

Values, Imaginaries and Templates of Journalistic Practice:

A Critical Discourse Analysis

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Abstract

This article shows that templates are not only crucial for the ways in which journalists construct or structure the media discourse but also for how they perceive themselves and others in the process of journalistic practice. A Critical Discourse Analysis of interviews with Polish journalists on their practices related to reporting migration – a topic largely discarded and ignored by the Polish media – shows that the construction of practice in the journalistic field constantly negotiates the contradiction between ‘knowing-it-all’, a key element of the template of journalistic habitus/identity, and the frequent lack of experience or limited knowledge of practice and of journalistic work. The analysis reveals that, while often using a discursive strategy of *pre-legitimation*, journalists enact templates that blur the boundaries between discourses about experiences of journalistic work and imaginaries or scenarios of actions they would only potentially undertake. Journalistic discourses of practice thereby become increasingly displaced i.e. they run along similar templates of discourse of/about quasi-universalised ethics and values of journalism almost irrespective of media organisations of the informants. By the same token, it is emphasised that, rather than being limited by the ideologies and powers of media organizations, agency seems to be often self-constrained by journalists in their self-entrapment in values, templates and imaginaries of journalism.

Keywords: discourse, practice, journalism, values, pre-legitimation, identity, agency

1. Introduction

Like probably very few other professions, journalism organises its practices strictly around various ‘templates’ that guide the ways in which journalists construct the news and thus reflect on various social realities. Those templates, transmitted to journalists already at the level of their training and ‘professional socialisation’, become the bases for the ways in which media discourses eventually represent society. They include various ‘stages’ and ‘aspects’ of seeing the world – as e.g. in the case of news reporting of crises and disasters (see, inter alia: Cottle, 2009; Machin and Mayr, 2012) – that, practically irrespective of the actual events or social actors reported, can always be enacted in the process of constructing media representations.

But, as the article is willing to show, such templates are not only crucial for the ways in which journalists actually construct or structure media discourse but also for the ways in which journalism professionals perceive themselves and others in the process of journalistic work. The templates are hence central for how journalists speak about or articulate their practice – including its role vis-à-vis the wider society – and for

how they thus discursively construct their professional identities, very often as ‘knowers’ and as legitimate analysts of social reality.

Analytically, this article focuses on how in/through their discursive accounts of various practices, journalists *de facto* link discourses about experiences of journalistic work with imaginaries and scenarios of actions they would only ‘potentially’ undertake, and how the boundaries between those two areas remain increasingly blurred. As the analysis below shows, the *omnipresent discourse of ‘knowing’* is often unmatched in the journalistic field with the actual experience. Therefore, visions and imaginaries of experience rather than experience itself prevail in discursive accounts of journalistic practice and serve as key tools in the self-construction of journalistic identity of ‘knowers’. Thereby, practically irrespective of (the experience of) practice, journalists always negotiate a certain existent template of what they *should* do and *know*. This template is sustained by the value-laden discourse about journalistic principles and ethics that can also be seen as a form of a recurrent construction of a ‘*professional-mythology of journalism*’ (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2009).

It is that mythology in context that the article wishes to deconstruct while looking at how agency and, to lesser degree, experience, are intertwined in journalists’ discourses of/about practice. Those discourses are analysed below on the basis of interviews with Polish journalists and their practices related to reporting of migration and multiculturalism in the Polish media. Since, as a topic, migration is largely discarded and very often ignored by the Polish post-1989 media – who consider the theme as highly un-newsworthy and irrelevant to, e.g., political debates and agendas and only report on migration as an element of very isolated or sensational news – it is surprising that the discourse about related journalistic practices is full of various descriptions or of quasi-accounts practices. That points to the fact that many imaginaries of practice are enacted in the journalists’ discourse in the course of the interviews. As the article shows, such imaginaries serve as key tools of constructing the aforementioned professional myth of journalists as ‘knowers’, a myth that seems foundational for journalists’ professional identity irrespective of the organisational, social or national contexts in which it is (re)produced.

As is shown below in the course of a Critical Discourse Analysis of interviews with journalists, *journalistic identities and mythologies are very strongly reliant on discursive construction of legitimation of different actions – those actually undertaken as well as in the majority of cases those just imagined – by means of references to predominantly values and standards of journalistic work*. However, since values are omnipresent and ubiquitous in journalistic accounts of practice they at the same time become an empty signifier – or a catch-all notion – which can be always be used whenever, especially in lieu of actual experience, scenarios and visions of practice are enacted. Values of journalism are hence key examples of the ‘*deep-seated dispositions*’ (Bourdieu et al. 1999) of the journalistic field and are, as such, the key elements of journalistic habitus. As is shown below, they help construct imagined rather than de-facto practices and identities and hence are very often deployed as a tool in searching for agency and identity of journalism rather than pointing to what it is and how it is ‘made’ in the actual practice.

The article deals specifically with the discursive construction of pre- rather than post-factual legitimation called here the *pre-legitimation of practice*. As is shown below, pre-legitimation allows speakers to present their visions rather than accounts of

practice yet constructs those visions from an experience-like aspects of discursive representation of social action. Hence, drawing on discursive resources typical for post-factual, often experience-based representation of practice, pre-legitimation as a discursive strategy points to the experience/expectations intersection in discourse (cf. Krzyżanowski 2010 for a similar account with regard to politicians' identities). It also adds ethical dimensions of legitimation – in a sense 'this is what we always/anyway do or would do' – to interpret practices which are often imagined as an element of constructing identities of 'knowledgeable' or 'expert' journalists.

The empirically funded, critical-analytic stance of this paper rests on a combination of two approaches to analysing representation of practice in discourse. On the one hand, the article draws extensively on the Discourse Historical Approach in CDS (Reisigl and Wodak 2001, 2009; Wodak, 2008; Krzyżanowski, 2010) and its interest in analysing discourses about social actions from the point of view of various discursive dimensions and strategies as well as frames (*topoi*). These, as is shown below, help social actors argue in favour or against various accounts and visions of their practice, in this case in the journalistic field. On the other hand, the paper draws inspiration from a social-semiotic approach of Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (Machin, 2013) and in particular its approaches to recontextualisation and legitimation of practice in/through discourse (van Leeuwen, 2007, 2008). *Combining the two approaches allows the article to provide a careful take on the nuances and key elements of the discourses about journalistic practice.* In doing so, the article furthers language and discourse oriented explorations of journalistic practice (see, inter alia: Richardson, 2007, 2008, 2010; see also: van Hout and Jacobs, 2008; van Hout and Macgilchrist 2010; Macgilchrist, 2011; Catenaccio et al. 2011) and adds new dimensions to the relevant critical-analytic research. It does so by linking insights from various areas of critical discourse studies – e.g. practice-oriented multimodal and discourse-historical analysis – and by combining their theoretical and analytical tools in order to explain the complex nature of journalist discourses. *Here, the focus is especially on broadening the interest in, and reflection on, discourse as a key constituent rather than merely the output of journalistic practice.*

As such, this article also contributes to several further intersecting research fields. On the one hand, it adds the empirical and discourse-based insight to the existent work on *the notion of 'practice'* and especially its relevance to study media and journalism. That research, re-initiated within *Social Semiotics* a decade ago (Couldry, 2004), has taken many directions and resulted in many calls including for treating 'practice' as a nodal concept helpful in overcoming a divides between the theoretically oriented media studies and practice-based journalism research (Machin and Niblock, 2006). It has also brought many useful concepts – such as those from within Pierre Bourdieu's practice-oriented approach to the media field and journalistic habitus – which are followed below. On the other hand, the article sheds new light on the concept of *journalistic identities*. Though extensively studied in recent years (see, inter alia, Deuze 2005a, 2005b, and below), those identities still call for further empirical work. The latter should aim at not only showing researchers' *etic* interpretations of media and journalistic practice – as in the majority of studies on media newsrooms and other key sites of journalistic practice – but also complexity and heterogeneity of journalists' *emic* accounts of their actions and motivations in the journalistic field. At the same time, the article proposes researching the *discursive construction and representation of practice as an approach to understanding the increasingly complex 'self-understanding of journalism'* (Dahlgren, 1992; Deuze, 2005a). It does so by

looking at how practice and identity in/of journalism are tied together and whether both are based on experiences of what journalism is or actually or mostly on scenarios or visions of what it could or should be.

The article opens up with a section devoted to theorising and explaining the notion of 'practice' as a central concept in the journalistic field. Thereby, it is pointed to the fact that both agency-oriented and ethical dimensions remain central for the ways in which the work and practice of journalism is perceived from within and outside of journalistic field. Following on that, the article moves to discuss the recent work on journalistic identities including in the context of the omnipresent ideas and arguments on (various) journalistic values as well as in the context of organizational identities as reflecting journalism's ongoing necessity to negotiate between agency and structure. After the presentation of research project that yielded the empirical material as well as of key aims and categories of analysis, the article moves to the subsequent Critical Discourse Analysis of various discursive accounts and imaginaries of practice stemming from a number of semi-structured interviews with Polish journalists.

2. Practice, Identities and Ideologies in/and the Journalistic Field

In its very basic sense, *practice* is a description of 'doing things', and of making them an element of a certain more or less contextualised routine. It denotes doing things repeatedly, continuously, and usually in a more or less similar manner. Through his notion of '*praxis*', Karl Marx pointed to practice as primarily focussed on 'achieving' social goals, hence as resting on certain vision or objectives. For Marx, practice denotes objectives and goal-oriented actions rather than doing things for their own sake. At the same time, Marx saw '*praxis*' as fundamentally about improving and changing society and foregrounded those who initiate and undertake social action – i.e. social actors – as the actual 'doers' of things of social significance. On the other hand, drawing on 'practical philosophy' of Spinoza, Deleuze (1988) saw practice in a different, and far less action- or actor-oriented way. His views on practice could be called 'ethical' inasmuch Deleuze saw practice as principled and value-based and as thus opposed to rather spontaneous and unprincipled 'action'. In that sense, reflexivity was seen as a distinct feature and a virtue of practice. As Deleuze argued, through reflexive conduct, the practices were becoming ethical and were thus becoming different from the rather spontaneous (and thus often e.g. radical or unethical) actions.

The two views – the one linking practice to (repeated and goal-oriented) actions and the one rooting it firmly in reflexivity – seem to integrate into probably the most wide-ranging social-theoretical account on practice i.e. the one proposed in his reflexive sociology by Pierre Bourdieu. He saw practice as primarily based on action undertaken by social actors yet thereby emphasised the "need for a 'reflexive' relation to our social practices" (Webb et al. 2002, 50). Practice was in fact the basis of Bourdieu's perception of a social 'field' in which social actors were, adequately, able "to make sense of what is happening around them, and to make strategic decisions as to how a field or fields should be negotiated" (ibid.). Bourdieu claimed that "a social space comes to work as a field when the institutions and characters who enter it are trapped in its stakes, values, debates, when one cannot succeed in it without a minimum of practical or reflexive knowledge of its internal rules and logics" (Neveu, 2007, 338). Similarly, he saw agency and reflexivity as crucial to his central idea of 'habitus'. While based on 'deep-seated' and internalised as well as routinised 'dispositions', habitus was also seen as negotiated when values and principles of a

field in which it is realised become contested. Habitus should, accordingly, be seen as “both durable and oriented towards the practical: dispositions, knowledges and values are always potentially subject to modification, rather than being passively consumed or reinscribed” (Webb et al. 2002, 41).

While practice is a leading term in social theory and social research, it has also been used widely in relation to media studies, and, more specifically, journalism. With regard to the latter, the usage of ‘practice’ has, however, for a long time mainly denoted the actual process of journalistic work – especially in terms of ‘production’ of news and other forms of journalistic output. Such a ‘practice-oriented’ trend has also proved vital for the fact that, until recently, very few scholars have approached journalism or media practice as a theoretical, interpretive or analytical concept. Until the early 1990s, the academic reflection of the notion was mainly limited to various forms of ‘observations’ and ‘descriptions’ of practice.

A significant change in this trend has been started in the 1990s by Bourdieu who, seeking an extension to his sociological theory or practice, started to use its central concepts of *habitus* or *field* in relation to media realities where he famously spoke of an emergent, separate *journalistic field* (cf. also Bourdieu, 1999). However, unlike with his general theory of the ‘field’ – which saw the importance of agency and even a necessity to negotiate values and principles that structure the habitus of social actors within those fields (see above) – Bourdieu’s reflection on contemporary journalism was far less optimistic (see Bourdieu, 2005; cf. Benson and Neveu, 2005; Couldry, 2005). He claimed that, as such, the contemporary journalistic field becomes strongly ‘heteronomous’ i.e. dependent on other fields – most notably politics and economy – and that it thus gradually loses its own, field-specific logic. This impinged directly on social actors in the journalistic field whose agency, contrary to that of actors within other fields, was seen by Bourdieu as significantly limited. As he argued, the journalistic field is characterised by the dominance of structure over agency whereby “journalists are caught up in structural processes which exert constraints on them such that their choices are totally preconstained” (Bourdieu 2005: 45).

But despite or perhaps exactly because of his aforementioned pessimism, Bourdieu emphasised the need to foreground the social rather than solely institutional or organisational character of contemporary media. He argued that, especially in the course of the weakening of the journalistic field’s autonomy and of its field-internal agency, “part of what is produced in the world of journalism cannot be understood unless one conceptualizes this microcosm as such and endeavours to understand the effects that the people engaged in this microcosm exert on one another” (ibid: 33). His call for a more socially-constructive look at journalistic and media practice was on a par with some of the long-term traditions in media studies such as, most notably, ethnographic analyses of media and journalism, especially in the sense of situated studies of news organisations, news production and newsroom practices (see, e.g., Tuchman, 1978).

Cottle (2007) and Wahl-Jorgensen (2009) each provide an overview of a huge variety of such ethnographic studies and claim that they have significantly contributed to a new understanding of a variety of recurrent issues of media and journalism research. Yet while Cottle (2007) argues that the said studies have reinvigorated work on, inter alia, discourses and identities in media and journalism, Wahl-Jorgensen (2009) also saw some of their key disadvantages. As she argued, the main issue with many

ethnographic studies proposed so far was that in a huge majority of cases they contributed to what Wahl-Jorgensen calls 'newsroom-centricity'. The latter has been responsible for the development of a very routine-based look at journalistic practice and the ongoing search for recurrent patterns of such practice in related research. This, according to Wahl-Jorgensen, has also had wider implications and has led to a perception of journalistic cultures and practices as schematic, highly patterned, or even as ritualised (cf. also Cottle 2006). Or, put differently,

“the ways in which the practices of journalists have rubbed up against the cultures of journalism ethnographers in the context of newsroom-centricity have contributed to an emphasis on routinized and controlled forms and aspects of news work, rather than on the spontaneous and unpredictable elements favoured by the professional mythology of journalists” (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2009, 25).

Couldry (2004) claimed that there are several further reasons that make Bourdieu's theory of practice particularly viable in contemporary context. The first is that, unlike any of the significant theories before, Bourdieu emphasises the very close relation between discourse and practice whereby he sees the latter as articulated through the former. Secondly, exactly because of the focus on discourses as forms of articulation and recognition of practice, Bourdieu allows social actors to provide their own understandings (accounts) of practice and thereby highlights their distinctions between various types of those practices (cf. also Couldry, 2003, 2005). Thirdly, in relation to the above, actors are given the possibility to construct practices as multiple as well as mutually interdependent and thereby see that “some practices are defined as part of a larger practice that provides their key reference points” (Couldry 2004: 122). Finally, actors in the journalistic field can recognise the importance of path dependency within and across practices by working “to enact new forms of categorisation and distinction replied upon in their practices” (ibid.).

Continuing this line of thinking, Machin and Niblock (2006) advocated a look away from just products or end-effects of media and journalism practice and to treat these instead as processes that are inherently social in nature. Thereby, they proposed linking theoretical approaches to practice with the in-depth look at de-facto journalistic practices. They emphasised the role of reflexivity in journalistic work as well as argued for a balance between theory and practice in order to enrich everyday media and journalistic practice by the scholarly approaches to media production and media language/discourse. Niblock (2007) followed this chain of thought and argued for focusing on what journalists actually do yet in a manner which predisposes insightful and critical thinking about how they do it. She also investigated why the practice/s undertaken by journalists often take different, context-dependent forms. Following Schön (1983) and his theory of reflective practice, Niblock distinguished between *reflection-in-action* and *reflection-on-action* and pointed to the necessity of balancing the two. Especially the second of those concepts is crucial here as it points to the fact that *experience* is central to both construct (accounts of) practice and to be able to repeat certain practices in a similar context and/or under comparable work conditions. Niblock summarized this by saying that “*being able* to do good journalism as opposed to simply *knowing how* develops through immersion in experience rather than by possessing a body of pre-existing knowledge about how journalism should be” (Niblock, 2007, 25).

While journalistic practice has for a long time preoccupied researchers in media studies, it is rather recently that theoreticians and especially analysts of journalism have undertaken attempts to scrutinise journalistic identities and the ways in which these are formed in/through discourse about journalistic practice. This, to be sure, has taken place despite the fact that for decades now journalism has been considered from the point of its ‘values’ (e.g. Galtung and Ruge, 1965; Hall et al. 1978; Schlesinger, 1987), ‘cultures’ (especially in the sense of ‘editorial cultures’, cf. Preston, 2009) or ‘rituals’ (e.g. Cottle, 2006) which elsewhere – i.e. in other social fields – have long served as descriptions and artefacts of various collective identities. Yet only in a recent decade or so does one witness a growing interest in identity-oriented studies of journalism. However, it seems that while operating on potentially pregnant and relevant concepts – such as e.g. ‘*counter/hegemonic identities*’ (Carpentier 2005), ‘*professional reflexivity*’ (Ahva 2012) or ‘*liquid ethos*’ (Kantola 2012) – many of the recent works on journalistic identities do not yield sufficient theoretical and empirical charisma that would help explaining not only the new challenges faced by the journalistic profession but also the reliance on ideologies, values and thereby path-dependencies of the journalistic field.

A notable exception can be found in the works of Deuze who has analysed journalistic identities by relating them to a certain form of ‘occupational ideology’ by means of which journalists articulate and “give meaning to their newswork” (Deuze 2005a, 444). This meaning-making process was seen as a combination of, on the one hand, constructions of what Zelizer famously called ‘collective knowledge’ of journalism and, on the other hand, of the ongoing articulation and reappropriation of journalism’s ‘dominant discourse’ (Dahlgren, 1992). It is the latter that, according to Deuze, is deeply and almost inextricably rooted in the constant search for and pronouncement of various journalistic values. Used as mainly discursive constructs, those values range from those pertaining to public service and objectivity to those on outright ethics that apparently functions in the domain of journalism.

Ethics is, according to Deuze, also a foundation of journalism’s ‘imagined community’ (Anderson, 1989) whereby journalists “do share a sense of being ethical – which in turn legitimizes journalists’ claims to the position as (free and fair) watchdogs of society” (Deuze, 2005a, 449). Indeed, the legitimatory force of values is what needs to be emphasised as the main reason for its omnipresence in the journalistic field where value-laden and ethical notions serve two functions. Namely,

“ethics can be both a flag behind which to rally the journalistic troops in defence of commercial, audience driven or managerial encroachments, as well as an emblem of newsworkers’ legitimacy when reporting on complex events involving the wants and needs of different media, different people, and different ways to be inclusive” (ibid, 458).

Elsewhere, Deuze (2005b) furthered his exploration of journalistic identity from the point of view of its professional ideology. He argued that research based on interviews and other forms of eliciting the discourse of self-understanding of journalism is central to understanding how journalism perceives its contemporary social and other roles that are both real but often just imagined or perceived. In doing so, Deuze argued for a need to look at “how journalism organizes and defines itself, how this process of definition is structured, and how, in turn, this influences how journalism functions” (ibid, 862). Deuze also claimed that the agency vs. structure

duality is, in fact, central in the ways journalists work and perceive their work. He argued that discourse about how journalists give meaning to their work is a way of “constantly negotiating their professional identity with elements of structure (the context in which they work, the journalistic field) and subjectivity (what they bring to the job)” (ibid.). Indeed, Deuze also pointed to the fact that the debate of skills and standards – or, differently put, values – of journalism is one of the central dimensions of talking about journalistic practice and journalism in general. Ethics are thus, according to Deuze, vital for the ways in which journalists judge their own profession as well as its audiences and readerships.

3. Pre-Legitimation of Practice, Values and Identities in Journalistic Discourse

Aims and Empirical Material

Drawing on the aforementioned multiple ideas and insights on, inter alia, journalistic practice and identities in the field of journalism, the analysis below looks at the process of their discursive construction. The focus is thereby on recurrent patterns of journalistic discourse and therein various ways in which journalism’s identities are constructed discursively including, predominantly, by means of references to values and ethics of the journalistic profession. The analysis below hence looks at language/discourse of/about practice as a key tool in construction of media/journalist identities that are formed in the process of articulation of not only experience-based accounts but also *pre-legitimised* visions and scenarios or imaginaries of practice.

Empirically, the analysis targets journalistic discourses about practices related to migration and multiculturalism. Those discourses are targeted by the subsequent analysis as they are considered to be the key traits of the ways in which identities and professional ideologies of journalism are formed in late modernity when journalistic responsibilities vis-à-vis society and various communities are increasingly in flux. Hence, migration and multiculturalism are chosen as foci here as they are, at least hypothetically, “one of the foremost issues in journalism, where media professionals are confronted by the real or perceived responsibilities in contemporary society” (Deuze 2005a, 452).

Yet, while it is argued that “the multicultural society indeed shifts the focus and news values of today’s media professionals”(ibid.), the aim here is to show that in some contexts – in the present case, the post-1989 Poland – debating values and principles of journalism is often a strategy to, in fact, *avoid* discussing the changing responsibilities of journalists in relation to society and thereby to salient issues such as migration and multiculturalism. It is hence, as shown below, a way of ‘escaping to values’ and to the often purely speculative and hypothetical discourse, especially in a situation of a lack of knowledge or experience of practice related to reporting and discussing migration in the media. It is also a way of, in fact, covering up the lack of knowledge of migration and related media practices and using values as a rhetorical excuse for some (very) limited experience of related media and journalistic practice.

The analysis below is conducted on the material gathered within the research project MEDIVA, a cross-national, EU-funded research initiative that took place in 2011-12¹. The aim of the project was to assess the capacity of the media to reflect the increasing diversity of European societies as well as the ability of European media to foster a better understanding of immigrant integration processes in/through the media. The study, conducted in the context of the recent economic crisis and the framework of

dynamics and transformation of European and national public spheres, looked at such areas as: media content/discourse (what and how is presented in the news), media news-making and production practices (inclusiveness in practice, news filters for instance), media recruitment and employment practices (provisions for recruiting minority/migrant staff, careers of this staff, existence of glass ceiling), media training practices (diversity management).

The analysed semi-structured interviews – inquiring about all of the areas listed above with the special focus on media discourses and on news-making practices – were conducted in the period June-August 2011. Altogether, 68 media professionals were interviewed across Europe including from senior management, senior journalists, producers and editors. In the Polish case analysed below, twelve journalists were interviewed mainly from public but also private media organisations. In line with the aims of the project – i.e. testing integration as represented in media discourse and in real-world ‘social’ inclusiveness of media organisations – the interviewed journalists were of both migrant and non-migrant origin, which, however, still proved incompatible with e.g. views on the importance and salience of migration and multiculturalism as a ‘newsworthy topic’ (see below).

As indicated by the research conducted as a background to the analysed interviews (see esp.: Bennett et al. 2013; Gemi et al. 2013), contrary to other European countries, Polish media still lack significantly as far as patterns of reporting and news making in relation to migration and multiculturalism are concerned. For example, many categories of describing migrant groups are notably missing from the Polish media discourses with only designations such as refugees or immigrants (*uchodźcy/imigranci*) used more widely. Polish media discourses also do not follow some of the tendencies of multiculturalism-related framing such as e.g. references to Islam/Muslims widespread in western and southern Europe. At the same time, Polish media eagerly follow some of the negative patterns of representing migrants including as passive ‘victims’ of disasters, human trafficking, etc. Interestingly, they do so in the framework of various media ideologies that, unlike elsewhere – e.g. Western Europe, characterised by the increasing flexibility of media as far as their political affiliation – remain rather stable. Accordingly, Polish media can still be characterised as favouring e.g. anti-immigration ethno-nationalist or pro-immigration liberal discourse, while other media – especially tabloids – favour negativised and sensationalised views on migration and multiculturalism (cf. Grzymała-Kazłowska, 2007).

Methodology and Analytical Categories

The empirically funded, critical-analytic stance of this paper rests on a combination of two approaches to analysing representation of practice in discourse. On the one hand, the article draws extensively on the Discourse Historical Approach in CDS (DHA; see, inter alia, Wodak, 2008; Krzyżanowski, 2010) while on the other it takes inspiration from a social-semiotic approach of Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (Machin, 2013) and in particular its approaches to recontextualisation and legitimation of practice in/through discourse (van Leeuwen, 2007, 2008). Combining the two approaches allows the article to provide a careful take on the nuances and key elements of the discourses about journalistic practice.

As far as DHA is concerned, it provides the study with the general perception of discourse as a social practice whereby the focus is on how social phenomena – in our case journalism and its practices – are constructed and represented linguistically and how they are profoundly linguistic in character (Wodak, 1996). This allows linking the view of discourse followed in this study with the aforementioned ideas on practice as a site of articulation of individual and collective agencies. It also allows seeing discourse as a carrier of different forms of legitimation of discursively constructed forms of identity and agency whose role and uniqueness is sustained in/through both experience based and imaginary discourse about practice. By the same token, the DHA also provides this study with such key discourse-interpretive notions as e.g. ‘*discursive dimensions*’ (Weiss 2002; Wodak and Weiss 2004; Krzyżanowski 2010) that designate larger, extra-discursive framing of the analysed discourses. Developed originally in the context of political discourses, discursive dimensions allow pointing to the usual ways in which identities are formed and legitimised, especially in organizational and related contexts. Whereas in their original sense, discursive dimensions encompassed three types of legitimation (legitimation through idea, legitimation through organization/procedure and legitimation standards/values; cf. Weiss 2002), the aim here is to show that it is the discursive dimension and legitimation oriented towards values that outright dominates journalistic discourses about practice.

On the other hand, the aforementioned social-semiotic approach in CDS provides this study with a perception of discourse as a site of recontextualisation of practice. Discourse is hence seen as an inherent reflection of social reality and thereby of social practices that constitute such a reality. Drawing on the concept of ‘recontextualisation’ originally introduced by Bernstein (1990) and elaborated by, inter alia, Wodak (2000) allows strengthening the key discourse-to-practice link and argue that “all texts, all representations of the world and what is going on in it, however abstract, should be interpreted as representations of social practices” (van Leeuwen, 2008, 5). In such vein, discourses are seen as “social cognitions, socially specific ways of knowing social practices, they can be, and are, used as resources for representing social practices” (ibid, 6).

The two highlighted methodological approaches also provide a set of key analytical categories followed below. From DHA, this study follows the category of a ‘discursive strategy’ i.e. of “a more or less accurate and more or less intentional plan of practices (including discursive practices) adopted to achieve a particular social, political, psychological or linguistic aim” (Reisigl and Wodak, 2001, 44). In case of the analysed journalistic discourses, discursive strategies are seen as linguistic and discursive realisations of the aforementioned discursive dimensions. Hence, as is shown below, one of the key strategies deployed in the analysed discourse is that of ‘*ethicalisation*’ of discourse i.e. of representing actions and practices of journalists from the point of view of their adherence to values and standards of journalistic work. The realisation of that strategy also implies referring to and legitimising actions and practices by means of various values and standards. Therefore, the focus is also on various argumentative patterns supporting such strategies. Those patterns are encompassed by the concept of *topoi* i.e. “certain headings of arguments which, in a way, summarise the argument while also providing it with a necessary ‘skeleton’ which is fleshed over by respective discourse contents” (Krzyżanowski, 2010, 85). In line with the key dimensions and strategies of the analysed discourse, the central *topoi* guiding the arguments expressed by the interviewees below include e.g. the *topos of*

journalistic values (arguments which are aimed at emphasising values as key/driving for actions and practices) or the *topos of journalistic practice as path dependent* (arguments showing that journalistic practices are inherently path-dependent and hence self-reproductive by paving the way for other, similar practices; or arguments claiming that e.g. negativity of social dynamics has to be reflected in the negativity of the news).

It is within the linguistic realisation of the said discursive strategies and *topoi* that one encounters various forms and patterns of legitimation of the either experienced or imagined practices. In order to trace such patterns and forms, the analysis below also follows the categories of *discursive legitimation strategies* provided by the social-semiotic, multimodal CDS (van Leeuwen, 2007). This is done with the general aim of showing that the *pre-legitimation* deployed by many speakers is constructed largely the same way as experience-based and post-factual *legitimation*. Thereby, the focus is, in particular, on such discursive legitimation strategies as e.g. *moral evaluation* that attempts to present the constructed practices in terms of “discourses of moral value” (ibid, 97) and thereby moralising – or adding a moral and value-laden dimension – to the discourse of/about practice. As is shown below, that form of legitimation is often linked to what van Leeuwen defines as *authorization strategies* where path-dependencies are invoked as a key tool of legitimising various practices: “‘because this is what we always do’ or ‘because this is what we have always done’”(ibid, 96; orig. emphasis). Whereas the aforementioned authorization strategy might be termed as ‘*the authority of tradition*’ (ibid.) it often goes on a par with ‘*authority of conformity*’ (ibid.) which helps constructing arguments of a “‘because that is what everybody else does’” (ibid.) type. The final and related legitimation strategy that frequently underlies the realisation of *topoi* deployed in the analysed discourses is the so-called *rationalization strategy*. It pertains to both *instrumental rationalization* (‘whether it works or not’, ibid, 101) as well as the very relevant *theoretical rationalization* founded on “‘some kind of truth, on ‘the way things are’” (ibid, 103; orig. emphasis).

Analysis

Pre-legitimation and legitimation through various media values seem to be among the main discursive strategies deployed in the analysed interviews. The latter include many references to media values and alleged journalistic codes of ethics as those that also apply to the ways in which journalistic practices with regard to migration take place. As it seems, such *topos of journalistic values* is realised mainly within the argument that claims that since journalism as such is ethical and conducted along ethical codes, that also applies to the ethical – or ethicised – treatment of various topics, including migration and multiculturalism, in media discourse.

As the interviews highlight, though, the aforementioned *topos*, is, in fact a pre-legitimation tool and hence an element of a certain scenario of practices. If asked explicitly about the existence of certain local codes of ethics or values or related guidelines within their media organisation, journalists’ discourse becomes increasingly vague as in the following example:

Example 1²:

Q: Mhm. Yyy, so in your editorial team do you actually have some sort of a written code some sort of set of rules which would indicate how one should talk about this topic [MK: migration]?

Int.: Eee (5,0) well no not specifically about migration we do not have such a code we do have a journalistic code such (.) standard (.) such a book (.) for journalists and it is really there irrespective whether we talk about human or migrant rights (Int. 22, PL)

As the example shows, the interviewee points to the lack of actual (written) codes of practice and instead turns the discussion towards a wider, and to large extent imagined, ethical code of journalism. The interviewee uses synonymy ('code' – 'standard' – 'book') to emphasise the knowledge of that imagined code yet fails to provide any further details as to its actual character, origin, or contents. By the same token, the informant nominalises other ethical codes – e.g. 'human or migrant rights' – as if willing to show where, in semantic terms, s/he wishes to place – as it seems mostly in imaginary terms – the roots of journalistic ethics in relation to migration.

In fact, when inquired about the presence of editorial guidelines, another informant argues that they used to exist in other media (e.g. the 'XYZ' s/he worked for before) but that nowadays media generally do not have such guidelines.

Example 2:

Q: Is there any policy in relation to language, wording etc

Int.: No

Q: Or on relation to the wider perspective or thematic frames

Int.: No

Q: Headlines

Int.: No (.) I think its is much more of an issue of yyy (4,0) a certain feeling journalists have (.) whatever they consider to be the topic (.) and certain general conviction of us as editorial team right yyy who are migrants for Poland (.) I think we are speaking of a certain migration-friendly tone here

Q: An approach

Int.: And an approach but there are no guidelines that is for sure (.) I used to work before for XYZ where that was actually terribly regulated and where we were as if sensitised to how we should speak (.) so perhaps my perspective is an XYZ perspective but

Q: Interesting I will ask you more about that later

Int.: But for sure for sure there is nothing like editorial guidelines as far as what we write how we write when or why (Int. 12, PL)

As is suggested by the interviewee above, whereas his/her current media organization does not have guidelines it is still guided by certain values/principles like national relevance ('who are migrants for Poland') or a positive stance towards multiculturalism ('a certain migration friendly tone'). The statement is also an attempt to present his/her current medium as objective and as anyway presenting reality truthfully (value of 'realism'?) rather than in line with any editorial guideline or policy that would define a particular presentation of certain topics (but note the discourse about media ideologies below).

Vagueness seems to be, in fact, one of the key characteristics of the analysed interviews about journalistic practice. As the example below illustrates, it can be constructed in a form of ellipsis where despite uncertainty expressed at the beginning and the end of a statement (from agentic 'I guess' to the more expletive phrase 'there is nothing concrete') the informant still provides an extensive imaginary of practice while supporting it even with examples:

Example 3:

Q: What what sort of event yyy or what aspect of an event yyy is defined as news here in your editorial team (.) in particular in relation to migration (.) what must happen in relation to the migration issue yyy what must come about for you to speak about that at all

Int.: (5,0) Well hmm I guess in most cases that is related to yyy human rights in general (.) but that can go in various directions say medical care that may also concern various groups (.) some sort of migrants who died from say Cuba somewhere for example yyy we talk about them we discuss this I mean (5,0) in various ways (.) there is nothing concrete though (Int. 22, PL)

While the discourse about practice in the example above includes, yet again, a recontextualisation of human rights as the allegedly driving catalogue of values, the remaining part of the statement indicates that the account of practice presented here actually draws on elements of various, and indeed arbitrary, elements of different practices. While these serve a pre-legitimation – in the sense of ‘what we would potentially do’ – those practices are presented in a way that supports the *theoretical rationalization* strategy (‘the way things are’) thus also disguising the lack of informant’s knowledge about specific, migration-related media practices.

But the *topos of journalistic values* is also discursively constructed by means of specifying the value-related talk and making it precise in particular by relating it to the language of the media (the nominalised values of ‘*precision*’ or ‘*detail*’ appear to be the driving ones in this case).

Example 4:

Q: What would you say (.) is your editorial team sensitive to various terminological differences (.) are they applied by the journalists

Int.: Rather yes

Q: Rather yes

Int.: Rather yes because yyy we are committed to being precise yyy and sometimes yyy a precise formulation or naming of a group can yyy influence the contents of a whole news yyy its contents yyy (.) not everybody can be called a refugee

Q: Mhm

Int.: So yes such differences are applicable (.) perhaps not in the overwhelming number of cases not in each case (.) but when it is crucial to make the news (.) more detailed then yes (Int. 12, PL)

Yet, contrary to the previous cases, the example above highlights an instance where the value-related arguments are tied to legitimation rather than pre-legitimation of practice. As is evident, the example is rooted in experience of news making (note references to the practices of creating contents etc.) while the supporting examples provided by the informant (‘*not everybody can be called a refugee*’) point to the actual experience with migration-related media contents. Interestingly, as the example shows, the legitimation of practice is less rooted here in a macro-level ideological discourse (about codes and ideas of journalism as such) that is apparently characteristic for the vague and imagined pre-legitimation. It is instead constructed on the basis of actual practice-based values (precision, detail, etc.).

But in the large majority of cases, the interviewees resort to pre-legitimation rather than legitimation thus pointing to the Polish journalists’ very limited knowledge of migration as a topic. As the following example illustrates, even what was named above as practice-based values can be used to pre-legitimise and, more specifically, to divert the discourse away from the journalist’s lack of relevant knowledge or experience of practice.

Example 5:

Int.: The language of the news should be as simple as possible so that it gets across you know the majority of viewers does not fully understand the news (...) news items nowadays are just two minutes (...) well we are going in this direction of shortening-shortening the news items so we are trying to use the more general terms (.) that is the way it is (Int. 21, PL).

In fact, the example above points to a certain degree of duality in the discourse of pre-legitimation. On the one hand, it attempts to concretise the value-related claims (note predicates such as ‘*simple*’, ‘*shortening*’, ‘*general*’) while on the other hand it attempts to generalise the ontology of such values. Namely, the former is rooted in dynamics which reside outside, rather than inside, of the journalistic field. Here, the informant mentions as the main reason the viewer-related dynamics (implying that media users do ‘*not fully understand the news*’; note the condescending tone of the utterance and the thereby implied/legitimised elitism of journalism) rather than any field-internal causes located within journalism. Thereby, journalistic practices are pre-legitimised and objectified while elements of legitimation discourse – in fact a combination of *authorization and rationalization strategies* (‘*that is the way it is*’) – are deployed to show the logic of journalistic practice as if, paradoxically, independent of dynamics of/in the journalism itself.

In several instances, the otherwise leading topos of values/standards is subscribed to a wider argumentative frame of a *topos of media ideology* (NB: as indicated above, media ideologies are still very prevalent in the Polish media context). That topos allows informants to present their media organisations as driven by various ideologies which as if define all activities of a media organization including in relation to all practices of news making and of construction of media discourse.

Example 6:

Int.: There are no concrete regulations but there are certain rules which concern that topic as well as all the other ones (.) well we call it some sort of a catalogue of values some sort of axiology of our publication (.) a republican one ((cough)) which can well be explained and developed but I think the slogan says it well yy we are both praised and attacked for that eee (.) we are a publication which is open also to that topic but we are (.) have always been quite cautious (.) for tactical reasons yyy generally with THIS very much so precisely depending on the situation at hand (Int. 17, PL).

However, as the example illustrates, whereas the informant can define the overall media ideology for his/her publication (the former is predicated as ‘*republican*’), the latter is hardly explained or highlighted otherwise than through the fact that the media organisation in question can either be praised or criticised for its obedience to such an ideology. In fact, the only ‘value’ that is mentioned is that of ‘openness’ which the informant then argues to apply across all topics, including migration. But interestingly, migration and multiculturalism are not presented by means of nominalisation but just deictic indexicalisations (‘*that topic*’, or the audibly emphasised ‘*THIS*’ later on). That proves that the media ideology discourse is, in fact, a default-like statement whereas migration may not be related to any actual media practice at all. Yet, just like in other interviews, the attempt here is made to first and foremost present oneself and one’s professional identity as knowledgeable and as experienced in practice, despite the apparent knowledge of practice as such.

Another element of the discourse of interviews with Polish journalists is their insecurity as far as terminology used with regard to migration and multiculturalism.

As it seems, such insecurity points to the immense uncertainty of journalists as far as knowledge of and distinction between relevant media practices are concerned. As the example below indicates, the informant is increasingly uncertain about his/her opinion – note e.g. the frequent hedgings/disclaimers like ‘*I guess*’, ‘*but not always*’ or ‘*that is not so clear*’ or the supporting adverbs like ‘*quite*’ or ‘*sometimes*’ – yet still attempts to express as many opinions, or as much ‘*knowledge*’, as possible.

Example 7:

Int.: No there is no care about that (.) everybody is just thrown into the same basket under migration or IMMIGRANTS (.) so one does not look whether emigrants immigrants (.) that is all blurred now (.) I guess (.) although emigration and immigration is differentiated (.) refugees and repatriation OFTEN too but not always (.) sometimes the reporters do mistake that (.) I would say quite often too (.) that is not so clear (Int. 13, PL)

Elsewhere in the same interview, the terminological insecurity issue is developed further. As it seems, it can, on the one hand, be ascribed to certain national discursive traits: historically, Poland has been a country of emigration rather than immigration and it is the former which has for a long time now been debated in Polish public discourse, including especially literature and the media. But, on the other hand, the obvious terminological puzzle displayed in the interview might be a trait of the fact that media practices related to migration – and in particular immigration – are, plainly speaking, very limited.

Example 8:

Int.: Media (.), especially the news media are not there to tell us that the world is beautiful they just focus on the news (.) accordingly (.) of course, if something bad happens media talk about that (.) but as far as EMIGRATION is concerned (.) especially Polish one after EU accession (.) I think all the information were positive (.) that means we talked about how great the Poles are coping abroad what are they doing and not doing what skills they have or not how are they learning so most of the news went in that direction (.) on the other hand when we are talking about IMMIGRANTS it is really hard to expect that the media will be showing how great they do in Poland (Int. 13, PL).

The example above – which opens up with yet another attempt to define media values (in this case close to ‘*truthfulness*’ or ‘*reality resemblance*’ of media contents) – reveals that such values can be applied very selectively. Whereas, as is implied, emigrants (especially Polish) are viewed in a positive way (note the phrase ‘*how great they are doing*’), it seems that the largely negative realism is only applied to immigrants. Such a realist stance – which implies that immigrants do not encounter favourable living and other conditions in Poland – points to and legitimises the existence of certain journalistic templates of media discourse such as those that clearly differentiate between ‘*EMIGRATION*’ and ‘*IMMIGRANTS*’ (note the audible emphasis in the example). But interestingly, such templates also point to the salience of the *topos of journalistic practice as path dependent*, in this case encapsulated by the rather paradoxical argument which helps the speaker claiming that if social conditions are unfavourable – immigrants have to be presented negatively by the media too. This pre-legitimises negative and stereotypical representations and does so by means of the *authority of tradition strategy* (‘*this is what we always do*’) that points to the alleged, practice-based relationship between the logic of social reality and of its media representations.

The path-dependency topos seems to be another rhetorical escape that allows informants to often resort to common-sense knowledge or even stereotypes in lieu of

talking about practice. As the final example below indicates, it is also a way of legitimising, e.g., the ignorance of migration as a topic in/by the Polish media.

Example 9:

Int.: Our approach to immigrants as such stems from the fact that our immigration looks differently than the immigration in most of the countries yyy western countries (.) briefly speaking we do not have those problems which societies say yyy, French Italian British have which are let's be honest real problems (.) so when we talk about an untrue image of immigrants in Pakistan yyy Pakistani migrants in Great Britain

Q: Mhm.

Int: or migrants from Morocco yyy in Spain yyy there are two different levels (.) on the one hand we have political correctness which tells us to be lenient or even close an eye with regard to some (4,0) negative phenomena in immigrant communities (.) on the other hand we have the different end of the spectrum which can be seen in the media in political debates though political debates overlap with what media writes (.) the second pole is that everything bad that is happening in France Italy or Great Britain immigrants are accused of that (Int. 14, PL).

As the complex example indicates, journalists often have more detailed knowledge about international migration rather than of migrant-related situation in Poland (although their knowledge about situation elsewhere is also quite limited and cursory). That knowledge is, however, an element that underlies the aforementioned *topos of journalistic practice as path dependent* which, yet again, allows suggesting that, since Poland allegedly does not have negative migration-related phenomena (not the phrase ‘*our immigration looks differently*’ where the possessive pronoun ‘*our*’ refers to ‘in Poland’ rather than ‘Polish’), there is not need for a migration-centred media discourse and related practices. At the same time, it is argued metaphorically that, since migration elsewhere pertains to ‘*real problems*’ it is also reported ‘there’ – rather than ‘here’ – at all or more extensively. This is another instance when path dependency – between the way things apparently are and media practice – is emphasised thus providing pre-legitimation of why migration- and multiculturalism-oriented topics are ignored by Polish journalists.

4. Conclusions

As the analysis above demonstrates, the articulation of identities in the journalistic field is very complex and takes place with use of discourse about journalistic practice that, as such, is often paradoxical and contradictory in nature. It links the de facto knowledge and experience of practice with, in most cases, visions, scenarios and imaginaries of what, according to the journalists, the practice could or should look like. It is also based on the ongoing *pre-legitimation of practice* that allows journalists to constantly negotiate the template/s of their professional habitus that requires them to upkeep self-image of ‘knowers’ or knowledgeable experts while in fact often lacking relevant knowledge or experience.

As the analysis above highlights, journalistic discourses are prone to be based very strongly on almost omnipresent references to imagined principles and values of journalism, and definitely much more so than on the actual, context-related accounts of practice. Hence, as it seems, imaginaries of what journalism is and should be are much more pivotal and constitutive for the construction of journalistic identities than the actual, shared experiences of journalists as individuals or members of media organizations.

Indeed the focus on values, and their overall predominance, shows that discourses in/about journalism are now acquiring different dynamics than discourses in other social fields. Whereas, e.g. discourses in the political field would still rest on a relative balance between ideational/identity, organisational and value or standard-related *discursive dimensions* (cf. Weiss, 2002; Wodak and Weiss, 2004; Krzyżanowski 2010), it seems those are mostly the value-related and value-laden arguments that dominate discourses in the field of journalism. Such an imbalanced and strictly value-centred self-discourse of journalism is a result of its aforementioned paradox. Namely, while it constantly needs to reinvent itself as a ‘knowing-it-all’ profession, it increasingly lacks experience and knowledge of practice that would be at the basis of its professional reflexivity and would help legitimise its claims for social importance. Journalists, therefore, deploy the discourse of norms and standards – or values – to legitimise their claims to social power. As is shown, however, these claims are often backed up by the imagined scenarios and visions rather than fact-based accounts or experience of the actual journalistic practice.

The analysis of the journalistic discourse also reveals that, somewhat contrary to many classic studies which shown that values and ideologies of journalism are tied to the ‘local’ context of media organizations, late modern journalistic identities are in many cases displaced and very often practically context-independent (however, note the topos of media ideology which still strongly ‘localises’ the analysed discourses within specific media organisations). Journalistic discourses become predominantly displaced due to – as it seems – journalists’ ever more limited knowledge and experience of practice that would be at least in some sense ‘localised’ or tied to specific ‘sites’ of journalistic practice. Instead, journalistic discourse points to the omnipresence of discourse of/about various quasi-universalised ethics and values of journalism that are all constructed in an often abstract, displaced and thus frequently context-independent way. This points, yet again, to the fact that discourses of those working for media organizations differ significantly in comparison to other, related social fields or contexts (e.g. in case of political identities which are usually very strictly attached to the context of the institutions in which they are produced; cf. Krzyżanowski, 2010). It also makes research on practice in/of journalism much more challenging. Namely, while examining journalists’ discourses on practice and agency it is far more difficult than elsewhere to discover certain culture-specific *linearities* i.e. fixed practices that help sustain its distinct institutional or organizational character as well as assure its continuity (Krzyżanowski, 2011). By the same token, the vagueness of journalistic discourse makes it difficult to see whether journalists actually know or experience practice-in-context or whether they are in fact gradually becoming unable to recognise the difference between the actual (legitimised) and imagined (pre-legitimised) practices, especially as their discursive constructions seem almost identical.

But, perhaps even more importantly, the character and complexity of journalistic discourse about practice point to the ongoing challenge of analysing agency in the journalistic field. Namely, again somewhat contrary to the existent research, journalistic agency seems to large extent self-constrained rather than being limited by the ideologies and institutional powers of media organizations. Such a peculiar self-entrapment stems from the fact that, while willing to upkeep the professional ideology of journalism as a ‘knowing it all’ professional elite that has a unique role in society, journalists almost always fail to discursively construct or legitimise their social relevance. Instead, they resort to limiting their agency by either claiming that they are

obliged to ‘defend’ certain professional values, or are ‘unable’ to negotiate media and social realities that are often intersecting and therefore path-dependent. Yet, while doing so, journalists also become unable to actually describe – or recontextualise – practice and thereby they themselves become increasingly uncertain of their accounts about their actual experiences vs. mere scenarios. In doing so, they apparently fail to change their image or the template or habitus that is inscribed in the still powerful ‘mythologies’ of journalism. They also deprive themselves of the possibility to negotiate their role as those who could, and should, influence society in a positive way.

In fact, as the analysis reveals, instead of developing their knowledge and positive impact on society (e.g. with regard to news on migration and multiculturalism scrutinised above), journalists often choose to keep on dwelling about journalistic values and thereby continue to legitimise their lack of knowledge as well as pre-legitimise their growing disconnection from practice. In doing so, they fail to foster their professional agency and instead constantly recontextualise journalism’s ‘deep-seated dispositions’ (Bourdieu et al. 1999) embodied by the said and ubiquitous journalistic values. These, as has been shown, operate at several levels ranging from the broad ideas about universal journalistic ethics to the very specific principles applied in media discourse and media practice. Yet, as has also been shown, ‘journalistic values’ fail to become the principles that actually guide practice. On the contrary, they progressively become empty signifiers and mere tools that allow for its discursive pre-legitimation of journalism’s imagined identity.

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Notes

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² The analysed interviews were conducted in Polish and the analysis was performed on the original transcripts. Gender and names of interviewees as well as names of media organizations were anonymised. The following transcription convention was applied: (.) – short pause (1 second or less); (6.0), (8.0), (9.0) – longer pause (six seconds, eight seconds, nine seconds duration etc.); (unread. 6.0) – unclear elements of speech; Mhm. Eeeee – para-verbal elements; ((leans back)),((laughs)) – non-verbal behaviour; I would not say so – regular speech; THIS – stressed/accentuated element

of speech; (↑) – rising intonation (if significant); (↓) – falling intonation (if significant); [...] – omitted parts of text/utterance.

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