

LANGUAGE AND JOURNALISM

An expanding research agenda

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Since the publication of Roger Fowler's seminal (1991) text, the study of the language of journalism has increased dramatically. The form, function and politics of the language of journalism have attracted scholars from a wide range of academic disciplines, including linguistics, discourse studies, media studies, sociology and others. It goes without saying that such work has developed sophisticated and intricate analytic tools in order to describe the form and content of the news, and has produced detailed and frequently astute readings of the products of journalism. Nevertheless, such approaches often said more about the views and methods of the analyst than the language of journalism *qua* journalism – that is, about the specific dialectical relations that exist between journalists and their text genres, these texts and their audiences, and between journalism (as a trade, profession and constellation of institutions) and the wider social formation.

Of course, journalism produces texts – texts that can be analysed using the same linguistic categories, tools and concepts that can be used to study any other type of text. This observation, alongside the more general and frequently commented upon ‘linguistic turn’ in social scientific enquiry, has resulted in a swathe of research which implicitly (and on occasion explicitly) suggests that newspaper texts can be studied in the same way as magazine texts, or in the same way as political speeches, or conversations across a dinner table, or a range of other discourse genres. Such an approach is appreciably wrongheaded. Each genre of text or talk is the product of a combination of discursive practices that make it, to the greater extent, unique. Aside from the differences between journalism and other genres that can be identified through first-level analysis of newspaper texts (e.g. the unique narrative sequencing characteristic of hard news reporting), journalism fulfils particular social functions; has been created by men and women in accordance with particular production techniques and in specific institutional settings; is marked by particular relationships between other agencies of political, judicial and economic power; is characterised by particular interpersonal relations between writer and reader; and is consumed, interpreted and enjoyed in ways that are specific. As Fairclough (1995: 204) puts it, journalistic texts are “the outcome of specific professional practices and techniques, which could be and can be quite different with quite different results.” However, all too often these professional practices are lost behind linguistic logocentrism – a failing not peculiar to discourse analysis – in which analysts are overly preoccupied with the intricacies of ‘the text’, rather than with the material contexts that bound and situate journalism. In more detail, Blommaert (1999: 5-6) argues:

Texts generate their publics, publics generate their texts and the analysis of ‘meanings’ now has to take into account a historiography of the context of production, the mechanisms and instruments of reproduction and reception, ways of storage and remembering. The fact is that discourses

[...] have their 'natural history' - a chronological and sociocultural anchoring which produces meaning and social effects in ways that cannot be reduced to text-characteristics alone.

Journalistic discourses are always socially situated, therefore analysing them requires more than a list of text-linguistic concepts. And, contrary to the ways that his work has often been interpreted and used, this observation wasn't lost on Fowler. Indeed, he argued explicitly that, since discourse occurs in social settings (of production and consumption), and the construction of discourse "relates systematically and predictably to [these] contextual circumstances" (Fowler, 1991: 36), so these settings, and the values and practices that spring from and underpin them, should be a factor in our analysis. These aspects of the study of the language of journalism remain the most under-developed. Referring specifically to Critical Discourse Analysis – the bundle of approaches advocated by scholars such as Fairclough (1995, 2003), Graham (2005), van Dijk (1988, 1991) and Wodak (2001, Reisigl & Wodak, 2001; Weiss & Wodak 2003) - Jones and Collins (2006: 30) go as far as to argue that although the critical interpretation and interrogation of discourse

[...] can only be supplied by experienced, well-informed and critically minded participants in the relevant field [...] this principle has been ignored or set aside in CDA in favour of a view in which detailed historical, theoretical and practical knowledge of the relevant spheres is deemed unnecessary to understanding political and ideological aspects of discourse.

At this point in the study of the language of journalism, this is undoubtedly a salient argument. This special issue is founded on the belief that we, within the various fields of study interested in the language of journalism, need to develop "a type of materialism which should replace the current idealism [...] but which should not lapse into too rigid interpretations of Marxism as economism" (Blommaert, 1999: 7) that limited the applicability of some Marxian analysis published in the sixties and seventies. As Berglez (2006: 18) points out, some earlier Marxian work "tended to ignore the potential power of discursive practices, and in many cases incorrectly classified language use as strictly determined by material structures." Instead, our materialist approach should be guided by

[...] an ethnographic eye for the real historical actors, their interests, their allegiances, their practices, and where they come from, in relation to the discourses they produce – where discourse itself is seen as a crucial symbolic resource onto which people project their interests, around which they construct alliances, on and through which they exercise power. (Blommaert, 1999: 7)

Focusing on journalistic discourse in particular, Cotter (2001: 428) argues that current research has not analysed news texts as the "*outcome of a discourse process* [...] A process- or practice-orientated approach would allow new insights into the integrated examination of news practice, news values and audience role". Such concerns, and others, about the current state of CDA are spelt out most clearly and thoroughly in the opening article of this collection, by Anabela Carvalho.

The principal focus of Carvalho's article is CDA – an approach to the analysis of mediated language use that has risen in prominence in recent years, and now dominates the field. She argues that, despite the goals that CDA has set itself, “of looking beyond texts and taking into account institutional and sociocultural contexts [...] a research programme that encompasses all the moments in the ‘life’ of a particular news text as well as the wider picture of the media discourse produced on a given topic” is still unaccomplished (p.XX [2]). More specifically, Carvalho examines three aspects of CDA that currently lack satisfactory examination: first, longitudinal studies and diachronic analysis examining how the reporting of a particular story, theme or issue develops over time. Second, the discursive strategies adopted by sources and other social actors outside the newsroom in their efforts to gain access to the pages of the news, and the extent to which the discursive strategies of each (relevant) social actor are reproduced, challenged or excluded by journalists need closer consideration. Whilst journalists' discursive interventions regarding particular subjects have been examined at length (e.g. Blackledge, 2005, on immigration and citizenship; Richardson, 2004, on Islam and Muslims), the interventions of sources have thus far escaped systematic analysis. And third, CDA should pay greater attention to the effects of mediated discourse over specific fields of action (e.g. the political field) and, concomitantly, the influence of such fields upon the practices and products of journalism. Following this account, Carvalho presents an analytic framework, and a way of *operationalising* this framework, in order to start plugging some of these holes in the CDA *oeuvre*. Her approach, which starts by examining the text as a unit of analysis, expands this out to an examination of the wider context and attempts to draw out the dialectical relations between text and context, provides an extremely useful account of the practice of *doing* CDA, which should be of interest to both the novice and veteran alike.

Although directed towards CDA, much of Carvalho's discussion is relevant and potentially stimulating for other approaches to the analysis of journalistic discourse. Indeed, some of the neglected issues she identifies are discussed in other articles later in this issue. And, although the papers that follow shouldn't be viewed as *explicitly* taking up the challenge of addressing these lacunae of mediated discourse analysis, they certainly contribute to the debates. For instance, Martin's article, on the “discursive transformation in labour news in the second half of the twentieth century”, takes a historic and comparative sample of the prestige press of Canada and the USA (the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post* and the *Toronto Star*) and traces a decisive shift in the ways that they report striking workers. The aim of the article is to demonstrate how a newspaper's target readership demographic, and their class in particular, can have profound effects on the language of news reporting. In more detail, Martin first details the historic “shift in the target market of U.S. and Canadian newspapers from a mass audience of the working and middle class to a niche, ‘upscale’ audience of the upper middle class” (p.XX [28]). Second, the article critically analyses the ways that the sampled newspapers report transportation strikes (of, for example, rail, bus and airline workers) and “how the framing of those strikes dramatically switched from a pre-1970s orientation of worker struggles to a post-1970s orientation of high consumer inconvenience” (p.XX [28]). He concludes by arguing the

consumer-oriented approach to news harms the working class and labour in two ways. First, targeting upscale consumers contributes to class

inequality, as the working class is excised from news discourse. [...] Second, consumer-oriented discourse is “an expression of a profoundly fragmenting individualism,” with significant political consequences (Cross, 2000, p. 191). Instead of news stories that refer to labour’s long collective movement for economic and social justice, newspapers began to focus on individuals organized into fleeting collectives only for occasions of “spontaneous interest”.

Such shifts in newspapers’ editorial contents also bear testimony to the creeping influence of market research profiling and disfiguring effects that such concerns have on the potential of journalism to treat their readers as citizens and hence serve complete communities. In an article included later in the issue, Machin and Niblock also examine the issue and influence of class, the increasing importance of affluent readers and the effects of this on the branding and identity of a British newspaper. Explicitly “addressing one of the major criticisms of CDA, that it fails to consider the role of production factors in explaining textual choices”, their article “looks at these changes in the context of the re-branding of one newspaper” (p.XX [125]). Taking a local newspaper, the (Liverpool) *Daily Post*, as a case study, Machin and Niblock analyse the *visual* differences between the pre- and post- rebranding versions of the newspaper, and ask “what kinds of discourses, ideas and values these [differences] connote” (p.XX [125]). As they point out, little academic writing has acknowledged, much less analysed, the “careful attention to visual design that has swept through press organisations over the past decade” (p.XX [125]) – the few notable exceptions proving the rule (cf. Barnhurst 1994, Barnhurst & Nerone, 2001). Trying to help fill this gap, their paper attends to the grammar of visual design, applying the multimodal approach to analysis developed by Kress and van Leeuwen (2001). Drawing on Halliday’s (1985) view that *language* fulfils three communicative functions – to convey ideas, attitudes and provide textual coherence – the multimodal approach expands analysis to include the communicative potential of *visual* elements of texts. That is, multimodal analysis examines the ways that elements such as colours, typography and layout “can create moods and attitudes, convey ideas, create flow across the composition, in the same way that there are linguistic devices for doing the same in texts” (Machin, 2007: xi). Supplementing their analysis of the newspaper with an interview with the commissioned designer, Machin and Niblock argue that the visual styles adopted as part of the rebrand should not be viewed simply “as aesthetic or individual choices made by the text producers” (p.XX [126]), but rather as “part of the social practice of commercialising the regional press and of targeting market groups to increase profits” (p.XX [143]).

In their different ways, these two complimentary articles from Martin and Machin and Niblock both examine the ways that capitalism, and the want for profit in particular, drive newspapers to change their discourses – both linguistic and visual – in order to appeal to affluent target readers. Both articles demonstrate newspaper marketing’s continued use of class and wealth in the market segmentation of readers – which remain the most salient modes of social stratification despite the increasing use of ‘psychographic’ characteristics.

Zabaleta *et al* remind us that, for a large number of journalists, the first questions to answer in relation to their reporting are not which way to represent an issue or which reader demographic to try to attract, but which

language to use and the degree to which it is possible to report in this language. Taking as their focus the journalists that work in the media of ten European minority linguistic communities (Basque, Catalan, Galician, Corsican, Breton, Frisian, Irish, Welsh, Scottish-Gaelic, and Sámi) they explore these journalists' perceptions of "their own language's development and issues when applied to journalism, their knowledge of the minority tongue and its use in the workplace" (p.XX [51]). In a fascinating and important addition to the minimal available literature on minority language journalism (though see Cotter 1996, 1999), Zabaleta *et al* reveal "less than two thirds (62.6%) of the European minority language journalists surveyed [...] believe their language is sufficiently developed for journalism" (p.XX [59]). Echoing debates of mainstream broadcasting (and conservative 'proper English' campaigns in particular), some of the perceived deficiencies seem to arise from the tensions among the sampled journalists on whether their point of reference should be the standard form of the minority language or should instead aim to reflect people's speech and dialects. Drafting and adhering to newsroom stylebooks is cited by the sampled journalists as a frequently adopted discursive strategy, though these may be a double edged sword: while they help standardize linguistic and presentational styles, they also (perhaps necessarily) introduce a degree of 'journalese' and learned or standardised forms of wording (i.e. clichés). Such stylistic and lexical practices warrant close attention, from journalists as well as academics, given the ways that they can "contribute to the modernization and standardization of the minority language" (p.XX [73]). As Zabaleta *et al* conclude, the linguistic interventions of minority language journalists, reflected in "varied strategies (newsroom discussions, in-house linguists, stylebooks, etc.) add an additional language-recovery role to journalism, but also create tension for the audience who may not fully understand the new or renewed lexicon" (p.XX [73]).

Following Zabaleta *et al*, are two articles that apply the APPRAISAL model to illuminate their close readings of the sampled texts. The first, by Thomson *et al*, examines the form and content of hard news reporting across languages and cultures, focusing in particular on objectivity, authorial neutrality and the use (or constraint) of attitudinal language. As the authors point out, unfortunately very little academic work has been published

which has as its primary focus the comparison of news reporting discourse across the diversity of the world's journalistic cultures. [...] This lack of knowledge is of concern in its own right, since it means that we remain unclear as to the degree to which different languages and cultures have developed their own individual journalistic styles and structures. But it is even more troubling given the possibility that the global forces [...] may be acting to homogenise journalistic practices internationally (p.XX [98-99]).

Drawing on some cases of hard news reports in languages other than English (French, Japanese and Indonesian) the authors "point to both similarities and differences in the way hard news reporting is conducted across different journalistic traditions and in the way the 'ethic of objectivity' is understood and practiced" (p.XX [77]). Their analysis of hard news employs the fruitful notion of 'journalistic voice' (see White, 2000a, 2005, 2006; Martin & White, 2005), allowing for a separation and clarification of the epistemic and agentive aspects of 'objective reporting'. In more detail, "journalistic voice refers to a taxonomy for classifying and grouping news media texts according

to the use they make of certain key evaluative meanings, and more specifically to the various ways in which positive or negative assessments are conveyed or activated" (p.XX [88]). Their article examines the key tension at the heart of hard news reporting: between the subjective and objective, between value judgments and journalistic neutrality, between recording an event and interpreting it. Of course, nobody could ever convincingly argue that news reporting is valueless, given that value judgements are built into the process of news making at all stages of news gathering, processing and presentation. But the inevitable value-laden status of hard news journalism doesn't stop it from being *journalistically* objective (Richardson, 2007). The task, therefore, is to examine journalistic objectivity by analysing "what journalists do when they are being objective" (Dunlevy, 1998: 120).

As Thomson *et al* point out, the typical hard news report involves "a strategic avoidance of certain key evaluative meanings and thereby backgrounding and potentially concealing the subjective role of the journalist author" (p.XX [94]). Their analysis shows that objectivity should be viewed as a relative quality, "a measure of the degree to which the "voice" employed avoids or constrains the use of key attitudinal meanings and modes" (Ibid.). Further, in their preliminary findings, presented here, they have observed something "very similar to English-language reporter voice operating in the hard news reporting of a range of languages, including Japanese, French, Indonesian, Thai and Chinese" (p.XX [94]). Such important findings deserve further investigation.

Of course, a primary strategic ritual adopted by journalists aiming to produce objective copy is the quotation of sources, whose credentials and credibility are openly accounted, to verbalise (usually opposing) truth-claims. But what are the consequences for news factuality and objectivity of using *unnamed* sources in news reports? In the second article drawing on the system of ATTITUDE laid out in the APPRAISAL framework, Stenvall explores the various ways that anonymous sources affect news rhetoric. The data set is a sizable sample of reports collected between 2002 and 2007 from the newswires of Associated Press and Reuters, amounting to about 4million words, or 8,000 pages, of news text. For this article, Stenvall takes as her starting point a memo of June 2005, drafted by the managing and executive editors of AP and sent to their reporting staff. This emphasised AP's corporate view – also echoed by Reuters – that anonymous sources are the weakest sources. However such sources still feature in the reports of these press agencies, included, amongst other considerations, for their inherent 'newsworthiness'. Given that such sources cut against both spirit and letter of editorial policy, their inclusion requires journalists to use a range of explicating rhetorical techniques to justify their anonymity, particularly following AP's editorial policy reminder. So, while there were "only a few examples referring to reasons for anonymity" in the reports filed before this date, "In contrast, the AP files after June 2005 offer a great variety of anonymity explanations; and Reuters, too, seems to have adopted a similar trend, though on a much smaller scale" (p.XX [115]). Such explanations are not rhetorically benign, however, and Stenvall's analysis provides fascinating evidence "of the central functions that the attribution of unnamed sources can have in news rhetoric", including "enhanc[ing] the credibility of an unnamed source or evok[ing] emotions in the reader" (p.XX [120]). Thus, she concludes, "the more copiously journalists surround the anonymous sources with various expressions, the more possibilities they open up for their rhetorical construction" (p.XX [121]). And, since these expressions

contain evaluation, these kinds of attribution “can be argued to undermine the factuality and objectivity of the news agency discourse” (Ibid.).

The inclusion of sources is also a central concern of the next article in the collection, by Montgomery, though here the focus is squarely on the broadcast news interview. Montgomery argues that “broadcast news constantly seeks to discover appropriate forms of discourse for a mass audience” and within “this process, the news interview itself is the primary mechanism for dramatising or making palpable the news as an interactional, dialogic discourse” (p.XX [169]). But, despite the relative rarity of combative, political interviews in standard news programming – in which a politician or similar public figure is held to account – this particular form of news interview has attracted a considerable (indeed disproportionate) amount of academic attention. In a similar way that academic research dwells on ‘politically weighty’ national newspaper titles to the detriment of our understanding of the equally important local and regional newspapers, so too have political interviews – or what Montgomery calls ‘accountability interviews’ – almost defined our understanding of what a broadcast news interview is. In fact, as Montgomery puts it, “to focus on the political interview as if it were typical of news interviewing in general is supported neither by the history of the journalistic interview nor justified by a survey of current broadcasting practice” (p.XX [149]). Supporting his argument, Montgomery explores the range of types of news interviews, positing the *experiential* (or witness) interview, the *expert* interview and the *affiliated* interview (such as two-ways between presenter and correspondent or reporter) as additional sub-genres to accompany the accountability interview. Each of these sub-genres is marked by a different matrix of assembled relations between the news organisation, the event or story in question, the interviewee (and specifically the interviewee’s relation to the news event), and the alignment with the audience. Taking the accountability and experiential interviews, for instance:

The former is built upon questions designed to seek justifications from the recipient for their statements or lines of action and to challenge them. The latter is designed to elicit perspectives on an event or an issue [...In addition,] in the *accountability interview* the interviewer speaks as if for us and the interviewee is presented as estranged from the audience (‘an evasive politician’), in the *experiential interview* the interviewee is treated as one of us (p. XX [162-3])

Montgomery shows that, although the sub-genres he introduces and discusses should be viewed as ideal-types, nonetheless each “are associated with recognisable differences [...] both in terms of broad purpose (within the overall discursive economy of the news) and particular discursive practice (for instance, type of lead-in or question)” (p.XX [150]).

Like many of the earlier articles, the final paper in this collection, by Leon Barkho, starts from a position which foregrounds the material production of news: in other words, journalists as people producing texts. The article identifies “a regrettable gap” in the discourse-analytic literature on the language of journalism, meaning “the impact political, economic and social relations and influences have on discursive output” has been under examined (p.XX [173]). The largely logocentric approaches of van Dijk (1988) and Fairclough (1995) are specifically mentioned for confining their analysis “to the scrutiny of the actual details of content and the realization of the systems of

ideas through the language as a final product” (p.XX [173-74]). As Barkho points out:

A critical study based merely on the analysis of texts, despite its importance and usefulness, will not provide good answers for why and how these particular structures are chosen and whether the selection is part of an overall discursive strategy that places special constraints on reporters, and editors (p.XX [174])

The article focuses on the discursive strategy and practices of the BBC and the ways these relate to the way the Corporation’s journalists report the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. And, although Barkho *does* offer a critical analysis of how the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is linguistically represented, drawing in particular on Fowler’s work on transitivity, the article moves beyond these news reports, contextualising their ideational content through an examination of the BBC editors’ blog, BBC editorial guidelines (particularly their style policies) and extensive interviews with senior BBC editorial staff. The result is not only a nuanced and critical examination of the way the Corporation reports this most contested of stories, but also the most up-to-date insight into the aims and practices of BBC news reporting in a post-Hutton, post-Neil Report era. In conclusion, Barkho argues that the “BBC’s choice of vocabulary” in reporting Israel-Palestine “reflects the unequal division of power, control and status separating the protagonists and this inequality surfaces at several levels and is strongly backed by editorial strategy and policy” (p.XX [194]).

Though necessarily selective, collectively, this group of articles represents some of the breadth and depth of work currently being written on the language of journalism. We hope that readers find this special issue interesting and useful, that it provokes further debate around the form and functions of journalistic discourse, and that it helps to resituate *journalists* and their working practices at the centre of such an analytical and empirical focus. It only remains for me to thank the editor, Bob Franklin, for his advice, encouragement and enthusiasm throughout the development of this special issue, the contributing authors and the reviewers for their supportive criticism of the articles. Working with you all on this project has been an absolute pleasure.

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