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VARIOUS SHADES OF *BLUE(S)*. A STUDY OF THE MEANING POTENTIAL OF THE COLOUR TERM 'BLUE' IN THE BRITISH PRESS

The article examines the meanings, both literal and figurative, that are expressed in the British national press by the words *blue* and *blues*. The materials on which this study is based come from two corpora of newspaper texts: one collected from the daily newspaper *The Guardia*n, and the other from the weekly magazine *The Economist*. In its main part, the paper analyses numerous instances of *blue* and *blues* use to determine their meanings in respective contexts. This is done to see which aspects of their meaning potential are activated in newspapers targeted at different readerships and preoccupied with dissimilar thematic and ideological concerns.

1. Introduction

Colour terms have attracted considerable interest from different scholars seeking to answer the question why a given colour name is used to convey a certain meaning and which meanings are evoked by it. However, attention has been mainly focused on the use of colour words in concrete expressions, such as idioms and metaphors. Moreover, relatively little account has been taken of the meaning potential of particular colour terms in comparison with the meanings typically expressed by their derivative forms.

Therefore, in the present study, which concentrates on the colour word 'blue', the lexical item *blue* is investigated along with its derivative *blues*. This seems the more intriguing, as the latter term carries a whole range of meanings, some of which are certainly shared with those of *blue*, yet others are not necessarily related to the meanings commonly associated with the colour name. Hence the title of the article, in which the colour word, owing to the parentheses around the letter 's', can be interpreted either as *blue* or as *blues*, whereas *shade* is meant to signify the diverse meanings that the two lexical items may possibly express.

Given that the aim here is to establish which facets of the meaning potential of *blue* and *blues* are actually activated in language use, rather than listed in

the dictionaries, the analysed occurrences of the two words have been obtained from two corpora of authentic texts published in the British national press, respectively, in *The Guardian* and in *The Economist*. The instances of *blue* and *blues* use under investigation constitute a set that has not been subjected to any form of selection. Hence, they occur in all possible word combinations, including proper names, act as nouns or adjectives[1] and convey both literal and figurative meanings. Bearing in mind the fact that *The Guardian* and *The Economist* are different at least in terms of target audience, coverage foci and ideological intent, it can be tentatively expected that certain context specific uses of *blue* and *blues* may prove to be more frequent in only one of the two publications.

With a view to the above-mentioned issues, the article addresses the question whether any of the two representatives of the British press favours particular meanings that *blue* and *blues* convey, and if it does, how these preferences can be accounted for. Therefore, attention is devoted to the quantitative-qualitative aspects of the distribution of the two words. In particular, a comparison is made between the frequency of their literal and figurative occurrences in the analysed corpora of journalistic texts. Comments are also provided on selected instances of *blue* and *blues* use to find out which aspects of their meaning potential are reified in the discourse of, respectively, *The Guardian* and *The Economist*.

2. *The Guardian* and *The Economist* as representatives of the British national press

National newspapers in Britain, depending on "their circulation, editorial style" and size, are divided into the popular press or tabloids, the slightly more serious "mid-market" papers and the quality press or broadsheets, a representative of which is the prestigious daily paper *The Guardian* (Franklin 2009: 209). As for the topics it raises, they include serious reports on home and international affairs, extensive coverage of cultural events, sports, financial reports, travel news as well as book and film reviews. *The Guardian*'s readers are expected to be left-wing, middle-class British intellectuals who "tolerate different opinions and behaviour" and whose level of education and command of English allow for effective everyday communication across a wide range of contexts (Crowther and Kavanagh 1999: 236).

All these factors have an impact not only on the content but also on the language of the newspaper. An interesting overview of the linguistic features characterizing comment articles in *The Guardian* has been given by González Rodríguez (2007). According to her findings, opinion discourse in *The Guardian* is formal, objective as well as marked by the absence of vocatives, abbreviations,

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[1] *Blue* can also act as a verb to mean "to make blue in colour" or "to squander", however, no such examples of use have been detected in the set analysed for the purposes of the present study.

colloquialisms and slang. Hence, a full understanding of the presented materials often requires time and vast knowledge on the part of the readership.

By comparison, *The Economist* is the oldest British weekly news-focused magazine devoted largely to political, economic and financial matters, which targets highly educated readers, preferably influential executives and policy-makers with right-wing views (Sterling 2009: 1008; Room 1990: 110). Although many of its articles assume a basic understanding of the intricacies of classical economics, they are actually meant to be accessible to an audience of experts and generalists alike. According to Skorczyńska and Deignan (2006: 89), such journalistic texts, the main concern of which is not only to inform about newsworthy issues relating to the field of business sciences, but also to "entertain more generally" constitute examples of "popular business discourse". Indeed, it can be read on the magazine's website in the "About Us" section that the publishers prefer plain language, marked by metaphoric scarcity, which nevertheless seeks to remain conversational owing to the use of the somewhat more picturesque and colloquial resources of common speech (*About Us*).

What stems from the above is that *The Guardian* and *The Economist* have differing objectives, since the former concentrates chiefly on general interest news and shows a somewhat left-of-centre inclination in its journalism. The latter, by contrast, provides mainly the latest financial and world affairs information in a spirit of liberal conservatism. Given this, it can be assumed that the two newspapers are likely to show differences in the way they use language, and especially lexis, to discuss topics of interest to their readers. Indeed, as Fowler (1991: 10) aptly comments on newspaper discourse, "anything that is said or written about the world is articulated from a particular ideological position: language is not a clear window but a refracting, structuring medium".

3. Literal and figurative dimension of journalistic language

When reading a newspaper, most people expect to find an accurate, unbiased recording of facts about the world, presented in an explicit and transparent way, which is generally considered to be the fundamental principle of the professional ethos of journalism. Seemingly, the easiest way to fulfil this aim is to mediate meanings through the literal use of language, as then clarity and preciseness are brought into content. This is largely because literal meaning is "direct, original, unembellished and unadorned", since it resides "in the words themselves", as they denote exactly those entities to which they actually refer (Israel 2005: 147).

However, "newspapers are not simply vehicles for delivering information", but rather a platform for constructing a view of reality that appeals to the respective audience, and yet conforms to the stylistic and ideological conventions of the institution within which the newspaper operates (Reah 1998: 50). One of the linguistic means by which the intended content emerges in a captivating manner, connoting simultaneously additional layers of meaning which often reinforce

the editorial stance, is the figurative use of language. Obviously, as Holtgraves (2005: 73) claims, non-literal language is not "a monolithic phenomenon", since its diverse tropes include, among other things, metaphor, metonymy, irony and other figures of speech. Many of these devices are meant to decorate a text and thus make it more attractive to the reader. Still, equally important seems to be the role they play in developing a routine vocabulary for dealing with abstract ideas in terms of more concrete and tangible entities, basing on the juxtapositions and correspondences between the attributes they share. According to Skorczyńska and Deignan (2006: 97), the true value of figurative language becomes even more evident in the type of discourse found in *The Economist*, where it often serves to fill terminological gaps or clarify what would otherwise be inexplicable.

4. *Blue* as a cultural concept

According to Berlin and Kay's (1969: 2) theory concerning the evolution of basic colour terms, *blue* is one of the eleven basic colour categories "from which the eleven or fewer basic colour terms of any given language were always drawn". By comparison, Kay and McDaniel (1978: 630) maintain that *blue* is one of the six primary colour terms that is one of "the six fundamental neural response categories". Certainly *blue*, despite being a primary basic colour category, is not as significant as white, black or red, which constitute the colours with the most similar foci across various languages (Sarapik 1997). Nevertheless, it does play a role in the cultures and languages of numerous corners in the world, especially that only people living in isolated places with a small population and poor technology as well as those who speak Vietnamese do not have *blue* in their colour vocabulary (Berlin and Kay 1969: 45). One peculiar exception here is the Russian language, which has no single word for the colour, but rather two different terms for dark blue and light blue (Paterson 2003: 57).

Blue is described as the colour of the clear sky or of the deep sea as well as of the air (*OED*). Information about the colour and its symbolic significance can be found in numerous sources, including those of disputable merit that are accessible via the Internet, as well as the ones considered to be more reliable, such as Cirlot (2001: 52-56), Kopaliński (2003: 87, 829) or Paterson (2003: 57). Still, whichever is selected as reference materials, certain data remain consistent and show the same overall picture of *blue* and its diverse meanings. In particular, the colour is often associated with heaven as the seat of gods, and is thus said to represent such values as modesty, humility and penance. In Christianity, especially in Catholicism, *blue* is treated as the colour of angels and the Virgin Mary, whose blue clothes are to symbolise sincerity, contemplation and piety. *Blue* is also the colour of God's Glory in Judaism, therefore, staring at this colour aids in meditation. Moreover, many of the gods in Hinduism are depicted as having blue-coloured skin, whereas in Islam *blue* is used figuratively for evildoers whose eyes are glazed with fear.

Sovereignty or kingship are the values with which *blue* is typically associated in the Celtic tradition, especially in Ireland where the heraldic flag of Irish kings has a blue background. By comparison, *light blue* in heraldry is the symbol of purity, loyalty and faith. *Blue* is also a popular colour associated with various political positions, especially those adopted by Conservative parties, and thus it is often contrasted with anarchist black or communist red. Its lighter hue known as azure is used for the background of the flag of the United Nations where it symbolizes peace and hope.

In current folklore, *blue* is commonly used in the Western hemisphere as a gender marker for the clothing of boys. Additionally, as a colour associated with loyalty and true love, it is considered to be lucky for brides, who on the day of their wedding should wear something blue. In some cultures, especially in Iran, *blue* serves as a funeral colour to symbolize immortality and eternal life. The colour also conveys importance, dependability and "confidence without being sombre or sinister" (Bowkett and Bailie 2010: 148). Therefore, the uniforms of police officers are often blue as well as the power suits of the corporate world, because of whom *blue* is also associated with intelligence, stability, unity and conservatism. On the other hand, *blue* is the popular colour of the standard work shirt worn by industrial and manual workers, who are stereotypically regarded as people with no education or skill.

Blue is believed to be a calming colour, often recognized as the most beloved one. For instance, in an experiment conducted by Pieter (1974), 74 employees of an English factory manufacturing dyes pointed to *blue* as the most pleasant colour. In a similar experiment, 30 Poles were asked to decide which emotions they would associate with particular basic colour terms (Szczygłowska 2003). The results obtained for *blue* revealed that both males and females linked the colour with kindness, but also with longing. Overall, most of the feelings marked by the respondents were positive although as many as 7 women out of 23 pointed to compassion, an emotion which is classified as negative (Nowakowska-Kempna 1995).

This dual nature of *blue*, comprising, on the one hand, attributes such as happiness, optimism, freedom, strength, new beginnings and opportunities, but on the other hand, also sadness, depression or profanity, is often reflected in language. For instance, if someone has been described as *blue blood*, the colour term is meant to imply loyalty, faith and admiration, which are the values fundamental to those of noble lineage. Indeed, originally the phrase was used to refer to the light skinned Spaniards from the oldest families of Castile, simply because of the colour of their veins, which appeared bluish due to the people's fair complexion (Martin 1996-2013a). Yet, if someone *feels blue* or is *in a blue despair*, the person is sad and hopeless, which is probably due to the conviction that too much blue could dampen spirits.

5. *Blues* as a cultural concept

Hearing the word *blues*, many people think of a music genre created in the Deep South of the United States at the end of the 19th century to express "the oppression of African Americans" and depict the sadness of their experience, "addressing their cry for freedom, but also speaking to the pain of relationships, the anguish of love, the dilemmas and contradictions of sex, and other subjects excluded from the spiritual genre" (Brown 1995: 441). Indeed, the blues is a form of secular music which developed from spirituals, work songs, field hollers, shouts and chants, and rhymed simple narrative ballads.

The African American community, especially in the South, was regarded as inferior and often experienced discrimination practised against them by other US citizens. To alleviate their suffering and give voice to frustrations, African Americans sang about their problems in the music. Therefore, the major themes of blues lyrics comprise "oppression, social issues, the spiritual realm, the hope for something better, and relationships" (Brown 1995: 442). Cone (1972: 240) explains the phenomenon of blues music in this way:

> The blues are not art for art's sake, music for music's sake. They are a way of life, a lifestyle of the black community; and they came into being to give expression to black identity and the will for survival. Thus to seek to understand the blues apart from the suffering that created them is to misinterpret them and distort the very creativity that defines them.

After reading the above, it is hard to avoid the impression that the name given to the musical style is not accidental. As Ayto (1999: 73) claims, the name, coined in 1912 after the publication of W.C. Handy's song "Memphis Blues", "comes from *the blues* 'sadness', reflecting the generally melancholic aspect of the music". The word *blues* itself, often preceded by the definite article *the*, is a shortening of *the blue devils*, demons formerly believed to cause sadness and depression. Therefore, the phrase *blue devils* generally refers to despondency and hypochondriac melancholy or, alternatively, to the apparitions seen in delirium tremens (*OED*). According to the *OED*, some early uses of the expression in this sense can be found in one of Fanny Burney's diaries from 1781 (i.e. *Thinking that generous wine will destroy even the blue devils*) as well as in George Colman's one-act farce from 1798 titled *Blue Devils*.

6. Data and method of analysis

The study is aimed at determining the diverse meanings, both literal and figurative, that are evoked by the use of the words *blue* and *blues* in the language of particular discourse types. The material on which this analysis is based comes from two sources. The first of them is a corpus of authentic newspaper articles

published in the 1995-1996 issues of *The Economist* of around 7.7 million words. The other source is a corpus of journalistic texts published in the 1993 issues of *The Guardian* of around 27 million words.

The corpora were scanned with *WordSmith Tools* version 3.0 for Windows (Scott 1999) for all possible occurrences of *blue* and *blues*. The initial step in the analysis was aimed at determining the maximum number of randomly selected authentic language contexts containing the two words that would be subjected to further study. Thus, in the exploratory search, performed separately for each individual corpus, the number of entries was set to 16000 to ensure that all possible occurrences of the two items would be listed. As a result, the first search generated a total of 3670 hits, from among which 3177 (*blue*: 2573, *blues*: 604) were found in *The Guardian* and 493 (*blue*: 416, *blues*: 77) were found in *The Economist*.

At this point, it was decided that the highest search results obtained from the latter source would be used as the default settings for the main search, given that searching for *blue* and *blues* in *The Guardian* corpus yielded many more hits, actually too many to cope with, considering the limited scope of the present paper. Thus, in the second search the default number of entries for each search word was set to 416, which was the maximum number of lines containing *blue* produced by the concordancer from *The Economist* corpus. At this stage, search results were looked through to eliminate false hits, such as repeated entries, which was the case when the wording of the first line of an article was the same as its headline. As a result, a total of 1309 instances of *blue* and *blues* use of any type were selected for further study, the overall distribution of which in both corpora is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Distribution of *blue* and *blues* use in the two corpora

SEARCH WORD	*blue*	*blues*	Total
CORPUS	number of occurrences		
The Guardian	414	411	**825**
The Economist	407	77	**484**
Total	**821**	**488**	**1309**

As a final step, each entry was manually examined to classify the data into one of three categories: proper names and titles with *blue* and *blues* as well as literal uses and figurative uses of the two words. This was done to determine the frequency with which particular facets of the meaning potential of the two terms were activated by newspapers aimed at different audiences and employing slightly different lexis. For convenience, in the discussion that follows, the occurrences of *blue* and *blues* found in *The Guardian* are marked as TG, whereas the abbreviation TE corresponds to the examples extracted from *The Economist*.

7. Frequency distribution of the three categories of *blue* and *blues* use in *The Guardian* and *The Economist*

From among the three categories of data mentioned above, proper names and titles (11.2% in *The Economist* and 26.8% in *The Guardian*) were not analysed in much detail because of a limited scope of the present study (see Fig. 1 below). Overall, in most of the examples included in this set, *blue* and *blues* were used literally to refer to the colour of something (1) or style of music (2), respectively.

(1) *Honda directed his first movie, The <u>Blue</u> Pearl, in 1951 and on his next he had the special effects wizard Eiji Tsuburaya.* [TG: 5 Mar 1993]

(2) *The spell cast by lived-in faces is just as potent in another, purely graphic volume, 'The <u>Blues</u>: Album Cover Art', , a collection of the photographs and paintings which adorned records by the blues masters in the 1950s and 1960s.* [TE: 4 May 1996]

However, there were also occurrences similar to the one below, where the two words were used in their figurative meaning:

(3) *Frost, who produced Hill Street <u>Blues</u> and Twin Peaks, has fashioned a pretty unlikely mixture of the two here, ...* [TG: 22 Jul 1993]

Here, *blues* probably implies two different concepts. First, because *Hill Street Blues* is the title of an American serial police drama, *blues* may symbolize police officers who are commonly referred to as *the guys in blue*. Still, since the series focuses on the conflicts between the work and private lives of the main characters, an even more likely interpretation would be that *blues* denotes unhappiness. Unfortunately, without a careful study of similar instances of *blue* and *blues* use in proper names and titles, it is impossible to draw any definite conclusions.

With regard to the two remaining categories of data, the results were quite surprising. As can be seen in Figure 1, the figurative use of *blue* and *blues* was more popular in *The Economist* (50.2%) than in *The Guardian* (26.6%). As a matter of fact, the literal meaning of the two lexical items under investigation was employed in less than half of all the occurrences of *blue* and *blues* use detected in *The Economist* (38.6%). In the case of *The Guardian*, the results were totally different. Specifically, these were the figurative uses of *blue* and *blues* that accounted for far less than half of all the examples analysed in this set (26.6%), whereas the literal uses of the two words amounted to almost fifty per cent (46.6%).

There may be two reasons behind such results of the analysis. First, many of the articles published in *The Economist* are concerned with issues related mostly to business and economy, whose nature is often complex and difficult to define. What, in turn, facilitates the explanation and understanding of abstract economic phenomena are in fact figurative expressions. Indeed, the non-literal use of words ensures the possibility of handling specific economic problems in terms of more familiar and concrete concepts by "exploiting the transference of meaning from one form to another" (Vaghi and Venuti 2003: 829).
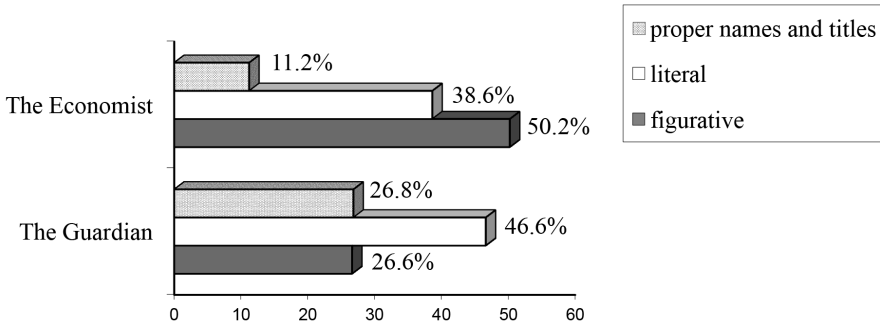
Fig. 1. Distribution of the three categories of *blue* and *blues*
use in *The Economist* and *The Guardian*.

Second, a significant part in the set of the figurative uses of *blue* and *blues*
played only four or five phrases, such *as blue collar* (57 examples), *blue helmets*
(42 examples), *blue chip* (32 examples), *Big Blue* (20 examples) and *the blues*
(18 examples). In consequence, they also had a major influence on the total
number of examples in the set. Especially the first four phrases perfectly integrate
into the topics discussed in the magazine, and even the fifth one was used to talk
about such serious issues as *France's property blues* or *privatisation blues*.
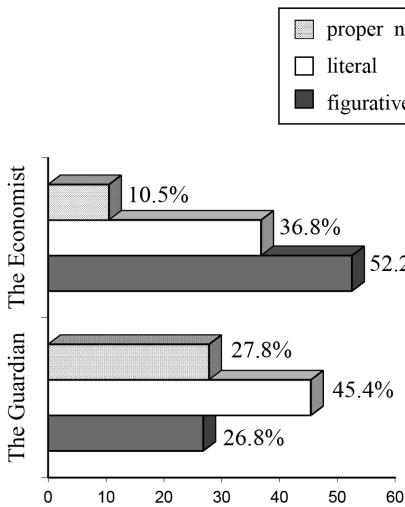

Fig. 2. Distribution of the three
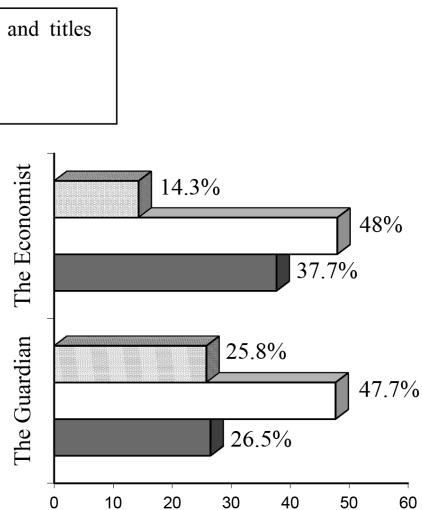categories of *blue* use
in *The Economist* and *The Guardian*.

Fig. 3. Distribution of the three
categories of *blues* use
in *The Economist* and *The Guardian*.

Considering now the distribution of the figurative and literal uses of *blue* and *blues* separately in each newspaper, the results are shown in Figure 2 and Figure 3, respectively. Generally, it was observed that in *The Guardian* the literal meanings of both words were employed with similar frequency (around 46%) and the same could be said about their figurative meanings (around 26%), the former being more popular than the latter. By comparison, in *The Economist* both the figurative and literal uses of the two terms were slightly more evenly distributed (36.8 % to 52.5% for *blue* and 37.7% to 48% for *blues*). What seems interesting is that the figurative uses of *blue* accounted for more than half of all the occurrences of the word in the magazine, whereas in the case of *blues* its literal meanings were more popular. This may be due to the fact that *blue* is more often employed in phrases carrying figurative overtones in comparison with *blues*. Additionally, there were detected only 77 occurrences of the latter term and as many as 407 instances of the former term. Moreover, typically the word *blues* is used either to refer to a genre of music or as a derivative of the word *blue*, which means that it only sometimes carries its own independent meanings.

8. Discussion of the results

In the discussion that follows, there are demonstrated various literal and figurative uses of *blue* and *blues* and their meaning in respective contexts. The analysed examples have been selected mostly for their representativeness in terms of the frequency of occurrence in both corpora. Additionally, certain infrequent, yet unusual or particularly interesting occurrences are also discussed. Nevertheless, all instances of the non-literal use of both lexemes that have been identified in *The Guardian* and *The Economist* are presented in Table 2 and Table 3.

8.1 Examples of the literal use of *blue* and *blues*

As indicated above (see Fig. 2 above), *blue* was used in its literal meaning more frequently in *The Guardian* (45.4%) than *in The Economist* (36.8%). It thus seems that, given the nature of topics discussed by the former newspaper, many of which are of interest to the general public rather than to expert readers, there is probably reduced need to talk about certain domains with the help of other domains (Kalisz 1994: 71).

Overall, when *blue* was used literally, in both corpora it acted mainly as a colour adjective (4) to refer to the blue colour of various objects, but also as a noun (5) denoting that portion of the colour spectrum which lies between green and violet.

(4) *Richard is robed in a <u>blue</u> gown with yellow facings, and tells the Society what's what about medical ethics.* [TG: 30 Jan 1993]

(5) *The exhibition at the Grand Palais in Paris ends with the triumphant 'Great Bathers' from Philadelphia, its figures arrayed beneath a vault of trees that*

resembles a Gothic arch, surrounded by a ravishing sky compounded of white, purple, <u>blue</u>. [TE: 7 Oct 1995]

Another frequent use of *blue* in its literal sense was as part of compound adjectives, the majority of which were simply compound colour terms serving to qualify various nouns. Most of such occurrences of the lexeme constituted two-element combinations of the colour-colour type, in which *blue* occurred either in the head position, as in example (6) or, alternatively, in the modifier position, as in example (7). Interestingly, the latter pattern turned out to be relatively more common. As a matter of fact, *blue* is one of those colour terms which, according to Steinvall (2002: 81), "prefer to take the modifier slot" in colour-colour combinations, many of which describe a subtle variation in hue between the two colours.

(6) *For a long time cricket did not have managers – or it did, but they were amateurs in <u>navy-blue</u> blazers whose job was to settle hotel bills and make conversation at the governor's cocktail party.* [TE: 13 Jan 1996]

(7) *Of if you feel like forking out pounds 11 for a bottle of essential sludge the size of a vial of eye drops, you could try super <u>blue-green</u> algae.* [TG: 30 Jan 1993]

Yet, in the case of those compounds which were meant to indicate the intensity of the colour blue, the word *blue* occurred in the head position, as exemplified by *deep-blue* or *pale-blue*. Additionally, in the group of compound colour adjectives with *blue*, there were also a few instances of multi-word combinations, such as *blue-and-white*, *red-and-blue*, or even *red-white-and-blue*.

Worth mentioning here is also the compound adjective *blue-eyed*, the interpretation of which proved to be problematic, especially in the case of *The Guardian* where as many as 38 examples of its use were identified. As can be seen from example (8), when the compound is used to modify such nouns as *baby*, *child* or *girl*, either in the attributive or the predicative position, it simply denotes the quality of having blue eyes. However, when it is followed by the noun *boy*, as in example (9), then it is used figuratively to refer to a person who is liked and admired by someone in authority.

(8) *Some are exposed in the plant's offspring (in the same way that two brown-eyed parents can have a <u>blue-eyed</u> baby).* [TE: 16 Nov 1996]

(9) *For a short time he [John Moore] became Margaret's <u>blue-eyed boy</u>...she was always susceptible to good looks and in John's case she found loyalty.* [TG: 1 Oct 1993]

Turning now attention to the occurrences of *blues*, it is apparent from Figure 3 above that the word was used in its literal meaning in a relatively similar number of examples both in *The Guardian* (47.7%) and in *The Economist* (48%). In the majority of cases, *blues* acted as a noun either to refer to a specific music genre (10), and then it was usually preceded by the definite article *the*, or to denote a song or a musical form of this type (11).

(10) *Elvis blended musical traditions in the best tradition of the melting pot, borrowing something from the <u>blues</u> and something from white country music.* [TE: 10 Aug 1996]

(11) *The songs are 12-bar <u>blues</u>, mostly, screeched by Axl in one of the least mellifluous voices in hard rock.* [TG: 31 May 1993]

Another popular use of *blues* in its literal sense was in the role of an adjective qualifying a given noun as related to the type of music known as 'the blues', though such examples were more numerous in *The Guardian*, for instance:

(12) *But the greatest of <u>blues</u> artists, whom he heard as a youth, left an inedible impression on him.* [TG: 16 Mar 1993]

Additionally, in the case of *The Guardian*, *blues* sometimes acted as the plural form of the noun 'blue' to denote a specific hue in the colour spectrum, as illustrated by the following sentence:

(13) *Freaked and dappled with colour, with <u>blues</u>, reds, oranges and blacks, they at first suggest a disarming gaiety but closer examination corrects this reassuring impression.* [TG: 7 Jun 1993]

8.2. Examples of the figurative use of *blue*

With regard to the figurative use of *blue*, it is apparent from Figure 3 above that such occurrences of the search word were more frequent in *The Economist* (52.5%) than in *The Guardian* (26.8%). A complete list of all instances of *blue* use included in this set is presented in Table 2. Selected examples are followed by information in parentheses that specifies the context in which the search word or an expression containing the term occurred in both corpora. However, due to the limited scope of the present paper, the discussion here focuses mainly, but not exclusively, on those examples of the figurative use of *blue* which have been identified both in *The Guardian* as well as in *The Economist*.

Table 2. Examples of the figurative use of *blue*

The Economist	both newspapers	*The Guardian*
blue note	blue(-)collar	sacred blue
black and blue	blue(-)chip	blue-eyed boy
blue ribbon	out of the blue	blue (*university*)
blue pencil	blue murder	blue (*sport*)
working blue	blue rinse	blue (*livid skin*)
blue(-)print(s)	blue sky/skies	deep blue sea of
fuck smb blue	Big Blue	talk oneself blue
clear blue water	true(-)blue	blue in the face
blue(-)dog	blue (*politics*)	bolt out of/from the blue
between the devil and the	blue (*the police, the UN*)	blue Monday
deep blue sea	blue (*depressed*)	
the Blue (*fleet*)	blue helmets	
blue (*butterflies*)	blue beret(s)/blue-bereted	
	blue(-)blood(ed)	
	blue (*the sea, water*)	
	blue flag	
	blue-stocking	
	blue (*obscene*)	

Some of the expressions found in both sources can be discussed together since they seem to be somewhat similar in terms of the context in which they typically occur. One of such sets comprises phrases in which *blue* refers to the blue uniform or cap of forces such as the police and UN peacekeepers, namely, **the men/gentlemen/boys in blue** as well as **blue berets** and **blue helmets**. Certainly, *blue* is used here as a referent for the colour of clothing, however, it also symbolizes importance, dependability and confidence in the case of police members as well as peace and hope in the case of UN peacekeeping forces (see section 4 above). Thus, the phrases, especially the two latter ones, have come to be used not only as the official names of the forces in question, but also as their popular nicknames. For example:

(14) *Our enemies are <u>the guys in blue</u>. Fuck the police.* [TE: 23 Nov 1996]

(15) *The UN's <u>blue helmets</u> began arriving in Croatia in 1992 after Croatia's Serbs, backed by the Yugoslav army directed from Belgrade, had managed to rip a third of Croatia from its government's control.* [TE: 21 Jan 1995]

Worth mentioning here is the fact that the expressions listed above were much more frequent in *The Economist* (46 examples altogether) than in *The Guardian* (14 examples altogether). This is probably due to the nature of issues discussed in both newspapers, which in the former one tend to be concerned more with politics and international affairs than with general interest topics that are typical of the latter newspaper.

The same can be said of phrases such as **blue-collar**, **blue chip** and **Big Blue**. They typically appear in the context of matters related to employment, economic and financial affairs as well as computer industry, respectively, and hence they were more numerous in *The Economist* (109 examples altogether in comparison to 40 found in *The Guardian*). As for **blue-collar** (16), it denotes workers performing manual work and thus may be contrasted with 'white-collar', referring to employees who perform office or administrative tasks. Here, *blue* describes the colour of the standard work uniform of such workers. Additionally, it implies concepts such as unity and conservatism, which are sometimes associated with manual labour, as well as sadness or even depression resulting from the fact that blue-collar workers are usually considered to be "unskilled and undereducated" (Bleicher 2012: 53). As a result, they do not earn much, and thus often live in financial distress.

(16) *Keith Ford, head of the cleansing department's personnel team, will be some 60 pounds out of pocket every month under the cut, which affects employees from Sheffield's chief executive to <u>blue collar</u> staff on more than a minimum of 90 pounds a week.* [TG: 4 Mar 1993]

The phrase **blue chip** refers to "a venture, investment, or enterprise that is considered to be among the most secure or consistently profitable or successful in its class" (*Webster's* 1993: 241). The term has its origin in a blue counter used in the game of poker, where it represents the highest value. Yet, as can be seen in example (17), *blue chip* is also often used as a modifier to imply the quality of being first-class and thus reliable, especially that the colour word itself is

said to symbolize confidence and dependability. In both corpora, the phrase was most often found in those contexts where the focus was on the complexities of economy.

(17) *The margins on loans to <u>blue-chip</u> American companies are hardly more attractive; yet the Japanese are also rushing to lend to them.* [TE: 24 Jun 1996]

Big Blue (18) is a popular nickname for IBM, a multinational computer, technology and IT consulting corporation. There are various theories explaining the origin of the term. One theory suggests that it simply refers to the Company's blue logo (Walters 2001: 55). Another theory holds that the nickname comes from the colour of the casings of the computer systems IBM installed for major corporations in the 1950s and 1960s (Morgan and Foges 2003: 15). By comparison, Crease (2006: 228) maintains it was coined by business writers in the 1960s because of the blue covers of IBM's mainframes and other products. Additionally, some believe that **Big Blue** refers to a former company dress code that required IBM executives to wear blue suits, which, as Morgan and Foges (2003: 15) explain, were to suggest their reliability and dependability.

(18) *Soon <u>Big Blue</u> came to symbolise the perils of bigness, the folly in a fast-moving world of having a regimented culture and promising your people jobs for life. Under Lou Gerstner, the firm's new boss, the number of IBMers has tumbled to little more than half its mid-1980s peak of over 400,000.* [TE: 10 Jun 1995]

Worth attention are also three phrases usually used in the context of serious politics, which may be the reason why they occurred more often in *The Economist* (13 examples altogether) than in *The Guardian* (5 examples altogether). First, the very word **blue** as well as its plural form **blues** have been associated with a variety of political positions, and thus they often stand metonymically for the members of a given party (19) or connote the beliefs held by them (20). In particular, blue is the colour of the Conservative Party (the Tory Party) in Britain, the Conservative Party of Canada as well as the Democratic Party in the United States.

(19) *At the last election, only a year ago, the reds won 35% to the blacks' 28%, with Mr Haider's Freedom <u>blues</u> zooming up from 5% in 1983 to 23%.* [TE: 9 Dec 1995]

(20) *Originally good Tory wife to Peter Bottomley, the slightly loopy MP for Eltham. Worked as a researcher for the Child Poverty Action Group, then as vice-chair of National Council of Carers (sic). Fought Isle of Wight under slogan "Turn Wight <u>Blue</u>" in 1983.* [TG: 5 Jan 1993]

Second, there is the expression **true blue** (21), which is used metonymically to refer to someone "extremely constant or loyal usually to a cause" (Paterson 2003: 439). Additionally, in both sources similar qualities were alluded to when the phrase acted as an adjective, as in *true blue voters* or *true-blue conservatism*.

(21) *On the stand was a speaker in favour of the National Curriculum, a notorious <u>true blue</u>.* [TG: 19 Aug 1993]

As Martin (1996-2013b) explains in *The Phrase Finder*, it is believed that the meaning of the term may be traced back to Coventry dyers who had a reputation for producing blue cloth that did not fade away with washing, that is, it remained 'fast' or 'true', or generally speaking 'always the same'. In the 17th century the phrase also acquired a figurative meaning when a group of Scottish Presbyterians, known as the Convenanters, swore to unequivocally support the National Convenant and oppose the rule of James I of Scotland. Since they wore blue as their badge, they were called 'true blue'. Later *true blue* started to be associated with conservative politics and blue was adopted as the colour of the Tory Party in England, and thus staunch Conservative supporters are popularly known as 'true blue' Tories.

Third, the final phrase with *blue* related to the world of politics, namely **blue dog** (22), was found only in *The Economist*. The term is a shortened version of the so-called Democratic Blue Dog Coalition, a conservative faction within the Democratic Party in the United States. There are a few theories about the origin of the name in question. Members of the group themselves explain that "a blue dog is our mascot because when dogs are not let into the house, they stay outside in the cold and turn blue" (Mays 2012). Popular is also the anecdote that the original members of the coalition used to meet in the offices, the walls of which were decorated with the "Blue Dog" paintings of Cajun artist George Rodrigue. However, equally feasible seems to be the theory that *blue* has become one of the elements of the phrase, since it is often seen as implying conservative politics and, moreover, it is also the official colour of the Democratic Party in the United States.

(22) *Nevertheless, the <u>blue dog</u> is becoming an endangered species, especially in the South. Most conservative southern Democrats hold seats that now naturally lean Republican.*[TE: 12 Aug 1995]

Quite interesting are also a few expressions, the figurative meaning of which is not necessarily activated in any particular context, such as politics or economy, which may be the reason why they were more frequently found in *The Guardian* than in *The Economist*. For instance, the phrases **out of the blue**, as illustrated by example (23), as well as **a bolt from/out of the blue** allude to the popular connotation of *blue*, namely, the one that relates the word to the sky, often referred to as 'the blue'. Both phrases imply something unexpected or done without warning. In particular, the former expression refers to "a blue (i.e. clear) sky, from which nothing unusual is expected", whereas the latter one refers to "the unlikelihood of a thunderbolt coming out of a clear blue sky" (Siefring 2004:31-32).

(23) *Yet, in Mr Clarke's account, the first world war comes virtually <u>out of the blue</u>, in an otherwise peaceable domestic narrative.* [TE: 7 Dec 1996]

Worth considering are also those instances of the figurative use of *blue*, found mainly in *The Guardian*, in which the word evokes largely negative associations. This is clearly the case in example (24), where **blue** implies the quality of being indecent or obscene, probably because production companies mark movie genres

by colours, and blue is reserved for sex. As for possible origin of this sense of *blue*, Paterson (2003: 57) points to a theory according to which imprisoned prostitutes had to wear blue gowns, and thus were referred to as *bluegowns*. Eventually the word was abbreviated. As a result, nowadays the very colour term *blue* is used to mean pornographic, which can also be said of similar occurrences of the search word, such as those in the phrases *blue jokes(s)* and *blue movie(s)*.

(24) *Hungary has also won a name as Eastern Europe's porno capital, with hundreds of <u>blue films</u> made there every year.* [TE: 27 Jul 1996]

Negative connotations are also evident in example (25), where *blue* implies some kind of discomfort or anxiety. Specifically, **blue Monday** denotes a date stated to be the most depressing day of the year, "perhaps after the Blue Monday of the Middle Ages being the Monday before Lent when last minute drinking caused serious hangovers" (Paterson 1993: 61). However, the phrase may also be used to refer to other Mondays which are generally disliked by many people who have to return to work after a weekend.

(25) *The first <u>blue Monday</u> for GMTV, and already Fiona Armstrong, her male friend whom she does not know very well – (...) – little Lorraine, hunky Hilary and unfortunate guests subjected to Fiona's rigorous grilling are all having trouble staying awake squashed inside the poky set.* [TG: 5 Jan 1993]

By comparison, in example (26) **blue** is meant to evoke similar meanings, especially those which can be labelled as 'melancholy'. As a matter of fact, this particular use of the search word as well as the one in *blue Monday* or in the expression *a blue blanket of frustration* seem to be related to the connotations typically associated with the term *the blues*, which is generally understood as low in spirits.

(26) *And there's nothing more lonely than being around so many people and not having anything in common with them and not wanting to talk. [...] Is creates a melancholy that makes me want to write. [...] All my best lyrics come from that <u>blue period</u> on the way home to an empty house.* [TG: 9 Jan 1993]

Moreover, the figurative use of **blue** was also identified in phrases evoking the relation between the skin and its livid or leaden colour due to such reasons as beating, severe cold, alarm, anger or exhaustion. In *The Guardian*, the word was used in this sense in sentences similar to example (27) as well as in such expressions as *go blue* or *talk oneself blue*, where it often implied that someone had been doing something for a very long time, but unfortunately without any effect.

(27) *MPs can argue and seek to amend <u>until they are blue in the face</u> but they are not allowed to change one single word of the treaty.* [TG: 15 Feb 1993]

Added to that are two phrases which were found in *The Economist*. In example (28), the word-combination **black and blue**, understood as discoloured from a blow, alludes to some kind of damage that may possibly affect the environment due to ill-considered budget allocation. By comparison, in example

(29) the colloquial phrase **to fuck someone blue**, implying enthusiastic and vigorous copulation lasting up to the moment of exhaustion, often manifested physically by livid skin colour, is actually meant to indicate some form of abuse, not really sexual in this case.

(28) *The Republicans 'claim their environmental budget is clean and green,' he says, 'but it would leave the environment <u>black and blue</u>.'* [TE: 6 Apr 1996]

(29) *One of his more colourful contributions to the English language, noted down by a colleague during a 1984 meeting and revealed to the Senate Whitewater Committee earlier this year, was his observation that Justice department lawyers were '<u>fucking us blue</u>'.* [TE: 20 Apr 1996]

8.3. Examples of the figurative use of *blues*

With reference to the figurative use of *blues*, it can be seen in Figure 3 above that such occurrences of the search word were more frequent in *The Economist* (37.7%) than in *The Guardian* (26.5%). A complete list of all instances of *blues* use included in this set is presented in Table 3, where selected examples are followed by contextual information in parentheses. For the purposes of discussion, a selection of the figurative uses of *blue*s are considered, mainly those which have been identified both in *The Economist* and in *The Guardian*.

Table 3. Examples of the figurative use of *blues*

The Economist	both newspapers	*The Guardian*
blues (*politics*)	sing the blues blues (*depression*) true blues blues (*university*) blues (*butterflies*)	booze blues blues and twos blues idiom blues (*sport*)

To start with, in both corpora there have been identified the expressions **to sing the blues** and **(the) blues**, which seem to convey similar concepts, namely, some form of dissatisfaction. When using the former phrase, one wants to express a pessimistic or discouraged attitude to a displeasing state of affairs, for instance:

(30) *In reality Liverpool were, (...), "outplayed and outfought" by a third division team (...) And seldom have Liverpool supporters felt more like <u>singing the blues</u>.* [TG: 15 Jan 1993]

(31) *Barometer: Old Lady <u>sings the blues</u> / Inflation* [TE: 10 Aug 1996]

In example (30), the phrase implies that Liverpool supporters have been complaining because of their team's defeat in a football match, as a result of which they are no longer the FA Cup holders. By comparison, in example (31) the Bank of England, popularly referred to as the Old Lady, is unhappy because it expects inflation to rise unless interest rates are raised. As a matter of fact, the phrase is etymologically based on the type of music known as 'the blues',

the lyrics of which are themed around hardship, bad luck or lost love (Spears, 2005: 53).

As for the other phrase, it has been already explained in section five above that **(the) blues** denotes a state of mind similar to depression or melancholy, that is feelings characteristic of blues music as well. Still, there has been noticed a subtle difference in the way in which the expression was actually used in the two corpora. In particular, in *The Economist* it usually occurred in contexts related to economic matters (32), whereas in *The Guardian* the contexts of use were more general (33).

(32) *The Bombay Stock Exchange index fell by 3.8% on July 23rd, suffering from post-budget <u>blues</u>, and ended the week to July 24th 3.8% lower.* [TE: 27 Jul 1996]

(33) *Sunny climes also attracted Julia Taylor, 22, who decided to escape from her home town of Nottingham in a fit of post-exam <u>blues</u>.* [TG: 30 Jul 1993]

Blues was used in its figurative sense also in the context of Cambridge and Oxford Universities, where it served as the plural form of *blue*, for example:

(34) *Apart from Pinsent, there are three <u>Blues</u> – last year's president Joe Michels at two, Kingsley Poole at four, and the man who stroked Oxford brilliantly last year, Ian Gardiner, again in the stroke seat.* [TG: 23 Feb 1993]

According to Paterson (2003: 57), the singular form of the search word stands metonymically for "someone who represents the Universities of Oxford or Cambridge in some game, sport or other activity" and is thus awarded to wear university colour. Historically, light blue and dark blue have become the official colours of the representatives of, respectively, Eaton and Harrow Schools as well as Cambridge and Oxford Universities. Thus, athletes are typically awarded a Blue for competition at the highest level. Such meanings are typically realized by a variety of phrases, for instance, *as to be/get an Oxford/Cambridge blue, to win one's blue, to be a Blue* or *an old Blue*. Some of these expressions were actually identified in *The Guardian* when scanning the corpus for occurrences of *blue* (see Table 2 above).

In both sources **blues** was used elliptically as the plural form of 'blue' to talk about "blue species or varieties of animals, (...), the nature of which is explained by the context" (*OED*). Hence, in example (35) below, the term denotes one of the blue butterflies, whereas in the example (36) it refers to a type of lizards.

(35) *Small <u>blues</u> are unusual butterflies as they can exist in very small discreet colonies with sometimes less than a hundred kidney vetch plants in flower.* [TG: 15 Jul 1993]

(36) *The beauty of the side-blotched lizards is that things have not settled down, and the competition is there for the biologists to see. [...] In 1991-92, orange males increased as <u>blues</u> declined.* [TE: 13 Apr 1996]

From among the remaining instances of the figurative use of *blues*, worth considering are also some of the phrases that were found only in *The Guardian*. Specifically, in the case of **booze blues** (37), *blues* alludes to a depressive state of mind, which is typically associated with the word. *Booze*, on the other hand,

commonly occurring in such expressions as *to be on the booze*, *to be off the booze*, *post-booze blues*, or simply *booze*, is informally used to mean a spell of hard-drinking or an alcoholic drink, if used alone. Thus, the two words, when combined together, refer to "the depressive state after drinking alcohol and thinking about things too much" (*Urban Dictionary*).

(37) *BOOZE BLUES (...) John Yates-Smith, of YSE, would never have them in his chalets (...) They were an absolute pain in the neck – ignorant, arrogant, middle-class yobs. They lost their deposits on the first night when 11 rooms became unusable because of vomit.* [TG: 9 Jan 1993]

Yet another phrase, **blues and twos**, is a colloquial term that refers to the emergency vehicle equipment, consisting of flashing lights and sirens that are used by the UK emergency services. The expression has been coined due to the fact that the lights of British emergency vehicles are usually blue and their sirens are typically two-tone horns (*Urban Dictionary*). In the example below, it has been rather mentioned and explained than actually used as an integral part of the sentence. Still, it is worth attention, especially that the concordancer also found another instance of its use, or rather an occurrence of its variant form, which is *two and blues*.

(38) *Before you ask, "blues and twos" is said to be jargon for driving with sirens and lights flashing.* [TG: 23 Nov 1993]

Finally, **blues** was used in *The Guardian* to refer metonymically to sportsmen, mostly football players, whose club colour is blue (39). The word appeared in this sense also in its singular form *blue* and then, additionally, it sometimes denoted the supporters of a given football club, as in *the blue half of Glasgow*.

(39) *David Webb shook up Chelsea to launch a mini-revival of the Blues on his managerial bow at Stamford bridge last night.* [TG: 2 Mar 1993]

9. Conclusions

From the discussion presented above, it can be concluded that the meaning potential of the words *blues* and *blue*, as activated in *The Guardian* and *The Economist*, constitutes a rich and diverse repertoire of concepts, expressed both literally and figuratively. The findings reported here indicate that both terms may be seen as somewhat ambiguous, since they tend to evoke certain negative connotations such as sadness or depression, despite the fact that if they are used as colour terms, most people associate them with positive attributes. Overall, the main conclusions drawn from the study can be summarized as follows.

The quantitative analysis of the distribution of *blue* and *blues* in their literal and figurative sense resulted in the following observations:

a) *blue* and *blues* are used in their figurative meaning more often in *The Economist* (50.2% in comparison with 26.6% in *The Guardian*),

b) *blue* and *blues*, when used literally, are employed slightly more often by *The Guardian* (46.6% in comparison to 38.6% in *The Economist*),

c) in both newspapers, *blue* is more often used figuratively than *blues* (52.5% for *blue* in comparison to 37.7% for *blues* in *The Economist*; 26.8% for *blue* in comparison to 26.5% for *blues* in *The Guardian*),

d) *blue,* when used figuratively, occurs much more often in *The Economist* (52.5% in comparison to 26.8% in *The Guardian*),

e) *blues*, when used literally, occurs in both newspapers with similar frequency (48% in *The Economist* and 47.8% in *The Guardian*).

The qualitative analysis of the distribution of *blue* and *blues* in their literal and figurative sense resulted in the following findings:

a) *blue*, when used literally, in both newspapers serves either as an ordinary colour adjective or as a noun denoting a specific portion of the colour spectrum,

b) *blues*, when used literally, most often serves either as a noun referring to a specific music genre, especially in *The Economist*, or as an adjective describing this type of music, especially in *The Guardian*,

c) in both newspapers, when *blue* and *blues* are used figuratively, they often connote negative concepts associated with depression or melancholy,

d) in both newspapers, when *blue* and *blues* are used figuratively, they often serve as referents for people belonging to various organizational units of society, the official colour of which is blue,

e) when *blue* is used figuratively in *The Guardian*, it tends to connote general concepts,

f) when *blue* is used figuratively in *The Economist*, it often occurs in phrases associated with the context of politics, international affairs, employment as well as economic and financial maters.

The dominant trends in the use of *blue* and *blues* as well as their different linguistic manifestations in the analysed corpora of newspaper texts indicate that most of the meanings activated in respective contexts are general rather than highly specific and they relate to concepts that are easy to understand for an average reader. Specifically, the most frequent non-literal wordings with *blue* and *blues* do not really seem to be part of the terminological resources of any specific domain such as economy or politics, which might be the case especially in *The Economist*. In fact, the relatively higher recurrence of such phrases as *blue collar* or *blue chip* in *The Economist* in comparison with *The Guardian* may be possibly accounted for by the desire to inform about complex and multi-faceted issues in simple and yet attractive terms. Nevertheless, this is rather due to the nature of topics covered in the former newspaper rather than because the terminological apparatus developed for their description or interpretation offers labels, an integral constituent of which are the words *blue* or *blues*.

Overall, the analysis suggests a more urgent need in the case of *The Economist* than *The Guardian* to activate semantic connections between seemingly intricate aspects of reality and other, more familiar concepts which have been already linguistically articulated and inscribed in the cognitive experience of the readers. In this respect, the colour term *blue* and its derivative *blues* as well as the

connotations they both carry seem to constitute an excellent domain in terms of which alternative ideas, often of interest mainly to specialists, can be made explicit and readable to an even wider audience. Indeed, the meanings that have come to be associated with the colour 'blue' have been evolving for centuries and can be traced back at least to antiquity. Notwithstanding the fact that the language of the *Guardian* is reported to be "more involved and less explicit and abstract, in other words, more informal", these are still the facts of the matter what remains in the focus of attention of the newspaper's editorial staff (Westin and Geisler 2002: 150). This, in turn, may be a reason why its readers are less frequently subjected to looking at the world from an alternative perspective, and instead are left to interpret it for themselves.

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