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April 3, 2022

A functional discourse analysis of German media portrayals of virologist Dr. Christian Drosten  
during the COVID-19 pandemic

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## Abstract

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By Kristin Wadsworth

In Germany, as in most countries around the world, the politicization of the government's attempts to respond effectively to the ever-changing COVID-19 pandemic has polarized the general public and complicated mitigation efforts. One key and often controversial figure during this time has been Dr. Christian Drosten, a renowned German virologist and Director of Virology at the Berliner Charité. Due to his expertise on novel viruses like SARS-CoV and MERS-CoV, Dr. Drosten has played a key role in advising politicians and policymakers and in reporting on pandemic-related current events. In an attempt to better understand Germany's perception of the pandemic, the present study explores the portrayal and representation of Dr. Drosten in German media across four key events of the COVID-19 pandemic. Data were collected for the four events from reports by six German newspapers with readerships ranging from the far right on the German political spectrum to the political left. In addition to the newspaper texts, transcripts of corresponding episodes of *Das Coronavirus-Update* NDR podcast, on which Dr. Drosten is a recurring guest, were included to produce a total corpus of 28 texts. To analyze and distinguish the different media portrayals of Dr. Drosten, a functional discourse analysis drawing on systemic functional linguistics and its fine-grained attention to the function of language in the creation of meaning was employed. This methodology also accentuates how the three fundamental meanings achieved by structured language - ideational, interpersonal, and textual meanings – are realized linguistically. Specifically, data analysis of the grammatical mechanisms for realizing these meanings (i.e., transitivity, mood, theme) reveals a polarization of representations of Dr. Drosten by political ideology, with unfavorable depictions from right-wing publications and more favorable portrayals from left-of-center and left-wing publications.

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## I. Introduction and Background

In December of 2019, the novel virus SARS-CoV-2 was first identified in Wuhan, China. Due to its high transmissibility, this pathogen quickly spread throughout the world, and on March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared it the cause of a global pandemic. Named after the acute respiratory disease associated with SARS-CoV-2, the COVID-19 pandemic has affected nearly every country, resulting in over 402 million cases and over 5.7 million deaths worldwide as of February 10, 2022 (*WHO Coronavirus (COVID-19) Dashboard*, 2022).

The novelty of SARS-CoV-2 and the emergence of variants of the original virus, among other things, have resulted in numerous challenges for government officials, scientists, healthcare providers, and ordinary people. After an initial period of research and investigation of the best ways to curb the spread of the virus, many scientists urged the reduction of unnecessary social contacts and, upon the release of vaccines roughly one year after the start of the pandemic in early 2021, encouraged the public to vaccinate against COVID-19. Responding to and guided by the latest science-based evidence on how to curb the spread of the virus, government entities worldwide instituted preventative policies like curfews, mask mandates, and quarantine and lockdown measures. These institutional actions, while accepted and welcomed by many, have sparked controversy (specifically among a vocal minority who believe pandemic regulations infringe upon basic rights) and, in some cases, the politicization of efforts against the pandemic.

In Germany, as in most countries around the world, this politicization of the government's attempts to respond effectively to the ever-changing COVID-19 pandemic has polarized the general public and complicated mitigation efforts. Compounding the political

response to the pandemic were the federal elections to the *Bundestag* (German Parliament) in September of 2021 and the retirement of long-time Chancellor Angela Merkel. Facing an upcoming election, politicians grappled with the political consequences of supporting or opposing COVID-19 measures. Protest responses to the pandemic often connected conspiracy theorists from the German “*Querdenker*” (Lateral Thinkers) movement,<sup>1</sup> anti-vaxxers, members of the right-wing populist political party *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD, Alternatives for Germany), and far-right extremists. As the pandemic dragged on into its second year and restrictive measures remained in place, the protest movement gained momentum and began to even include more mainstream participants, such as those behind the “*#allesdichtmachen*” (Close Everything Down) project in the spring of 2021, in which well-known German actors satirized COVID-19 lockdown measures. While such satire drew criticism for inadvertently encouraging pandemic deniers, it led to a broader public discussion of freedom of speech in the world of COVID-19.

One key and often controversial figure during this time has been Dr. Christian Drosten, a renowned German virologist and Director of the Institute of Virology at the main medical research hospital in the capital city of Berlin, the Berliner Charité. Due to his expertise on novel viruses like SARS-CoV and MERS-CoV, Dr. Drosten has played an important role in advising politicians and policymakers and in reporting on pandemic-related current events as an expert. In an effort to keep the public informed on the science of the pandemic, Dr. Drosten collaborated with the state-run radio and television broadcaster Norddeutscher Rundfunk (NDR) to launch the weekly *Das Coronavirus-Update von NDR Info* (*The Coronavirus Update from NDR Info*)

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<sup>1</sup> Founded in 2020, the “Querdenker” (Lateral Thinkers) movement consists of conspiracy theorists, anti-lockdown protestors, and anti-vaxxers who believe that the German government’s pandemic mitigation efforts deprive citizens of basic rights (Fürstenau, 2021). In April of 2021, the movement was placed under surveillance by the German Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz, BfV) for its delegitimization of the German state and its often extremist, anti-Semitic, and conspiracy-promoting platform (“Germany puts anti-lockdown Querdenker group under observation,” 2021).

podcast in February of 2020. The podcast quickly became one of the more popular podcasts in Germany, achieving the position of number one program on Apple podcasts after only two episodes, and in June of 2020, it won 2 Grimme Online Awards for online journalism (Schmitz, 2020). The podcast continues to this day, and Dr. Drosten remains a recurring guest on the program. Furthermore, in October of 2020 Dr. Drosten received the *Bundesverdienstkreuz* (Federal Cross of Merit), the highest federal decoration of citizens in Germany, for his work and contributions during the COVID-19 pandemic. Nevertheless, throughout his development from a relatively unknown virologist to a public figure and household name, Dr. Drosten himself has not been immune to the political controversies surrounding federal and local responses to the pandemic and has drawn criticism and even death threats along with praise and media attention.

In an attempt to better understand Germany's response to the pandemic, the present study explores the portrayal and representation of Dr. Drosten in German media from a longitudinal perspective across four key events of the COVID-19 pandemic: (i) a controversial debate between the widely read populist tabloid *Bild* newspaper and Dr. Drosten in May of 2020, (ii) the fall 2020 COVID-19 wave leading into the winter holidays, (iii) the lockdown of January 2021 coupled with the rollout of vaccines in Germany, and (iv) the spring 2021 wave of COVID-19. By investigating the representation of Dr. Drosten in German media, the present study seeks to reveal how the portrayal of Dr. Drosten differs according to the political leanings of the examined publications; in doing so, this research aims to enhance the understanding of the politicization of the COVID-19 pandemic in Germany and its polarization of public discourse.

In an effort to represent the breadth of the German political spectrum, six German publications ranging from a right-wing populist tabloid to a left-wing, alternative newspaper were selected for study. To analyze and distinguish the different media portrayals of Dr. Drosten,

a functional discourse analysis drawing on systemic functional linguistics and its fine-grained attention to the function of language in the creation of meaning was employed.

### **1.1. Chronology of the COVID-19 Pandemic in Germany**

As of January 22, 2020, a few weeks after the discovery of SARS-CoV-2 in China, the predominant view among officials in the German government was that the risk of this new virus spreading to Germany was low; the expectation remained that SARS-CoV-2 would not be as significant as the SARS-CoV epidemic of 2003. The next day, Dr. Drosten and a team of researchers at the Berliner Charité released a PCR test for detection of COVID-19, which was readily accepted by the WHO. On January 27, 2020, the first confirmed COVID-19 case in Germany was recorded in the state of Bavaria (“Germany’s COVID timeline: from first case to 100,000 dead,” 2021).

As cases gradually began increasing in Germany in the coming weeks, German government officials like Health Minister Jens Spahn from Chancellor Angela Merkel’s Christian Democratic Union (CDU) party began warning the public that the COVID-19 virus would continue to spread through Germany (“Germany’s COVID timeline,” 2021). On February 26, 2020, Dr. Drosten and NDR released *Das Coronavirus-Update von NDR Info* (*The Coronavirus Update from NDR Info*) podcast to accessibly explain the science of the pandemic and research findings related to COVID-19. As mentioned above, the program became an instant success, achieving the position of number one program on Apple podcasts after only two episodes (Schmitz, 2020).

On March 8, 2020, Germany recorded its first COVID-linked death (Bosen & Thureau 2021). Two days later, the virus had officially spread to all sixteen states in Germany

(“Germany’s COVID timeline,” 2021). With the WHO’s announcement of a global pandemic on March 11, 2020, German government officials found themselves turning to scientists like Dr. Drosten for guidance on how to best respond to the pandemic. With his expertise on the MERS-CoV virus from 2012 and as a co-discoverer of the SARS-CoV virus of 2003, Dr. Drosten became a consistent advisor to politicians and lawmakers both within Germany and was even appointed to the European Union (EU)’s COVID-19 advisory panel on March 17, 2020. By the end of March, after coordination between national lawmakers, leaders like Chancellor Merkel, and state governors, Germany instituted its first nationwide lockdown, closing, among other institutions, restaurants, movie theaters, schools, and daycares and limiting international travel; it is worth noting that these measures, while nationally coordinated, were officially instituted at the state level (Bosen & Thureau, 2021). Public sentiment toward these mitigation measures remained initially moderately positive, and countries around the world praised Germany for its efficient response to the COVID-19 pandemic (Bosen & Thureau, 2021). By May 4, 2020, after only seven weeks, the first pandemic lockdown had been lifted in all sixteen German states (Bosen, & Thureau, 2021).

On May 25 of the same year, the populist tabloid and most widely read daily publication in Europe, the *Bild* newspaper, published an article criticizing a preprint paper on COVID-19 viral loads in children by Dr. Drosten and a research team at the Berliner Charité. The paper, originally released on April 29, 2020, as a preprint publication that, consequently, had not yet undergone a formal peer review, garnered criticism from members of the scientific community for its statistical methods. Such critique is typical, as one of the main benefits of sharing research findings in a preprint paper is the opportunity to receive early feedback before the paper is formally reviewed. After picking up on this criticism, the *Bild* newspaper alleged that the study

itself was carelessly unscientifically conducted, misunderstanding the commonplace, scientific critique of preprint papers. The author of the text, Filipp Piatov, pulled quotes from specific scientists' critiques of the paper out of context, failing to even reach out to a number of the cited experts in the piece. Furthermore, Piatov gave Dr. Drosten only one hour to respond to his request for comment. Due to these unjournalistic actions, *der Deutsche Presserat* (German Press Council) issued a reprimand of the *Bild* and Piatov's article, and a flurry of follow-up articles and memorable Twitter responses for Drosten filled German news feeds for the remainder of the week. It should also be noted that this incident was not the first time the *Bild* raised eyebrows for controversial or problematic journalistic strategies. In the spring of 1968, the publication printed a series of anticommunist articles and a smear campaign against student activist and leading figure of the 1968 Student Movement Rudi Dutschke; these articles are credited with inspiring the assassination attempt of Dutschke by a right-wing individual who frequently read the *Bild* newspaper (Meaney, 2020). To name another example, the publication received over 12 reprimands from the *der Deutsche Presserat* (German Press Council) in 2004 alone ("Sex, Smut and Shock: Bild Zeitung Rules Germany," 2006).

By August 3, 2020, Germany recorded 215,891 new cases of COVID-19 within one week, a notable increase of about 5,998 cases compared to the previous week (*WHO Coronavirus (COVID-19) Dashboard*, 2022). For the rest of August, a new wave of protests against pandemic measures swept Germany. During one notable demonstration on August 29, 40,000 protestors gathered in Berlin; a handful of this group attempted to storm the Reichstag, the building that houses the national German Parliament, in some ways presaging the attack on the U.S. Capitol four months later (Bosen & Thurau, 2021). By October of 2020, the second wave of COVID-19 had reached Germany, causing a new daily record of 7,000 daily cases on

October 16 and resulting in over 10,000 total deaths by October 24 (see Figure 1) (“Germany’s COVID timeline,” 2021). By November 2, 2020, the German federal government announced a partial lockdown in response to this new wave, limiting public meetings to a maximum of 10 people and shutting down restaurants and tourism businesses while keeping schools open (Bosen & Thureau, 2021). In early December, Dr. Drosten and a number of other scientists from the *Nationale Wissenschaftsakademie Leopoldina* (National Science Academy Leopoldina) released a joint statement advocating for a “hard lockdown” over the holidays to bring down case numbers. Such a lockdown was officially instituted on December 16.

On December 26, 2020, the first doses of the new mRNA COVID-19 vaccine from Pfizer-BioNTech arrived in Germany, bringing hope that swift vaccination against the virus would facilitate the easing of restrictions (“Germany’s COVID timeline,” 2021). The German government, however, received much criticism for its perceived slow and inefficient rollout of vaccine doses. Subsequently, lockdown measures were extended through the end of January of 2021, then through February 14, then through March 7 of the same year. During this time, Dr. Drosten expressed his expectation of a challenging first few months of 2021 with an optimistic hope of restrictions easing in time for summer.

By early March of 2021, one full year into the pandemic, Germany entered a third wave of COVID-19 cases, prompting the extension of lockdown measures through April 18 and resulting in increased hospitalization of COVID-19 patients (“Germany’s COVID timeline,” 2021). As of March 22, 2021, Germany had recorded 112,885 new COVID-19 cases within the past week, with over 22,000 new cases compared to the previous week (*WHO Coronavirus (COVID-19) Dashboard*, 2022). Amid the rising case numbers and concerns over new

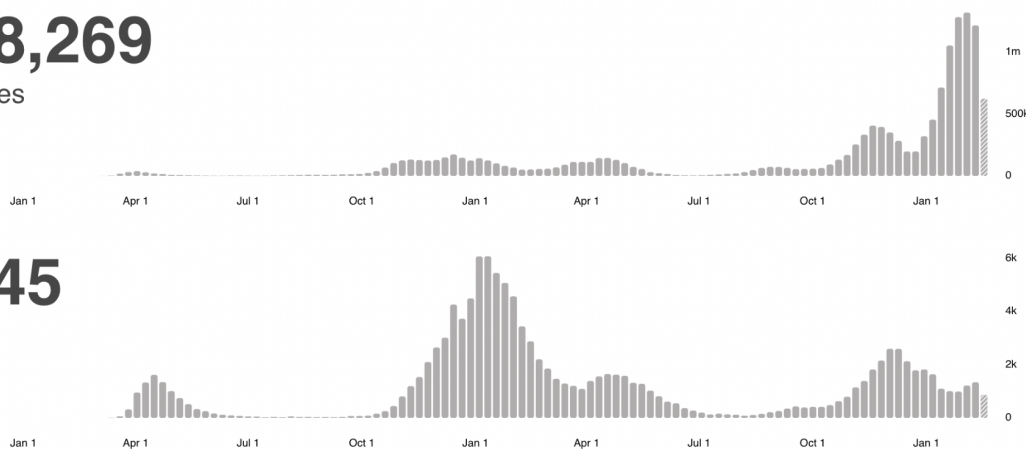
# 14,188,269

confirmed cases

# 122,145

deaths

Source: World Health Organization  
Data may be incomplete for the current day or week.



**Figure 1: Trajectory of the COVID-19 Pandemic in Germany.** Graphs from the WHO depicting the trajectory of the COVID-19 pandemic in Germany from December 30, 2019, through February 14, 2022 (*WHO Coronavirus (COVID-19) Dashboard, 2022*). The top graph displays the number of weekly confirmed cases in Germany and notes the total number of 14,188,269 confirmed COVID-19 cases as of February 14, 2022; the bottom graph displays the number of weekly COVID-19 deaths in Germany and notes the total number of 122,145 deaths as of February 14, 2022 (*WHO Coronavirus (COVID-19) Dashboard, 2022*).

COVID-19 variants from the United Kingdom, India, and Brazil, Dr. Drosten consistently advocated for lockdown measures and for more rapid vaccinations. Around this time, the growing protest movement against pandemic measures gained momentum, leading to the aforementioned satirical “#allesdichtmachen” (Close Everything Down) campaign and an uptick in protests attended by anti-vaxxers, members of the “*Querdenker*” (Lateral Thinkers) movement, and far-right extremists; a new hostility, clashes with police, and a more noticeable wave of anti-Semitism often colored these protests. As of April 18, 2021, over 80,000 people in Germany had died from COVID-19 (Bosen & Thurau, 2021).

By May 3, 2021, the total number of new weekly cases had dropped to 103,507 cases, indicating a 25,897 case decrease compared to the previous week (*WHO Coronavirus (COVID-19) Dashboard, 2022*). Due to falling case numbers, the German Parliament (Bundestag) began to ease pandemic restrictions for the vaccinated and individuals who recently contracted COVID-19; lockdown measures for the unvaccinated, however, remained in place.



On May 14, 2021, approximately 1.35 million doses were administered, marking a record number of single-day vaccinations (“Germany’s COVID timeline,” 2021). With encouragingly low case numbers and more rapid vaccination, many grew optimistic about a return to “normal,” pre-pandemic life.

As the present study began in May of 2021, the events of the pandemic beyond this point were not examined and investigated, although the pandemic continues to affect Germany. By the end of June and early July of 2021, case numbers in Germany began rising due to the so-called Delta variant of COVID-19, and by August 20, 2021, Germany entered the fourth wave of the pandemic, causing record hospitalizations and increases in COVID-19 cases (“Germany enters 4th coronavirus wave,” 2021). By November of 2021, concerns over the new, more contagious Omicron variant of COVID-19 prompted the German government to advocate for COVID-19 booster shots in an effort to mitigate a potential fifth wave of COVID-19 (“German health minister warns of ‘massive’ omicron wave,” 2021). On January 17, 2022, Germany recorded 715,470 new cases within one week, setting a record high of new infections (*WHO Coronavirus (COVID-19) Dashboard*, 2022). As of February 14, 2022, Germany has recorded over 14,188,269 cases and 122,145 deaths since the start of the pandemic (*WHO Coronavirus (COVID-19) Dashboard*, 2022). Over 62 million people in Germany are now fully vaccinated, but vaccination efforts remain ongoing as the pandemic continues to unfold (*WHO Coronavirus (COVID-19) Dashboard*, 2022).

## **1.2. The German Media Landscape**

In order to gain a better understanding of Germany’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the portrayal of Dr. Drosten over the course of this global health crisis, the present

study turns to a media source with a prominent role in shaping German public opinion: newspapers. With approximately 323 daily newspapers, 23 weekly newspapers, and six Sunday newspapers (in addition to countless smaller, local publications), Germany is the world's fifth largest market for newspapers ("Germany - Land of Newspapers," 2019). Even in an age dominated by digital media, German newspapers continue to reach over 75% of the German-speaking population daily, thus demonstrating their ongoing popularity and significant presence in the media landscape of Germany ("Germany - Land of Newspapers," 2019).

Among these hundreds of publications, the periodicals with the most influence are those with interregional or national scope, which uniquely positions them to shape public opinion. Furthermore, many of these important news sources represent different portions of Germany's political spectrum. In the far-right, extremist political region is the magazine *COMPACT*, which is published by *Compact-Magazin GmbH* (*Compact Magazine Ltd.*) and is infamously known for its extremist propaganda, conspiracy theories, and anti-Semitism. Its readership consists primarily of the extreme wings of the far-right *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD, Alternatives for Germany) party.<sup>2</sup> Notably, these more extreme portions of the AfD are currently monitored by Germany's domestic intelligence agency (Goldenberg, 2021). The primary mouthpiece of the AfD, however, is the conservative, right-wing, nationalistic weekly newspaper *Junge Freiheit*. Although it was initially founded as a student-run school newspaper in 1986, the publication quickly found a larger audience and launched as an independent news platform in 1994. Today, it primarily draws its readership from the base of the AfD.

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<sup>2</sup> The *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD, Alternatives for Germany) is a far-right populist political party that was founded in 2013. While the original party platform was primarily focused on criticism of the European Union (EU), the AfD has quickly developed into a nationalistic, xenophobic, and Islamophobic party since the refugee crisis of 2015. In the last two elections to the German Parliament in 2017 and 2021, the AfD won 13% and 11% of votes, respectively.

Representing the conservative, right-wing populist region of Germany's political spectrum is the *Bild*, a daily tabloid newspaper originally founded in 1952 and published by *Axel-Springer Verlag* ("National Newspapers in Germany," 2021). Based in Berlin, the *Bild* circulates approximately 2 million copies every day, making it Germany's most popular newspaper and the most widely read daily publication in all of Europe ("National Newspapers in Germany," 2021). In the style of boulevard journalism, the *Bild's* articles consist largely of gossip and sensationalism, and its typical readership is young to middle-aged men.

In the center and slightly left-of-center of the political spectrum are two well-reputed publications. The first, *Die Zeit*, was founded in 1946 in Hamburg as a weekly newspaper and is published by *die Zeit Verlagsgruppe* (*die Zeit* publishing group) (*die Zeit Verlagsgruppe*, n.d.). Its liberal news coverage is particularly popular in northern Germany and Berlin, and its typical reader is young and educated ("National Newspapers in Germany," 2021). The second publication, founded one year after *Die Zeit* in Hannover, is *Der Spiegel*. This weekly news magazine, published by *Spiegel-Verlag* (*Spiegel* publishing), is known for its investigative journalism and often provocative content and is popular among an educated, middle-aged readership (*Spiegel-Verlag*, n.d.).

Located further to the left on the political spectrum is *die tageszeitung* (or *die taz* for short), a daily, left-wing alternative newspaper based in Berlin since 1979 ("National Newspapers in Germany," 2021). Notably, the newspaper is a cooperative that is produced for and owned by its readership ("Newspapers in Germany," 2012). The publication is known for its politically progressive content and willingness to criticize the broader "system," and it has often

been well-received and read by supporters of Germany's *Bündnis 90/Die Grünen* (Alliance 90/The Greens) political party.<sup>3</sup>

Finally, representing the left-wing, socialist region of Germany's political spectrum is the Berlin-based daily newspaper *Neues Deutschland*, which is published by *Neues Deutschland Druckerei und Verlags GmbH* (*Neues Deutschland* Printing Firm and Publishing Ltd.) (*Neues Deutschland*, n.d.). Notably, the periodical was founded in 1946 and functioned as the primary propaganda platform for the *Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands* (SED, Socialist Unity Party of Germany), the communist party that governed the former German Democratic Republic (GDR or East Germany). While the publication is not as widely read as it was during the days of the GDR, *Neues Deutschland* continues to find a regular audience in eastern Germany.

It should be noted that, despite the hundreds of German publications and periodicals, the present study focuses on the aforementioned publications (with the exception of *COMPACT*, which is only briefly examined) due to (i) their national and interregional influence and circulation (although they are not the only interregional publications in Germany), (ii) their role in shaping public opinion, (iii) their representation of distinctive voices across the political spectrum, and (iv), because of the need to access these publications electronically, their lack of a pay wall.

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<sup>3</sup> The *Bündnis 90/Die Grünen* (Alliance 90/The Greens) is a left-wing political party whose platform primarily focuses on infrastructure development and environmental issues (Goldenberg, 2021). Although the party was officially founded in 1993, it initially grew out of the collective social protest movements of the 1980s (Goldenberg, 2021).

## II. Theoretical Framework

To examine the portrayal of the pandemic and Dr. Drosten in German media, the present study utilizes a discourse analysis drawing on systemic functional linguistics. Systemic functional linguistics (SFL), originally developed by linguist Michael Halliday beginning in the 1950s, is a subset of linguistics focusing on how language creates meaning in social contexts. According to SFL, every context involving language use is shaped by three variables: the subject matter or “field” (which is, in turn, influenced by culture, beliefs, and attitudes), the method of communication or “mode,” and the roles and relationships of individuals communicating social purposes or “tenor”; thus, languages never exist as neutral mediums but instead reflect the contexts that shape them (Derewianka, 2011). Within each context, as molded by field, tenor, and mode, speakers and writers make choices for construing meaning. In the SFL framework, these choices are functional in nature and relate to the three metafunctions, or fundamental meanings, that are realized in every clause that is spoken or written in structured language. Each clause simultaneously represents an experience (ideational meaning), establishes a relationship with the listener or reader (interpersonal meaning), and creates a cohesive message (textual meaning). Furthermore, each of the three fundamental metafunctions can be examined to reveal how meaning is realized through specific linguistic features.

When examining the linguistic realization of ideational meaning, or how experiences are conveyed and expressed, an analysis of processes, participants, and circumstances (formally called a transitivity analysis) is employed. Firstly, information about the world or an experience can be conveyed through “processes,” or the occurrences and states communicated through verbs

and verbal phrases (Derewianka, 2011). SFL identifies five processes. Each represents a different type of occurrence or action:

- “action processes,” which capture actions that are done (Derewianka, 2011)
- “speaking processes,” which capture the act of speech or communication (Derewianka, 2011)
- “sensing processes,” which denote what is thought, felt, and perceived (Derewianka, 2011)
- “existing processes,” which describe a static, unchanging state of existence (Derewianka, 2011)
- “relating processes,” connect pieces of information in a sentence without conveying speech, states of existence, actions, senses, or thoughts (Derewianka, 2011)

Details about the time, place, and manner in which a process occurs are imparted by prepositional phrases and adverbs, or the “circumstances” of a given process (Derewianka, 2011). Additionally, processes implicate and connect the “participants” (i.e., noun phrases, such as subjects, direct objects, and indirect objects) of the experience being conveyed (Derewianka, 2011). Examination of these “semantic triplets” (i.e., the participants acting as the grammatical subject, the participants acting as the grammatical object, and the process connecting these two participants) in addition to circumstances is termed a transitivity analysis in SFL and is particularly useful when investigating the portrayal of specific participants in the experience being described.

Due to the crucial role of ideational meaning in the representation of experience through texts, transitivity analyses are a prevalent tool in SFL-based language analysis. In the words of Halliday (1971), transitivity functions as “the cornerstone of the semantic organization of experience” (p. 134). As one compelling example of the merits of a transitivity analysis, SFL discourse researchers Butt, Lukin, and Matthiessen (2004) examined a speech given by former

President George W. Bush's nine days after the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. In this speech, memorably nicknamed "Bush's Battle Cry" by one *Newsweek* article, Butt, et al. (2004) identify "Al Qaeda," the "Taliban," "enemies of freedom," and "terrorists" as the primary participants that function as the "enemy" in Bush's portrayal of the world (p. 272). These "enemies" are characterized primarily through action processes, specifically through negative processes like "kill," "is threatening," "wants to overthrow," and "is repressing" (Butt, et al., 2004, p. 272). These action processes generally appear in the present tense, thereby suggesting these actions are "habitual" and "characteristic behaviors" of these entities (Butt, et al., 2004, p. 275). Furthermore, the "enemies" are never associated with speaking processes. As such, they are "denied the role of the Sayer" (Butt, et al., 2004, p. 273). In stark contrast to the portrayal of "enemies," Butt, et al. (2004) identify the United States, U.S. Congress, the U.S. governmental administration, and the American people as associated with neutral or positive action processes like "will direct," "will oversee," and "will come together"; moreover, these processes generally indicate actions that will be taken in the future. Thus, Butt, et al.'s (2004) transitivity analysis reveals "an asymmetric world... in moral... terms" that is consistently presented and maintained throughout Bush's speech (p. 267).

Occurring simultaneously with the expression of ideational meaning, the construction of interpersonal meaning, or the establishment of a relationship between the author and reader, is achieved through numerous linguistic devices. Firstly, interpersonal meaning of language is achieved, in part, through grammatical mood (i.e., interrogative, declarative, imperative, subjunctive moods), which helps create the relationship the author establishes with his or her readership. This relationship is further developed through the author's use of speech role pronouns (e.g., "we" as opposed to "I"), inclusive language like slang and colloquialisms, and

exclusive language like highly technical terms (Derewianka, 2011). While some texts may be full of bare assertions that leave little space for other positions and viewpoints, other texts include more ambiguity and thereby create opportunities and spaces for other ideas and opinions (Derewianka, 2011).

Additionally, the author may choose to draw upon the words of others and incorporate other voices into the text. In this case, the author must decide both whether to use direct or indirect speech in presenting the words of others and whether to name the outside source (specific attribution) or use only vague references (broad attribution) (Derewianka, 2011). The terms of address associated with the outside voices, particularly in the case of specific attribution, can be used to convey the credibility, power, or expertise of the outside voice (i.e., titles); a familiarity between the author and the outside voice (i.e., through the use of first names only); or disdain, contempt or scorn of the outside voice (i.e., through negative name-calling) (Derewianka, 2011).

In addition to how an author interacts with readers and presents information, examination of the interpersonal function of language can also reveal the author's own viewpoints and opinions, even in a text designed to be as neutral as possible. Language choice within a text can be used to evaluate the qualities and merits of a person or thing ("appreciation"), convey an attitude about a behavior or event ("judgment"), or express emotions and feelings ("affect"); collectively, these language choices constitute the "attitudinal lexis" of a text (Derewianka, 2011). Negating words like "not," "never," and "no" can contribute to the "negative tenor" of the text, indicating disapproval, denial, or opposition to a particular participant or event (Derewianka, 2011). Furthermore, the force of a message conveyed within the text may be strengthened or softened through intensifiers like "very," "slightly," and "extremely," to name a



few examples; the use of repetition, parallelism or parallel structure, and listing can also be used to increase the strength of a message (Derewianka, 2011). To highlight an additional linguistic device, a text's modality, which is created through modal verbs like "should," "must," and "can," as well as modal adjuncts like "definitely" and "usually," conveys the degree of certainty or obligation about an event, course of action, or an object (Derewianka, 2011).

Analyses of interpersonal meaning in SFL have been particularly effective in revealing how the author-reader relationship is established linguistically. In a 2000 analysis of the interpersonal function of language, specifically an analysis of mood, linguist Martin (2000) examines a rap performed by singer-songwriter Bono of the Irish rock band U2 during a live performance of their song "Sunday Bloody Sunday," which condemned the ongoing violence in Northern Ireland as well as violence elsewhere in the world. As Martin (2000) outlines, Bono's rap portion begins in the declarative mood, providing information about Irish Americans talking about the glory of the revolution in Northern Ireland. The mood then shifts to the imperative, as Bono firmly dismisses this tendency to glorify the ongoing conflict (Martin, 2000). After briefly switching back to the declarative once again, Bono moves to a series of four interrogative clauses: "What's the glory in taking a man from his bed and gunning him down in front of his wife and children? Where's the glory in that? Where's the glory in bombing a Remembrance Day parade of old age pensioners, their medals taken out and polished up for the day? Where's the glory in that?" (Martin, 2000, p. 280). This series of rhetorical questions asks the audience for information that they cannot provide, "since glory is not a value... naturally associated with killing a father in front of his family or bombing elderly war veterans"; in this way, these questions provide information that the act of killing should not be connected with glory instead of requesting information (Martin, 2000, p. 282 - 283). From here, Bono asserts in the

declarative mood most people in Ireland do not want the bloodshed that is taking place before voicing the plea “No more” against the violence (Martin, 2000, p. 283). In a powerful conclusion to his rap solo, Bono transitions once more to the imperative (“Say no more”), starting a call-and-response between himself and the audience (Martin, 2000, p. 283 - 284). Through these effective, rhetorical changes in mood, Bono is able to align the audience members with his own position against the conflict in Northern Ireland (Martin, 2000).

Finally, construed alongside ideational and interpersonal meaning, the textual function of language relates how texts are cohesively constructed and how the author guides the reader through the text. For SFL researchers, the primary linguistic feature for achieving this coherence and cohesion is “theme” (Derewianka, 2011). A theme, or the first element of a clause, sentence, or paragraph, indicates how the rest of the sentence and text will unfold (Derewianka, 2011). When conducting a theme analysis of a text, one considers whether a theme is marked or unmarked. Unmarked themes are composed of words that, according to the normal, canonical grammar rules of a language, are commonly used to open sentences; in the case of the English and German languages, for example, beginning a declarative sentence with the subject would be considered an unmarked theme (e.g., “Dr. Drosten” is the subject and theme in the following sentence: “Dr. Drosten released a new podcast episode today”). Marked themes, on the other hand, are composed of a word or words that canonically are not found at the beginning of a declarative sentence; to use English and German as examples once again, beginning a sentence with an adverbial phrase or a conjunction would be considered marked themes (e.g., “Today” is not the subject of the sentence and thus a marked theme: “Today Dr. Drosten released a new podcast episode”).

In one notable analysis of theme, linguist and SFL-founder Halliday (1992) studies the use of marked and unmarked themes in a fundraising letter from the non-profit organization Zero Population Growth. Within this letter, all themes are unmarked, with three exceptions. The first of these three marked themes, “At 7 a.m. on October 25...,” opens the entire text, “[setting] the text plan - deceptively, as it turns out - [as a] narrative” (Halliday, 1992, p. 330). This narrative style continues through the text until the second marked theme (“With your contribution”) “reveals the nature of the text as a begging letter” (Halliday, 1992, p. 330). When these two marked themes are considered alongside the third marked theme (“Every day”), the text’s story becomes, in the words of Halliday himself: ““here’s what happened one day - now about your contribution - here’s what happens every day - so please!” (Halliday, 1992, p. 330). Furthermore, the unmarked themes of the text first thematize the relationship between the organization and media, next highlight the organization’s actions, and then return to their ““small staff”” and ““modest resources”” before the marked theme of “With your contribution,” thus clearly demonstrating the “role [in which] the letter reader [is] expected to take part” (Halliday, 1992, p. 330).

In relation to the present study, SFL’s fine-grained attention to the function of language in the creation of ideational, interpersonal, and textual meaning and its ability to reveal how portrayals and perspectives are achieved grammatically make it a powerful and highly useful framework for textual analysis, even those presented as being neutral reports. SFL discourse analyses have been applied to the examination of texts in a variety of contexts, ranging from history textbooks, classroom pedagogy, historical speeches, media analyses, and even clinical settings (Schleppegrell, 2013). While most existing SFL studies focus on English language texts, there is some precedence for SFL being applied in other languages. As noted by Schleppegrell

(2013), SFL has been extended to Spanish in order to investigate the representation of dictatorships, democracy, and the transition between the two in Chilean and Argentinian textbooks (Otezía and Pinto, 2008). Additionally, SFL has been applied to the analysis of German language learners; in Byrnes (2009), SFL was used to study the development of second-language writing for 14 German students over three curricular levels in a college-level German program. In another application of SFL to German language learners, Maxim (2021) conducted a transitivity and theme analysis of three learners of German across three curricular levels. It should be noted, however, that, to date, SFL discourse analysis has not been applied to German texts written by native speakers; thus, the present study ventures into uncharted territory in an attempt to apply SFL to the analysis of native German language texts.

### III. Methodology

To examine the portrayal and representation of Dr. Drosten in German media over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, four key events of the pandemic, which featured a flurry of discourse involving Dr. Drosten, were selected:

- Event 1: The controversial debate between the *Bild* newspaper and Dr. Drosten (May 25, 2020 - May 30, 2020)
- Event 2: The fall 2020 wave of COVID-19 continuing into the winter holidays (October 2020 - December 2020)
- Event 3: The January 2021 lockdown coupled with the start of vaccine rollout in Germany (December 2020 - January 2021)
- Event 4: The spring 2021 wave of COVID-19 (March 2021 - May 2021)

In an effort to capture the breadth of the political spectrum and to use public opinion-shaping media sources, six interregional and national publications were selected for study: *Junge Freiheit*, *Bild*, *die Zeit*, *der Spiegel*, *die taz*, and *Neues Deutschland*. For each of the four events of interest, one “characteristic text” was selected from each of the aforementioned publications. Each characteristic text contained a minimum of one paragraph featuring Drosten and was published during the time periods of each corresponding event (as defined above). Reports were preferentially selected as characteristic texts, but in the absence of otherwise fitting articles, editorials were also chosen as data sources. Op-ed texts were not considered for selection, as the authors of such pieces are generally not affiliated with the publication circulating their work. Due to ease of access, all texts were pulled from the digital news platforms of all six publications.

It should be noted that for Event 3, there were no texts from *Junge Freiheit* that featured Dr. Drosten enough to be considered for further study; a characteristic text from *COMPACT* was therefore selected as a replacement text for the voice of the far-right region of the German political spectrum in Event 3.

### **Event 1:**

- **Junge Freiheit:** “[Kaisers royaler Wochenrückblick: Drosten, Bild und Trump](#)” (May 30, 2020)
  - Editorial by Boris T. Kaiser
  - **Title Translation:** “Kaiser’s royal weekly review: Drosten, Bild and Trump”
  - **Word Count Analyzed:** 398
- **Bild:** “[Fragwürdige Methoden: Drosten-Studie über ansteckende Kinder grob falsch](#)” (May 25, 2020)
  - Report by Philipp Piatov
  - **Title Translation:** “Questionable Methods: Drosten-Study about infectiousness of children grossly incorrect”
  - **Word Count Analyzed:** 605
- **die Zeit:** “[Auf dem Boulevard der Wissenschaft](#)” (May 26, 2020)
  - Editorial by Johannes Schneider and Carolin Ströbele
  - **Title Translation:** “On the boulevard of science”
  - **Word Count Analyzed:** 1630
- **der Spiegel:** “[Wie berechtigt ist die Kritik an der ‘Drosten-Studie’?](#)” (May 27, 2020)
  - Editorial by Julia Köppe
  - **Title Translation:** “How legitimate is the criticism of the ‘Drosten-Study’?”
  - **Word Count Analyzed:** 1156
- **die taz:** “[Wie man sich einen Aufreger baut](#)” (May 26, 2020)
  - Editorial by Steffen Grimberg
  - **Title Translation:** “How one builds controversy”

- Word Count Analyzed: 427
- Neues Deutschland: “[Drosten blamiert die ‘Bild’ mit nur einem Tweet](#)” (May 26, 2020)
  - Editorial by Robert D. Meyer
  - Title Translation: “Drosten disgraces the ‘Bild’ with only one Tweet”
  - Word Count Analyzed: 916

## **Event 2:**

- Junge Freiheit: “[Jedem steht eine Behandlung zu](#)” (December 23, 2020)
  - Editorial by André Hagel
  - Title Translation: “Everyone is entitled to treatment”
  - Word Count Analyzed: 300
- Bild: “[Corona-Streit: Intensivmediziner: Virologe Drosten macht unnötige Angst](#)” (November 3, 2020)
  - Report (no listed author)
  - Title Translation: “Intensive Care Doctor: Virologist Drosten creates unnecessary fear”
  - Word Count Analyzed: 251
- die Zeit: “[Virologe Drosten fordert Lockdown über die Feiertage](#)” (December 9, 2020)
  - Report (no listed author)
  - Title Translation: “Virologist Drosten calls for a lockdown over the holidays”
  - Word Count Analyzed: 427
- der Spiegel: “[Diese Maßnahmen gelten ab Montag](#)” (November 1, 2020)
  - Report (no listed author)
  - Title Translation: “These measures go into effect on Monday”
  - Word Count Analyzed: 482
- die taz: “[Keine Gefahr durch Mutationen](#)” (November 12, 2020)
  - Report by Felix Lee
  - Title Translation: “No danger through mutations”

- Word Count Analyzed: 174
- Neues Deutschland: “[Europäische Arzneimittel - Agentur lässt Biontech Impfstoff für EU zu](#)” (December 21, 2020)
  - Report (no listed author)
  - Title Translation: “European Medical Agency allows the Biontech Vaccine for the EU”
  - Word Count Analyzed: 245

### **Event 3:**

- COMPACT: “[Drostens wirrologischer Amoklauf: Im Sommer sorgt britische Mutation für 100.000 Infektionen täglich](#)” (January 22, 2021)
  - Editorial by Karel Meissner
  - Title Translation: “Drosten’s Confused Rampage: In the summer the British mutation will cause 100,000 infections daily”
  - Word Count Analyzed: 570
- Bild: “[Millionenteure Hotline des Bundes überlastet - Chaos bei der Impf-Terminvergabe...](#)” (January 3, 2021)
  - Report (no listed author)
  - Title Translation: “Million-dollar Hotline of the Federal Government Overloaded - Chaos with vaccine rollout...”
  - Word Count Analyzed: 598
- die Zeit: “[Bund prüft weitere Reisebeschränkungen und Grenzkontrollen](#)” (January 27, 2021)
  - Report (no listed author)
  - Title Translation: “The federal government considers additional travel restrictions and border controls”
  - Word Count Analyzed: 167
- der Spiegel: “[Es ist praktisch unmöglich, das im Nachhinein zu bewerten](#)” (January 3, 2021)
  - Report (no listed author)



- Title Translation: “It is practically impossible to evaluate this in hindsight”
- Word Count Analyzed: 407
- die taz: “[Aktuelle Entwicklungen in der Coronakrise: Drosten erwartet komplizierte Monate](#)” (January 3, 2021)
  - Report (no listed author)
  - Title Translation: “Drosten expects complicated months”
  - Word Count Analyzed: 186
- Neues Deutschland: “[Lockdown-Verlängerung zeichnet sich ab](#)” (January 3, 2021)
  - Report (no listed author)
  - Title Translation: “Lockdown extension becomes apparent”
  - Word Count Analyzed: 264

#### **Event 4:**

- Junge Freiheit: “[Kaisers royaler Wochenrückblick: Gender-Gaga, TKKG und Drosten](#)” (April 4, 2021)
  - Editorial by Boris T. Kaiser
  - Title Translation: “Kaiser’s royal weekly review: Gender-Gaga, TKKG, and Drosten”
  - Word Count Analyzed: 363
- Bild: “[Drosten warnt: Wer sich nicht impfen lässt, wird sich infizieren!](#)” (May 12, 2021)
  - Report (no listed author)
  - Title Translation: “Drosten Warns: Those who don’t let themselves get vaccinated will get infected!”
  - Word Count Analyzed: 617
- die Zeit: “[Wer sich nicht impfen lässt, wird sich unweigerlich infizieren](#)” (May 12, 2021)
  - Report (no listed author)

- Title Translation: “Those who don’t let themselves get vaccinated will inevitably get infected”
- Word Count Analyzed: 544
- der Spiegel: “[Drosten plädiert für weitere Maßnahmen jenseits der Corona-Notbremse](#)” (April 13, 2021)
  - Report (no listed author)
  - Title Translation: “Drosten pleads for additional measures beyond the Corona-Emergency-Brake”
  - Word Count Analyzed: 233
- die taz: “[Drosten: Neuer Lockdown ist nötig](#)” (April 2, 2021)
  - Report (no listed author)
  - Title Translation: “Drosten: New lockdown is necessary”
  - Word Count Analyzed: 209
- Neues Deutschland: “[Unionsfraktionsvize: Politiker sollen sich mit AstraZeneca impfen lassen](#)” (March 31, 2021)
  - Report (no listed author)
  - Title Translation: “Vice President of the Union Faction: Politicians should let themselves be vaccinated with AstraZeneca”
  - Word Count Analyzed: 490

In addition to the newspaper texts, transcripts of 4 episodes of the *Das Coronavirus-Update von NDR Info* podcast corresponding to each of the four events of interest were also included in an effort to feature Drosten’s own, unfiltered voice over the course of the pandemic. Thus, the present study examined a corpus of 28 texts.

- Event 1 Transcript for *Das Coronavirus-Update von NDR Info*: Episode 44, “[Die rote Murmel kontrollieren](#)” (May 28, 2020)
  - Title Translation: “Controlling the red marble”
  - Word Count Analyzed: 1263

- Event 2 Transcript for *Das Coronavirus-Update von NDR Info*: Episode 68, “[Harter Lockdown jetzt?](#)” (December 8, 2020)
  - Title Translation: “A hard lockdown now?”
  - Word Count Analyzed: 1322
- Event 3 Transcript for *Das Coronavirus-Update von NDR Info*: Episode 70, “[Die Mutanten im Blick behalten](#)” (January 5, 2021)
  - Title Translation: “Keeping an eye on mutations”
  - Word Count Analyzed: 1406
- Event 4 Transcript for *Das Coronavirus-Update von NDR Info*: Episode 82, “[Die Lage ist ernst](#)” (March 30, 2021)
  - Title Translation: “The situation is grave”
  - Word Count Analyzed: 1125

Drawing from the framework SFL, an analysis of transitivity, interpersonal meaning, and theme was employed to investigate and examine the different portrayals of Dr. Drosten by each media source. In the analysis of transitivity, the participants were identified and categorized as either the grammatical subject or the grammatical object. The processes associated with each participant were then categorized as action, speaking, sensing, relating, or existing processes. Additionally, the frequency of types of process present was calculated for each text, and the circumstances were identified. The analysis of interpersonal meaning consisted of an examination of mood, attitudinal lexis, modality, and intensifiers. Finally, in the analysis of theme, themes present in the text were identified and categorized as marked or unmarked. In an effort to establish interrater reliability, the 7 texts corresponding to Event 1 were double-coded.

## IV. Data Analysis and Results

In this section, the results of the present study will be presented chronologically one event at a time. For each event, the texts will be presented by moving across the German political spectrum from far-right to far-left: *Junge Freiheit*, the *Bild*, *die Zeit*, *der Spiegel*, *die taz*, and *Neues Deutschland*. After all six publications, the corresponding podcast episode for each event will also be presented.

### 4.1. Event 1: The Controversial Debate between the *Bild* and Dr. Drosten

#### 4.1.1. *Junge Freiheit* - Conservative, Right-Wing, Nationalist

In Boris T. Kaiser's (2020) editorial entitled "*Kaisers royaler Wochenrückblick: Drosten, Bild und Trump*" ("Kaiser's royal weekly review: Drosten, Bild and Trump"), Dr. Drosten's primary role, when he appears as the subject of a clause, is that of an actor (63.6% of all processes) who "presses charges," "goofs up," and, in one case, regularly "shoots" down his critics on Twitter:

"...seines sehr aktiven Twitter-Accounts, auf dem Drosten regelmäßig gegen seine Kritiker schießt." (... his very active Twitter account, on which Drosten regularly shoots at his critics.) (Kaiser, 2020, para. 2)

When Dr. Drosten appears as the grammatical object, he is the one who is given one hour's time to respond to the *Bild's* request for comment, or he is the one who is criticized or defended by others during his debate with the *Bild*.

The analysis of interpersonal meaning shows that Kaiser fills his editorial with bare assertions and claims. Moreover, modality, a primary linguistic means for introducing doubt into a clause, plays a minimal role in the text overall. The text also does not feature the voices of

other figures, and even though Kaiser (2020) embeds two quotes from Dr. Drosten's Twitter response to Piatov's request for comment, Dr. Drosten is not allowed to have his own voice within the text.

*“Nun, Drosten hat die Mail aus der Springer-Redaktion rechtzeitig gelesen, hatte aber, laut eigener Aussage, ‘Besseres zu tun,’ als diese zu beantworten.”* (Well, Drosten read the E-Mail from the Springer editorial team in time, but had, according to his own statement, “better things to do” than to respond.) (Kaiser, 2020, para. 2)

*“Hinzu kamen etliche Texte in großen Medien, die genau das waren, was Drosten schon vor Veröffentlichung des Bild-Artikels in diesem sah: ‘eine tendenziöse Berichterstattung.’”* (Additionally, a number of texts in major media sources came out that were exactly what Drosten saw in the *Bild* article before its publication: “a tendentious reporting.”) (Kaiser, 2020, para. 3)

In the first case, Kaiser (2020) mockingly notes Dr. Drosten's claims of having better things to do and uses the quotation to cast doubt on the validity of Dr. Drosten's statement in the first place. In the second example, Kaiser uses Dr. Drosten's own words, which were critical of Piatov's article, to criticize the reports and articles released in other major newspapers that were critical of the *Bild* and Piatov's journalistic methods.

In terms of attitudinal lexis, Kaiser's mocking tone, use of the subjunctive mood, and terms of address for Dr. Drosten all reveal the author's tendency to use judgment (rather than the other two types of attitudinal language, appreciation or affect) to express his opinion and explicit contempt of Germany's famed virologist. In one instance, Kaiser compares Dr. Drosten with a blind, heavyweight boxer:

*“Drosten hat mit seinen Prognosen öfter danebengehauen als ein blinder Schwergewichtsboxer.”* (Drosten misses his prognoses more frequently than a blind heavyweight boxer.) (Kaiser, 2020, para. 4)

With this comparison, coupled with his bare assertion that the virologist is a “*Scharlatan*” (charlatan), Kaiser (2020) portrays Dr. Drosten as an unreliable expert and attempts to discredit him as a scientist (para. 5).

Furthermore, this criticism morphs into blatant personal attacks. Kaiser (2020) comments that Dr. Drosten, despite his “*großspurigen Auftretens*” (cocky demeanor), looks more like a “*professioneller Glücksspieler*” (professional gambler) than a true scientist (para. 5). Dr. Drosten is Germany’s “*selbsternannten Wissenschaftskönig*” (self-appointed science king) and a “*Virologe mit [einem] Napoleon-Komplex*” (virologist with a Napoleon-Complex) (Kaiser, 2020, para. 1, 3). This representation is further emphasized through Kaiser’s use of the subjunctive mood, which he uses to “plant the seed” of how Drosten would act in hypothetical situations; needless to say, these actions are almost always negative.

“*Wäre der Strafbestand der ‘Majestätsbeleidigung’ hierzulande nicht vor wenigen Jahren abgeschafft worden, der Virologe Christian Drosten hätte in dieser Woche vermutlich Filipp Piatov angezeigt.*” (If the criminal offense of “insulting royalty” had not been abolished in this country a few years ago, Virologist Christian Drosten would have reported Filipp Piatov this week.) (Kaiser, 2020, para. 1)

To name one other example of the author’s use of judgment, Kaiser’s (2020) use of the epithet “*heiligen Christian Drosten*” (holy Christian Drosten) reveals not only his contempt for Dr. Drosten but also his derision for the perceived lack of criticism Dr. Drosten receives in the public sphere (para. 4). The most striking term of address for the German virologist, however, is “*geistigen Führer Christian Drosten*” (spiritual Führer Christian Drosten) (Kaiser, 2020, para. 3). The use of the noun “*Führer*” is still to this day largely a taboo term because it evokes an immediate association with Adolf Hitler, the ruthless Nazi dictator responsible for the Holocaust.

Kaiser’s attitudinal language also consists largely of judgment when he portrays the *Bild* journalist, Filipp Piatov. For instance, although Kaiser (2020) acknowledges the short time period given to Dr. Drosten for his response, Kaiser (2020) ultimately presents Piatov as the “*überkritisch[er] Journalist*” (overcritical journalist) and unfortunate victim who dared to investigate the criticism surrounding Dr. Drosten’s paper, and even though there were “*durchaus*

*gute Gründe*" (definitely good reasons) for this feedback, Piatov was unjustly attacked in a "virtuellen Prügel-Arie" (virtual beating-aria) (para. 3, 4).

The use of marked themes contributes to the depiction of Dr. Drosten as an individual held beyond reproach due to seemingly everyone coming to his defense. For instance, a series of marked themes emphasizes the vast amounts of support Dr. Drosten received online, from major news sources, and from politicians following the release of Piatov's article:

*“Gefühlt 90 Prozent der ‘kritischen Köpfe’ bei Twitter sprangen ihrem geistigen Führer Christian Drosten zur Seite. Auch mit Anrufen bei dem Ketzer der Bild-Zeitung. Auch in den sozialen Netzwerken selbst bekundeten viele ihre bedingungslose Solidarität mit dem Virologen mit dem Napoleon-Komplex. Hinzu kamen etliche Texte in großen Medien, die genau das waren, was Drosten schon vor Veröffentlichung des Bild-Artikels in diesem sah: ‘eine tendenziöse Berichterstattung.’ Zu guter Letzt beteiligen sich auch noch Politiker wie Karl Lauterbach (SPD) an der virtuellen Prügel-Arie gegen den überkritischen Journalisten.” (It felt as if 90 percent of the “critical minds” on Twitter leaped to the side of their spiritual Führer Christian Drosten. Also with calls to the heretic of the Bild-Zeitung (i.e., Piatov). Also, in social networks, many expressed their unconditional solidarity with the virologist with a Napoleon-Complex. Additionally, a number of texts in major media sources came out that were exactly what Drosten saw in the Bild article before its publication: “a tendentious reporting.” Last but not least, even politicians like Karl Lauterbach (SPD) took part in the virtual beating-aria against the overcritical journalist.) (Kaiser, 2020, para. 3)*

Each of these marked themes contributes to a crescendo and intensification that the author establishes to emphasize the vast amounts of support Dr. Drosten received. The intensification culminates in the support Dr. Drosten receives from Karl Lauterbach, a prominent politician during the pandemic (in part, due to his background in epidemiology) and the Federal Minister of Health since December of 2021.

#### **4.1.2. Bild - Conservative, Right-Wing, Populist**

In Piatov's (2020) report "*Fragwürdige Methoden: Drosten-Studie über ansteckende Kinder grob falsch*" (Questionable Methods: Drosten-Study about the infectiousness of children

grossly incorrect), the article that sparked the debate between *Bild* and Dr. Drosten and received a reprimand from the *der Deutsche Presserat* (German Press Council), Dr. Drosten, when the grammatical subject, primarily assumes the role of a sayer (in 38.46% of cases) who “refuses,” “recommends,” and “says.” The virologist also assumes the role of an actor (46.15% of cases) who “leads,” “changes,” and “publishes.” He appears as the grammatical object once, when *Bild* confronts (“*konfrontierte*”) Drosten with the accusations (“*mit den Vorwürfen*”) about his recent preprint paper (Piatov, 2020, para. 17). The other major participants featured in the text are a series of cited experts who appear as sayers and sensors who voice their criticism of Drosten’s paper.

Similar to *Junge Freiheit* journalist Kaiser’s (2020) attempt to discredit Dr. Drosten as a scientist, Piatov (2020) portrays Dr. Drosten as a bad virologist and expert by attempting to discredit his preprint study. This is primarily accomplished through the voices and critiques of four cited experts, each of whom is allowed to have his own voice through the use of direct speech. Each expert is first introduced with a long noun group noting the expert’s current position, effectively establishing the expert’s expertise and credibility. Two such introductions are listed below as examples:

“*Professor Leonhard Held vom Institut für Epidemiologie, Biostatistik und Prävention an der Universität Zürich....*” (Professor Leonhard Held from the Institute for Epidemiology, Biostatistics and Prevention at the University of Zürich....) (Piatov, 2020, para. 7)

“*... Wirtschaftsprofessor Jörg Stoye von der renommierten Cornell University in New York....*” (economics professor Jörg Stoye from the renowned Cornell University in New York....) (Piatov, 2020, para. 14)

The addition of new voices, which are always critical of the so-called “Drosten study,” are notably emphasized in two instances by the marked theme “*auch*” (also):



“*Auch Statistik-Professor Dominik Liebl von der Universität Bonn weist auf schwere Ungereimtheiten in der Drosten-Studie hin.*” (Also, statistics professor Dominik Liebl from the University of Bonn indicates severe inconsistencies in the Drosten study.) (Piatov, 2020, para. 10)

“*Auch Wirtschaftsprofessor Jörg Stoye von der renommierten Cornell University in New York geht hart mit der Drosten-Studie ins Gericht....*” (Also, economics professor Jörg Stoye from the renowned Cornell University in New York harshly judges the Drosten study....) (Piatov, 2020, para. 14)

Marked themes are similarly used when Piatov (2020) vaguely attributes some criticism of Dr. Drosten’s preprint study to members of his own research team at the Charité, effectively emphasizing and highlighting the presence of internal objections and critique:

“*Intern wurden die Fehler bereits eingestanden.*” (Internally, these mistakes were already admitted.) (Piatov, 2020, para. 5)

“*Innerhalb des Forscherteams wurden die Mängel der Studie nach Bild-Informationen jedoch bereits diskutiert und zum Teil eingestanden.*” (Within the research team, the shortcomings of the study were, however, already discussed and partially admitted according to *Bild* information.) (Piatov, 2020, para. 17)

In contrast to the representation of the four cited experts, who are given their own voices and are introduced with respectful titles, Piatov (2020) uses judgment to introduce Dr. Drosten with the “tongue-in-cheek” nickname “*Star-Virologe*” (star virologist) (para. 1). Additionally, Piatov slightly favors the use of indirect speech when reporting on Dr. Drosten’s response. The placement of Dr. Drosten’s reply at the very end of the text weakens his defense of the preprint paper.

In terms of attitudinal lexis within the text, Piatov (2020), like Kaiser (2020) in the previous text, uses judgment to negatively evaluate Dr. Drosten’s scientific technique through phrases like “*fragwürdige Methoden*” (questionable methods), “*grob falsch*” (grossly incorrect), and “*unsauber gearbeitet zu haben*” (of working sloppily or carelessly) (title, para. 4).

Additionally, appreciation is present in the text through the critiques of the four cited experts, who (as two examples) claim that the employed statistical methods were “*sehr schwach*” (very weak) and a “*geringe Zahl*” (a low number) of children were studied (Piatov, 2020, para. 11, 8). Piatov also offers his own appraisal of the Drosten study, and notes with the dramatic use of a hyphen that the sloppy research methods of the Drosten team have had “*verhängnisvollen Konsequenzen*” (cataclysmic consequences):

“...*Wissenschaftler aus mehreren Ländern werfen Charité-Forschern vor, unsauber gearbeitet zu haben - mit verhängnisvollen Konsequenzen.*” (... scientists from several countries accuse the Charité researchers of working sloppily - with cataclysmic consequences.) (Piatov, 2020, para. 4)

#### 4.1.3. *die Zeit* - Center / Left-of-Center

In contrast to the texts selected from *Junge Freiheit* and *Bild*, Johannes Schneider and Carolin Ströbele’s (2020) editorial in *die Zeit* entitled “*Auf dem Boulevard der Wissenschaft*” (On the boulevard of science) offers a rather positive portrayal of Dr. Drosten; interestingly, this favorable representation of the virologist is partly indirect and is a by-product of the authors’ strong condemnation of Piatov and his article in the *Bild*. An analysis of transitivity reveals that Dr. Drosten, when he appears as the grammatical subject, is presented as an actor who “publishes” and a sayer who “retorts,” “recommends,” and “speaks out”; each type of process occurs in 42.85% of cases. In one notable instance, the authors use the action process “*zurückschlagen*” (to strike back), suggesting that Dr. Drosten was provoked and fought back against the *Bild* (Schneider & Ströbele, 2020, para. 1). When Dr. Drosten appears as the grammatical object, he is accused by Piatov (“...*wirft der Autor [Piatov] dem Virologen... vor*”), portraying him as the victim of Piatov’s reporting (Schneider & Ströbele, 2020, para. 7). Additionally, Dr. Drosten is contacted by Stoye, one of the cited experts from the *Bild* article

(“*habe... [Stoye] sofort Drosten kontaktiert*”), as a trusted and respected colleague (Schneider & Ströbele, 2020, para. 8).

It is also worth noting that when the *Bild* appears as the grammatical subject, it is presented as an actor who “publishes” (“*veröffentlicht*”) and a sayer who “did not ask Stoye for a comment” (“*haben... [Stoye] nicht angefragt,*”) (Schneider & Ströbele, 2020, para. 1, 8).

Thus, the *Bild* is portrayed as an entity that publishes its work without properly speaking with the experts it claims to have contacted.

While the editorial consists primarily of the authors’ own voices, direct and indirect speech is used to feature briefly the voices of Dr. Drosten as he responds to the *Bild* piece, Jörg Stoye as he attempts to distance himself from the *Bild* text, and the words of the *Bild* article itself (Schneider & Ströbele, 2020). The subjunctive mood is used to outline the hypothetical actions that a “*guter Journalist*” (good journalist) would have taken when writing a report on the critique surrounding Drosten’s preprint study; the implied contrast with Piatov’s journalistic actions requires no further explanation (Schneider & Ströbele, 2020, para. 5).

“... *Ein guter Journalist im oben skizzierten Sinn hätte sich nun ans Telefon geklemmt, sich von den betreffenden Forschern das wissenschaftliche Prozedere erklären lassen, wonach die Kritik an der Vorveröffentlichung der Studie Teil eines völlig normalen Kollegendiskurses ist und hätte auf Basis dieser Expertise mit seinem Vorgesetzten befunden, dass es hier keine Geschichte zu erzählen gibt oder höchstens eine, die eher kompliziert als knallig ist.*” (A good journalist in the sense outlined above would have stayed on the phone, let the researchers explain the scientific procedure (whereby the criticism on the preprint study is part of a completely normal discourse between colleagues), and would have, based on this expertise, found with his supervisor that there is no story to tell here. At most, there is a story that is more complicated than gaudy.) (Schneider & Ströbele, 2020, para. 5)

In terms of attitudinal lexis, the authors use appreciation to dismiss the criticism of Dr. Drosten’s preprint study:

“Die Kritik... Teil eines völlig normalen Kollegendiskurses ist...” (...the criticism is part of a completely normal discourse between colleagues....) (Schneider & Ströbele, 2020, para. 5)

“Außerdem behauptet Piatov, in Drostens Forscherteam seien ‘Fehler bereits eingeräumt’ worden. Auch dafür liefert er im Text aber keinerlei Belege, sondern führt als Quelle lediglich ‘Bild-Informationen’ an.” (Furthermore, Piatov claims that mistakes were already acknowledged by those in Drosten’s research team. For this, too, he provides no proof whatsoever and instead merely cites “Bild information.”) (Schneider & Ströbele, 2020, para. 7)

Additionally, the authors use judgment to condemn the *Bild*’s reporting:

“Die Bild selbst hatte wiederum keinerlei Skrupel, ihre Meinung zu Christian Drosten innerhalb kurzer Zeit zu ändern, beziehungsweise: ihm die Sympathien zu entziehen.” (The *Bild* itself has no scruples whatsoever about changing its opinion on Christian Drosten within a short span of time, or rather: withdrawing sympathies from him.) (Schneider & Ströbele, 2020, para. 10)

The authors also use two recent examples of poor journalism from the *Bild*, suggesting a habitual tendency of distorting reality in an unjournalistic manner (“*unjournalistische Verzerrung einer diffizilen Realität*”) (Schneider & Ströbele, 2020, para. 13). Furthermore, the authors imply that the *Bild* article is a “Kampagne” (campaign), seemingly suggesting an organized, concerted effort to portray Dr. Drosten unfavorably (Schneider & Ströbele, 2020, para. 16).

The analysis of theme for this text showed that the themes of the text served primarily to establish a chronology of events and did not contribute explicitly to the authors’ portrayal of Dr. Drosten, Piatov, or the *Bild*.

“Am heutigen Dienstag titelte die Print-Ausgabe sogar ‘Schulen und Kitas wegen falscher Corona-Studie dicht’ und insinuierte also einen unmittelbaren Zusammenhang zwischen wissenschaftlicher Forschung und politischen Handeln, den der Text nicht belegt.” (On Tuesday, the print edition had the headline “Schools and kindergartens shut down due to false coronavirus study” and insinuated a direct connection between scientific research and political action that the text does not prove.) (Schneider & Ströbele, 2020, para. 6)

“Mitte März war Drosten noch der ‘nahbare’ Virologe, dem ‘Erfahrung und Expertise’ bescheinigt wurden.” (In mid-March, Drosten was the “approachable” virologist who was certified with “experience and expertise.”) (Schneider & Ströbele, 2020, para. 10)

“Nun ist er der Mann, der die deutschen Kinder zu Unrecht zu Hause einsperrt....” (Now, [Drosten] is the man that wrongly locks German children at home....) (Schneider & Ströbele, 2020, para. 10)

#### 4.1.4. *der Spiegel* - Center / Left-of-Center

In her editorial “*Wie berechtigt ist die Kritik an der ‘Drosten-Studie’?*” (How legitimate is the criticism of the “Drosten study”?) published in the left-of-center weekly magazine *Der Spiegel*, author Julie Köppe (2020) presents Dr. Drosten solely and equally as an actor and sayer who “writes,” “acknowledges,” and “speaks out.” When Dr. Drosten appears as the grammatical object, he is accused by the *Bild* and is given a deadline of one hour to respond to the *Bild*’s request for comment. In contrast with Drosten’s actions and statements, the *Bild* is characterized negatively as a sayer that accuses others and as an actor that acts without speaking to important individuals beforehand. Thus, Köppe’s editorial mirrors the aforementioned editorial from *die Zeit*, in which the text is more anti-*Bild* than pro-Dr. Drosten.

Additionally, Köppe (2020) uses both direct and indirect speech to demonstrate how experts Jörg Stoye and Dominik Liebl, both of whom were cited in Piatov’s *Bild* report, have distanced themselves from the *Bild* and its piece on Dr. Drosten’s preprint study. Analysis of the attitudinal lexis in their quotes reveals the experts’ judgment of the *Bild* report and the tabloid itself.

Stoye: “*Ich will nicht Teil einer Kampagne sein....*” (I do not want to be part of a campaign....) (Köppe, 2020, para. 5)

Liebl: “*Die aktuelle Bild-Berichterstattung skandalisiert einen in der Wissenschaft völlig üblichen Vorgang....*” (The recent *Bild* report scandalizes a completely commonplace process in science.) (Köppe, 2020, para. 12)

Furthermore, Köppe (2020) offers her own evaluation of the debate surrounding the preprint paper and Piatov's report, noting that the critique of the study is "*trotzdem legitim*" (nevertheless legitimate) and that disagreement within the scientific community is "*jedoch völlig normal*" (completely normal) (para. 1, 12). Her argument that such critique of preprint papers is commonplace is effectively highlighted in one particular paragraph in which every theme is marked.

*“Doch in der Coronakrise werden Forschungsergebnisse möglichst schnell geteilt. Allein auf dem Wissenschaftsserver medRxiv werden pro Tag 50 Veröffentlichungen und mehr hochgeladen - und finden Beachtung. Auch bei anderen Forschern weltweit, die inzwischen als eine Art Schwarmintelligenz die Forschungsergebnisse prüfen. Dabei gibt es auch immer wieder Kritik. So auch and der Studie zur Infektiosität von Kindern.”* (However, in the coronavirus crisis, research results are shared as fast as possible. On the science server medRxiv alone, 50 or more publications per day are uploaded - and find attention. Also from other researchers worldwide, that scrutinize the publications in a form of “swarm intelligence.” There is always criticism. This applies to the study about the infectiousness of children as well.) (Köppe, 2020, para. 7)

Here, Köppe's emphasis on the routine, typical process of scientific criticism cements her argument that the critiques of Dr. Drosten's preprint paper are in no way unique. Thus, in contrast with Piatov's article from the *Bild*, Köppe makes it clear that Dr. Drosten's preprint paper, however flawed, is not necessarily “bad” science simply because it received seemingly negative feedback from other scientists.

#### **4.1.5. *die taz* - Left-Wing, Alternative**

Just as the *Bild* was criticized in the articles from *die Zeit* and *der Spiegel* for its coverage of Drosten's preprint study, Steffen Grimberg (2020) of *die taz* offers fierce criticism of the infamous tabloid alongside a highly favorable portrayal of Dr. Drosten in his editorial “*Wie man sich einen Aufreger baut*” (How one builds controversy). As in the other texts, Dr. Drosten, when the grammatical subject, is presented as an actor (in 66.7% of cases) and as a sayer (in 33.3% of

cases) who “tweets” and “refuses to play along.” Dr. Drosten never appears as the grammatical object; thus, Dr. Drosten is always the actor and never the entity that is acted upon. The *Bild*, on the other hand, is always portrayed as an actor that “throws out the whole affair.”

Interestingly, Grimberg (2020) avoids any discussion of what aspects of Dr. Drosten’s preprint study were criticized or of whether this criticism was valid. After claiming that the important part about this event is not the content of the paper or critique (“*Um Inhalte geht es nicht*”), the author returns to his commentary on the *Bild*’s questionable journalistic actions (Grimberg, 2020, para. 5). Furthermore, Grimberg’s (2020) claim is notably emphasized by a marked theme followed by a sentence fragment:

“*Um Inhalte geht es nicht. Sondern ums Prinzip.*” (This is not about content. But about the principle.) (para. 5)

Although the editorial consists primarily of bare assertions, the grammatical mood and sarcastic humor make the piece inclusive of a broad group of readers. The brief use of the interrogative mood when posing the rhetorical question “*Merken Sie was?*” (Do you notice something?) provides an opportunity for the author to engage directly with the reader (Grimberg, 2020, para. 5). While the *Bild*’s journalistic irresponsibility is frequently thematized throughout the article, Grimberg’s condemnation and derision for the *Bild* is particularly obvious in the analysis of attitudinal lexis. The text is filled with language that judges and mocks the *Bild*:

“*Stehen Sie weiterhin zu den Methoden und der Aussagekraft der Studie?*’, wollte Bild treudoof wissen.” (“Do you still stand behind the methods and the validity of the study?” is what *Bild* naïvely wanted to know.) (Grimberg, 2020, para. 4)

“*Weil sich Drosten aber weigerte, mitzuspielen, haute Bild das Ganze online gleich raus: ‘Drosten-Studie über ansteckende Kinder grob falsch Wie lange weiß der Star-Virologe schon davon?’, steht auch noch am Mittag danach auf bild.de. Davon, dass sich mittlerweile mehrere der zitierten ‘Kronzeugen’ auf Twitter und anderswo mehr als deutlich distanziert haben, steht da natürlich nichts.*” (Because Drosten refused to play along, *Bild* threw the whole thing online: “Drosten study about the infectiousness of children grossly incorrect: How long has the star-virologist known?” stood on bild.de by

noon. The fact that several of the cited “chief witnesses” have, in the meantime, more than clearly distanced themselves on Twitter and elsewhere, is, of course, not included. (Grimberg, 2020, para. 6)

The use of the term “*Kronzeugen*” (chief witnesses), which has a legal connotation, is suggestive of the *Bild* putting Dr. Drosten on trial (Grimberg, 2020, para. 6). The final sentence in Grimberg’s (2020) editorial combines both his derision for the *Bild* and his favorable view of Dr. Drosten:

“Für boulevardesken Schaum vor dem Mund gilt: Wir haben Besseres zu tun!” (For boulevardesque foaming of the mouth: We have better things to do!) (para. 8)

The use of the pronoun “*wir*” (we) is highly inclusive, suggesting a unity and consensus between the author and the readers. Furthermore, Grimberg (2020) chooses to mirror Dr. Drosten’s famous response to the *Bild*’s request for comment: “*Ich habe Besseres zu tun*” (I have better things to do) and adds an exclamation point to move the utterance into the exclamatory mood (para. 3).

#### **4.1.6. Neues Deutschland - Left-Wing, Socialist**

Similar to the aforementioned article from *die taz*, Robert D. Meyer (2020) offers a perspective that is anti-*Bild* (and pro-Dr. Drosten by extension) in his editorial “*Drosten blamiert die Bild mit nur einem Tweet*” (Drosten disgraces the *Bild* with only one Tweet). As the grammatical subject, Dr. Drosten is given the role of an actor (41.67% of cases) and a sayer (50% of cases) who “disgraces,” “publishes,” “clarifies,” and “refuses.” Dr. Drosten appears as the grammatical object only once when he is confronted by Filipp Piatov.

Although Dr. Drosten is notably thematized in the editorial’s title, the focus generally remains on the *Bild*’s actions and Dr. Drosten’s response to those actions. While Meyer (2020)



does note that the preprint study received criticism, the content of this feedback is not closely examined. The text opens with the critical comments of author and singer Wiglaf Droste about the *Bild* from a 2012 interview with the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*.<sup>4</sup> These comments, in addition to a quote from the writer Max Goldt characterizing the *Bild* as an “*Organ der Niedertracht*” (organ of perfidy), effectively portray the infamous tabloid as one that is, historically and habitually, nefarious (Meyer, 2020, para. 1).

Analysis of attitudinal lexis reveals Meyer’s (2020) utilization of terms with military connotations like “*Kampagne*” (campaign), “*Manöver*” (maneuver), and “*Nebenkriegsplätze*” (secondary theaters of war) to deride and judge the *Bild* (para. 10, 4, 14). Furthermore, as in the article from *die taz*, Meyer’s (2020) use of the term “*Kronzeugen*” (chief witnesses) suggests that the *Bild* aimed to put Dr. Drosten on trial, due to this word’s legal connotation (para. 9).

“*Der Professor ließ sich auf diese dreiste Manöver allerdings nicht ein und machte die Anfrage öffentlich.*” (The professor (i.e., Dr. Drosten) did not, however, engage with this impudent maneuver and made the request for comment public.) (Meyer, 2020, para. 4)

“*Keine Ahnung vom wissenschaftlichen Diskurs, kein Kontakt mit den angeblichen Drosten-Kritikern - diese Bild-Geschichte ist wie aus dem Lehrbuch für miesen Boulevard, der den Zusatz ‘Journalismus’ nicht verdient hat.*” (Clueless about scientific discourse, no contact with the alleged Drosten critics. It’s as if this *Bild* story comes out of the textbook for appalling boulevard that has not earned the additional term ‘journalism.’) (Meyer, 2020, para. 13)

Quoting Jörg Stoye: “*Ich will nicht Teil einer Anti-Drosten-Kampagne sein.*” (I don’t want to be a part of an anti-Drosten campaign.) (Meyer, 2020, para. 10)

“*... Piatovs Kollegen Nebenkriegsplätze eröffneten und Drosten vorwarfen, er habe die Kontaktdaten des Reporters veröffentlicht.*” (Piatov’s colleagues opened secondary theaters of war and accused Drosten of publishing the contact details of the reporter (i.e., Piatov).) (Meyer, 2020, para. 14)

“*Die vorgeschobenen Kronzeugen gegen die ‘Drosten-Studie’ fanden ihre Instrumentalisierung dann überhaupt nicht in Ordnung....*” (The chief witnesses that

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<sup>4</sup> The *Süddeutsche Zeitung* is another interregional, daily German newspaper based in Munich. Its readership consists primarily of highly educated individuals who are younger (i.e., in their twenties) or middle-aged. In terms of its political leanings, the publication is generally described as being to the left-of-center.

were put forward against the ‘Drosten study’ thought their instrumentalization was not alright at all.) (Meyer, 2020, para. 9)

Furthermore, Meyer (2020) interestingly turns the same phrase originally used by Piatov when he accused Dr. Drosten’s research team of working sloppily (“*unsauber arbeiten*”), back on the *Bild*’s own journalistic actions (para. 14). Thus, Meyer not only condemns Piatov’s actions as a journalist but also indirectly expresses support for Dr. Drosten.

“*Bezeichnend ist, dass Bild natürlich nicht einräumt, unsauber gearbeitet zu haben....*” (It is significant that the *Bild*, of course, does not admit to having worked carelessly....) (Meyer, 2020, para. 14)

The analysis of theme in Meyer’s (2020) editorial reveals the consistent thematization of the *Bild*’s journalistic irresponsibility:

“*Wie das Boulevardblatt arbeitet....*” (The way the tabloid newspaper works...) (para. 2)

“*Was diesen Zeitdruck journalistisch begründete, ist absolute unklar.*” (What reasons substantiated this time pressure is absolutely unclear.) (para. 3)

“*Wenig überraschend folgt der Beitrag dem typischen Bild-Muster....*” (Unsurprisingly, the article follows the typical *Bild* pattern....) (para. 6)

“*Auch von der angeblichen internen Kritik, die Bild recherchiert habe, bleibt nicht viel übrig.*” (Also, regarding the alleged internal criticism, not much remains.) (para. 12)

One particularly noteworthy use of a marked theme, however, highlights Meyer’s (2020) contrast between Dr. Drosten’s response to the *Bild* and the responses of previous “victims” of the *Bild*’s sensationalistic news coverage:

“*Im Gegensatz zu vielen anderen ‘Opfern’ der Bild-Methoden machte der Wissenschaftler allerdings nicht den Fehler, die Angelegenheit auf sich bewenden zu lassen, sondern veröffentlichte den Vorgang.*” (In contrast to the many other victims of the *Bild*’s methods, the scientist did not make the mistake of letting the matter rest but instead published the incident.) (para. 2)

#### 4.1.7. *Das Coronavirus-Update von NDR Info*

In Episode 44 of *Das Coronavirus-Update von NDR Info*, released on May 28, 2020, Dr. Drosten begins with a discussion of recent media coverage on his preprint study examining the viral load of COVID-19 in children's throats (Hennig & Drosten, 2020a). Dr. Drosten, his research team, and scientists more generally are largely portrayed as actors who “scrap together data,” “do,” and “provide.” In addition, this same constellation of participants also takes on the role as sayers and sensors who “know,” “discuss,” “think,” and “believe.” Journalists, the *Bild*, and media sources more generally are presented as actors who “confront,” “take others by surprise,” and “misuse.”

Although the majority of this portion of the podcast consists of Dr. Drosten explaining the scientific logic and reasoning behind the statistical methods used in the preprint study (for which there is much evaluative language), the unfavorable portrayal of journalists and the media is further evidenced through the analysis of attitudinal lexis, which points to both Dr. Drosten's use of judgment to condemn the media coverage as attacks and his use of affect to convey the horror of two experts cited in some of this coverage:

*“... es gab noch zwei weitere Angriffe auf mich oder die Studie. Der erste Angriff war gestern....”* (There were two additional attacks on me or the study. The first attack was yesterday (referring to the aforementioned *Bild* article by Piatov)....) (Hennig & Drosten, 2020a, para. 4)

*“Das war der eine Angriff. Der andere Angriff, der war wirklich perfide, da haben Journalisten Kooperationspartner von mir... versucht anzurufen, einige davon auch erreicht und die offenbar ganz komisch konfrontiert.”* (That was the one attack. In the other attack, which was particularly perfidious, journalists tried to call my cooperation partners, reached a few of them, and confronted them obviously very strangely.) (Hennig & Drosten, 2020a, para. 6)

*“Wahrscheinlich heute schon, weil die Medien oder eine Zeitung [die Studie] so massiv missbraucht.”* (Probably today (we will post the study online), since the media or one newspaper massively misuse the study.) (Hennig & Drosten, 2020a, para. 7)

“Das stand dann in der Zeitung: In der EU-Kommission, in der ich auch drin wäre, hätte es eine Auseinandersetzung um die Drosten-Studie gegeben, was vollkommen irreführend ist.” (This stood in the newspaper: in the EU commission, in which I was also present, there was a dispute surrounding the Drosten study, which is completely misleading.) (Hennig & Drosten, 2020a, para. 6)

“Der Hermann hat mich mit Entsetzen gleich kontaktiert....” (Hermann immediately contacted me with horror....) (Hennig & Drosten, 2020a, para. 7)

“... das ist David Spiegelhalter. David hat auch mit Entsetzen festgestellt, was da in den Medien passiert.” (... that’s David Spiegelhalter. David also asserted with horror what occurred in the media.) (Hennig & Drosten, 2020a, para. 6)

It is also interesting to note Dr. Drosten’s address of scientist Hermann Goossens and statistician David Spiegelhalter by their first names, which is suggestive of a strong, close relationship between Dr. Drosten and these experts, despite their alleged criticism of Dr. Drosten conveyed in the media (specifically, in the *Bild* and in an unnamed Belgian newspaper). Furthermore, Dr. Drosten notes that the debate between himself and the *Bild* has cost him much time, thus hindering the progress of important science relevant to the pandemic; the implication here is, arguably, that this hindrance caused by the *Bild* has cost lives:

“Ich habe diese Woche mich fast nur mit der Bild-Zeitung herumgeärgert. Es hat mich extrem viel Zeit gekostet, und das verzögert die Wissenschaft inzwischen ganz maßgeblich.” (I have spent the whole week dealing with the *Bild* newspaper. It has cost me an extreme amount of time, and that delays science in the meantime quite significantly.) (Hennig & Drosten, 2020a, para. 7)

Additionally, Dr. Drosten opts for the use of the pronoun “*wir*” (we) instead of “*ich*” (I) when describing the scientific rationale of the preprint study and the discussions amongst scientists described in the podcast. The frequent use of the relational and existential processes “*es ist*” (it is) and “*es gibt*” (there is) function as bare assertions to state scientific fact; this is a common rhetorical technique in scientific discourse and one that is expected in the language of a scientist like Dr. Drosten.

The theme analysis did not reveal any overarching trends within the excerpt beyond the facilitation of textual cohesion and “flow” of the podcast, as demonstrated in the excerpt below.

*“Wenn wir diese Daten schon zusammenstellen, dann machen wir auch wenigstens eine grobschlächtige statistische Analyse mit. Darüber haben wir dann diskutiert, und es ging darum, soll man jetzt so eine Statistik machen oder nicht? Das war eigentlich der Kern unserer Diskussion.”* (If we are going to compile the data, then we will at least conduct a coarse statistical analysis. This is what we then discussed: should one do such a statistical analysis or not? That was actually the core of our discussion.) (Hennig & Drosten, 2020a, para. 7)

## 4.2. Event 2: The Fall 2020 Wave of COVID-19 and the 2020 Winter Holidays

### 4.2.1. *Junge Freiheit* - Conservative, Right-Wing, Nationalist

In the editorial in the right-wing publication *Junge Freiheit*, “*Jedem steht eine Behandlung zu*” (Everyone is entitled to treatment), author André Hagel (2020) offers another negative portrayal of Dr. Drosten. In contrast to the *Junge Freiheit* text from Event 1, in which Dr. Drosten remains the sole subject of criticism, Hagel’s unfavorable representation of Dr. Drosten occurs simultaneously with a condemnation of Professor Wolfram Henn, a scientist and member of the German ethics council. An analysis of transitivity shows that Dr. Drosten, when the grammatical subject, assumes the role of an actor (60% of cases) who “brings himself to do” an action and “conducts.” The virologist also assumes the roles of a senser (20% of cases) who “deems” and a sayer (20% of cases) who “questions.” These processes are almost always negative, and Dr. Drosten never appears as the grammatical object.

Hagel’s (2020) criticism of Henn is focused on a comment from the scientist in which he suggests that unvaccinated individuals should forgo intensive care treatment for COVID-19; the author strongly condemns this position as unethical and inhumane. Because Dr. Drosten

defended Henn, this portrayal of an immoral scientist with little regard for human life is extended to Dr. Drosten.

“... *des [Henn] stützenden Charité-Virologen Christian Drosten....*” (...the Charité virologist that supports Henn, Christian Drosten....) (Hagel, 2020, para. 4)

“... *der [Henn] zur Seite gesprungene Herr Drosten....*” (... Mr. Drosten who sprung to Henn’s side....) (Hagel, 2020, para. 5)

In the second example, the term of address “*Herr Drosten*” (Mr. Drosten) can be interpreted as mocking and tongue-in-cheek (Hagel, 2020, para. 5).

Additionally, the analysis of attitudinal lexis reveals Hagel’s (2020) judgment of Dr. Drosten and Henn, both of whom are portrayed as nefarious, unscrupulous experts who question one’s basic right to live and are part of a larger dictatorship intent on repressing its citizens.

“*Eine solche, in ihrem Kern, wie in ihren Konsequenzen unethische und inhumane Position wie die Henns und des ihn stützenden Charité-Virologen Christian Drosten mag das Kennzeichen einer Gesundheitsdiktatur sein können, nicht aber einer Demokratie.*” (Such an unethical and inhumane position like the one of Henn and the Charité virologist that supports him, Christian Drosten, may be the hallmark of a “health dictatorship,” but not a democracy.) (Hagel, 2020, para. 4)

“*Denn sie stellen in der Denklogik das Recht eines Erkrankten auf adäquate Behandlung und somit in letzter Konsequenz das Recht auf Leben in Frage.*” (Because they question the logic of a sick individual’s right to adequate medical treatment and consequently the right to life.) (Hagel, 2020, para. 5)

Hagel (2020) also seems to question the credibility of Henn and Dr. Drosten as scientists. The placement of the word “*Wissenschaft*” (science) in quotations in the editorial’s final sentence effectively casts doubt upon the validity of the science Henn and Dr. Drosten put forward:

“*Das ist ‘Wissenschaft,’ die einen das Gruseln lehrt.*” (That is “science” that teaches one about the creeps.) (Hagel, 2020, para. 5)

Throughout the article, Hagel (2020) refrains from discussing Dr. Drosten's exact comments or perspective through either direct or indirect speech. Regarding the analysis of theme, Hagel initially chooses to highlight an individual's right to choose whether to get vaccinated and to receive medical treatment when sick, before thematizing the supposed immorality of Henn and Dr. Drosten.

*“Die persönliche Entscheidung über eine Impfung darf weder direkt noch indirekt erzwungen werden.”* (The personal decision on vaccination may be forced neither directly nor indirectly.) (Hagel, 2020, para. 2)

*“Das Recht eines Erkrankten auf eine spezifische Behandlungsform entspringt aber seiner akuten medizinischen Notsituation....”* (The right of a sick individual to a specific medical treatment, however, comes from his acute medical emergency situation....) (Hagel, 2020, para. 3)

*“Eine solche, in ihrem Kern, wie in ihren Konsequenzen unethische und inhumane Position wie die Henns und des ihn stützenden Charité-Virologen Christian Drosten mag das Kennzeichen einer Gesundheitsdiktatur sein können, nicht aber einer Demokratie.”* (Such an unethical and inhumane position like the one of Henn and the Charité virologist that supports him, Christian Drosten, may be the hallmark of a “health dictatorship,” but not a democracy.) (Hagel, 2020, para. 4)

#### **4.2.2. Bild - Conservative, Right-Wing, Populist**

The *Bild* continues its negative portrayal of Dr. Drosten in Event 2 through its report “Corona-Streit: Intensivmediziner: Virologe Drosten macht unnötige Angst” (Intensive Care Doctor: Virologist Drosten creates unnecessary fear) (2020), for which there is no listed author. As in the Event 1 text, in which Dr. Drosten is primarily associated with speaking processes (with action processes occurring the second most frequently), Dr. Drosten, when the grammatical subject, primarily assumes the role of a sayer (60% of cases) who “comments,” “mentions,” and “warns”; the virologist also assumes the roles of an actor (20% of cases) who “creates fear” and an entity who is associated with particular attributes through the relative process “sein” (to be)

(20% of cases). These percentages indicate an increase in the usage of speaking and relative processes and a decrease in the usage of action processes in comparison to the Event 1 text. Dr. Drosten appears as the grammatical object once, in which he is criticized by intensive care physician and president of the German Interdisciplinary Association for Intensive Care and Emergency Medicine Dr. Uwe Janssens.

When introducing both Dr. Drosten and Dr. Janssens, the *Bild* uses a title to establish their credentials and credibility (“Corona-Streit,” 2020). What is interesting here, however, is that while Dr. Drosten’s title appears only once at the beginning of the text, variations of Dr. Janssens’ title appear in two other places within the relatively short text. Two of these title variations are even thematized, further emphasizing Dr. Janssens’ expertise in intensive care medicine and triage situations.

The text consists primarily of Dr. Janssens’ response to Dr. Drosten’s triage example in which a physician must decide whether to leave an older COVID-19 patient with low survival chances on a ventilator or to remove this patient so a younger patient with young children and a worse case of COVID-19 can be ventilated; it should be noted Dr. Drosten does not provide an answer for which patient should be placed on the ventilator (“Corona-Streit,” 2020). Notably, Dr. Drosten’s example is conveyed entirely through indirect speech, and the virologist is never quoted within the report. Dr. Janssens’ comments, however, are primarily conveyed through direct speech.

An analysis of attitudinal lexis reveals Dr. Janssens’ (and, by extension, the *Bild*’s) judgment of Dr. Drosten in light of his triage comments. Here, Dr. Janssens and the *Bild* cast Dr. Drosten as an irresponsible fear monger, despite his credibility as a virologist and his expertise during the pandemic:



Janssens: “*Herr Drosten ist ein erstklassiger Virologe und einer der wichtigsten Experten, die wir derzeit bei der Pandemiebekämpfung haben. Seine Äußerungen zu einer möglicherweise drohenden Triage in Deutschland kann ich jedoch nicht nachvollziehen und halte sie für unverantwortlich. Indem er auf diese Weise davor warnt, macht er den Menschen unnötige Angst.*” (Mr. Drosten is a first-class virologist and one of the most important experts that we have in the fight against the pandemic. His comments about a possibly threatening triage in Germany, however, I can not comprehend and consider them to be irresponsible. By warning about such a situation in this way, he creates unnecessary fear among people.) (“Corona-Streit,” 2020, para. 4 - 5)

In the final sentence of the article, the *Bild* quotes Dr. Janssens once again; the clearly stated message in this quote is that Dr. Drosten is overstepping his boundaries by making comments about emergency medicine triages during the pandemic.

“*Janssens wörtlich: ‘Herr Drosten sollte sich aus der Diskussion um Kapazitätsengpässe auf Intensivstationen heraushalten.*” (Janssens word-for-word: “Mr. Drosten should keep himself out of the discussion about capacity constraints at intensive care units.) (“Corona-Streit,” 2020, para. 7)

As a final observation, the theme analysis revealed that Dr. Drosten’s alleged comments about triages were often thematized and usually marked, thus unfavorably highlighting the virologist’s supposed irresponsibility; the other themes of the text are notably left unmarked.

Janssens: “*Indem er auf diese Weise davor warnt, macht er den Menschen unnötige Angst.*” (By warning about such a situation in this way, [Drosten] creates unnecessary fear among people.) (“Corona-Streit,” 2020, para. 5)

“*Drosten nannte dabei ein Beispiel: Auf einer Intensivstation müsse ein älterer COVID-19 Patient beatmet werden, der eine Überlebenschance von 30 bis 50 Prozent habe. Wenn dann ein 35-jähriger Corona-Patient mit einem schweren Verlauf kommt, der kleine Kinder hat, ebenfalls beatmet müsste, müssten die Ärzte eine Entscheidung treffen, ob in einem solchen Fall der ältere Patienten von der Beatmungsmaschine abzunehmen sei.*” (Drosten named an example: At an intensive care station, an older COVID-19 patient must be ventilated who has a 30-50% chance of survival. If a 35 year old COVID-19 patient with small kids and a worse case comes and also needs to be ventilated, the doctors must come to a decision on whether, in such a situation, the older patient should be taken off of the ventilator.) (“Corona-Streit,” 2020, para. 3)

### 4.2.3. *die Zeit* - Center / Left-of-Center

In contrast to the negative portrayals of Dr. Drosten in *Junge Freiheit* and the *Bild, die Zeit* offers a rather positive representation of Dr. Drosten in the report “*Virologe Drosten fordert Lockdown über die Feiertage*” (Virologist Drosten calls for a lockdown over the holidays) (2020), for which no author is listed. In 66.67% of instances in which Dr. Drosten is the grammatical subject, he assumes the role of a sayer who “calls for a lockdown,” “recommends,” and “pleads.” The virologist also assumes the role of an actor (11.11% of cases) who “collaborates,” a senser (11.11% of cases) who “thinks,” and an entity associated with particular attributes through the relative process “*sein*” (to be) (11.11% of cases). This breakdown of processes differs from that in the Event 1 text for *die Zeit*, in which Dr. Drosten usually assumes the role of the actor and sayer. Dr. Drosten never appears as the grammatical object.

*Die Zeit* places Dr. Drosten’s comments about the necessity of a lockdown over the winter holidays to curb the spread of COVID-19 at the very beginning of the text (“Virologe Drosten fordert Lockdown,” 2020). Through the use of direct speech, Dr. Drosten is allowed to have his own voice. A sense of urgency remains present for the entirety of Dr. Drosten’s section of the article not only through the language choices of Dr. Drosten and *die Zeit* but also through the presence of modal verbs like “*müssen*” (must) and “*sollen*” (should).

“Drosten sagte, das [Leopoldina] Papier sollte vielleicht verstanden werden als deutliche und letzte Warnung der Wissenschaft.” (Drosten said the Leopoldina paper should probably be understood as the “clear and final warning of science.”) (“Virologe Drosten fordert Lockdown,” 2020, para. 3)

“*Werde jetzt nicht nachreguliert, drohe ‘Ende Januar und über den gesamten Februar hinaus’ ein Lockdown mit massiven Folgen für die Wirtschaft.” (If nothing is adjusted now, lurks the risk of a lockdown with massive economic consequences by the end of January and throughout February.) (“Virologe Drosten fordert Lockdown,” 2020, para. 1)*

“[Drosten] meint damit das *Plädoyer* der Leopoldina für einen harten Lockdown über die Feiertage.” (Drosten refers to the plea of Leopoldina for a hard lockdown over the holidays [with this statement].) (“Virologe Drosten fordert Lockdown,” 2020, para. 1)

“*Es ist schon so, dass wir jetzt unbedingt etwas tun müssen*,’ sagte Drosten....” (“It is already the case that we must absolutely do something now,” said Drosten....) (“Virologe Drosten fordert Lockdown,” 2020, para. 1)

After reporting on Dr. Drosten’s advocacy for a holiday lockdown to combat the pandemic, *die Zeit* continues by featuring the voices of four politicians who agree with Dr. Drosten’s suggestion. The introduction of each new voice is thematized, and the mere inclusion of these supporting opinions favorably bolsters Dr. Drosten’s previously outlined position.

#### 4.2.4. *der Spiegel* - Center / Left-of-Center

In this report from *der Spiegel* entitled “*Diese Maßnahmen gelten ab Montag*” (These measures go into effect on Monday) (2020), the unnamed author offers a subtle yet favorable portrayal of Dr. Drosten. As observed in the other Event 2 texts (with the notable exception of the *Junge Freiheit* text), Dr. Drosten, who always appears as the grammatical subject, primarily assumes the role of a sayer (66.67% of cases) who “advises,” “says,” and “promises.” The virologist is also takes on the role of a senser (33.33% of cases) who “believes” and “considers.”

Aside from being referred to by his last name and by his official title at the Berliner Charité, Dr. Drosten is introduced as one of the “*Befürworter*” (proponents) of these new measures (“*Diese Maßnahmen gelten*,” 2020, para. 3). Dr. Drosten is allowed to have his own voice and to speak for himself, as the unnamed author uses direct speech to convey Dr. Drosten’s favorable evaluation on the new pandemic restrictions in response to the “*akut steigenden Ansteckungszahlen*” (acutely rising infection numbers) (“*Diese Maßnahmen gelten*,” 2020, para. 5). It is also worth noting that, while the usage of modal verbs like “*müssen*” (must) and “*sollen*”

(should) is noticeably higher in comparison to the Event 1 text from *der Spiegel*, these passages do not feature Dr. Drosten specifically; nevertheless, these modal verbs and the sense of urgency they create implicitly express support for Dr. Drosten's calls for restrictions.

Interestingly, Dr. Drosten is the only proponent of the new restrictions that is named and given his own voice through direct speech ("Diese Maßnahmen gelten," 2020). *Der Spiegel* does note at the very end of the lengthy article the existence of a position paper opposing the new measures, but the portrayal of the dissenting voices is more unfavorable. None of the dissenting voices are given a chance to speak directly. Analysis of attitudinal lexis reveals the unnamed author's judgment of the position paper itself, particularly through words such as "*Streit*" (dispute) and "*plädieren*" (to plead):

*"Neben Drosten und einigen anderen Wissenschaftlern haben sich aber manche Forscher gegen einen Shutdown ausgesprochen. In der vergangenen Woche sorgte ein Positionspapier für Streit.... Darin plädieren die Experten dafür, sich stärker auf den Schutz von Risikogruppen zu konzentrieren und die bereits geltenden Hygienemaßnahmen gezielter zu kommunizieren. Anschließend distanzieren sich manche Ärzteverbände wieder von dem Papier."* (Aside from Drosten and a few other scientists, some researchers have spoken out against a shutdown. In the past week, a position paper caused a dispute.... In the paper, the experts plead for more focus on the protection of at-risk groups and for the more targeted communication of hygiene measures. Afterwards, many medical associations distanced themselves again from the paper.) ("Diese Maßnahmen gelten," 2020, para. 18)

Notably, the use of the word "*wieder*" (again) in the final sentence of the above excerpt highlights the distancing of medical associations from this position paper and effectively undercuts the dissenting opinion presented in the text ("Diese Maßnahmen gelten," 2020, para. 18). Additionally, the placement of this section at the very end of the article further weakens the strength of the opposing argument. This intentional weakening, by extension, strengthens Dr. Drosten's argument in favor of the new restrictions, thereby contributing to *der Spiegel*'s positive portrayal of him.

#### 4.2.5. *die taz* - Left-Wing, Alternative

In his report entitled “*Keine Gefahr durch Mutationen*” (No danger through mutations) in *die taz*, author Felix Lee (2020) assigns Dr. Drosten the role of a sayer (80% of cases) who “surmises,” “sees,” and “considers.” The virologist, who is always the grammatical subject, also takes on the role of a sayer (20% of cases) who “says.” This breakdown of process frequency notably differs from that observed in the Event 1 text from *die taz*, in which Dr. Drosten primarily assumes the role of an actor.

Aside from being referred to by his last name and his official title at the Charité, Dr. Drosten is also called a “*Coronaviren-Experte*” (coronavirus expert), thus favorably establishing the virologist’s credibility and knowledge on the pandemic and COVID-19 (Lee, 2020, para. 5). Dr. Drosten’s perspective on the possibility of mutations coming from Danish mink provides cautious assurance that the risk of new mutations is low, while leaving the possibility open for this assessment to change if given new data:

“*[Drosten] halte es dennoch für gut möglich, dass die mutierte Variante schon gar nicht mehr bei Menschen zirkuliere.*” (Drosten considers it quite possible that the mutated variant is already no longer circulating among people.) (Lee, 2020, para. 2)

Drosten: “‘...*die wissenschaftlichen Daten die Möglichkeit eben offenlassen, dass es vielleicht zu einer gefährlichen Situation gekommen ist. Momentan sehe er diese Gefahr aber nicht.*” (“...the scientific data leaves the possibility open of a dangerous situation potentially arising.” At the moment, Drosten does not see this danger.) (Lee, 2020, para. 5)

Interestingly, Dr. Drosten remains the only cited expert up until the very last paragraph of the text, in which Lee (2020) includes briefly the voice of one other virologist in his report on this “*Entwarnung*” (all-clear signal) from virologists (para. 1). The second virologist, Dr. Hendrik Streeck, functions as a supporting voice within the text, further bolstering Dr. Drosten’s assessment of whether the mutated COVID-19 variants in mink are cause for concern. Both

virologists are given an opportunity to speak for themselves through Lee's usage of direct speech.

#### 4.2.6. *Neues Deutschland* - Left-Wing, Socialist

In the report entitled “*Europäische Arzneimittel - Agentur lässt Biontech Impfstoff für EU zu*” (European Medical Agency approves the Biontech vaccine for the EU) (2020), for which there is no listed author, Dr. Drosten predominantly appears in the role of a sayer (62.5% of cases) who “states” and “emphasizes” information about the virus and Germany's response to the pandemic. The virologist, who always appears as the grammatical subject, also fills the role of a sayer (12.5% of cases) who “assumes,” an actor (12.5% of cases) who “shows,” and an entity ascribed certain characteristics through the relative process “*sein*” (to be) (12.5% of cases). In comparison to the *Neues Deutschland* text from Event 1, Dr. Drosten appears in this text much more as the sayer and much less as the actor.

*Neues Deutschland* favors the use of indirect speech when conveying Dr. Drosten's assessment of the COVID-19 mutation discovered in Great Britain, though Drosten is occasionally given his own voice through direct speech (“*Europäische Arzneimittel*,” 2020). Interestingly, Dr. Drosten is the only voice mentioned or cited in this portion of the text.

The analysis of attitudinal lexis points primarily to Dr. Drosten's cautious evaluation of the new COVID-19 variant.

“*Mit Blick auf die von der Virus-Variante ausgehende Gefahr zeigte Drosten sich angesichts der unklaren Informationslage zurückhaltend. Er sei angesichts der bestehenden Informationen über die Virus-Mutation 'nicht sehr besorgt', sagte Drosten. Allerdings sei die Datenlage 'noch sehr lückenhaft'.” (Regarding the danger posed by the virus variant, Drosten was cautious in light of the unclear information. He is in light of the existing information about the mutated virus “not too worried,” said Drosten. However, the data is “still very patchy.”) (“*Europäische Arzneimittel*,” 2020, para. 10 - 11)*

“Mit Blick auf die Angaben des britischen Premierministers Boris Johnson, wonach die neue Virus-Variante zu 70 Prozent ansteckender sei als die Ursprungsvariante, sagte Drosten, dies sei nur ein Schätzwert. Es sei noch unklar, ob die neue Variante tatsächlich stärker übertragbar sei.” (Regarding the statement from British prime minister Boris Johnson, which states the new variant is 70 percent more infectious than the original variant, Drosten says this is only an estimate. It is still unclear if the new variant is actually more contagious.) (“Europäische Arzneimittel,” 2020, para. 12)

While the themes of the text did not play a large role in shaping the author’s portrayal of Dr. Drosten, it should be noted that several themes do highlight the new COVID-19 variant from Great Britain.

#### **4.2.7. Das Coronavirus-Update von NDR Info**

In episode 68 of *Das Coronavirus-Update von NDR Info*, Dr. Drosten, when the sole grammatical subject, appears as the senser/thinker in over 85% of cases (Hennig & Drosten, 2020b). Dr. Drosten never appears as the object. When the participant “Lockdown” appears as the subject, it performs negative actions (e.g., “schädigen” = to damage) (Hennig & Drosten, 2020b, para. 7). When the participant “Virus” appears as the subject, it also is an actor/doer, thereby taking on a different role from the Event 1 podcast episode, in which “Virus” appeared only as an object.

As in the podcast episode from Event 1, Dr. Drosten frequently uses the inclusive pronoun “wir” (we); in episode 68, however, this pronoun is sometimes extended to include everyone in Germany, rather than being only inclusive of scientists. An analysis of attitudinal lexis highlights Dr. Drosten’s evaluation and appraisal of the state of the pandemic. A palpable sense of urgency persists throughout the podcast, which is further amplified through the frequent use of the modal verbs “müssen” (must) and “sollen” (should) when the virologist describes the

steps that should and must be taken to address the pandemic. The high modality of the text is also achieved through the use of modal adjuncts like “*sicherlich*” (certainly) and the frequent repetition of the adjective “*konkret*” (concrete) to emphasize the unequivocal nature of the situation (Hennig & Drosten, 2020b). In multiple instances, Dr. Drosten also conveys the image of a unified scientific community in which experts from multiple different fields and areas of study collaborate and work together.

*“Und das wird durch die gemeinsame Stimme der Wissenschaft, durch die Nationale Akademie der Wissenschaften, der Leopoldina, auch empfohlen. Es wird eine Stellungnahme geben, das wie eine deutliche und letzte Warnung der Wissenschaft verstanden werden sollte.”* (And this is recommended by the collective voice of the scientific community, by the National Academy of Sciences, the Leopoldina. There will be a statement that should be understood as a clear and final warning of science.) (Hennig & Drosten, 2020b, para. 8)

The analysis of attitudinal lexis also reveals Dr. Drosten’s judgment of how scientific findings have been covered in the media and used (or misused) by politicians. Throughout his critiques, the virologist avoids naming any specific figures, publications, or entities, oftentimes through the use of passive voice:

*“... die Botschaft der Wissenschaft wurde in den vergangenen Wochen auch stark verwässert, zum Teil aus der Wissenschaft selbst. Diese Verwässerung wurde in der Politik zum Teil dankbar aufgenommen, zum Teil aber auch nicht verstanden.... Ich will nicht unterstellen, dass bestimmte Kräfte in der Politik jetzt die Wissenschaft missbrauchen. Aber ich denke, dass das Grundklima die Wissenschaftler in den letzten Wochen betroffen hat.”* (The message of science has been strongly diluted in recent weeks, partially from within the scientific community. This dilution was partly well-received in the world of politics, partly not understood.... I don’t want to imply that particular political powers are now misusing science. But I do think that the basic climate in the past weeks has affected scientists.) (Hennig & Drosten, 2020b, para. 3)

*“Man kann einfach nicht mehr sagen, wie es ist, weil man sonst verheizt, in der Ecke gestellt wird, in den Medien und leider auch von einigen Stimmen innerhalb der Wissenschaft angegriffen wird. Oder einige empören sich dann darüber und die finden dann wieder in den Medien sehr viel Gehör.”* (One can’t simply say the way things are, because then he is burned, pushed into a corner, or attacked in the media and, unfortunately, by some voices within the scientific community. Or, a few are outraged



over the comments and then they find again a large audience in the media.) (Hennig & Drosten, 2020b, para. 3)

*“Wir hoffen, dass hier nicht wieder einzelne Personen herausgegriffen und persönlich angegriffen wird.”* (We hope that individual people will no longer be singled out and personally attacked.) (Hennig & Drosten, 2020b, para. 14)

As evidenced above, Dr. Drosten portrays the media negatively as a place where individual scientists are attacked, which echoes his depiction of media coverage in the Event 1 podcast episode as “*Angriffe*” (attacks) (Hennig & Drosten, 2020a, para. 4).

### **4.3 Event 3: The January 2021 Lockdown and Vaccine Rollout**

#### **4.3.1. *COMPACT - Far-Right, Extremist***

In the *COMPACT* editorial entitled “*Drostens wirrologischer Amoklauf: Im Sommer sorgt britische Mutation für 100.000 Infektionen täglich*” (Drosten’s Confused Rampage: In the summer, the British mutation will cause 100,000 infections daily), author Karel Meissner (2021) offers the most unfavorable portrayal of Dr. Drosten out of all texts examined. Analysis of transitivity reveals that Dr. Drosten, who is always the grammatical subject, is presented as an actor (50% of instances) and sayer (37.5% of instances) who “warns,” “criticizes,” “appears to fabricate,” and “engages.” The virologist also occasionally takes on the role of a senser (12.5% of instances) who “considers.” It is also worth noting that when the participant, the “evil British” COVID-19 variant, appears as the subject, it too is an actor that “attacks” “unprotected young people.”

Meissner (2021) uses belittling, sarcastic nicknames for Dr. Drosten, calling him “*Hofwirrologe Drosten*” and the “*Star-Wirrologe*,” both of which are puns exchanging the first

syllable of “*Virologe*” (virologist) with the adjective “*wirr*” (confused, addle-headed) (para. 1, 10). An analysis of attitudinal lexis reveals the author’s judgment of government lockdown measures, which he condemns as a fabrication with words like “*Erzählung*” (story) and “*Narrativ*” (narrative); Dr. Drosten is portrayed as part of the falsehood spouted by the “*Corona-Diktatur*” (corona dictatorship), which is bent on depriving citizens of their “*Grundrechten*” (basic rights) (Meissner, 2021, para. 2, 3). The author’s derision for Dr. Drosten is also evident, as he depicts the virologist as an addle-brained, frenzied fear monger who gets his information from a spin doctor, not from science.

“*Drostens wirrologischer Amoklauf....*” (Drosten’s confused rampage....) (Meissner, 2021, title)

“*Dabei stellt sich die Frage, ob Drosten für seine Horror-Szenarien jetzt den gleichen Spin-Doktor engagiert hat, der auch für Karl Lauterbach die Grusel-Monologue liefert.*” (This raises the question of if Drosten got his horror stories from the same spin doctor that provided [Federal Health Minister] Karl Lauterbach with his scary monologue.) (Meissner, 2021, para. 2)

While Dr. Drosten is briefly given his own voice through direct speech in the text, his words are discredited with dissenting, outside opinions from experts like WHO epidemiologist Klaus Stöhr, who argues that the virologist’s advocacy for a “zero COVID-19” strategy is “*vollkommen unrealistisch*” (completely unrealistic) (Meissner, 2021, para. 6). Furthermore, Meissner includes quotations from Dr. Drosten only after giving his own unfavorable commentary; in this sense, Dr. Drosten’s words function more as supporting evidence for the author’s own argument. Throughout the text, ellipses are employed to create suspense and dramatic effect.

“*Dann fällt die böse britische Variante über das ungeschützte Jungvolk her....*” (Then the evil British variant attacks unprotected young people....) (Meissner, 2021, para. 7)

Exclamations are also occasionally used, which emphatically highlight the author's belittling sarcasm.

*“Dank Drosten haben wir jetzt ‘die einmalige Gelegenheit’ (Drosten) diese Apokalypse zu verhindern!”* (Thanks to Drosten, we now have the “one-in-a-lifetime opportunity” to forestall this apocalypse!) (Meissner, 2021, para. 10)

The use of the pronouns “*wir*” (we) and “*uns*” (us), which are inclusive of readers and those agreeing with the author's argument, create an “us vs. them” situation in which the readers must face the so-called dictatorship set on depriving them of their rights and confront the fabrications spouted by Dr. Drosten and other pandemic experts (Meissner, 2021). Such a call to action is, as shown in the first example below, further emphasized through a shift to the imperative mood.

*“Halten wir fest: ....”* (Let us note: ....) (Meissner, 2021, para. 3)

*“Aber ein Lockdown gegen Null Inzidenz kann uns noch retten....”* (But a lockdown aimed at zero cases can still save us....) (Meissner, 2021, para. 1)

While it is beyond the scope of this project, it is nevertheless interesting to note the problematic visual portrayal of Dr. Drosten in the editorial (see Figure 2). Immediately beneath the title of the article is an image of Dr. Drosten in a striped prison garb (potentially reminiscent of the vertically striped uniforms worn by those imprisoned in Nazi concentration camps) with a red label reading “*schuldig*” (guilty). In the picture, Dr. Drosten is also holding a sign that reads “Prof. Drosten.” Notably, the “Prof.” prefix is written significantly smaller than the virologist's last name and is even crossed out with a black “X.”



**Figure 2: A Problematic Image of Dr. Drosten from *COMPACT*.** A problematic image featured in Karel Meissner's (2021) editorial "*Drostens wirrologischer Amoklauf: Im Sommer sorgt britische Mutation für 100.000 Infektionen täglich*" (Drosten's Confused Rampage: In the summer, the British mutation will cause 100,000 infections daily) in the far-right extremist newspaper *COMPACT*.

#### 4.3.2. *Bild* - Conservative, Right-Wing, Populist

In contrast to the highly negative depiction of Dr. Drosten in the *Bild* texts from Events 1 and 2, the *Bild* offers a milder, but still unfavorable, portrayal of Dr. Drosten in the report "*Millionenteure Hotline des Bundes überlastet - Chaos bei der Impf-Terminvergabe....*" ("Million-dollar Hotline of the Federal Government Overloaded - Chaos with vaccine rollout...") (2021), for which there is no listed author. Dr. Drosten, who always appears as the grammatical subject, assumes the role of a senser (55.56% of cases) who "expects," "believes," and "assumes," and the role of a sayer (33.33% of cases) who "says" and "refers to" the approval of the AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine in Great Britain. Notably, Dr. Drosten assumes the role of an actor when he defends the federal government's vaccination efforts through the action process "*in Schutz nehmen*" (to come to someone or something's defense) ("*Millionenteure Hotline des Bundes überlastet*," 2021, para. 16).

Dr. Drosten's defense of vaccine rollout efforts in Germany reflects poorly upon the virologist due to the author's negative representation of vaccine rollout as chaotic, inefficient,

and expensive; his negative representation and judgment from the author comes out clearly in the analysis of attitudinal lexis:

*“Millionenteure Hotline des Bundes überlastet: Chaos bei der Impf-Terminvergabe....”*  
(Million dollar federal government hotline overloaded: Chaos with vaccine rollout....)  
(“Millionenteure Hotline des Bundes überlastet,” 2021, title)

*“Zu wenig Impfstoff, zu lahme Verurteilung... der Impfstart ist vermurkst!”* (Too little vaccine, a distribution that is too laggy... vaccine rollout is botched!) (“Millionenteure Hotline des Bundes überlastet,” 2021, para. 1)

*“... vor acht Tagen... wurde in einem Pflegeheim in Halberstadt... die erste Deutsche gegen das Coronavirus geimpft. Seitdem sind laut Robert-Koch-Institut bis Sonntagmorgen 238.808 weitere Impfungen dazugekommen. Wenn wir in dieser Geschwindigkeit weitermachen, wird rein rechnerisch 2038 der letzte Deutsche geimpft sein.”* (Eight days ago, the first German was vaccinated against the coronavirus in a nursing home in Halberstadt. Since then, 238,808 additional vaccinations have been administered according to the Robert-Koch-Institut.<sup>5</sup> If we continue at this rate, the last German will be vaccinated, mathematically speaking, in 2038.) (“Millionenteure Hotline des Bundes überlastet,” 2021, para. 2 - 3)

Further examination of interpersonal meaning in the text shows that Dr. Drosten is allowed to have an opportunity to speak for himself through direct speech. Continued analysis of attitudinal lexis highlights Dr. Drosten’s own appraisal of the pandemic more than the author’s own thoughts on the virologist. Intensifiers (“ganz” = very), quantifiers (e.g., “viele” = many), and modal verbs like “sollen” (should) create a sense of urgency in the virologist’s words, as he urges more vaccinations and advocates for the approval of the AstraZeneca vaccine in the EU:

*“Drosten gehe davon aus, ‘dass ab der zweiten Jahreshälfte eine Entspannung eintreten könnte, aber nur, wenn man es schafft, ganz viele Personen in der ersten sechs Monaten zu impfen.”* (Drosten assumes “that a relaxation [of restrictions] could occur in the second half of the year, but only if one successfully vaccinates a lot of people in the first six months.”) (“Millionenteure Hotline des Bundes überlastet,” 2021, para. 18)

*“Der Wissenschaftler verwies darauf, dass nach dem Biontech-Impfstoff nun in Großbritannien der AstraZeneca-Impfstoff bereits zugelassen sei. ‘Da sollte man in der EU ganz schnell hinterherkommen....’”* (The scientist pointed out that, after the Biontech

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<sup>5</sup> The Robert-Koch-Institut is the German federal government agency responsible for the control and prevention of disease (i.e., the German counterpart to the American Center for Disease Control (CDC)).

vaccine, the AstraZeneca vaccine has already been approved in Great Britain. “[The EU] should catch up very quickly...” (“Millionenteure Hotline des Bundes überlastet,” 2021, para. 19)

#### 4.3.3. *die Zeit* - Center / Left-of-Center

Similar to its texts from Event 1 and Event 2, *die Zeit* presents another positive portrayal of Dr. Drosten in the article “*Bund prüft weitere Reisebeschränkungen und Grenzkontrollen*” (The federal government considers additional travel restrictions and border controls) (2021), for which there is no listed author. Dr. Drosten, who always appears as the grammatical subject, assumes the role of a sayer (75% of instances) who “says,” “advises,” and “describes”; he also assumes the role of an entity with particular attributes through the use of the verb “*sein*” (to be) (25% of instances).

The unnamed author conveys Dr. Drosten’s statements on the proposed travel restrictions and border controls through both direct and indirect speech; because Dr. Drosten is quoted, he is, effectively, allowed to speak for himself within the text (“Bund prüft weitere Reisebeschränkungen,” 2021). Interestingly, he is not the only expert who is featured; the report also includes comments from virologist Sandra Ciesek, whose thoughts are also conveyed through a mix of direct and indirect speech. Both virologists support the proposed restrictions, and therefore, they can be considered supporting voices. Although Dr. Ciesek’s words are conveyed first in the text, it is worth noting that Dr. Drosten is featured more overall.

In terms of the analysis of interpersonal meaning, the text consists primarily of appreciation, indicating Dr. Drosten’s own evaluation of the state of the pandemic in Germany and the role of restrictions:

“*Christian Drosten, Leiter der Virologie an der Berliner Charité, bezeichnete die Pläne über neue Reisebeschränkungen... als ‘aus wissenschaftlicher Sicht sinnvoll.’*” (Christian

Drosten, the Director of Virology at the Berliner Charité, described the plans for new travel restrictions as “sensible from a scientific perspective.” (“Bund prüft weitere Reisebeschränkungen,” 2021, para. 9)

“Wenn die Maßnahmen jetzt einfach beendet würden, ‘dann werden wir sicherlich erleben, dass das Virus sich wieder ganz stark vermehrt.’” (If pandemic measures are simply ended now, “then we will certainly see the virus increase substantially once again.”) (“Bund prüft weitere Reisebeschränkungen,” 2021, para. 9)

While the theme analysis did not alter the text’s favorable representation of Dr. Drosten, it is nonetheless interesting to note the consistent use of marked themes to highlight pandemic measures in the section of the text detailing the perspectives of Dr. Drosten and Dr. Ciesek.

“Denn je stärker die Ausbreitung des Coronavirus innerhalb des Landes gebremst werde, ‘desto wichtiger wird das, was von außen eingeschleppt wird,’ sagte [Drosten] mit Blick auch die Virusmutationen. Von Lockerungen rät Drosten derweil ab.” (Because the more the spread of the coronavirus within [Germany] is slowed, “the more important that which is brought in from outside is,” said Drosten regarding mutations of the virus. Regarding easing of restrictions, Drosten advised against this.) (“Bund prüft weitere Reisebeschränkungen,” 2021, para. 9)

“Wenn die Maßnahmen jetzt einfach beendet würden, ‘dann werden wir sicherlich erleben, dass das Virus sich wieder ganz stark vermehrt.’” (If pandemic measures are simply ended now, “then we will certainly see the virus increase substantially once again.”) (“Bund prüft weitere Reisebeschränkungen,” 2021, para. 9)

#### 4.3.4. *der Spiegel* - Center / Left-of-Center

*Der Spiegel* provides a similarly mild yet positive portrayal of Dr. Drosten in the report entitled “*Es ist praktisch unmöglich, das im Nachhinein zu bewerten*” (“It is practically impossible to evaluate this in hindsight”) (2021), for which there is no listed author. As in the aforementioned text from *die Zeit*, Dr. Drosten always is the grammatical subject and appears as the sayer 58.3% of the time who creates a sense of urgency about the need for vaccinations and the approval of the AstraZeneca vaccine in the EU through speaking processes such as “*auf (etwas) dringen*” (to insist upon something) (“*Es ist praktisch unmöglich,*” 2021, para. 1).

Otherwise, he appears as the senser who “expects” and “believes.” A sense of urgency is also evidenced through the frequent use of intensifiers and negation in Dr. Drosten’s quotes (as is the case in the Event 3 text from the *Bild*).

“*Der Wissenschaftler verwies darauf, dass in Großbritannien der AstraZeneca-Impfstoff bereits zugelassen sei. ‘Da sollte man in der EU ganz schnell hinterherkommen....’*” (The scientist pointed out that the AstraZeneca vaccine has already been approved in Great Britain. “[The EU] should catch up very quickly....”) (“Es ist praktisch unmöglich,” 2021, para. 4)

“*Der Anteil der positiven Tests zeige jedoch, ‘dass die Zahlen derzeit nicht nach unten gehen. Das ist nicht gut.’*” (The portion of positive tests shows, however, “that the numbers currently are not going down. That is not good.”) (“Es ist praktisch unmöglich,” 2021, para. 8)

“*[Drosten] gehe davon aus, dass erst ab der zweiten Jahreshälfte eine Entspannung eintreten könnte - ‘aber nur, wenn man es schafft, ganz viele Personen in der ersten sechs Monaten zu impfen.’*” (Drosten assumes that a relaxation of restrictions could occur in the second half of the year, “but only if one successfully vaccinates a lot of people in the first six months.”) (“Es ist praktisch unmöglich,” 2021, para. 7)

In this last example, which is very closely worded to the aforementioned excerpt from the Event 3 *Bild* text, the author notably uses a hyphen to emphasize Dr. Drosten’s condition for what must occur in the present in order for the restrictions to be relaxed in the future.

Through direct speech, Dr. Drosten is frequently allowed to have his own voice, which he uses in a few instances to defend Germany’s vaccine rollout; furthermore, the virologist’s voice is the primary perspective conveyed throughout the article (“Es ist praktisch unmöglich,” 2021). The unnamed author from *der Spiegel* does, however, devote one short paragraph toward the middle of the piece to criticism of vaccine rollout; two critical voices are mentioned as examples. The first voice comes from Frauke Zipp, a researcher from the National Science Academy Leopoldina in Germany. While the author does quote Zipp, her speech is embedded within the author’s own words, and therefore, Zipp is not completely allowed to speak for



herself. The second voice, which is not quoted, comes from politician and Bavarian head of state Markus Söder. Although these critical voices are not allowed to speak for themselves and Dr. Drosten's response is featured immediately afterwards, the analysis of attitudinal lexis still reveals their judgment of vaccine distribution.

*“Bayerns Ministerpräsident Markus Söder bemängelte, die EU habe zu wenig Impfstoff bestellt und auf die falschen Hersteller gesetzt.”* (Bavaria's minister president Markus Söder criticizes the fact that the EU did not order enough vaccines and that it relied on the wrong manufacturer.) (“Es ist praktisch unmöglich,” 2021, para. 2)

*“So sprach die Leopoldina-Forscherin Frauke Zipp mit Blick auf die Bestellstrategie von ‘einem groben Versagen der Verantwortlichen.”* (The Leopoldina researcher Frauke Zipp spoke about the vaccine ordering strategy as “a gross failure of the people responsible.”) (“Es ist praktisch unmöglich,” 2021, para. 2)

The analysis of attitudinal lexis also highlights Dr. Drosten's evaluation (appreciation) of vaccine rollout and his judgment of those who are critical of how vaccines have been distributed in Germany:

*“Es ist jetzt praktisch unmöglich, das im Nachhinein zu bewerten,‘ sagte [Drosten]....”* (“It is now practically impossible to evaluate [vaccine rollout] in hindsight,” said Drosten.) (“Es ist praktisch unmöglich,” 2021, para. 1)

*“Virologe Christian Drosten hält eine Beurteilung im Rückblick für abwegig....”* (Virologist Christian Drosten considers an evaluation in hindsight [of vaccine rollout] absurd.) (“Es ist praktisch unmöglich,” 2021, para. 1)

While no overarching trends in theme revealed themselves in the analysis, one marked theme notably emphasizes the contrast between Dr. Drosten and “a number” of critics of vaccine rollout. The contribution of this accentuated contrast is evident when one considers the difference in attention paid to Dr. Drosten's defense of the vaccination strategy and the criticism it received.

*“Anders als etliche Kritiker der Impfstrategie von EU und Bundesregierung hält der Virologe Christian Drosten es nicht für möglich, das Vorgehen rückblickend”*

*einzuordnen.*” (Unlike a number of critics of the vaccination strategy of the EU and the federal government, virologist Christian Drosten considers it impossible to classify the approach [of vaccine distribution] in hindsight.) (“Es ist praktisch unmöglich,” 2021, para. 1)

#### 4.3.5. *die taz* - Left-Wing, Alternative

In contrast to the mildly positive representations of Dr. Drosten in *die Zeit* and *der Spiegel*, *die taz* offers a more solidly positive portrayal of the virologist in the report “Aktuelle Entwicklungen in der Coronakrise: Drosten erwartet komplizierte Monate” (Drosten expects complicated months) (2021), for which there is no listed author. Dr. Drosten, who always appears as the grammatical subject, assumes the role of a sayer who “expects” and “believes” and a sayer who not only “says” but also “prophesies.”

Within the report, Dr. Drosten, who is quoted multiple times, is the only voice featured (“Aktuelle Entwicklungen,” 2021). As in the aforementioned Event 3 texts from the *Bild* and *der Spiegel* (which quote the same excerpts included below), intensifiers in the direct speech from Dr. Drosten convey a sense of urgency.

“Der Wissenschaftler verwies darauf, dass nach dem BioNTech-Impfstoff nun in Großbritannien der AstraZeneca-Impfstoff bereits zugelassen sei. ‘Da sollte man in der EU ganz schnell hinterherkommen....’” (The scientist pointed out that, after the BioNTech vaccine, the AstraZeneca vaccine has already been approved in Great Britain. “[The EU] should catch up very quickly....”) (“Aktuelle Entwicklungen,” 2021, para. 3)

“[Drosten] gehe davon aus, ‘dass ab der zweiten Jahreshälfte eine Entspannung eintreten könnte, aber nur, wenn man es schafft, ganz viele Personen in der ersten sechs Monaten zu impfen.’” (Drosten assumes “that a relaxation of restrictions could occur in the second half of the year, but only if one successfully vaccinates a lot of people in the first six months.”) (“Aktuelle Entwicklungen,” 2021, para. 3)

Due to the extent that Dr. Drosten's voice is featured in the text, the analysis of attitudinal lexis primarily highlights the virologist's evaluation (appreciation) of the expected trajectory of the pandemic:

*“Der Chef-Virologe der Berliner Charité, Christian Drosten, erwartet in der Corona-Krise für 2021 herausfordernde erste sechs Monate.”* (The chief virologist of the Berliner Charité, Christian Drosten, expects a challenging first six months of 2021 in the corona crisis.) (“Aktuelle Entwicklungen,” 2021, para. 3)

*“Ich schaue schon optimistisch auf das neue Jahr, aber ich glaube, dass die erste Jahreshälfte sehr kompliziert werden wird, sagt Drosten....”* (“I’m already optimistic about the new year, but I believe the first half of the year will be very complicated,” says Drosten....) (“Aktuelle Entwicklungen,” 2021, para. 3)

As a final observation, the analysis of theme reveals that while Dr. Drosten is frequently thematized, the two marked themes emphasize the criticism of vaccine rollout and the AstraZeneca vaccine instead.

*“Zur Kritik am Vorgehen bei der Impfstoffbeschaffung sagte Drosten, es sei ‘jetzt praktisch unmöglich, das im Nachhinein zu bewerten.’”* (Regarding criticism of the approach to vaccine procurement, Drosten said it is “now practically impossible to evaluate it in hindsight.”) (“Aktuelle Entwicklungen,” 2021, para. 3)

Drosten: *“Bei diesem Impfstoff hat man nicht die besondere Kühlpflicht.”* (“With [the AstraZeneca vaccine] there is no special cooling requirement.”) (“Aktuelle Entwicklungen,” 2021, para. 3)

#### 4.3.6. *Neues Deutschland - Left-Wing, Socialist*

*Neues Deutschland* conveys a similarly positive portrayal of Dr. Drosten in “*Lockdown-Verlängerung zeichnet sich ab*” (Lockdown extension becomes apparent) (2021), a report by an unnamed author. Similar to the Event 3 article in *die taz*, Dr. Drosten, who always appears as the subject, takes on the role of a sayer and senser (63.63% and 36.36%, respectively, of all processes) who “expects,” “says,” “believes,” and “prophesies.”

The unnamed author favors the use of direct speech to convey Dr. Drosten's statements. As in many of the aforementioned Event 3 texts (e.g., from the *Bild*, *die taz*, *der Spiegel*), a sense of urgency is evident in Dr. Drosten's words and in his use of intensifiers (although this necessity does not persist throughout the majority of the text, as it does in some of the aforementioned articles).

“*[Drosten] rechne damit, dass ab der zweiten Jahreshälfte eine Entspannung eintreten könnte - vorausgesetzt, es würden in den ersten sechs Monaten sehr viele Personen geimpft.*” (Drosten expects that a relaxation of restrictions could come in the second half of the year - provided that lots of people are vaccinated in the first six months.) (“Lockdown-Verlängerung zeichnet sich ab,” 2021, para. 10)

In the example provided above, the author also effectively uses a hyphen to emphasize the condition Dr. Drosten gives for the possibility of relaxing pandemic restrictions.

The analysis of the attitudinal lexis primarily reveals Dr. Drosten's own evaluation (appreciation) of the expected course of the pandemic and vaccine rollout criticism; it should be noted that Dr. Drosten's comments in the first excerpt listed below are also featured in the Event 3 text from *die taz*.

“*Der Berliner Virologe Christian Drosten erwartet hinsichtlich der Coronavirus-Pandemie ein herausforderndes erstes Halbjahr 2021. ‘Ich schaue schon optimistisch auf das neue Jahr, aber ich glaube, dass die erste Jahreshälfte sehr kompliziert werden wird,’ sagte Drosten....*” (The Berlin-based virologist Christian Drosten expects a challenging first half of the year 2021 in regard to the coronavirus pandemic. “I’m already optimistic about the new year, but I believe the first half of the year will be very complicated,” says Drosten....) (“Lockdown-Verlängerung zeichnet sich ab,” 2021, para. 10)

“*Zur Diskussion um angeblich zu geringe Bestellmengen von Impfstoff sagte der Virologe, dies sei im Nachhinein kaum zu bewerten.*” (Regarding the discussion that, allegedly, too little vaccine was ordered, the virologist says this can hardly be evaluated in hindsight.) (“Lockdown-Verlängerung zeichnet sich ab,” 2021, para. 12)

The use of the adverb “*angeblich*” (allegedly) in the second excerpt also reveals the author’s own judgment of criticism of vaccine rollout, as it casts doubt on the validity or merit of the existing critique of how vaccines were distributed and ordered in Germany (“*Lockdown-Verlängerung zeichnet sich ab,*” 2021, para. 12).

Finally, the analysis of theme shows that, while Dr. Drosten was thematized on several occasions, the use of marked themes was reserved for emphasizing the controversy behind vaccine rollout, Dr. Drosten’s reluctance to offer a prognosis on the pandemic without proper data, and the possibility of a lockdown extension.

*“Zur Diskussion um angeblich zu geringe Bestellmengen von Impfstoff sagte der Virologe, dies sei im Nachhinein kaum zu bewerten.”* (Regarding the discussion that, allegedly, too little vaccine was ordered, the virologist says this can hardly be evaluated in hindsight.) (“*Lockdown-Verlängerung zeichnet sich ab,*” 2021, para. 12)

*“Eine Prognose, wann die aktuellen Beschränkungen aufgehoben werden könnten, wollte Drosten nicht abgeben: ‘Wir haben zurzeit keine validen Zahlen, weil die Labore über die Feiertage weniger getestet haben, aber auch weil viele Menschen, die krank geworden sind, nicht zum Arzt gegangen sind.’”* (As for a prognosis for when the current restrictions could be lifted, Drosten was reluctant to provide one: “We have at present no valid numbers, because the laboratories tested less over the holidays and because many people who were sick did not go to the doctor.) (“*Lockdown-Verlängerung zeichnet sich ab,*” 2021, para. 13)

*“Ob der Lockdown bis in den Februar verlängert werden muss, könne nicht vorhergesagt werden.”* ([According to Drosten,] whether the lockdown must be extended into February can not be determined ahead of time.) (“*Lockdown-Verlängerung zeichnet sich ab,*” 2021, para. 13)

#### **4.3.7. Das Coronavirus-Update von NDR Info**

In episode 70 of *Das Coronavirus-Update von NDR Info* (released on January 5, 2021), Dr. Drosten, who always appears in the subject position, engages in sensing, speaking, and relative processes (63.16%, 21.05%, and 15.79%, respectively, of all processes) (Hennig & Drosten, 2021). Thus, although he also assumes the role of the sayer and of an entity with

particular attributes through the use of the verb “*sein*” (to be), Dr. Drosten primarily assumes the role of the senser. Interestingly, as observed in the Event 2 podcast episode, the virus and COVID-19 mutations, when appearing as the subject, assume the role of actors that engage in processes like “*weiterverbreiten*” (to disseminate), “*laufen*” (to circulate), and “*zurückgehen*” (to return) (Hennig & Drosten, 2021, para. 125)

As in the podcast episodes from the first two events, Dr. Drosten frequently uses the pronoun “*wir*” (we), which is used to be inclusive of all in Germany. Additionally, a palpable sense of urgency persists throughout the podcast, which is further amplified through the use of the modal verbs “*müssen*” (must) and “*sollen*” (should) when the virologist describes the steps that should and must be taken to address the pandemic.

*“... man sollte einfach im Sinne auch der Bevölkerungsimpunität aus den jetzt begrenzt verfügbaren Impfdosen das Maximum rausholen.”* (... one should simply, in the sense of population immunity, roll out the maximum amount of the limited vaccine doses that are available now.) (Hennig & Drosten, 2021, para. 123)

*“Deswegen ist es, glaube ich, naiv, einfach darauf zu hoffen, dass es schon gutgehen wird. Ich denke, man müsste sich und sollte sich jetzt in diesen Wochen darauf vorbereiten.”* (That’s why I believe it’s naïve to simply hope that everything will go well. I think one must and should prepare oneself in the coming weeks.) (Hennig & Drosten, 2021, para. 130)

Regarding the results of the analysis of attitudinal lexis, Dr. Drosten uses appreciation and judgment to evaluate and praise *die Ständige Impfkommission (STIKO*, the Standing Committee for Vaccination), Germany’s top vaccine advisory board, and its COVID-19 vaccine recommendations:

*“Das sind wirkliche Experten, die da am Werk sind.... Ich denke, dass auch in Deutschland, die übrigens schon sehr guten, sehr lesenswerten STIKO-Empfehlungen zur COVID-19-Impfung, vielleicht auch noch mal dem angepasst werden.”* (These are real experts that are at work.... I think that in Germany too, the STIKO recommendations on COVID-19 vaccination, which, by the way, are very good and are very much worth reading, will maybe be adopted again.) (Hennig & Drosten, 2021, para. 117)

“*Und wie gesagt, unsere STIKO in Deutschland ist wirklich ein sehr gut besetztes Gremium. Und wir können da erwarten, dass da mit viel Dateneinsicht und Evidenz gehandelt und entschieden wird.” (Like I said, our STIKO in Germany is really a very well-staffed committee. And we can expect that actions and decisions will be taken with much data insight and evidence.) (Hennig & Drosten, 2021, para. 123)*

“*Ich kenne aber natürlich Leute, die in der STIKO sind. Ich kann nur sagen, denen kann man wirklich vertrauen.... Da ist unsere STIKO in Deutschland jetzt nicht das schlechteste Gremium, wenn man so europaweit schaut.” (I, of course, know people that are in STIKO. I can only say that one can really trust them.... Our STIKO in Germany is not the worst board, when one looks throughout Europe.) (Hennig & Drosten, 2021, para. 117)*

It is also worth noting that, in contrast to the podcast episodes from Events 1 and 2 in which Dr. Drosten remarks on the misuse and misrepresentation of science in the realm of politics and media, the virologist indicates that public entities and figures (particularly in politics) are beginning to listen to scientists more.

Question Posed to Dr. Drosten: “*Ist ist Ihr Eindruck jetzt, dass weite Teile der Wissenschaft wieder mehr Gehör finden?*” (Do you have the impression now that large parts of the scientific community are now being heard more?) (Hennig & Drosten, 2021, para. 132)

Dr. Drosten: “*Ich glaube, das kann man mehr aus der öffentlichen Diskussion entnehmen.... Ich denke, das ist zum Teil darauf zurückzuführen, dass auch Wissenschaftler gehört wurden.” (I believe one can glean this from the public discussion.... I think that this is partly because scientists were heard too.) (Hennig & Drosten, 2021, para. 133)*

#### **4.4. Event 4: The Spring 2021 Wave of COVID-19**

##### **4.4.1. Junge Freiheit - Conservative, Right-Wing, Nationalist**

As in all aforementioned texts representative of the far-right, Boris T. Kaiser (2021) offers yet another negative portrayal of Dr. Drosten in his editorial “*Kaisers royaler*

*Wochenrückblick: Gender-Gaga, TKKG und Drosten*” (Kaiser’s royal weekly review: Gender-Gaga, TKKG, and Drosten). In the text, Dr. Drosten, who always appears as the grammatical subject, assumes solely and equally the role of an actor (50% of occurrences) who “sets” and “applies” and the role of a sayer (50% of occurrences) who “sermonizes” and “demands.”

As one might expect from an editorial, Kaiser’s (2021) own voice, conveyed through bare assertions peppered with the occasional colloquialism like “*einen an der Klatsche haben*” (to be nuts, insane), remains the focus throughout the text (para. 11). The author’s tone is consistently sarcastic and belittling, and, in two instances, he addresses Dr. Drosten as “*Panik-Professor Christian Drosten*” (panic professor Christian Drosten) and “*Untergangsprophet aus dem Labor*” (prophet of doom from a laboratory) (Kaiser, 2021, para. 8).

An analysis of attitudinal lexis also reveals Kaiser’s (2021) derision for Dr. Drosten and his unfavorable judgment of pandemic lockdown restrictions more generally, which he characterizes as never-ending and as an encroachment on citizens’ freedoms.

“*Es ist klar, es müssen die Kontakte reduziert werde, ’ predigt der Untergangsprophet aus dem Labor dem sich im Dauerlockdown befindlichen Volk weiterhin ohne Unterlaß und würde in Sachen Freiheitsbeschränkungen nur zu gerne immer noch einen drauf setzen.*” (“It is clear that contact [between people] must be reduced,” the prophet of doom from a laboratory incessantly sermonizes to the people in a permanent lockdown and would be only too happy to add more restrictions of freedom.) (Kaiser, 2021, para. 8)

“*Apropos: Den Holzhammer würde Panik-Professor Christian Drosten nun auch gerne endlich gegen alle Deutschen einsetzen, die immer noch nicht genug Angst vor dem Corona-Tod entwickelt haben, daß sie komplett aufgehört haben, zu leben.*” (By the way: panic professor Christian Drosten would now like to finally apply the wooden hammer [i.e., lockdown] against all Germans, who have still not developed enough fear of Corona-death such that they completely stop living.) (Kaiser, 2021, para. 8)

“*Wenn Drosten und seine Fans nun unironisch aber zynisch fordern, es müsse endlich einen ’ernsthaften Lockdown’ geben, zeigt das vor allem eins: Diese Leute haben ernsthaft einen an der Klatsche. Aber diese Form von totalem Realitätsverlust gilt heute... als Verantwortungsbewußtsein und höchste Form der wissenschaftlichen und*



*politischen Vernunft.*” (When Drosten and his fans unironically but cynically demand that there must be a “serious lockdown,” this shows above all one thing: these people are seriously nuts. But this form of being completely out of touch with reality is considered today to be responsibility and the highest form of scientific and political reason.) (Kaiser, 2021, para. 11)

It should be noted that although Dr. Drosten is briefly allowed to speak for himself in the first excerpt through a direct quote, Kaiser’s own highly negative commentary immediately follows the virologist’s words. Additionally, Kaiser’s use of indirect speech to convey the “demands” of Dr. Drosten and his “fans” for a “serious lockdown,” which itself is placed in quotes, effectively casts doubt on the validity of such a proposal.

While a number of marked themes appear in the editorial, the analysis of theme also highlights one particularly long unmarked theme in which Kaiser outlines existing pandemic restrictions and some of their adverse effects on restaurants, the retail industry, and artists:

*“Die derzeit herrschenden Kontaktsbeschränkungen, die vielerorts verhängten nächtlichen Ausgangssperren, die dichtgemachten und nicht selten bereits jetzt in den Ruin getriebenen gastronomischen Betriebe und der mal komplette geschlossene, mal massiv eingeschränkte Einzelhandel sowie der Bankrott unzähliger Künstler, Kulturbetriebe und mittelständigen Unternehmen sind ihnen noch nicht genug.”* (The current prevailing contact restrictions, the nightly curfews imposed in many places, the gastronomical businesses that were shut-down and driven into ruin, and the completely closed, massively restricted retail stores, as well as the bankruptcy of countless artists, cultural institutions and medium-sized companies are not enough for them [(i.e., Dr. Drosten and those sharing his viewpoints on the pandemic)].) (Kaiser, 2021, para. 10)

The sheer length of this theme, in addition to its list of entities negatively impacted by COVID-19 restrictions, characterizes the existing pandemic measures as already taxingly excessive, even though individuals like Dr. Drosten who support their expansion.

#### **4.4.2. Bild - Conservative, Right-Wing, Populist**

In the *Bild* report “*Drosten warnt: Wer sich nicht impfen lässt, wird sich infizieren!*” (Drosten Warns: Those who don’t let themselves get vaccinated will get infected!) (2021), the unnamed author offers a rather mild portrayal of Dr. Drosten. The virologist, when the grammatical subject, primarily takes on the role of a sayer who “warns,” “affirms,” and “says” (58.82% of cases). Otherwise, Dr. Drosten assumes the role of the senser (29.41% of cases) who “estimates,” “assumes,” and “believes,” and the role of an entity described with particular attributes through the use of the verb “*sein*” (to be) (11.76% of cases). Although Dr. Drosten appears once as the grammatical object with the sensing process “*vorschweben*” (to envision), the virologist is nevertheless the entity undertaking this mental action (“Drosten warnt,” 2021, para. 7).

In contrast to the previously discussed texts from the *Bild*, Dr. Drosten is the sole voice featured throughout the text; no additional supporting or dissenting voices are included (“Drosten warnt,” 2021). Furthermore, despite the author’s favoring of indirect speech to convey Dr. Drosten’s thoughts and comments, the virologist is allowed to speak for himself through direct speech throughout the text. The analysis of attitudinal lexis primarily reveals Dr. Drosten’s use of appreciation to evaluate the state of the pandemic, mutations, and the likelihood of contracting COVID-19 if one is not vaccinated.

“*Und wer sich jetzt beispielsweise aktiv dagegen entscheidet, sich impfen zu lassen, der wird sich unweigerlich infizieren.*” (“And who now, for example, actively decides against vaccinated will inevitably be infected.”) (“Drosten warnt,” 2021, para. 2)

“*Der Sommer kann ganz gut werden in Deutschland.*” (“This summer can be quite good in Germany.”) (“Drosten warnt,” 2021, para. 5)

“*Das Virus hat ein bisschen mehr Fitness, aber das bedeutet jetzt überhaupt nicht, dass das eine Riesengefahr für uns unmittelbar darstellt,’ sagte Drosten über die Variante aus Indien.*” (“The virus has a little more fitness, but that doesn’t at all mean that it now immediately poses a huge danger to us,” said Drosten about the variant from India.) (“Drosten warnt,” 2021, para. 10)

The one hint of a slightly negative portrayal of Dr. Drosten in an otherwise rather mild characterization comes from the title itself, in which the unnamed author transforms a statement in the declarative mood from the virologist into an exclamation (“Drosten warnt,” 2021). Coupled with the short phrase “Drosten warns” before the paraphrased quote, the title reads almost like an ominous, emphatic prediction or a threat (“Drosten warnt,” 2021).

#### 4.4.3. *die Zeit* - Center / Left-of-Center

*Die Zeit* offers a similar portrayal of Dr. Drosten in the report “*Wer sich nicht impfen lässt, wird sich unweigerlich infizieren*” (“Those who don’t let themselves get vaccinated will inevitably get infected”) (2021), for which there is no listed author; however, in contrast to the Event 4 text from the *Bild*, the depiction of Dr. Drosten in the Event 4 text from *die Zeit* is slightly positive. Dr. Drosten, who always appears as the grammatical subject, assumes the role of a sayer who “warns” and “says” (58.33% of occurrences); otherwise, Dr. Drosten assumes the role of a senser (25% of occurrences) who “estimates,” “assumes,” and “sees,” and the role of an entity that exhibits particular attributes (16.67% of occurrences) through the process “*sein*” (to be).

Throughout the text, Dr. Drosten’s thoughts and comments on the course of the pandemic are conveyed with both direct and indirect speech; no additional supporting or dissenting voices are present in the article (“*Wer sich nicht impfen lässt*,” 2021). The analysis of attitudinal lexis reveals Dr. Drosten’s use of appreciation to evaluate the state of the pandemic. This result is not particularly surprising given the fact that the text is dedicated to presenting the virologist’s perspective; even the article’s title consists solely of a quote from Dr. Drosten. As the author

from *die Zeit* chose to quote the same comments as the unnamed author from the Event 4 *Bild* text, these quotes will not be presented again here.

While certainly not the only participant highlighted in the theme analysis, it is nevertheless worth noting that the virus itself is frequently thematized in the article.

“Das Coronavirus werde nicht weggehen, mahnt Virologe Drosten.” (The coronavirus will not go away, warns virologist Drosten.) (“Wer sich nicht impfen lässt,” 2021, para. 1)

“Die indische Corona-Variante, die von Großbritannien und der Weltgesundheitsorganisation (WHO) mittlerweile als besorgniserregend eingestuft wird, hat derzeit in Deutschland aus Drostens Sicht noch keinen Verbreitungsvorteil.” (The Indian coronavirus variant, which has been classified as worrisome by Great Britain and the WHO, currently has no dissemination advantage in Germany from Drosten’s perspective.) (“Wer sich nicht impfen lässt,” 2021, para. 6)

“Die Mutante sei etwas weniger beeinträchtigt durch Impfung und Immunität.” (The [mutated variant] is somewhat less affected by vaccination and immunity.) (“Wer sich nicht impfen lässt,” 2021, para. 6)

#### 4.4.4. *der Spiegel* - Center / Left-of-Center

In the report entitled “*Drosten plädiert für weitere Maßnahmen jenseits der Corona-Notbremse*” (Drosten pleads for additional measures beyond the Corona-Emergency-Brake) (2021), an unnamed author offers another slightly positive portrayal of Dr. Drosten. The virologist always appears as the grammatical subject and assumes the role of a sayer (54.54% of cases) who “pleads,” “demands,” and “says,” and the role of a senser (45.45% of cases) who “expects,” “thinks,” and “fears.” Throughout the article, Dr. Drosten’s perspective is conveyed through both direct and indirect speech. Although the author briefly and vaguely alludes to criticism of new pandemic restrictions, no specific supporting or dissenting voices are featured alongside Dr. Drosten.

In one instance, the author refers to Dr. Drosten as “*der Corona-Experte von der Berliner Charité*” (the corona expert from the Berliner Charité), effectively establishing the virologist’s expertise in the world of the COVID-19 pandemic (“Drosten plädiert für weitere Maßnahmen,” 2021, para. 1). The analysis of attitudinal lexis points to Dr. Drosten’s (and, by extension, the author’s) use of appreciation to evaluate the current course of the pandemic and the new round of federal guidelines for pandemic restrictions. Throughout the text, a sense of urgency is created through, for example, the frequent use of the modal verb “*müssen*” (must) and the processes “*plädieren*” (to plea) and “*verlangen*” (to demand):

“Drosten plädiert für weitere Maßnahmen....” (Drosten pleas for additional measures....)  
 (“Drosten plädiert für weitere Maßnahmen,” 2021, title)

“Wegen der sich verschlechternden Situation in den Krankenhäusern verlangt Virologe Christian Drosten zusätzliche Schritte.” (Due to the worsening situation in hospitals, virologist Christian Drosten demands additional steps.) (“Drosten plädiert für weitere Maßnahmen,” 2021, para. 1)

“*Ich denke, dass man anhand der sich jetzt einstellenden Situation in den Krankenhäusern auch noch mal anders reagieren muss,’ sagte der Corona-Experte von der Berliner Charité.... Dies müsse sicherlich in ‘allernächster Zeit’ geschehen.” (“I think that one, based on the current situation in the hospitals, must react differently,” said the corona expert from the Berliner Charité.... This must definitely happen in “the very near future.”) (“Drosten plädiert für weitere Maßnahmen,” 2021, para. 1)*

#### 4.4.5. *die taz* - Left-Wing, Alternative

Yet another favorable depiction of Dr. Drosten is presented in *die taz* report entitled “Drosten: Neuer Lockdown ist nötig” (Drosten: New lockdown is necessary) (2021), for which there is no listed author. An analysis of transitivity reveals that Dr. Drosten, who always appears as the grammatical subject, primarily assumes the role of a senser who “considers” (60% of occurrences) and the role of a sayer who “says” (40% of occurrences).

In the article, Dr. Drosten's perspective is presented through both direct and indirect speech ("Drosten: Neuer Lockdown ist nötig," 2021). Interestingly, immediately after sharing Dr. Drosten's perspective, the author also features the views of virologist Melanie Brinkmann, who, along with Dr. Drosten, advocates for another lockdown to combat the pandemic; thus, Dr. Brinkmann functions as a supporting voice that bolsters Dr. Drosten's earlier arguments.

The analysis of attitudinal lexis points to Dr. Drosten's use of appreciation to evaluate the pandemic and the potential usefulness of a new lockdown in Germany ("Drosten: Neuer Lockdown ist nötig," 2021). While the use of modal verbs in the text remains minimal, a sense of urgency is nonetheless achieved in the virologist's comments via words like "*unausweichlich*" (inevitable) and "*notwendig*" (necessary):

*"Der Berliner Virologe Christian Drosten hält einen erneuten Lockdown für unausweichlich."* (Drosten considers an additional lockdown to be inevitable.) ("Drosten: Neuer Lockdown ist nötig," 2021, para. 1)

*"... Neuer Lockdown ist nötig."* (... a new lockdown is necessary.) ("Drosten: Neuer Lockdown ist nötig," 2021, title)

*"Dazu ist jetzt aber politisches Handeln und auch die Unterstützung möglichst vieler Menschen notwendig, 'sagte Drosten.'*" ("To that end, political action and also the support of as many people as possible is now, however, necessary," said Drosten.) ("Drosten: Neuer Lockdown ist nötig," 2021, para. 1)

While Dr. Drosten remains the focus of the present study, it is nevertheless interesting to note the author's use of affect when describing Dr. Brinkmann's anger at the sluggish response to the warnings of the scientific community, particularly in the realm of politics ("Drosten: Neuer Lockdown ist nötig," 2021). Her comments somewhat echo Dr. Drosten's frustrations with the media and politicians, as expressed in the Event 2 podcast episode from *Das Coronavirus-Update von NDR Info*.

“*Sie sei wütend, dass nicht früher reagiert worden sei auf die Warnungen der Wissenschaft. ‘Wir könnten jetzt schon bei Zehner-Inzidenzen sein, wenn die Politiker bei der Bund-Länder-Konferenz im Januar ernst genommen hätten, was wir ihnen gesagt haben.’*” (She is angry that the warnings of the scientific community were not responded to earlier. “We could have been in the tens of cases now if politicians at the federal government-state conference in January had taken what we ([i.e., scientists]) told them seriously.”) (“Drosten: Neuer Lockdown ist nötig,” 2021, para. 2)

#### 4.4.6. *Neues Deutschland* - Left-Wing, Socialist

In the report “*Unionsfraktionsvize: Politiker sollen sich mit AstraZeneca impfen lassen*” (Vice President of the Union Faction: Politicians should let themselves be vaccinated with AstraZeneca) (2021), for which there is no listed author, Dr. Drosten appears predominantly as the sayer (69.23% of cases) who “requests,” “urges,” and “says.” The virologist also occasionally assumes the role of a senser (23.08% of cases) who “believes,” “thinks,” and “expects,” and the role of an entity associated with particular attributes through the process “*haben*” (to have) (7.70% of cases). Dr. Drosten always appears as the grammatical subject.

The unnamed author conveys Dr. Drosten’s perspective through both direct and indirect speech and chooses not to include additional supporting or dissenting voices (“Unionsfraktionsvize,” 2021). Because Dr. Drosten’s voice is the primary focus of the text, the analysis of attitudinal lexis primarily indicates his use of appreciation to evaluate the state of the pandemic, COVID-19 variants, and the necessity of new lockdown measures.

“*Angesichts der steigenden Corona-Zahlen mahnt der Berliner Virologe Christian Drosten schärfere Maßnahmen an. ‘Ich glaube, es wird nicht ohne einen neuen Lockdown gehen, um diese Dynamik, die sich jetzt ohne jeden Zweifel eingestellt hat, noch einmal zu verzögern,’ sagte der Charité-Wissenschaftler am Dienstag.... Die Situation sei leider sehr ernst und sehr kompliziert.*” (In light of the rising coronavirus cases, Berlin-based virologist Christian Drosten requests tighter measures. “I believe that slowing down this dynamic, that has now undoubtedly settled in, without a new lockdown will not work,” said the Charité scientist on Tuesday.... The situation is unfortunately “very serious and very complicated.”) (“Unionsfraktionsvize,” 2021, para. 3)

“*Das ist natürlich alles andere als beruhigend.*’ Die Variante B.1.1.7 sei zudem eindeutig krankmachender und auch tödlicher als das Ursprungsvirus.” (“This is, of course, anything but reassuring.” The B.1.1.7 variant is, moreover, clearly more pathogenic and deadlier than the original virus.) (“Unionsfraktionsvize,” 2021, para. 4)

The analysis of attitudinal lexis also reveals Dr. Drosten’s judgment and evaluation of COVID-19 reopening models, which he characterizes as lacking strong scientific foundations and criteria for success:

“Kritisch gegenüber Öffnungsmodellen” (Critical of reopening models)  
 (“Unionsfraktionsvize,” 2021, para. 8)

“*Modellprojekte wie in Tübingen sollten eine gute wissenschaftliche Begleitung haben, sagte Drosten.*” (Modeling projects like those in Tübingen should have good scientific support, says Drosten.) (“Unionsfraktionsvize,” 2021, para. 8)

“*Keines dieser Projekte habe bislang bewiesen, dass es funktionere, betonte Drosten.*” (None of these projects so far have proven that they work, emphasized Drosten.)  
 (“Unionsfraktionsvize,” 2021, para. 8)

“*Wichtig sei, vorher Erfolgskriterien zu definieren wie etwa eine Zahl der Krankenhausaufnahmen, der Todesfälle nach drei Wochen oder der Wirtschaftsleistung. ‘Also ich denke, man sollte sich eine ganze Zahl von solchen Erfolgskriterien hinlegen, bevor man diesen Modellversuch macht....’*” (It’s important to define criteria for success beforehand like the number of hospitalizations, the number of deaths after three weeks, or the economic performance. “So I think that one should lay down a whole number of such criteria for success before one tests the model.”) (“Unionsfraktionsvize,” 2021, para. 9)

While the theme analysis revealed little contributing to the overall characterization of Dr. Drosten, the virus and COVID-19 mutations are often thematized.

“*Die Variante B.1.1.7 sei zudem eindeutig krankmachender und auch tödlicher als das Ursprungsvirus.*” (The B.1.1.7 variant is, moreover, clearly more pathogenic and deadlier than the original virus.) (“Unionsfraktionsvize,” 2021, para. 4)

“*Die in Südafrika und in Brasilien entdeckten Varianten lägen in Deutschland immer noch im Bereich von ein Prozent oder niedriger.*” (The variants that were discovered in South Africa and in Brazil are still around one percent or lower in Germany.)  
 (“Unionsfraktionsvize,” 2021, para. 5)



Drosten: ““Diese Varianten kommen nur dann hoch, wenn wir in der Bevölkerung schon eine Immunität haben.”” (Drosten: “These variants go up when we already have immunity in the population.”) (“Unionsfraktionsvize,” 2021, para. 5)

#### 4.4.7. Das Coronavirus-Update von NDR Info

In episode 82 of *Das Coronavirus-Update von NDR Info*, which was originally released on March 30, 2021, Dr. Drosten, when appearing by himself as the sole grammatical subject, assumes the role of a senser (90% of cases) who “thinks,” “believes,” and “wonders” (Schulmann & Drosten, 2021). In the remaining 10% of instances, Dr. Drosten assumes the role of an entity that is ascribed attributes through the process “*sein*” (to be). When Dr. Drosten is the grammatical object, he is astounded (*erstaunen*) by the results of a poll by the research group Wahlen indicating that 36% of Germans do not find existing pandemic measures strict enough (Schulmann & Drosten, 2021, para. 26).

As in the previous podcast episodes from previous events, Dr. Drosten often uses the pronoun “*wir*” (we), which is used to be inclusive of all in Germany; additionally, he frequently formulates his statements using “*es ist*” (it is) and “*das ist*” (that is), which function as bare assertions. The analysis of attitudinal lexis reveals first and foremost Dr. Drosten’s use of appreciation to gauge the present state of the pandemic and the increasingly heated and controversial debates it has caused in public discourse.

“Wir haben leider eine immer mehr kontroverse Auseinandersetzung mit sich immer weiter von den wissenschaftlichen Befunden entfernenden Argumenten. Das ist im Moment das große Problem.” (We unfortunately have an increasingly controversial debate with arguments that are increasingly removed from scientific findings. That is the biggest problem, at the moment.) (Schulmann & Drosten, 2021, para. 20)

“Natürlich ist die Situation auch sehr ernst und sehr kompliziert.” (Of course, the situation is also very serious and very complicated.) (Schulmann & Drosten, 2021, para. 20)

“... *diese Pandemie eine Sondersituation ist.*” (...this pandemic is a special situation.) (Schulmann & Drosten, 2021, para. 21)

Additionally, Dr. Drosten uses judgment to criticize misleading public debates and the misuse of scientific findings, which he even labels as science denial (Schulmann & Drosten, 2021). The virologist also indicates the role of the media and politics in this science denial and compares the science denial during the pandemic with climate change denial, thereby demonstrating that science denial is in no way a new phenomenon in the age of COVID-19.

“*Ich glaube, da wird die Öffentlichkeit getäuscht, wenn gesagt wird: ‘Wir wissen ja noch gar nicht, wo das Virus übertragen wird, da muss noch viel geforscht werden’ und solche Dinge. Das ist falsch, das ist Wissenschaftsleugnung.” (I think that the public is being deceived when it is said, “we still don’t even know where the virus is transmitted, there is still much that must be researched” and such things. This is false, this is science denial.) (Schulmann & Drosten, 2021, para. 25)*

“*Hier herrschen in der Politik und in den Medien irreführende Wahrnehmungen.” (Here prevail misleading perceptions in politics and in the media.) (Schulmann & Drosten, 2021, para. 26)*

“*Weil wir sehr viel irreführende Debatten in der Öffentlichkeit hatten, weil wir eine schier undurchdringliche Bürokratie in der Umsetzung von Maßnahmen haben. Auch zum Teil eine Störrigkeit vielleicht von regulativen Strukturen, die nicht anerkannt haben, dass diese Pandemie eine Sondersituation ist. Und leider auch eine Fehlverwendung von wissenschaftlichen Argumenten in der politischen Debatten. Die geht fast in den Bereich von Wissenschaftsleugnung, von den klassischen Motiven der Wissenschaftsleugnung. Die kennt man schon aus der Klimadebatte. Da tragen alle etwas bei. Die Medien haben einen großen Beitrag, die Politik hat einen großen Beitrag. Und dann gibt es gewisse soziale Gruppe, die so etwas befeuern.” (Because we had lots of misleading public debates, because we have a nearly impenetrable bureaucracy in the implementation of pandemic measures. Also, maybe partially due to the stubbornness of regulatory structures that have not recognized that the pandemic is a special situation. And unfortunately also a misuse of scientific information in political debates. This almost goes into the realm of science denial, of the classic motives of science denial. One recognizes these already from the climate [change] debate. There everyone contributes something. The media has a large contribution, politics has a large contribution. And then there are certain social groups that fuel such a thing.) (Schulmann & Drosten, 2021, para. 21)*

## V. Discussion

### 5.1. *Junge Freiheit* / *COMPACT*

Beginning with the texts selected from *Junge Freiheit* and *COMPACT*, a consistent, strongly negative portrayal of Dr. Drosten by these far-right publications is evident across all four events. In the Event 1 text (as in the other articles from these publications), the author's reliance on bare assertions leaves little room for alternative perspectives; thus, the author's viewpoint is presented as the unequivocal truth about Dr. Drosten. The virologist is depicted as an incredible, irresponsible scientist who is more of a charlatan or a gambler than a reputed expert. By labeling him as a self-appointed king of science ("*selbsternannten Wissenschaftskönig*") and as a virologist with a Napoleon complex, the author portrays Dr. Drosten as an individual with delusions of grandeur and a desire for power (Kaiser, 2020, para. 1). The use of the action process "*schießen*" (to shoot) depicts Dr. Drosten as an individual who not only is unable to accept criticism but who also lashes out violently against those who find fault in his work; furthermore, the circumstance "*regelmäßig*" (regularly) suggests that Dr. Drosten's response to critics is habitual and frequent ("*...seines sehr aktiven Twitter-Accounts, auf dem Drosten regelmäßig gegen seine Kritiker schießt*") (Kaiser, 2020, para. 2). The violent connotation behind the term "*Prügel-Arie*," used to describe the flood of criticism against *Bild* reporter Piatov despite the supposedly valid points raised in his article, echoes the aforementioned portrayal of Dr. Drosten as an individual who lashes out against critics and considers himself to be above reproach (Kaiser, 2020, para. 3). Finally, by mockingly addressing Dr. Drosten as the "*geistigen Führer*" (spiritual Führer), the author represents the virologist as an individual comparable to the ruthless tyrant Adolf Hitler (Kaiser, 2020, para. 3). This

problematic connection of Dr. Drosten with Hitler and, by extension, the Nazi regime, is consistent with the broader trend among far-right extremists of using Germany's Nazi past to criticize COVID-19 measures and their proponents as "dictatorial".

In the Event 2 text from *Junge Freiheit*, Dr. Drosten is negatively characterized through his defense of Professor Wolfram Henn as an unethical, inhumane person with little regard for human life. Together with Professor Henn, Dr. Drosten is portrayed as someone who calls an individual's basic rights (e.g., the right to live) into question. Just as he was portrayed as a horrible scientist in Event 1, Dr. Drosten is depicted in Event 2 as a nefarious, unscrupulous expert who aids a dictatorship (i.e., the German federal government) intent on repressing its citizens.

The notion of Dr. Drosten playing a part in a repressive regime is continued in the Event 3 text (taken from *COMPACT*), in which Dr. Drosten is characterized as an agent who helps create the falsehoods and fabrications of the "*Corona-Diktatur*" (corona dictatorship) (Meissner, 2021, para. 3). He is also depicted as an addle-brained, frenzied fear monger in the *COMPACT* text; a similar representation is also evident in the Event 4 text through the sarcastic nicknames "*Panik-Professor*" (panic professor) and "*Untergangsprophet aus dem Labor*" (prophet of doom from a laboratory) (Kaiser, 2021, para. 8). This second moniker, when considered with the action process "*predigen*" (to sermonize), is suggestive of a sarcastic portrayal of Dr. Drosten as a holy, religious figure (Kaiser, 2021, para. 8). Furthermore, it is also interesting to note the violent tendencies attributed to Dr. Drosten in Event 4. Unlike in Event 1, in which Dr. Drosten lashes out specifically against his critics, the virologist is represented in Event 4 as a person who wants to use a wooden mallet (i.e., a lockdown) against the German people ("*Den Holzhammer würde... Drosten nun auch gerne endlich gegen alle Deutschen einsetzen....*"); in this way, Dr.

Drosten is portrayed as someone with an intent to harm those residing in Germany (Kaiser, 2021, para. 8).

## **5.2. *Bild***

Like *Junge Freiheit* and *COMPACT*, the *Bild* offers a consistently negative portrayal of Dr. Drosten across all four events; however, the degree of unfavorableness present in the depiction of the virologist unexpectedly diminishes in the later events examined in the present study. Beginning with Piatov's article, the Event 1 text that sparked the flurry of public discourse and resulted in a reprimand from the *der Deutsche Presserat* (German Press Council), Dr. Drosten is given the mocking, tongue-in-cheek nickname "*Star-Virologe*" (star virologist), simultaneously alluding to Dr. Drosten's scientific reputation and calling this reputation into question (Piatov, 2020, para. 1). Through the judgment and criticism of countless experts, as well as the author Piatov himself, Dr. Drosten is characterized as a sloppy, careless scientist. Furthermore, although Dr. Drosten is given an opportunity to respond to criticism of his preprint study in the *Bild* report, the placement of the virologist's words at the very end of a text outlining the accusations of scientists and alleged voices from within his own research team weakens the strength of his arguments; his words ring hollow.

In contrast to Event 1, in which Dr. Drosten is briefly allowed to speak for himself, the author of the Event 2 text from the *Bild* relays all of Dr. Drosten's comments through indirect speech, effectively removing any opportunity for the virologist to present his own viewpoint. The criticisms of Dr. Uwe Janssens, however, are frequently quoted through direct speech; thus, the Event 2 text is rather one-sided and heavily favors the critical voice of Dr. Janssens. Through the words of the *Bild* reporter and Dr. Janssens, Dr. Drosten is depicted as an irresponsible fear

monger and an individual who creates unnecessary fear (“*macht [Drosten]... unnötige Angst*”) (“Corona-Streit,” 2020, para. 5). Furthermore, Dr. Janssens’ final criticism characterizes Dr. Drosten as an individual who presumptuously oversteps his boundaries into fields beyond his expertise (“*Herr Drosten sollte sich aus der Diskussion um Kapazitätsengpässe auf Intensivstationen heraushalten*”) (“Corona-Streit,” 2020, para. 7).

After Event 2, the *Bild*’s negative depiction of Dr. Drosten diminishes significantly; this softening of the portrayal is evidenced by the striking similarities in language choices between the Event 3 *Bild* text and the Event 3 text from *der Spiegel*, a left-of-center publication. Nevertheless, the author of the Event 3 text taken from the *Bild* casts Dr. Drosten, who dismissed criticism of vaccine rollout in Germany, as someone who defends a chaotic, expensive, and inefficient federal government fiasco. This mildly negative portrayal of Drosten is continued in Event 4, in which Dr. Drosten is briefly characterized as someone who utters ominous threats (“*Drosten warnt: Wer sich nicht impfen lässt, wird sich infizieren!*”) (“Drosten warnt,” 2021, title). It is furthermore interesting to note that Dr. Drosten is the primary voice featured in the Event 4 *Bild* text and that the author’s language choices are often comparable to the language choices in the Event 4 text from *die Zeit*; these two observations further highlight the softening of the *Bild*’s characterization of Dr. Drosten.

### **5.3. *die Zeit***

In contrast to the *Bild*, *Junge Freiheit*, and *COMPACT*, *die Zeit* consistently offers a much more favorable portrayal of Dr. Drosten. In Event 1, the use of the process “*zurückschlagen*” (to strike back) characterizes Dr. Drosten as an individual who stands up for himself and fights back against the *Bild*, which is portrayed as the orchestrator of an anti-Dr.

Drosten campaign (Schneider & Ströbele, 2020, para. 1). While the *Bild* and *Junge Freiheit* depict Dr. Drosten as a lousy scientist due to criticism of his preprint paper, *die Zeit* highlights the normalcy of feedback in the scientific community (“*Teil eines völlig normalen Kollegendiskurses*”), effectively suggesting that the virologist is in no way an unreliable expert but rather is subject to criticism and review like nearly every other scientist (Schneider & Ströbele, 2020, para. 5).

In Events 2, 3, and 4, Dr. Drosten often assumes the role of a sayer (rather than an actor) who urges and recommends that others take necessary steps (e.g., institute a lockdown over the holidays) to combat the pandemic. Through the use of direct speech in the Event 2 text, the author provides a space for Dr. Drosten to speak for himself and present his own opinions. Furthermore, a series of concurring perspectives from politicians, as well as the lack of dissenting voices, reveals *die Zeit*'s support for Dr. Drosten and his recommendations in Germany's efforts to mitigate the pandemic. This trend is continued in Event 3, in which the author once again provides Dr. Drosten a space to present his own commentary through direct speech and supports him through the additional perspective of Dr. Sandra Ciesek. However, this pattern of including positive, complementary voices in addition to Dr. Drosten's notably changes in Event 4, in which Dr. Drosten's perspective is the sole focus of the text; no additional supporting or dissenting perspectives are included. While this may appear one-sided, it does suggest that the author finds Dr. Drosten's commentary to be sufficient on its own, effectively depicting the virologist as a highly credible and dependable expert.

#### **5.4. *der Spiegel***

In some respects, the favorable portrayal of Dr. Drosten in *der Spiegel* parallels his positive representation in *die Zeit*, though the two depictions do exhibit key nuances. As in *die Zeit*, Dr. Drosten is consistently allowed to speak for himself through direct speech across all four events. In Event 1, the author emphasizes the normalcy of scientific criticism (“*jedoch völlig normal*”) and suggests that, despite the legitimacy of the criticism of Dr. Drosten’s preprint study (“*trotzdem legitim*”), this seemingly negative feedback does not indicate that he is a poor expert (Köppe, 2020, para. 1, 12).

While *die Zeit* often bolsters Dr. Drosten’s arguments through the inclusion of supporting voices, *der Spiegel* generally supports the virologist’s perspective by limiting opportunities for dissenting voices to speak for themselves through direct speech despite acknowledging their existence; this pattern is evident across Events 2, 3, and 4. In Event 2, for instance, the author briefly discusses a position paper that opposes the newly approved pandemic restrictions (which Dr. Drosten supports). This discussion is limited to only one short paragraph, and the arguments of the opposing voices are always conveyed through indirect speech; thus, the author does not provide these dissenting voices a space in which to speak for themselves. Additionally, the fact that Dr. Drosten is introduced as one of the proponents (“*Befürworter*”) of these new measures characterizes the virologist as one of many advocates for expanded restrictions (“*Diese Maßnahmen gelten,*” 2020, para. 3). It is also worth noting that he is the only proponent that is named and whose perspective is presented in the article, indicating that the author finds Dr. Drosten’s commentary alone to be sufficient.

In Event 3, the pairing of Dr. Drosten with the speaking process “*auf (etwas) dringen*” (to insist upon something) not only portrays him as a sayer who encourages vaccinations and the adoption of the AstraZeneca vaccine but also indirectly expresses support for the virologist by



conveying a sense of urgency; this urgency and indirect support is notably continued in Event 4 through the use of the speaking processes “*plädieren*” (to plead) and “*verlangen*” (to demand) as Dr. Drosten insists on additional restriction measures in response to rising COVID-19 hospitalizations (“*Es ist praktisch unmöglich,*” 2021, para. 1; “*Drosten plädiert für weitere Maßnahmen,*” 2021, para. 1). Finally, the fact that the Event 4 moniker “*Corona-Experte*” (coronavirus expert) for Dr. Drosten is intertwined with a quote (“*..., ’sagte der Corona-Experte von der Berliner Charité....*”) essentially presents Dr. Drosten’s expertise as indisputable and undeniable; *der Spiegel* thus maintains that his expertise is not up for debate (“*Drosten plädiert für weitere Maßnahmen,*” 2021, para. 1).

### 5.5. *die taz*

As in the texts from *die Zeit* and *der Spiegel*, Dr. Drosten is given an opportunity to speak for himself through direct speech in all four texts taken from *die taz*. In the Event 1, Dr. Drosten is characterized as an individual who is unfairly put on trial by the *Bild* and refuses to act in accordance with the tabloid’s requests (“*...Drosten aber weigerte, mitzuspielen...*”) (Grimberg, 2020, para. 6). The fact that the author refuses to elaborate or examine the criticism of Dr. Drosten or his preprint paper effectively portrays Dr. Drosten as someone who is beyond reproach. Furthermore, the article is rhetorically effective, as demonstrated in one instance through the use of interrogative mood (“*Merken Sie was?*”); in this particular case, the question the author poses to the reader contributes to the author’s persuasive message, of which an anti-*Bild* and pro-Dr. Drosten “worldview” is a component (Grimberg, 2020, para. 5). The most overt endorsement of Dr. Drosten comes at the end of the text’s final sentence: “*...Wir haben Besseres zu tun!*” (Grimberg, 2020, para. 8). This final exclamation can be interpreted as a show

of solidarity and support of Dr. Drosten that is further emphasized by the conversion of Dr. Drosten's original statement in response to Piatov's *Bild* report into an exclamation. Furthermore, the use of the highly inclusive pronoun “*wir*” (we) here is rhetorically effective in that it suggests a shared set of values and beliefs between the author and the readers.

In Event 2, Dr. Drosten is represented as a coronavirus expert (“*Coronaviren-Experte*”); this title is also presented as an undeniable fact, as the sentence formulation leaves no room for objection on the part of the reader (“*Coronaviren-Experte Drosten sieht....*”) (Lee, 2020, para. 5). The additional voice of virologist Dr. Hendrik Streeck provides corroboration and support for Dr. Drosten's arguments. In the Event 3 text from *die taz*, however, no supporting or dissenting perspectives are included, indicating that the author finds Dr. Drosten's commentary alone to be sufficient. Interestingly, the use of the speaking process “*prophezeien*” (to prophesy) portrays the virologist as a holy or religious figure who foretells and predicts the path of the pandemic (“Aktuelle Entwicklungen,” 2021, para. 3). In Event 4, as in Event 2, the author once again includes a supporting perspective through the voice of virologist Dr. Melanie Brinkmann. Throughout Events 2, 3, and 4, Dr. Drosten predominantly takes on the role of the sensor, depicting the virologist not only as a thinker but also as a thoughtful, contemplative individual who witnesses the pandemic unfolding.

### **5.6. *Neues Deutschland***

In the Event 1 text from *Neues Deutschland*, Dr. Drosten is portrayed as someone who is attacked by the *Bild*, which itself is portrayed as historically and habitually evil. The use of words like “*Kampagne*” (campaign), “*Manöver*” (maneuver), and “*Nebenkriegsplätze*” (secondary theaters of war) depict the *Bild*'s actions as an intentional, premeditated attack on Dr.

Drosten (Meyer, 2020, para. 10, 4, 14). Furthermore, the author differentiates Dr. Drosten from previous victims (“*Opfer*”) of the *Bild* (Meyer, 2020, para. 2). This contrast and the use of the term “victims” (which blends nicely with the author’s portrayal of the tabloid as a nefarious, evil entity) effectively represents Dr. Drosten as an individual who stood up for himself against a treacherous news publication; such a portrayal echoes the characterization of the virologist in the Event 1 texts from *die Zeit* and *die taz*. Additionally, despite an acknowledgement of the existence of criticism of Dr. Drosten’s preprint paper, the author does not examine this critique more closely, subtly portraying Dr. Drosten as an individual beyond reproach.

In Event 2, the virologist’s perspective is the sole viewpoint presented in the text; the lack of supporting or dissenting opinions suggests that the author considers Dr. Drosten’s perspective alone to be sufficient. In contrast to the texts from *Junge Freiheit* and the *Bild* in which Dr. Drosten is portrayed as a fear monger, the virologist is represented as a cautious scientist who is hesitant to draw definite conclusions without sufficient data in the Event 2 *Neues Deutschland* text (“*Mit Blick auf der Virus-Variante ausgehende Gefahr zeigte Drosten sich angesichts der unklaren Informationslage zurückhaltend*”) (“Europäische Arzneimittel,” 2020, para. 10). Similar to the depiction of Dr. Drosten in the Event 3 text from *die taz*, the speaking process “*prophezeien*” (to prophesy) portrays the virologist as a religious figure or prophet (“*Lockdown-Verlängerung zeichnet sich ab,*” 2021, para. 11). In Event 4, as in the Event 2 text from *Neues Deutschland*, no agreeing or disagreeing perspectives are included in addition to Dr. Drosten’s own commentary, indicating the author’s view that the virologist’s words alone are adequate. Finally, it is also worth noting that, in contrast to *die taz* (in which Dr. Drosten often takes on the role of the senser), Dr. Drosten assumes primarily the role of the sayer across all four events taken from *Neues Deutschland*, effectively and consistently characterizing him

through his comments and remarks on the pandemic; in this sense, Dr. Drosten is portrayed as someone with agency and the authority to offer advice and recommendations during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **5.7. *Das Coronavirus-Update von NDR Info***

Interestingly, the selection of four podcast episodes from *Das Coronavirus-Update von NDR Info* tells its own story of the relationship between Dr. Drosten and the realms of media and politics. In Event 1, Dr. Drosten explicitly calls recent reports in the *Bild* and by an unspecified Belgian newspaper “attacks” (“*Angriffe*”) (Hennig & Drosten, 2020a, para. 4). This depiction is continued in the Event 2 podcast episode, in which he describes the fear scientists have of being attacked, burned, pushed into a corner, or singled out in the media. This fear, in turn, has caused many leading experts to be more cautious in how they phrase their findings, since one, according to Dr. Drosten, can no longer simply explain the pandemic as it is. This highly negative, unfavorable portrayal of how science is perceived by entities outside the world of science seems to abate in Event 3, as the virologist feels that scientists and their recommendations for how to best respond to the pandemic are finally being heard. Nevertheless, this brief improvement is limited to the third event; in Event 4, Dr. Drosten criticizes unnamed media sources and politicians for misleading the public, misusing scientific findings, and engaging in science denial.

It is also interesting to note the development of Dr. Drosten’s use of the inclusive pronoun “*wir*” (we). In Event 1, the virologist uses this term to refer to scientists, suggesting a unified scientific community that collaborates as a team. Frequently, this pronoun, as opposed to the pronoun “*ich*” (I), is also utilized when Dr. Drosten discusses the scientific rationale behind the

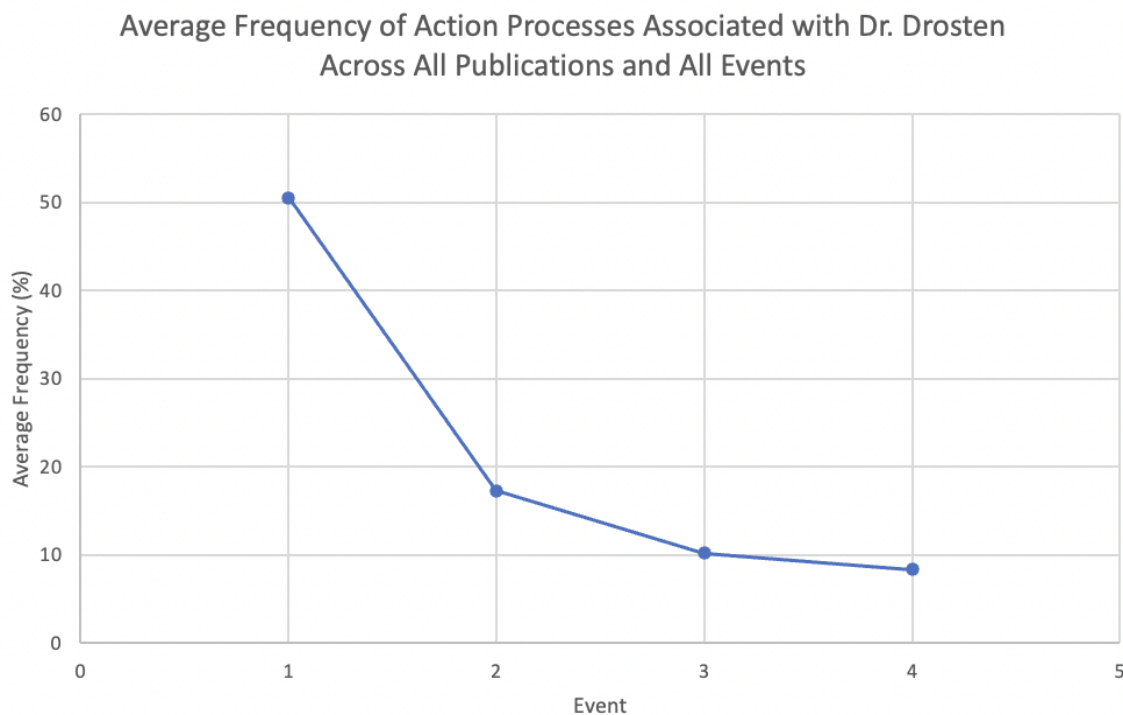
preprint study on the infectiousness of children, perhaps indicating his “team” mentality. Notably, the meaning of “*wir*” (we), while still often used to refer collectively to scientists, sometimes expands in Event 2 to be inclusive of all residing in Germany. In the final two events examined, “*wir*” (we) is solely used to be inclusive of everyone in Germany; a “team” mentality is also still evident in Events 3 and 4, as Dr. Drosten outlines the actions that Germans must undertake in order to respond effectively to the pandemic.

### 5.8. Summative Discussion

Overall, all six of the studied newspapers offer nuanced, distinct perspectives of Dr. Drosten, and while some publications presented parallel representations of Dr. Drosten, no one specific portrayal is consistent across all texts and all events. Nevertheless, the results do reveal clear differences in the depiction of Dr. Drosten along the political leanings of the examined publications; specifically, the data indicate a tendency among right-wing, conservative publications like *Junge Freiheit* and the *Bild* to portray Dr. Drosten in a negative light, while the left-of-center and left-wing publications like *die Zeit*, *der Spiegel*, *die taz*, and *Neues Deutschland* cast this virologist in a more positive light. Each nuanced depiction was largely distinguished through the analysis of interpersonal meaning (in particular, of attitudinal lexis), and, in many cases, the thematization of each text further supported the established representation of Dr. Drosten. Furthermore, the contrast in portrayals along political lines reflects the highly politicized debate surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic in Germany.

The infrequency with which Dr. Drosten appears as the grammatical object across all texts highlights the consistent role of Dr. Drosten as the entity carrying out a process, rather than an entity upon which a process is carried out; thus, the virologist consistently remains an

individual with agency and, by extension, a leader who can take charge amidst the COVID-19 global health crisis. Furthermore, the frequency with which Dr. Drosten assumes the role of an actor notably decreases over the course of the four events (see Figure 3). Although Dr. Drosten fills the position of an actor in all texts in Event 1, by the fourth event, the virologist primarily assumes the role of a senser and/or sayer. With the exception of *Junge Freiheit*, in which Dr. Drosten is equally portrayed as an actor and a sayer, all publications avoid assigning Dr. Drosten the position of an actor in Event 4. This transition reveals the changing portrayal of Dr. Drosten during the pandemic from an actor to an active observer who discusses and ponders the pandemic. In some respects, this finding parallels Dr. Drosten's own involvement during this global health crisis. From the development of a PCR test for detecting the virus, to the release of



**Figure 3: Average Frequency of Action Processes Associated with Dr. Drosten Across All Publications and All Events.** Graph depicting the average frequency of action processes associated with Dr. Drosten for all examined publications across all four events. A notable and significant decrease in the prevalence of action processes is evident.

his podcast and his research on the infectiousness of children, Dr. Drosten leaped into action within the early months of the pandemic. As the pandemic continued and with many of the important initial questions about COVID-19 answers, however, his primary role became increasingly one of an advisor and commentator (though it should be noted that he served in such a role even at the pandemic's onset). Future research with a larger sample size, however, is necessary to definitively confirm the extent of this transitivity trend. Additionally, the findings of the present study are not easily extrapolated to beyond May of 2021; future endeavors that investigate the representation of Dr. Drosten during the more recent months of the pandemic are essential for constructing a more complete picture of the perception of this key virologist and, by extension, Germany's response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

## VI. Conclusion

Through its extremely elaborate and sophisticated meaning-based grammar, SFL proved both instrumental in distinguishing portrayals of Dr. Drosten across six newspapers and useful in revealing subtleties in the depiction of this virologist. In contrast to other forms of discourse analysis, SFL, in the context of the present study, facilitated not only an analysis of what meaning an author creates in a text, but also provided concrete linguistic tools for examining how authentic language constructs meaning in context; thus, this methodology could prove highly productive in future analyses of native German language texts.

Because language itself is not a passive reflection of reality but rather “an active agent in constructing... reality,” the examined publications are effectively contributors to Germany’s evolving understanding and perception of the COVID-19 pandemic (Christie, 2002, p. 16). The relatively rapid shifts in the media representation of Dr. Drosten over the course of the year examined in the present study (May 2020 - May 2021) serve as a testament to the swiftly evolving nature of life and current events during the pandemic. Moreover, the polarization of Dr. Drosten’s portrayal in these German newspapers is indicative of a broader polarization of public discourse and, perhaps, of the introduction of new points of division by the pandemic; such divisions often exacerbate existing challenges like the COVID-19 global health crisis. Furthermore, due to the role these six publications play in shaping public opinion in Germany, the polarization by political ideology exhibited by these newspapers raises the concerning possibility that these publications are functioning as echo chambers that reinforce particular characterizations of Dr. Drosten, perceptions of the pandemic, and opinions of governmental response measures among their respective readerships. Thus, the examined media publications



may be contributing to and exacerbating both old and new divisions in German public discourse and public opinion.

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