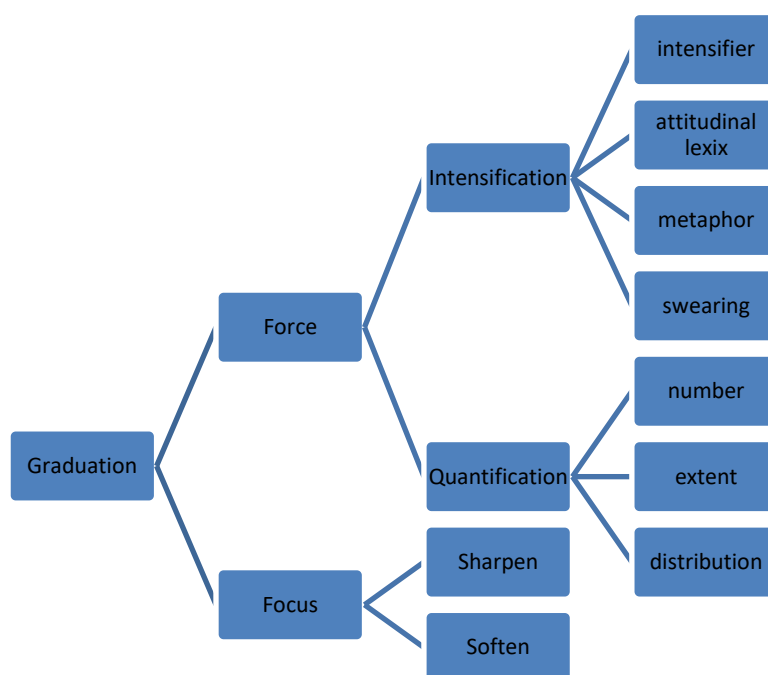


Figure: (1): Graduation System (Adopted from Martin & Rose , 2003, p. 48)

2.3 Graduation System and Writer-Reader Relationship

Martin and White (2005) argue that force, involving both degrees in intensity and quantity, interacts with attitude, that is, either to increase or decrease the volume of that attitude. This effect can be associated with regard to alignment and solidarity. As for up-scaling attitude, force functions to construe the writer as maximally committed to the value position being advanced and hence as strongly aligning the reader to that position. For example, “The legislature’s *extremely*

unwise decision to remove the cap on tuition increases at Ohio’s colleges was accompanied by an even more reckless act” (p. 153). In this example, the up-scaled word *unwise* construes the writer as maximally committed to a community of shared value with the reader. Down-scaled attitudes, on the other hand, act to construe the writer as having only a partial affiliation with the value position being referred to (Martin & White, 2005).

Focus plays an important role in stating the

relationship between writer and reader. As indicated above, a term is graduated according to prototypicality. When the term being graduated is already explicitly attitudinal (e.g., *a real brat, kind of marvelous*), the rhetorical affect varies with regard to its value, either sharpening or softening. When the term is sharpened (e.g., *a real brat*), the effect is realized as a maximal investment by the writer in the value position (whether positive or negative) being advanced. As a result, the writer strongly aligns the reader into the value position being currently advanced. As for softening, whether positive or negative, the purpose of the writer is to maintain solidarity with those who hold contrary views (Martin & White, 2005, p. 139).

3. Methodology

The purpose of this study is to investigate the *graduation system* of the Appraisal theory in media discourse of two important newspapers, NYT-United States of America, and RT-Russia. The main objective is to pursue how these newspapers utilize graduation strategies to affect public opinion about the Russia-Ukraine war.

3.1 Data Selection

Two newspapers are selected as samples that represent newspaper, one is American, NYT, and the other is Russian, RT. The reason behind selecting these newspapers is that they reflect the ideology and policy of their nations. NYT is considered as one of the longest-running newspapers in the United States. It serves as one of the country's newspaper of record. RT presents itself as an alternative to western newspapers like NYT and BBC. It covers international news, politics, and culture.

3.2 Texts Selection

A representative sample of eight extracts, four from each newspaper, is purposefully selected for the analysis. Concerning the extracted texts from each article, one basic strategy followed in selecting these texts is their relation to the Russia-Ukraine war to be ready for qualitative analysis and further discussion.

4. Data Analysis

The Analysis of NYT

The following four extracts are selected from NYT newspaper.

Extract 1

Title of the article: *With Russia Airfield Attacks, Ukraine Aims for Strategic and Symbolic Blow* by Marc Santora and Devon Lum, June 2, 2025. The article is to show that Ukraine's drone attacks on airfields inside Russia are strategic and symbolic blows, and these attacks are designed to slow Moscow's bombing campaign.

Although the full extent of the damage is unknown, the attack, known as Operation Spider's Web, showed how Ukraine is adapting and evolving in the face of a larger military with deeper resources. Using drones, Kyiv has been able to push Russia out of much of the Black Sea, limit its gains on the front lines despite Ukraine's own troop shortages, and hamper Russia's ability to amass large concentration of forces for major offensives.

This extract focuses on the Operation Spider's Web carried out by Ukraine against Russia. It is mainly about how Ukraine, using drones, has been able to limit Russia's ability and pushed it away out of the Black Sea. Being clear and concise, the writer employs certain graduating formulations. One instance is that of *full extent* used at the beginning of the paragraph, a lexical choice

indicating force: quantification. The phrase is composed of *extent*, which refers to quantity/ extent, and *full*, which maximizes it. The whole phrase *full extent* up-scales *damage* as the writer shows it as total and complete. The noun *damage* is a negative attitudinal lexis, labeled under the term *intensification*. The word *damage* means, as the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English 9th edition (Hornby, 2015) states, “to cause physical harm to something [sth.]” (p.384). The meaning implies impairing the value and function of something, which, for the action to achieve its goal, requires an up-scaling punctual change of state. The phrase *Although the full extent of the damage is unknown* might be used metaphorically to indicate that the damage is so big that it cannot be stated by words. The extract contains similar instances of intensification and quantification. The words: *attack, adapting, evolving, deeper, able, push Russia out of, limit, shortages, hamper, ability, amass, concentration, forces, major, offensives* are all attitudinal lexis. Although these words are different in form and function, most of them achieve their meaning through up-scaling. One example is that of process verbs, as in “...Ukraine is *adapting* and *evolving* in the face of a larger military with deeper resource,” where the verbs *adapting* and *evolving* are used to indicate how Ukraine over the time enhance its military abilities. Other similar examples of process verbs are, *push Russia out of, limit, hamper, and amass*. The degree of state is expressed via the adjectives: *deeper, able, and major*. The text also supports some examples of quantity, such as *much*, referring to the long distance for which Ukraine has pushed Russia from the Black Sea, and *larger* (large+ comparative –er), referring to the big amount of the Russian military campaign.

Extract 2

Title of the article: *A Landscape of Death: What's Left Where Ukraine Invaded Russia* by Nanna Heitman, July12, 2025. The article depicts the Russian areas invaded by Ukraine as places of death.

The devastation has fueled anger within the community against the Russian authorities, as well as against Ukraine and its Western supporters. Kursk represents the rare place in this war where Russian civilians found themselves under the control of Ukrainian forces, while large areas of Ukraine still remain occupied by Russia.

The extract opens with *devastation*, a lexical choice depicting how the Russia-Ukraine conflict has destroyed the Kursk region in Russia. The word *devastation* means, as stated by the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English 9th edition (Hornby, 2015) “great destruction or damage, especially over a wide area” (Oxf15p. 419). The writer selects *devastation* from a set of attitudinal lexis such as *damage* and *destruction*. These are all lexical items that refer to the degrees of destruction. The word *damage* means, as stated in the analysis of Extract 1, physical harm; *destruction* is a noun derived from *destroy* meaning “to damage something [sth.] so hardly that it no longer exists” (Hornby, 2015). It seems that *devastation* is different from *damage* and *destruction* in that *destruction* covers a wide area. The word *fueled* is used metaphorically, that is, the writer makes *anger* similar to *fire*; and that anger needs fuel (reason) the same way fire does. The word *anger* is an attitudinal word, expressing how people are furious at the sight of destruction in the Kursk region of Russia. The sentence, “The devastation has fueled anger...” consists of three attitudinal lexis, *devastation, fueled, and anger*; all

of these words, through up-scaling, are employed by the writer to show the degree of destruction caused by war. In this extract, the writer ideologically focuses on how the Russia-Ukraine conflict affects the Russian areas. Kursk, the Russian city, which is about 500 km south of Moscow, is shown by the writer as “the rare place” where the Russian civilians are suffering under the control of Ukrainian forces. The words, *rare*, *civilians*, *control*, and *force*, though different in the degrees of their force, express the writer’s attitude. The first two, *rare* and *civilians* are down-scaling, whereas the last two, *control* and *force* are up-scaling. In this sentence, the writer shows how the “Russian civilians” were surprised when they found themselves surrounded by the Ukrainian forces. Interestingly, the writer employs *control* and *forces*, which belong to intensification, to describe the situation, increasingly from *control* (e.g., firm fist), to *forces*, where the Ukrainian fists are catching Kursk firmly and strongly. The word *large* in “large areas in Ukraine” belongs to the category of quantification. It refers to the big Ukrainian areas occupied by Russia.

Extract 3

Title: Trump Gives Russia Less Than Two Weeks to End Its War in Ukraine by Matthew Mpoke Bigg, July 28, 2025. This article is about Trump’s warning to the Kremlin to end the conflict with Ukraine, or face a new round of sanctions.

But Mr. Trump’s new deadline underscored his growing frustration with Mr. Putin’s resistance to compromise, even as the Kremlin has continued to shower the American president with compliments. Last week, Sergey V. Lavrov, Russia’s foreign minister, praised the Trump administration for its “reasonable approach” to Ukraine and its “readiness for dialogue.”

This extract is about the time limit of two weeks that Trump has given Putin to end his war on Ukraine. To express this, the writer, from among a set of possible meanings like, for example, period, time limit, end, termination, etc., employs deadline. The word deadline means, as stated by Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary of Current English 9th edition (Hornby, 2015), “a point in time by which something [sth.] must be done” (Oxf15p. 392). It also connotes the additional meanings of urgency, warning, seriousness, consequences and finality. All such meanings are expressed as up-rising, starting from a certain point of warning until the situation reaches a deadline (end point), a point in time by which nothing can be done after that. The writer, then, uses the verb underscored, which means stress or emphasize. The verb underscored is classified under the general term of intensification: attitudinal lexis. The noun phrase his growing frustration is another attitudinal lexis. It consists of an adjective (growing)+ a noun (frustration). To say how much the American President Donald Trump was annoyed with the Russian President Putin, the writer employs the word frustration, which implies feeling and emotion. Trump’s state of being frustrated is graduated by the adjective growing, a participle adjective that implies the sense of being ongoing or continuous. There is a symmetrical relationship among these three attitudinal lexis, *deadline*, *growing*, and *frustration*. It shows how Trump has become increasingly disappointed with Putin for his resistance to ending the war. The noun *resistance* is another example of intensification: attitudinal lexis, which has an implied sense of fighting to stop something. So, the sense of process *resistance* indicates is graduated up till it reaches its ultimate end. The writer, then, talks about how the Kremlin

praised Donald Trump. To express this, the writer employs the sentence “the Kremlin has continued to shower the American president with compliments.” The verb *shower* is used metaphorically to mean to give somebody a lot of things. Of course, *shower* is an example of attitudinal words, used, together with *compliments*, to convey the sense of giving many compliments. However, as an example of showering Trump with compliments, the Russian’s foreign minister Sergey V. Lavrov “praised the Trump administration for its ‘reasonable approach’ to Ukraine and its ‘readiness for dialogue’.” The verb *praised* here is an attitudinal lexis, having a degree of intensity.

Extract 4

Title: *Foreign Recruits Killed in Ukraine as Missile Hits Camp’s Mess Hall* by Andrew E. Kramer, Aug. 12, 2025. The article is on a Russian missile that struck a Ukrainian training camp and killed some soldiers.

The Ukrainian Army, which only occasionally acknowledges missile strikes on military sites, confirmed that the attack had killed and wounded soldiers but declined to disclose details. Three soldiers, including one who witnessed the strike, described a harrowing assault that hit fresh recruits from the United States, Colombia, Taiwan, Denmark and other places.

The writer, in the above extract, describes the Russian missile strikes on the Ukrainian military sites; how this deadly attack killed and wounded soldiers, including fresh recruits from the United States, Colombia, Taiwan, Denmark and other places. To achieve his purpose, the writer exploits different graduating formulations. One instance is *only*, which belongs to intensification: focus. In the phrase *only occasionally acknowledges*, the focus

adverb *only* modifies the adverb of frequency *occasionally*, restricting the action to just occasional instances, no more. The difference between *occasionally acknowledges* and *only occasionally acknowledges* is that the latter is more emphatic. So, whereas *occasionally acknowledges* is neutral, simply describing the action as occurring sometimes, *only occasionally acknowledges* is an evaluative style, emphasizing the scarcity of occurrence contrasting it with what might be expected. The same line includes some other attitudinal lexis, such as *acknowledges*, *strike(s)*, *the attack*, *killed*, *wounded*, *declined*, and *disclose*. All these words carry with them different attitudinal connotations, varying from down-scaling to up-scaling, or lies somewhere between the two extremes. The verb *confirmed*, for example, is selected from a possible range of meanings, such as *state*, *acknowledge*, *confirm*, *assert*, and *affirm*. The first two *state* and *acknowledge* are said to be weaker or neutral in graduation, the last two *assert* and *affirm* are described as stronger and emphatic. Moderate in strength and indicating standard confirmation, *confirm* seems to lie somewhere between the two extremes, the weakest and the strongest. From the set of words above, we also take *declined*, a verb meaning *refuse*. According to Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary of Current English 9th edition (Hornby, 2015, p. 397), *declined* means “to refuse politely to accept to do something [sth].” The difference between *refuse* and *decline* is that whereas the former seems stronger, more direct, and even harsh, the latter is softer, more polite and formal. The second line includes some words of attitude, such as *the strike*, *harrowing*, *assault*, *hit*, *fresh*. Although the word *strike* is used as a noun and *hit* as a verb, both of them give different connotations. Implying a violent and aggressive

action, *strike* seems to have more up-grading intensity of impact than that of *hit*, which is used generally, often to mean “to bring your hand or an object you are holding against somebody [sb.]/ something [sth.] quickly and with force” (Hornby, 2015, p. 745). In the clause “Three soldiers, including one who witnessed the strike,...,” the writer, through *strike*, describes a big, comprehensive picture of the Russian attack on the Ukrainian sites, conveying all other related things that accompanied the attack, like destruction and killing the poor soldiers whom he describes as *fresh recruits*. The comprehensive picture gets narrower and more specific by using the verb *hit*, which describes the action physically. This strike, however, is described by the three soldiers as a *harrowing assault*. The noun phrase *a harrowing assault* consists of an adjective *harrowing* and a noun *assault*. Both are labeled as attitudinal lexis. The noun *assault* is up-graduated by the modifying adjective *harrowing*, which means, as indicated by Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary of Current English 9th edition (Hornby, 2015, p. 718), “very shocking or frightening and making you feel very upset.” Throughout the extract, the writer, describing the military situation, uses two words of attitude, *attack* and *assault*. They are different in their degrees of intensity. Whereas *attack* refers to an act of using violence, *assault* refers to the crime of attacking somebody physically. The variation in style depends on the situation; so whereas *attack* is broader and has a higher degree of intensity as used in “The Ukrainian Army, ..., confirmed that the attack killed and wounded soldiers...,” *assault* is more specific, as used in “The three soldiers, including one who witnessed the strike, described a harrowing assault that hit fresh recruits...” The noun *recruits* is down-graded by the modifying adjective *fresh*, which means newly joined

members of the Ukrainian Army. The phrase *fresh recruits* is used metaphorically, implying that these soldiers are new and inexperienced.

The Analysis of RT

The following four extracts are selected from RT newspaper.

Extract 1

Title: *Time’s up: Russia’s next move against Ukraine could be decisive* by Sergey Poletaev, Apr. 17, 2025. This article focuses on the Russian possible spring-summer campaign that Russia has planned for against Ukraine.

It’s worth remembering that for both the Russian and Ukrainian militaries, holding and capturing territory isn’t the ultimate goal. In a war of attrition, the primary objective is to wear down the enemy- to inflict greater losses than you take. Ukraine, however, hasn’t always adhered to this logic. Over the past three years, there have been numerous instances where political imperatives overrode military ones. The Armed Forces of Ukraine (AFU), reluctant to withdraw from certain positions, ended up suffering costly local defeats. We saw in this Bakhmut and Avdeevka, in Ugledar and Velikaya Novoselka, at the Krynkiv and Kurakhovo bridgeheads, and most recently in Sudzha.

The text starts with the adjective *worth remembering*, which does fall under intensification: attitudinal lexis. Classified as up-scaling, *worth remembering* expresses a degree of importance or significance, that is, the information is so important to remember. The gerund *holding* and *capturing* are both attitudinal lexis. They indicate a process (dynamic or an ongoing activity). However, in *holding and capturing territory*, the gerund is neutral, neither down-scaled, nor up-scaled. The gerund phrase refers to

the power and strength of controlling a territory in the Russian-Ukraine war. In the phrase *the ultimate goal*, the noun *goal* is up-graded by the adjective *ultimate*, functioning as a modifier and describing something as final and supreme in the degree of intensity. Both *ultimate* and *goal* are words expressing attitude, but they are different in the degree of intensity. Whereas the former is considered as up-scaling, the latter is only neutral. As Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English 9th edition (Hornby, 2015) states, the meaning of *attrition* is “a process of making somebody [sb.]/ something [sth.], especially your enemy, weaker by repeatedly attacking them or creating problems for them” (Oxf15p. 85). The word *attrition* is a down-graded attitudinal word, which, as the meaning suggests, describes a process by which somebody or something has lost its strength or power. Throughout the whole extract, the writer employs quite a lot of attitudinal words, different in their category and function. These words are *primary*, *objective*, *wear down*, *enemy*, *inflict*, *greater*, *losses*, *adhered*, *numerous*, *overrode*, *reluctant*, *withdraw*, *certain*, *ended up*, *suffering*, *costly*, *defeats*, and *most recently*. To avoid repetition and to support variation in our analysis, particularly what concerns attitudinal lexis, at least in this extract, we will focus on some newly introduced instance in our data. Take, for example, *wear down*, a phrasal verb meaning “to become, or make somebody [sb.]/ something [sth.] become weaker or less determined, especially by continuously attacking or putting pressure on them or it over a period of time” (Hornby, 2015). As a mode of quantification, the adjective *numerous* indicates *number* and is used as a synonym of *many*. Whereas *many* is more common and neutral, *numerous* is stronger and more formal. In “certain positions,” *certain* is classified under focus: soften,

where the specification is to characterize an instance as having only marginal membership in the category. Furthermore, the writer talks about how the Ukrainian soldiers are reluctant to withdraw from some Ukrainian cities where they are defeated by the Russian army. The writer mentions some of these cities in which the Russian attack has happened. One of these cities is Sudzha, in which the attack is described as having been happened “most recently”. In *most recently*, the superlative *most* is an intensifier. It up-grades the degree of intensity of the adverb of time *recently*.

Extract 2

Title: *Ukrainian bomb plot targeting Russian defense industry thwarted-FSB*, Sep 10, 2025. This article is about how the Federal Security Service (FSB) thwarted a Ukrainian military intelligence service' attempt to assassinate a senior employee of a major defense plant in the Urals.

Last month, the Russian agency reported preventing another alleged Ukrainian-organized terror plot, in which a 54-year-old Russian woman was tricked into debt and then unwittingly sent on a suicide bombing mission. Investigators said she survived because an encrypted signal intended to trigger the explosive device failed to transmit.

This extract contains some words of attitude, such as, *preventing*, *alleged*, *terror*, *tricked into debt*, *unwittingly*, *survived*, *intended*, and *failed*. Such words are different in their category and function. One example of these words is *preventing*, which is classified under force: intensification. The word *preventing*, a gerund, is selected by the writer from among possible set of attitudinal words such as, *stop*, *foil*, and *thwart*. The author, however, uses some of these words elsewhere in the article. One example is *thwart (ed)*, which appears in the title of the article “Ukrainian bomb plot targeting

Russian defense industry *thwarted*-FSB,”and *foiled* (*ed*), which appears in the opening paragraph of the article “Russia has *foiled* a Ukrainian military intelligence service assassination plot against a senior employee of a major defense plant in the Urals, the Federal Security Service (FSB) said Wednesday.” This variation in style is evaluative and attitudinal, that is, the writer selects the place in which each word appears. So whereas *foiled* seems the strongest, dramatic, and is often used in storytelling, and *thwarted* is deliberate and implies effort and intelligence, *preventing* is neutral to moderate, common and general. Making an objection to describing Ukrainian attack as *organized*, the writer employs the adjective *alleged*. The writer, by using *alleged*, claims that calling the Ukrainian attack *organized* has no evidence. It seems that the word *alleged* is more evaluative and personal since the writer expresses his own attitude regarding the Ukrainian attack. The writer calls this attack “terror plot.” The word *plot* means “a secret plan made by a group of people to do something wrong or illegal” (Hornby, 2015, p. 1178). The noun *plot* is premodified by the adjective *terror*, an attitudinal word having a neutral position between up and down scaling. One example of terror action is a 54-year-old Russian woman, who is deceived and sent to a suicide bombing mission. More appropriately, the author employs the phrasal verb *tricked into*, which highlights the extent of immorality and brutality reached by the Ukrainian soldiers. This meaning of immorality and brutality is emphasized by the use of the adverb *unwittingly*, used to describe the process of sending the elderly woman to the suicide bombing mission. This formulation of *unwittingly* involves an attitudinal overtone. However, the attempt to kill this elderly woman by the Ukrainian soldiers has failed. The verb failed is

attitudinal. It is somewhere between up and down-grading.

Extract 3

Title: *Foreign-made explosives used in railway terrorist attacks-Russian prosecutors*, Jun 4, 2025.

This article is primarily about Ukrainian explosives used to blow up two railway bridges in Russia. The head of the Russian investigative committee has claimed that these explosives are foreign-made.

The attacks were carried out the day before the second round of direct Russia-Ukraine talks in Istanbul. While no breakthroughs were achieved in Türkiye, the two sides agreed to conduct a prisoner swap as well as to exchange the bodies of thousands of fallen soldiers.

Some of the graduating formulations have already been focused on in some of the extracts above. The analysis would be restricted to new ones, for example, the phrasal verb *carried out*, a verb indicating a process. The verb *carry out* means “to do or complete something, especially that you have said you would do or that you have been told to do” (Cambridge University Press, n.d.). The author selects *carry out* from a set of possible similar meanings such as *perform*, *execute*, *implement*, *conduct*, *accomplish*, *fulfill*, and *complete*. The verb *carry out* is different from these verbs in tone, according to which it is more general and flexible. This verb, additionally, has its connotations of achieving a plan, duty, or an order. We can also note the phrase “the second round of direct Russia-Ukraine talks in Istanbul,” in which *second*, an ordinal number, functions as a modifying adjective for the noun *round*. The adjective *second* is labeled under the heading of force: quantification: number. The writers, then, shift their focus on advancement in the Russia-

Ukraine talks. They employ *breakthroughs*, meaning “new and important discoveries” (Hornby, 2015, p. 179). The word *breakthrough* has its synonym *overcome*, from which it is different in being able to make a way through something by using force. In the subordinating clause “While no breakthroughs were achieved in Türkiye,” the verb *achieved* is attitudinal. Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary of Current English 9th edition (Hornby, 2015, p. 11) mentions two synonyms of *achieve*: *attain*, meaning “to succeed in getting something, usually after a lot of effort,” (Oxf15p. 83) and *accomplish*, meaning “to succeed in doing or completing something” (Oxf15p. 9). *Achieve*, however, is different from *attain* and *accomplish* in that its meaning implicates “reaching a particular goal, status or standard, especially by making an effort for a long time” (Oxf15p. 11). There are also some graduating formulations used by the writers, for example, *thousands* in “to exchange the bodies of thousands of fallen soldiers,” which is classified under the rubric of force: quantification: number. Here, of course, *thousands* does not reflect the exact number of the dead soldiers from both countries. It is, rather, approximate, rhetorical, or subjective. Such evaluative use of numbers is often used to either minimize or intensity attitude. It is part of force: quantification: number. As for the phrase “fallen soldiers,” *fallen* is an adjective used to describe soldiers killed in a war.

Extract 4

Title: *Kiev timed “barbaric attack” on civilians to coincide with ceasefire talks-Moscow*, Mar 11, 2025. The article is about a Ukrainian attack targeted the Russian capital, resulting in multiple deaths and injuries.

The assault, which involved hundreds of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), some reportedly loaded with shrapnel to maximize casualties, resulted in three civilian deaths and multiple injuries in Moscow Region. According to the Russian Defense Ministry, a total of 337 Ukrainian drones were neutralized overnight, including 91 near the capital and 126 over Kursk Region.

The article includes a number of attitudinal lexis, such as *assault*, *hundreds*, *some*, *loaded*, *maximize*, *deaths*, *multiple*, *total*, and *neutralized*. The extract opens with the word of attitude *assault*, which we have talked about so far. This assault is carried out by hundreds of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs). The word *hundreds* is labeled under the heading of force: quantification: number. It is used here as a figurative style, since it does not give the exact number of aerial (UAVs). It gives an approximate number, which is neutralized in intensity, neither up nor down-graduated. To be accurate, we do not know the writer’s intention behind the use of hundreds. Do they mean many or few? Some of these UAVs are described as being reportedly loaded with shrapnel to maximize casualties. *Some* is a quantifier, used to convey the meaning of not many. Some of these are said in reports to be loaded with shrapnel. *Loaded* here is used in an attitudinal manner, since writers depend in their news on reports. The verb *loaded* is up-graded in itself. Then, writers show the purpose behind which these UAVs are loaded with shrapnel, that is, to maximize casualties. So, *maximize* is a word of attitude, used in this context as a verb of process. This verb of process reflects an up-scaling meaning. Its sense can be interpreted well if compared to its synonym to *minimize*, an opposite described in semantics as inverse. Writers stylistically employ *deaths* to refer to casualties.

The question worth asking here is: Is the number *three*, recognized in “resulted in three civilian deaths...” used as a figurative style? In other words, do writers mean this is the exact number of casualties; or is it used attitudinally to convey the idea that despite the hundreds of UAVs to attack Moscow region, the result is only three deaths? Even the quantifier to follow, *multiple* is used cautiously to indicate that even the injuries are not many. The difference between many and multiple is that whereas *many* is used to mean “a large number of,” *multiple* typically implies a smaller, more focused of quantity in a particular context (Hornby, 2015, p. 949). The article shifts its focus to the Ukrainian drones, which it states its number as 337. In the clause “...a total of 337 Ukrainian drones were neutralized overnight, including 91 near the capital and 126 over Kursk Region,” the usage of *total* here is a neutral quantification. It states the exact number of the Ukrainian drones, which is 337. But this number is neutralized to 91 near the capital and 126 over Kursk Region. *Neutralized* is used attitudinally by writers to show the Russian capacity to encounter these drones.

4. Conclusions

The present study is concerned with exploring what graduating formulations of Appraisal theory the journalists of NYT and RT employ to strengthen or intensify their meaning regarding the conflict between Russia and Ukraine. The study poses two questions, one is primarily related to the extent to which the graduation system of Appraisal theory serves as a useful tool for analyzing graduating attitudes, and the other is to investigate which of these graduation strategies are employed by the authors of NYT and RT.

Based on the findings obtained from the qualitative

analysis applied to the eight extracts, the study arrives at the following conclusions:

First, concerning the first question, the analysis proves that the graduation system of Appraisal theory is a powerful tool for analyzing graduating attitudes. It is so comprehensive a theory, that it covers the linguistic strategies the journalists employ to intensify or focus their attitudes. This system is able to justify for all the graduating categories used by the writers, such as force (e.g., intensifiers, attitudinal lexis, metaphor, and swearing) and focus (e.g., sharpening and softening). Second, the analysis supports the existence of all the graduation formulations of both *force* and *focus*. Of course, Reading between the lines of these extracts, one can notice that writers rely in their meanings heavily on attitudinal lexis, a significant finding that this study has come with. But, here, since our study is limited to a qualitative analysis, we leave the question: What graduating strategy do writers employ most in their articles? to a mixed-methods approach that combines both qualitative and quantitative analyses. Moreover, the study is limited to only eight extracts in order to avoid repetition, since almost the same graduation formulations are used in any extract of the different articles.

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