

STUDIES

EVERGREENS, SENSATIONS AND THE REST – A Quantitative Analysis of Dynamics of News Articles on Domestic Politics –

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Abstract: This study investigated the temporal dynamics of articles in connection with ‘lies’ which appeared in Hungarian dailies *Népszabadság* and *Magyar Nemzet* during a several year long time period. We targeted to reveal how the press reacted to Hungarian Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsány speech, when he said that they had lied throughout his term in office. We present a typology of media dynamics based on our previous results of investigating the same dailies and certain analytical procedures, which arise from the literature about diffusion of innovations. Having reviewed the possible typology of media dynamics we return to the dynamic analysis of the topic of ‘lying’ or ‘lies’. One of the main results was, that from an “evergreen” ‘lying’ turned into a “sensation-based” topic in the fall of 2006, and the prime minister’s leaked speech was this sensation.

Keywords: public discourse, lying, growth functions, diffusion of innovations

INTRODUCTION

According to ancient Greeks, truth is what is worthwhile remembering.¹ Yet, what Hungarians remember of domestic events in 2006 are, in effect, lies. In his speech before the party’s parliamentary faction, delivered in May 2006 but leaked only on 17 September, the Socialist Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsány said that they had lied throughout his term in office in 2004–2006. The speech and the resultant riots made Hungarian events headline news in the world’s major news agencies, as well as on CNN and BBC. International media interest did not last long, but it launched a lasting

1 The letter ‘a’ at the beginning of the Greek word *aletheia*, meaning truth, is a privative affix. Presumably, the word evolved from *lethe*, meaning forgetting. It shows the thinking of an oral culture, according to which information preserved in memory (because it is important) becomes a part of truth. Everything else was to be swept away by Lethe, the “river of forgetting”. Truth and error became distinguished only later. See Bok 1978.

and extremely intense activity in the Hungarian media. In connection with this, I would like to examine the dynamics of a specific area of political public discourse. I shall present a typology of the temporal dynamics of the articles on certain topics published in political dailies, and also test a few analytical techniques.

For the past decade, Hungarian domestic political life has been dominated by rivalry between the two big political camps, the Socialist Left and the conservative Right. *Népszabadság*, close to the Socialist-led government coalition, and *Magyar Nemzet*, communicating the views of the right-wing opposition, dominate the market of political dailies. For this reason, I decided to follow up the dynamics of news articles based on the number of articles published in these two dailies.

In the interest of analyzing media reaction to the prime-minister's speech, first I collected every printed and online article² published by these papers, which referred to lies or lying in whatever form. Their subject may be foreign-policy, culture, lifestyle, society-life, or even sports related. An article was selected, if it contained the words lie, lying or lies³. The first articles were selected from February 26th, 2000 because the electronic databases of daily papers provide public access from this date. The collection of data providing the basis of our computations ended on December 31st, 2006. By specifying such wide range of articles to be examined, first of all, I tried to find out what role the metaphor 'lie' plays in public discourse in general. Following this, I shall narrow down my investigation to an analysis of lies related to domestic politics.

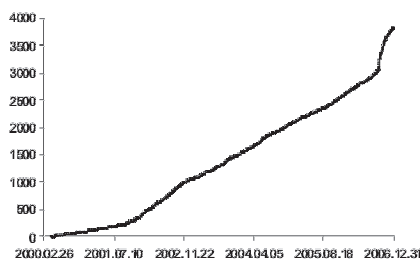


Figure 1. *Magyar Nemzet*,
Cumulative Number of "Lies" Articles

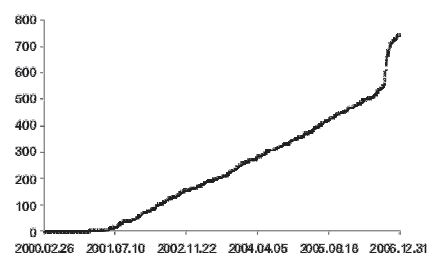


Figure 2. *Népszabadság*,
Cumulative Number of "Lies" articles

Figures 1 and 2 show the change over time in the cumulative number of the articles in question. It is conspicuous that nearly four thousand articles appeared in *Magyar Nemzet* and less than eight hundred in *Népszabadság*. The difference is big even if we take into account that the former paper generally publishes one and half times as many articles as the latter.⁴ For the moment it seems more important that the two diagrams

- 2 If an article appeared both in the online and in the printed version of the daily, it counted as one article.
- 3 I tried other expressions too ("he doesn't tell the truth" or "we were fooled" for example) but the number of articles in which these expressions were found was only 68 and 23 in the period from April 26th, 2006 until December 31st, 2006.
- 4 The growth rate of the total number of articles, which appeared in the papers after the beginning of online journalism, and which occurred a few months after the beginning of our investigation, remained the same in the analyzed period, so it did not influence the interpretation of results.

follow a visibly similar pattern of temporal dynamics than an examination of the obvious quantitative differences.

GROWTH AND PATTERNS

In order to investigate and interpret the pattern followed by diagrams of Figures 1 and 2 we interrupt the analysis of the topic of ‘lying’ or ‘lies’. In this chapter we present a typology of media dynamics based on our previous results of investigating the same dailies and certain analytical procedures, which arise from the literature about the diffusion of innovations.⁵

Evergreens

The most outstanding feature seen in Figures 1 and 2 is a linear graph spanning several years from mid-2001 to the fall of 2006, following a break marking the start of online journalism. This suggests that during this period the number of new articles on a specific subject was always the same within a given time frame. That is to say, this type of dynamics is not related to some concrete current event, and in this respect the said topic may be considered as timeless. For this reason, henceforth I shall call these “evergreens”. My earlier investigations (Fokas 2006) show that the “Trianon”⁶ question, the sphere of “privatization”,⁷ or the metaphor of social-economic “reform” may be regarded as such evergreen topics in Hungarian public discourse⁸ (see *Figures 3 and 4*).

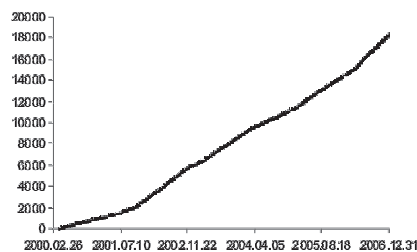


Figure 3. Magyar Nemzet,
Cumulative Number of “Reform”
Articles

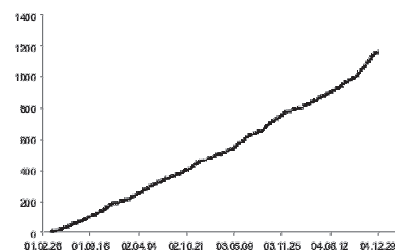


Figure 4. Népszabadság,
Cumulative Number of “Privatization”
Articles

- 5 In this publication I made clear the theoretical and practical relevance of this topic.
- 6 After the First World War, the peace treaty ruling the partitioning of historical Hungary was signed in Trianon near Paris. For Hungarians this decision was tantamount to a national catastrophe.
- 7 In Hungary, the transition from planned economy based on state ownership to market economy based on private ownership took place in the course of the nineties. The question of privatization, often burdened with the suspicion of corruption, remains to date one of the most important domestic political questions.
- 8 The article was always selected when related words were found.

Sensations

A different publication activity characterizes subject matters related to some topical event or based on a sensation. Two simple examples serve to illustrate that basically two kinds of dynamics characterize these cases. The first is the broker scandal, specifically, the embezzlement of billions (HUF), that broke in the summer of 2003 and was not devoid of political implications (see *Figure 5*). The other is the so-called *Tilos Rádió* (Forbidden Radio) case, which broke on 24 December 2003, that is, on Christmas Eve, when one of the station's – allegedly inebriated – announcers said literally, “I would exterminate all Christians”. The statement sparked a huge outcry and drew media reaction (*Figure 6*).

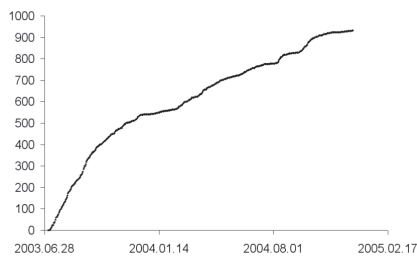


Figure 5. Magyar Nemzet,
Cumulative Number of Articles related
to the Broker Scandal



Figure 6. Népszabadság,
Cumulative Number of Articles related
to the Tilos Rádió Case

In spite of the obvious differences in the two figures, they have in common the process toward a kind of saturation point in both cases. While in one case we are dealing with a growth process that starts suddenly without any prior indication then gradually ebbs, in the other the process starts relatively slowly and resembles an S curve. The reason for the difference is that in the first case, an exogenous factor, that is, the sensation itself, predominates article production, while in the second, the “one-article-leads-to-another” type of endogenous article production process also starts almost immediately (Fokas 2006). As will be seen, similar dynamics can be observed in a number of other cases as well.⁹

And the Rest

A somewhat different type of dynamics appears in the case of the *informer law*¹⁰ (*Figure 7*). We can see the curve repeatedly enter a rapid growth phase only to level off.

⁹ In the course of the analysis I have relied on the empirical database prepared under the auspices of the Hungarian Scientific Research Fund (OTKA), within project no. TO43655.

¹⁰ This topic includes articles that deal with the network of informers of the former communist system, exposing of informers, and the legal and political settlement of the question.

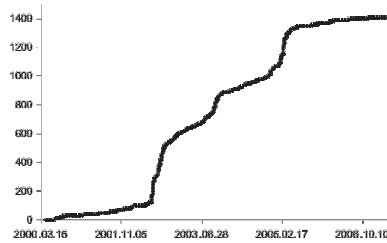


Figure 7. *Magyar Nemzet*. Cumulative Number of Articles related to the Informer Law

Experience shows that this topic is introduced by political public figures with well-defined regularity in order to impose their own political agenda, and monopolize public discourse.

The *dual citizenship* topic, which indisputably dominated public discourse on domestic politics in Hungary at the end of 2004, represents a special combined case. Initiated by the World Federation of Hungarians, a referendum was held on 5 December 2004 on whether Hungary should grant citizenship to members of Hungarian ethnic minorities living in the neighboring countries even if they do not resettle in Hungary. Analysis of the change over time in the number of related articles shows that we are dealing with a public topic representing special dynamics that has been present for many years.

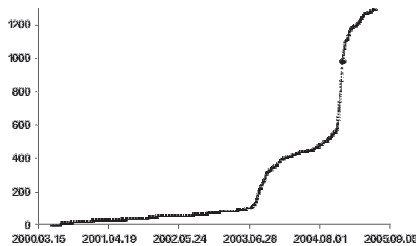


Figure 8. *Magyar Nemzet*, Cumulative Number of Articles related to Dual Citizenship, 24.05.2000–09.06.2005

Figure 8 clearly shows the characteristic linear phase of evergreen topics extending, this time, from May 2000 to the summer of 2003, and its low rise, which, at the same time, also attests to small media interest in the topic. Following this a new phase starts in the summer of 2003. Vojvodina Hungarians – fearing that the implementation of the Schengen agreement and introduction of the obligatory visa system would cut them off from the mother country – officially raised the question of being granted dual citizenship. Their initiative launched a rapid growth in the number of articles written on the subject, reaching the saturation point by the beginning of 2004. Information that the World Federation of Hungarians managed to collect more than the necessary 300,000 signatures in support of a referendum on the question

launched another slow growth phase in the summer of 2004. This new phase changed into an abrupt rise in the number of articles on 28 October 2004, when the president of the republic set 5 December as the date for the referendum. The momentum of growth remained even after the referendum, approaching the saturation point only by the summer of 2005.

Growth Functions

Obviously the spread of articles relate to the diffusion of innovations. In a previous article we gave an account of the most basic types of growth functions, and inspected the literature of diffusion of technological innovations (Fokas 2007). Here we only present the applications of the most basic technical tools.

I think that, ideal typically, we may suppose two kinds of “article-production” mechanisms behind the growth processes mentioned in Subchapters *Sensations and And the Rest*. The first contains the so-called sensation-based articles. In this case, a one-time event, which is exogenous in relation to the media, sets off a shock-wave-like growth in the number of articles, starting with a steep rise in accordance with the topicality of the event, which, sooner or later, peters out. It is this process that the Mitscherlich function reflects which may be interpreted as the model of information-transmission processes from a single origin. However, there obviously exists an endogenous, “one-article-leads-to-another” type of mechanism as well, which is most suitably represented by a logistics function forming a regular S curve describing interpersonal information-transmission processes. (On growth function types, see Geroski, 2000, Tsoularis and Wallas 2000, among others.)

Among our diagrams certain stages of the “broker scandal” or the “informer issue” even at first sight remind us of the Mitscherlich function, while the rest call to mind the logistics function. Actually, the two mechanisms are clearly both present simultaneously in the growth process. For instance, the “one-article-leads-to-another” mechanism of logistic growth can start only if articles have already been published. Therefore, the mechanism represented by the Mitscherlich function is indispensable as the “launch stage” of publication activity. On the other hand, we think it wholly unlikely that this exogenously started mechanism alone could explain even one week’s publication activity of a daily. It seems certain that the first articles prompted by a *sensation* will influence the number of subsequently published articles after only a few days. For this reason, I think that in the long run, and a period over one week is long in this case, the mechanism represented by logistic mapping is the more fundamental. Therefore, in the following we seek to become familiar with its possible applications.

We have already studied the problem of interpolating the logistic function in an earlier investigation when analyzing the media scandal concerning the Tilos Rádió (Fokas and Fokas 2006). We soon found that all articles related to the Tilos Rádió affair could be classified into three distinct groups. The first included articles that dealt directly with the radio broadcasts and public reaction. We called this category the Tilos case. On 11 January 2004, a demonstration was held at Tilos Rádió headquarters, at the close of which a small group burned an Israeli flag. The ensuing publication wave is

known as the “burning of the flag” category. At the demonstration, a leading member of the Writers’ Association delivered a speech that many deemed anti-Semitic. The articles dealing with the speech and the ensuing successive resignations from the Association are grouped under the heading, “Writers’ Association” (Figure 9).

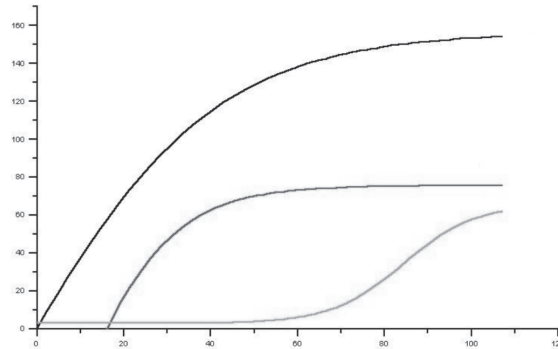


Figure 9. *Magyar Nemzet*, Logistic Fit to Cumulative Number of Articles related to “Tilos Case”, “Burning of the Flag” and „Writers’ Association” (from above)

The figure shows that the characteristic S curve of a logistic function can be observed only in the case of the articles related to the Writers’ Association. Following the procedure also applied by others for interpolating the logistic function (see Marchetti 1997, 2002; Konstandopoulos and Modis 2003), we decided in the case of the “Tilos” affair and the “burning of the flag” issue to interpolate logistic curves that depict the leaked information as part of a process that, in some sense, started considerably earlier (Figures 10 and 11).

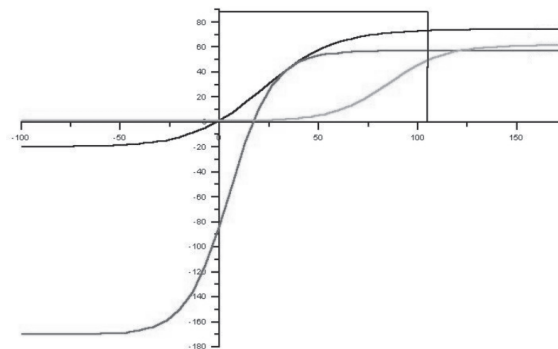


Figure 10. *Népszabadság*, Logistic Reconstruction related to “Tilos Case”, “Burning of the Flag” and „Writers’ Association” (from above)

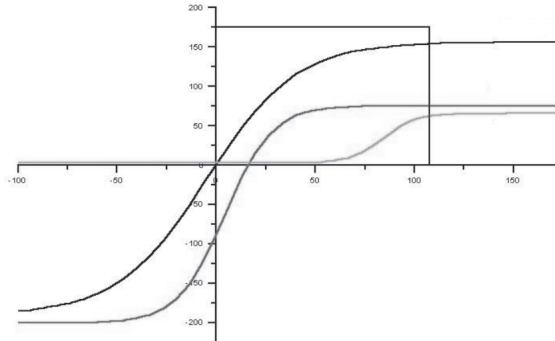


Figure 11. *Magyar Nemzet*, Logistic Reconstruction related to “Tilos Case”, “Burning of the Flag” and „Writers’ Association” (from above)

In the case of *Népszabadság*, for example, the Tilos affair proved to be part of a process that started more than fifty days before the first article was published. Of course, it would be a paradox to state that the Tilos Rádió affair already began before the statement in question was broadcast on the Tilos Rádió. We think that the finding shows not this but the degree of vehemence of media reaction, the extent of “watchfulness”. In the case of *Magyar Nemzet*, the vehemence of reaction and the degree of alert are far greater, since its publication activity in connection with the Tilos affair is best represented by a process that started more than a hundred days earlier.

Backtracking the logistic function is acceptable only if we can find those earlier-starting processes that subsequently culminated in the media scandal related to the Tilos Rádió. For this reason we extended the collection of data to the one hundred-day period immediately preceding the scandal. As yet, in this respect we have partial results concerning only *Magyar Nemzet*. At the moment, we think that in *Magyar Nemzet’s* case the media presentation of the scandal is, in fact, somehow rooted in the new tendencies of the preceding few months. We have looked for public topics closely related to the Tilos Rádió scandal. The most typical topics could be defined by the terms ‘hate speech’, ‘incitement’, ‘abuse of religion’, or ‘anti-Christianity’. We have found that September 2003 marks the beginning of a new phase in their treatment. At this time *Magyar Nemzet* began to focus more on Tilos Rádió, and publication activity concerning hate speech also increased in connection with a bill submitted in September 2003. It is noteworthy that if we combine the articles on hate speech with the articles on the Tilos Rádió scandal published in the period January 2003–December 2004, we get a diagram, which resembles the S curve of logistic growth more than the previous ones.

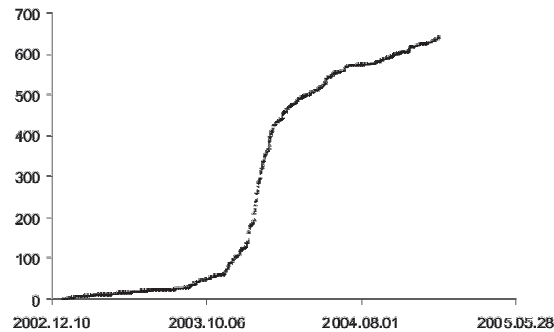


Figure 12. Cumulative Number of Articles related both the „Hate Speech” and the “Tilos Rádió” Affair

The above problem of interpolation of the logistic function may be considered as part of an even more general problem. In the case of media reactions to news of some current event or based on a sensation, we often find asymmetrical S curves, where the initial brief and steeply rising phase is followed by a closing phase gradually reaching the saturation point over a longer span of time. A symmetrical logistic diagram cannot be successfully interpolated to this curve type.

The method applied in Tilos Rádió’s case is only one of the possible ways of resolving the problem. We should not consider this to be the requisite method in the case of asymmetrical S curves. If it were, we would have to explore the antecedents, which is not always possible. Another standard method of function interpolation to asymmetrical S curves is the combination of several (logistic or other) growth functions. For example, in the case of the “benefits law,”¹¹ we have worked out the bi-logistic interpolation seen in Figures 13 and 14 after lengthy efforts.

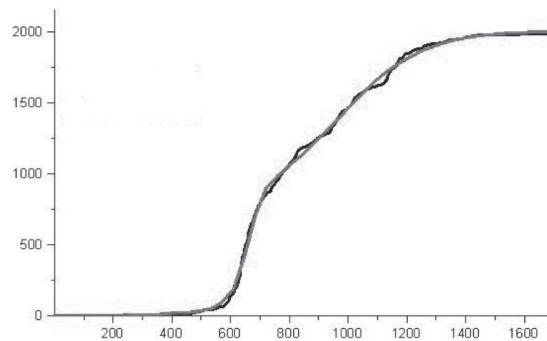


Figure 13. Magyar Nemzet, Cumulative Number of Articles related to “Benefits Law”, and Bi-logistic Fit

11 The benefits law adopted in summer 2001 granted special privileges to ethnic Hungarians living beyond the Hungarian border.

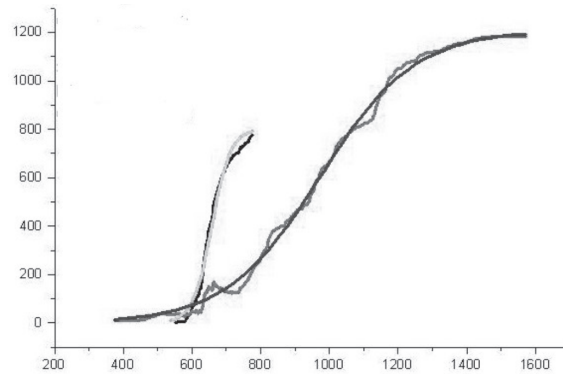


Figure 14. Magyar Nemzet, Cumulative Number of Articles related to “Benefits Law”, and Components of Bi-logistic Fit

We accept these results as final, and not only because of the satisfactory interpolation. Being familiar with publication practice, the assumption seems well founded that every new event gives rise to *hic et nunc* type articles directly related to the event, and, obviously, there are others, which try to fit the given issue into a broader context. It seems logical that the change in the number of the different kinds of articles will, by necessity, follow two logistic functions of different dynamics. Reasonably, articles belonging to the first type follow an extremely rapid logistic growth as indicated by the graph on the left in Figure 14, while the dynamics of analytical articles may be represented by the graph on the right, showing a longer, more leisurely growth.

‘LYING’ AS A SENSATION AND ITS ANTECEDENTS

Having reviewed the possible typology of media dynamics and certain analytical procedures, let us now return to the original problem of the study, namely, the dynamic analysis of the topic of ‘lying’ or ‘lies’. My main proposition is that from an evergreen ‘lying’ turned into a sensation-based topic in the fall of 2006, and the prime minister’s leaked speech was this sensation.

In order to show the metamorphosis in the dynamic status of the topic in the fall of 2006, we must narrow down the seven-year interval covered in *Figures 1 and 2*. We note that henceforth we shall study only news that have some bearing on the political lie. Since 2006 was an election year in Hungary, we narrowed down the examined interval to the period between the April elections and the end of the year, hoping to discover new details (*Figures 15 and 16*).

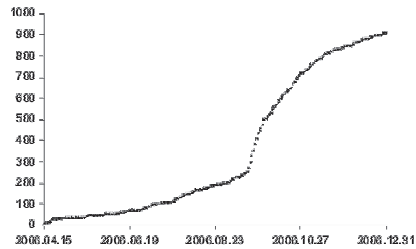


Figure 15. Magyar Nemzet, Cumulative Number of Articles related to “Lies”, 15.04.2006–31.12.2006

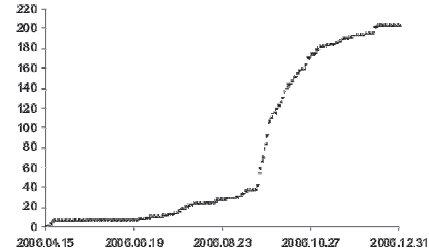


Figure 16. Népszabadság, Cumulative Number of Articles related to “Lies”, 15.04.2006–31.12.2006

In both cases the shift from evergreen to sensation can be clearly seen. Although the steepness of the graphs and the number of articles differ in the two figures, the growth curves show remarkable similarity insofar as a more or less linear graph suddenly gives way to a curve strongly resembling the “broker scandal”.

The intensity of media reaction to a sensation can be most easily measured by the number of related articles published daily within the following two weeks. Figures 17 and 18 clearly show that the coming to light of the prime minister’s speech created a very special situation in this respect too. The intensity of media reaction in this case far exceeds that of the reaction to the Tilos Rádió affair sparked by the statement, “I would exterminate all Christians”, and rivals media activity at the finish of the campaign in favor of the referendum on dual citizenship,¹² even though this was considered as the emotionally most strained period of the past few years.

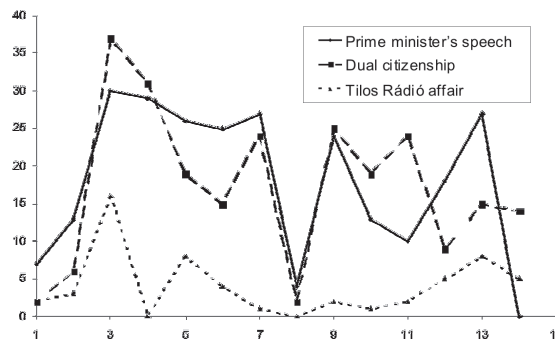


Figure 17. Magyar Nemzet, Number of Articles published daily in the case of a Few Sensations

12 Naturally, we had to go back in time, since media coverage in this case preceded the referendum.

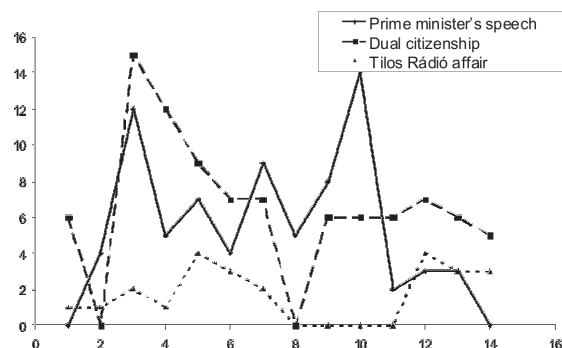


Figure 18. *Népszabadság*, Number of Articles published daily in the case of a Few Sensations

‘LYING’ AND KINDRED TOPICS

Internal Ties

Naturally, the articles on “lying” deal not only with lies, allowing the exploration of related kindred topics.

The topics of gas and electricity costs, budget deficit, convergence program, the fluctuating exchange rate of the Hungarian currency, access to cohesion funds, the new equilibrium program, budgetary adjustment, and living standard crisis are all grouped under the term ‘reform’. The topics of non-fulfillment of “election promises” was covered mostly under the terms of doublespeak and media politics. The word ‘lie’ appears in an incredible wealth of linguistic variations such as lie factory, lie crisis, lie community, lie construction, lie system, lie spiral. Another kindred area is covered by phrases such as “Kossuth Square,” violence, or, in short, “riot”,¹³ and yet another by constitutional order, technocrat government, “illegitimate” administration. Since municipal elections were held on 1 October, the phrase “municipal election” represented a separate topic, and, by reason of the 50th anniversary of the 1956 revolution, “1956” represented another.

In view of the above, in *Népszabadság*’s case I tried to break down the “lies” topic into its components with the help of subcategories denoted by the terms “campaign (election) lies”, “reform”, “illegitimacy”, “police”,¹⁴ “1956”, “municipal elections”, “demonstration”, and “referendum”.¹⁵ In *Magyar Nemzet*’s case, I also added the “media and intellectuals” and the “Gyurcsány” categories. Figures 19 and 20 contain the results of this breakdown for the period between 17 September and 31 December 2006, following the leaking of the prime minister’s speech.

13 These were all connected with anti-government activity in the street.

14 The roles played by police in restoring public order during the anti-government riots.

15 A referendum related to dual citizenship was held on December 5th, 2004 on whether Hungary should grant citizenship to members of Hungarian ethnic minorities living in the neighboring countries even if they do not resettle in Hungary.

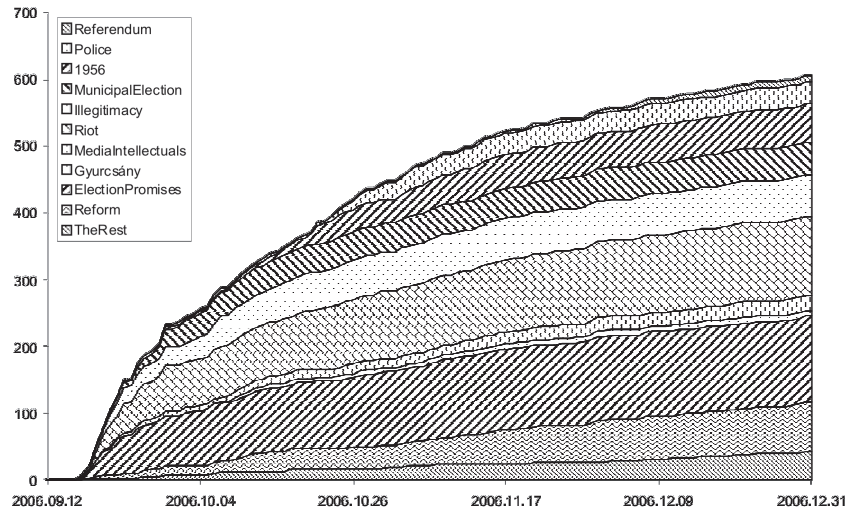


Figure 19. Resolution of “Lies” in Magyar Nemzet’s Case, 17.09.2006–31.12.2006

During the examined period, the most important kindred topics within the “lies” category, in terms of the number of printed articles in Magyar Nemzet, are “campaign lies” and “demonstration”, mentioned 130 and 119 times, respectively. These are followed by the group containing the topics of “reform”, “illegitimacy”, “1956”, and “municipal elections”, meriting 74, 62, 57, and 49 articles, respectively. “Police” and “media and intellectuals” form a separate group with 33 and 22 mentions. The “referendum” and “Gyurcsány” categories with close to, but no more than, ten articles lag behind.

Of course, it is not enough to give a merely static description of the role of related topics based on their share of articles. Their contribution to the dynamics of media reaction elicited by the sensation in question is at least as important. In this respect, the “campaign lies” and “demonstration” topics showing a sudden surge in volume plays a decisive part, but the “illegitimacy” topic has been present from the beginning as well. The “media and intellectuals” topic, carrying less weight, appears very early, and so does “reform”, which subsequently gains significance. It is very remarkable that a distinct second wave of growth in the number of articles started on 23 October, obviously prompted by a second sensation, the clash between demonstrators and police. The paper’s publication activity was embodied primarily in the sudden quantitative jump of articles on the “1956” and “police” topics.

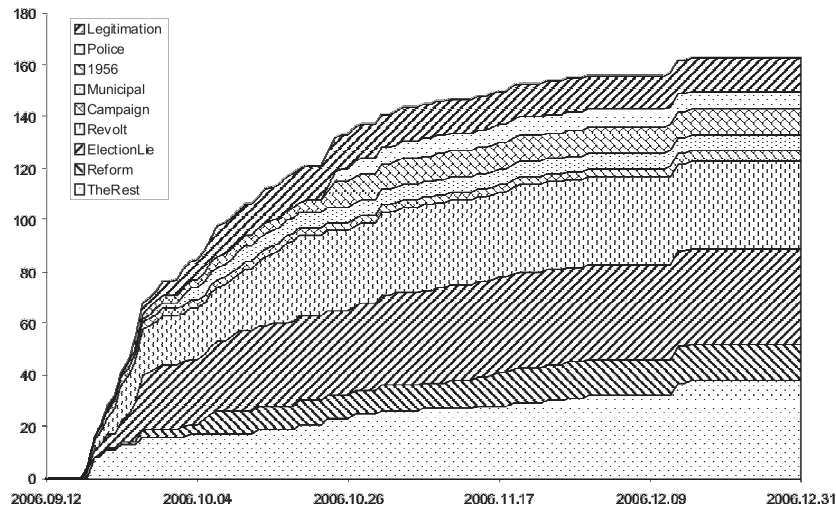


Figure 20. Resolution of the “Lies” in *Népszabadság*'s Case, 17.09.2006–31.12.2006

As regards *Népszabadság*, most articles (38) discuss political lies only in the abstract. This is closely followed by “campaign lies”(37) and “demonstration” (34), which, in terms of the number of mentions, represents more than twice the weight of the “reform” and “illegitimacy” categories producing 14 and 13 articles, respectively. “1956” with ten mentions stands alone. From the point of view of importance, the topics of “police”, “municipal elections”, and “campaign”, with 7, 6, and 4 mentions, respectively, may be grouped together.

As regards the dynamics of media reaction, the sudden growth in the number of articles is due, in this case too, mainly to the “campaign lies” and “demonstration” topics. The “campaign” topic is also present since the beginning, but its role is insignificant. The topics of “reform”, “municipal elections”, “illegitimacy”, and “1956” appear after a slight delay. Another wave of growth can be seen after 6 October in the case of “illegitimacy” and after 23 October in that of “1956”. The latter appears more distinct in the change of aggregate numbers, because its effect is strengthened by the nascent “police” topic.

So far, we performed the resolution of the “lies” topic only for the period after 17 September 2006, enabling us to measure the impact that a sensation, which boosts publication activity, exerts on the “lies” topic and its components. In order to find out in what respect a sensation represents the beginning of a new phase, we performed the resolution for several preceding periods, including the period beginning in September 2005 and closing with the coming to light of the prime minister’s speech.

Prior to the leaked speech the main brunt of *Magyar Nemzet*'s (Figure 21) effort to concentrate fire on the prime minister consisted of an almost exclusively ad hominem phraseology. The “Gyurcsány” category, representing an expressly personal attack, predominates over almost every other topic, and its counterpart, the “Orbán” topic, though given less significance, is similarly recognizably and persistently present.

“1956” proved to be a stable topic which is present since the beginning, while the “reform” category is present since the start of the campaign and growing stronger with time. The “campaign” topic has less weight than “reform”, but is similar in nature. About quarter way through the period in question, we witness the emergence of the “government is lying” and the “media and intellectuals” categories. Almost a month before the elections the “campaign lies” topic is introduced, which is to play a dominant role subsequently, and practically a day after the elections the short-lived “election cheating” topos emerges. Among the topics that gain significance later, “demonstration” and “municipal elections” first appear as a trickle during the summer.

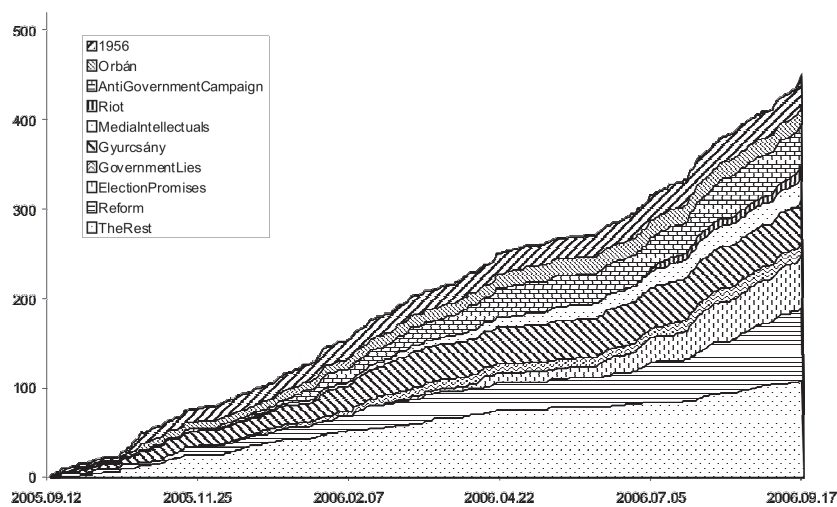


Figure 21. Resolution of “Lies” in the Case of *Magyar Nemzet*, 14.09.2005–17.09.2006

The structuring of topics of the year beginning with September 2005 is even easier to survey in *Népszabadság*. The individual topics follow one another like a flight of stairs. “Reform” appears very early already in December 2005, followed by “campaign lies” in March 2006. “Demonstration” introduced in June remains a trickle, while “campaign” suddenly appearing a little later at the end of July quickly gains momentum. The appearance of the topic of “municipal election” in September is barely noticeable in the diagram.

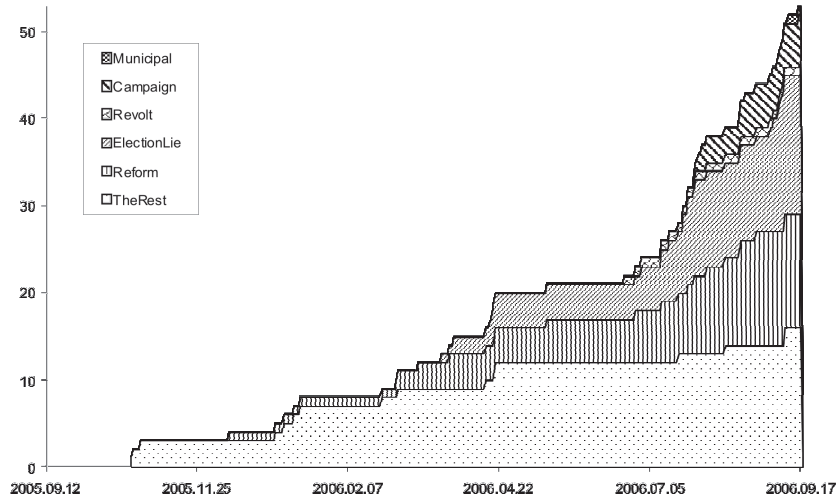


Figure 22. Resolution of "Lies" in the Case of *Népszabadság*, 14.09.2005–17.09.2006

External Ties

In the above chapter I have dealt with the question of the extent and the kind of role that the various kindred topics play within the related "lies" category. It is now time to examine these topics in themselves. For the sake of simplicity I shall again limit my analysis to the period following the leaking of the prime minister's speech.

I have found that basically two types of topics are worth distinguishing. The first owes its existence essentially to the leaked speech. This is exemplified by "illegitimacy" referring to the government's weakened status (*Figure 23*) and "police" referring to police brutality (*Figure 24*), and their form resembles the dynamics of sensation-based topics. Moreover, the latter shows two distinct surges of sensation-based dynamics, which are obviously closely related to the siege of Hungarian TV headquarters¹⁶ and the street battles on 23 October. It also indicates their close connection with the "lies" topic that the number of times they are mentioned together with lying is about one-third of their separate treatment in *Népszabadság* and as much as fifty percent in *Magyar Nemzet*.

16 A day after the speech was leaked a group of demonstrators attacked and for a short time occupied the headquarters of the state owned television company.

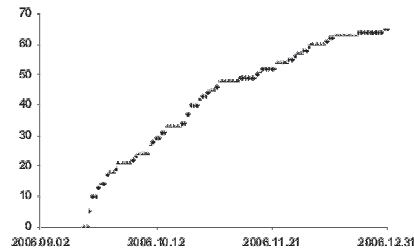


Figure 23. *Magyar Nemzet*,
“Illegitimacy”, 17.09.2006–31.12.2006

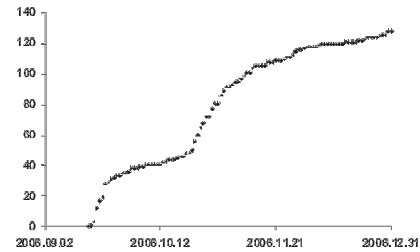


Figure 24. *Magyar Nemzet*,
“Police”, 17.09.2006–31.12.2006

The “Gyurcsány package” in *Magyar Nemzet* and “demonstration” in *Népszabadság* may also be considered as characteristic offshoots of the post-speech period, that is, as sensation-based topics. But they represent a different subcategory from the “illegitimacy” and “police” topics insofar as only a negligible number of articles (28 and 26, respectively) of the total of 146 and 254, respectively, mention them together with the “lies” metaphor.

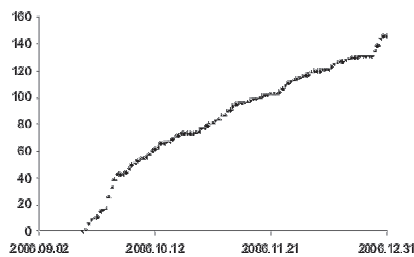


Figure 25. *Magyar Nemzet*,
“Gyurcsány Package”, 17.09.2006–31.12.2006

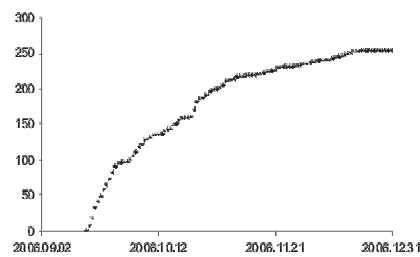


Figure 26. *Népszabadság*,
“Demonstration”, 17.09.2006–31.12.2006

Finally, “1956” represents yet another type of topic. The leaked speech clearly had a certain impact on media activity concerning this topic. Nevertheless, strictly speaking, in this case we are dealing with a topical rather than a sensation-based subject. According to my hypothesis, the fact that the quantitative change over time forms a more or less regular S curve is an expression of this. (Figures 27 and 28) It also indicates the separate independent existence of the topic that it appears together with the “lies” category in only a negligible fraction of the cases.

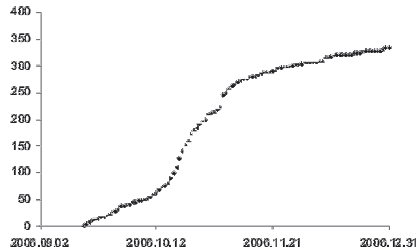


Figure 27. *Magyar Nemzet*,
“1956”, 17.09.2006–31.12.2006

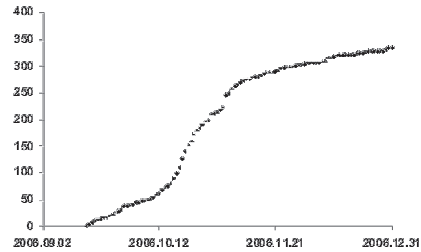


Figure 28. *Népszabadság*,
“1956”, 17.09.2006–31.12.2006

EPILOGUE

In the present study I have discussed in detail, from the point of view of “article production” in specific dailies, how and when the “lies” topic changed from an “evergreen” into a “sensation-based” topic. Of course, the question remains whether such change of status in public discourse, beyond the publication activity of the papers, is an indicator of anything in Hungarian domestic political life. Let me formulate a few preliminary working hypotheses in this field.

Since evergreens are always present to the same extent in the media, they are part of everyday public life. Consequently, this type of topic is associated mostly with the sense of familiarity. This is well illustrated by the topic of “privatization”, which, from the point of view of publication activity, proved to be a real – as well as an often mentioned – evergreen between 2000 and 2004, considering that six thousand articles were written on it in *Magyar Nemzet* during this relatively brief period. For years it was much talked about, yet we cannot say that – not counting the transient period of the referendum on hospital privatization – a movement was organized around this subject of public discourse. As a topic appealing to public sentiment it was soon struck from the agenda. In sharp contrast, the anniversary of the referendum on dual citizenship, which was held at the same time, has become an occasion for its regular commemoration in certain right-wing circles. Note that it is the question of “dual citizenship” and not the similarly evergreen “Trianon” issue that provides this occasion. The latter may keep alive certain nostalgia, sustain negative sentiments concerning the injustice suffered by the nation, but something more, some other topical issue or even sensation is necessary to mobilize the political camps. This role was fulfilled first by the “benefits law”, then, even more so, by the question of “dual citizenship”, which stirred really strong public sentiments at the time of the referendum.

As regards the question of “lies”, there are few more routine matters in Hungarian domestic political life than the reciprocal branding of one another as liars by the opponent parties. In the papers duly reporting on this by now prevalent mud slinging, this topic is, by necessity, constantly present, making it another “evergreen”. But it leaves the public bored. For years, Hungarian constituents have accepted all this with a shrug.

“The measures the SZDSZ–MSZP (Liberal–Socialist coalition) government has put before us are contrary to what these parties promised the Hungarian people during the election campaign. By now it has become obvious that MSZP and SZDSZ deceived the voters, they took Hungary’s helm spuriously, using deception, duplicity,” opposition leader Viktor Orbán said, not in 2006, but on 12 April 1995 during the parliamentary debate of the restrictive measures of that time. No movement was organized. On 12 April 2006, exactly eleven years later, between the two election rounds, the president of Fidesz declared in the program called “Background” on state Radio that “the socialists built their whole campaign on lies... The Socialist Party deceived the whole country including left-wing voters... we’re in debt, not up to our necks, but up to the top of our heads”. The text was the same as in 1995, and its fate was to be the same. The fact that events took a different course required many other things.

First, it required the leaking of the prime minister’s speech. But in my view the bewilderment caused by the raw nature of the speech would not have been enough if it was not linked almost immediately with the shock caused by the siege of state television. My media analysis also shows that these two events were decisive in bringing public sentiment to the boiling point. In addition, two cyclical elements also helped prolong this incandescent public state. Municipal elections – the campaign, the results and their consequences – and the anniversary of the 1956 revolution – decisively the street battles on 23 October – further exacerbated the situation given the highly charged emotional state of the public at large.

The communal feeling born out of the “memory of joint battles” is one of the most efficient modern tools for maintaining political division. This struggle, which in the 20th century sometimes meant actual civil strife, has by now become in Europe a mostly civilized contention, competition for votes. As I see it, what took place in the fall of 2006 was more than political (election) strife and less than civil war, which may leave an imprint not just in media reflection. I am convinced that the event sequence, which appears in the media as the inflation of “lies” into a sensation, did not leave the big political camps unaffected, and has already contributed considerably to the deepening of the division between them.

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