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Media

The term *media* is notoriously polyvalent. In the strict sense, *media* is the plural of *medium*, understood as a channel or conduit for the transmission of some kind of communication. Examples include print media, electronic media, televisual media, paint media, oral media, bodily media, and multimedia such as the simultaneous print-electronic-audio-visual media of computers.

Communication genres—culturally specific forms of communication such as songs, jokes, stories, and conversations—occur in media. Genre-media relations can be very tightly interlinked. For example, the genre of the "talk show" occurs almost exclusively in broadcast media. Genre-media relations can also be relatively looser. A narrative for example may occur in a hand-written letter, in a face-to-face encounter, in a book, or in a range of electronic media, including e-mail.

This definition of *media* differs from popular uses of the phrase *the media*, which denotes the dominant media and media professionals within a local, national, or international context. Correspondingly, *the media*, *mass media*, and *media* are often used as singular collective nouns—as in "the media glorifies violence"—highlighting a perception that they operate uniformly, with similar agendas and production values.

In media studies scholarship, the term is usually more far-reaching than in the above definitions. It encompasses communication channels, technologies, formats, genres, and products. At base, however, media in this sense is best defined by what it is not: face-to-face communication. There are several recognized sub categories of media. Most familiar are the conventionally understood *mass media*, i.e., mainstream television, film, radio, newspapers, and magazines. Other mass-produced communications include novels, videos, comic books, and recorded music. *Alternative media* are antithetical to mainstream media, but they may use similar technologies. Pirate radio and independent newspapers are two common examples. *Small media* are a type of alternative media that individuals and small groups control and (re)produce.

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Examples include underground audiocassettes, leaflets, and graffiti. *New media* are new digital-based electronic media, such as e-mail, Internet listserves, faxes, and video games. *Indigenous media* are any of the above technologies used by Fourth World peoples.

From an ethnography of communication perspective, these media can be studied at the levels of production, circulation, reception, message form, message function, and message content. The theoretical and methodological concerns of linguistics are profoundly relevant for media studies at all of these levels. Crucially, investigating the linguistic dimensions of media should not be classified as an enterprise confined to sociolinguistics or linguistic anthropology. The cultural, social, psychological, and political functions of media all depend on the semiotic operations of language and discourse. In the following discussion I briefly outline four areas of greatest importance.

First, media are key agents in the political economy of language, as they give value and exposure to certain language codes, linguistic varieties, and discourse styles. Media are important sites for ethnolinguistic representation and the production of language ideologies. Utilizing certain linguistic varieties in national media can legitimate the social, economic, and political dominance of some social groups at the expense of others. It can have consequences for access to representation in the public sphere, and it may even contribute to language shift or the death of unrepresented linguistic varieties.

Second, and related to this, media can be important catalysts for language socialization and language change because of their high visibility and mass reach. They contribute to the circulation and valorization of standard phrases, key words, and ready-made formulations in public culture. Radio Zambia, for example, has inspired a range of linguistic innovations in popular speech. The name of the "Chongololo" radio program, a show about wildlife preservation, has become a derogatory term for Zambians who try to act like Europeans. Other program titles, such as "Over to You," are used in conversations to create a playful rapport. This is analogous to the way that media discourse such as the Star Trek phrase "beam me up" circulates in American culture.

The fact that media help to circulate and even canonize a basic repertoire of ways of speaking has implications not only for the social life of language, but for the production of culture, ideology, and identity. In a Foucauldian sense, media are part of discursive formations, understood as culturally specific and historically contingent domains of knowledge and practice that establish relations of power and truth. The modes of language use in media do not come out of thin air, and they are always inherently ideological. As media provide ways of talking about modernity, deviance, collective identity, economic value, otherness, or any other phenomenon that falls within the horizons of a social formation, they ultimately provide ways of thinking about, experiencing, and acting on these phenomena. Anthropological research needs to attend to the very expressions that are given prominence in media and to the way that they provide inhabitable discourses that form the substance of culture and experience.

Third, the ability of media to delineate social identities and to function as forums for collective participation is greatly dependent on language use. Specifically, in linguistic terms this involves the indexical signaling of participants in mediated communication. Social identities (e.g., class, gender, age, ethnicity) of both media producers and media audiences are constructed through the choice of topic, code, register, and style. In English language broadcasting, for example, using sociolinguistic variables such as regional dialects or verbal contractions affects the definition of the communication event itself and helps to define the type of social individuals that are targeted as audiences. Pronoun choices and other modes of address are also crucial. Finally, audiences are constructed and attracted through metapragmatic devices that frame mediated communication events. For example, in radio there are titles for distinct times of the day, and promotional slogans that exhort listeners and define moods.

A fourth area of emerging research focuses on the intertextual relations across different media and various forms of face-to-face communication. Topics include the influence of indigenous communication genres on media genres; the transformation of verbal art in electronic technologies; the instrumental role of media in the global dissemination of certain communication genres; and the transfer of older media conventions into new media genres such as Internet e-mail and chatroom communications.

In all of these domains, media's relevance for culture rests heavily on language's relevance in media. At the turn of the millennium this is a relatively unexplored territory that promises to be a rich research ground for scholars in all areas of anthropology and media studies.

(See also *genre, identity, indexicality, intentionality, power, register, socialization, style, truth*)

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