Approaches to Language

Language and Media

What is Media?

- Media: the newspapers, radio, internet & television

- Functions of Media: information, education, entertainment

What is news?

- Representations of events in language & visual media;

- Messages in media: verbal & visual

- Social/cultural dimension to interpretation

- Common code = narrative code; photographic code (depicts 'actuality'/evidence')

Ideological power of Media

- Media: very powerful force in every society

- Journalists/editors shape news - selection of news items involves 'choices'; they highlight some news and ignore others

- Choices are associated with 'significance';

- Power to influence ideology; they can select what counts as news, which people appear on TV/radio/newspapers, how events/stories are reported (Thomas et al, 1999)

Commercial considerations

- News is a commercial product & newspapers are controlled by corporations.

- *The Sun* 3,624,563; *The Mirror* 2,113,705; *Daily Mail* 2,441,398; *The Daily Telegraph* 975,890; *Daily Express* 943,898; *The Times* 686,618; *Daily Star* 637,826; *Financial Times* 458,292; *The Guardian* 400,708; *The Independent* 197,075.
(Audit Bureau of Circulations, 2001)

- Economic factors influence 'content' of newspapers ->competition/profitability.

- Cultural factors influence content + commercial factors influence ideological representations also.

'News value(s)'

- How is news constructed?

- What criteria do journalists employ?

- News items differ from paper to paper

News Value(s)

- News values: what counts as news?
- News values: understand the focus and construction of new stories and the decision-making process journalist follow (Cotter, 2010)

News Value(s)

1. **Frequency** – short duration events > newsworthy than progressive events
2. **Threshold** – volume of an event/or increased intensity/escalation of events
3. **Unambiguity** – event must be interpretable from news codes e.g. royal story
4. **Meaningfulness** – social/cultural significance
5. **Consonance** – e.g. assumed demand for a story
6. **Unexpectedness –** surprising event/unpredictable
7. **Continuity –** persistence of high profile stories
8. **Composition** - needing to 'fill' up column inches

1.   (Galtung & Ruge 1973)

News value(s)

9. Reference to elite nations

10. Reference to elite people

11. Reference to people
   - e.g. as abstract symbols of an organisation/ideology/event

12. Reference to negative events – e.g. natural disasters/MP scandals

News value cont'd

- Criteria are a useful 'coding system' used to construct the meanings of events as 'news';

  SUMMARY

- News is shaped by commercial/ideological & semiotic structures;

- Representations are 'mythical' – don't represent an objective/natural reality but a 'choice' e.g. >likely to die from cancer/heart attack than be murdered.

Limitations of news value criteria…..

1. Don't explain why there are different stories in different newspapers;

2. They can't tell us about the signs (linguistic/visual) & their codes through which news stories are represented;

3. Are uninformative in terms of audience interpretation (although they say something about journalist/editors assumptions about their audiences).

Narrative

- Newsworthy events are represented through narrative codes;

- These define & order the contents.
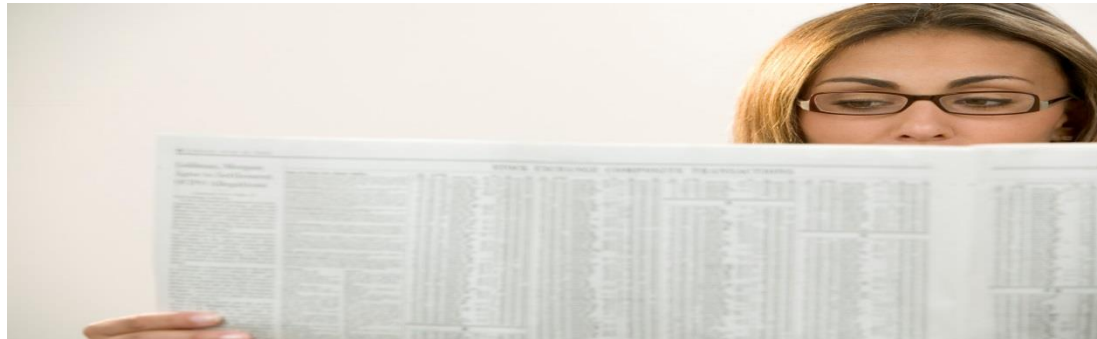
Event & discourse structure

- *Event structure:* actual sequence of events, organised chronologically.

- *Discourse structure*: typical in literary narrative – event not organised chronologically e.g. initial event not mentioned until later.

  3 major discourse structures of narratives in Western world (Brewer, 1985):
  i. *surprise*: a critical event followed by the resolution;
  ii. *suspense*: an initiating event followed by an outcome;
  iii. *curiosity*: a significant event followed by a resolution.

Holiday-maker in lion horror attack

Holidaymaker Bob Jones was dragged by a lion from his bed in the luxurious Mbuyu game resort yesterday.

Mr. Jones, in his early forties, is recovering from surgery in the Royal Hospital, following injuries to his right arm and leg. He is said to be "satisfactory".

The lion, an emaciated young male, was shot by a park warden a few hours after the attack.

Mr. Jones and his wife were asleep when the lion entered the open door of their bungalow shortly after 1 am. It approached the bed and, when Mr. Jones moved to get up, sprang at him, dragging him from the bed.

Mrs. Jones called the alarm and in the commotion, the lion made off into the bush surrounding the hotel. Mr. Jones was taken to the Royal Hospital by helicopter
.
The lion was tracked and shot later in the day. According to reports it had been hanging round the resort for the past month.

Event structure & discourse structure

During the past month: the lion is hanging around the resort

(Evening: Bob Jones and his wife go to bed)

Shortly after 1 am: the lion enters the bungalow

*   the lion attacks Bob Jones*

*   Mrs. Jones calls the alarm*

*   the lion runs off*

*   Mr. Jones is taken to hospital*

During the next day: (Mr. Jones has surgery)

*   the lion is tracked and shot*

*   Mr. Jones starts to recover*

News sources

- Key agencies + organisations.

- Adopt an idiomatic style of the 'imagined reader' – maybe different from broadsheet (quality/serious press) to tabloid (popular press) press.

Typical linguistic characteristics of tabloids

1. Use of first names/nicknames;
2. Idioms/clichés & slang;
3. Contractions of grammar e.g. don't;
4. Short, incomplete sentences; sentences without verbs; sentences beginning with a conjunction;
5. Modal verbs used to insinuate things;
6. Quotations or typeface emphasis e.g. **bold** or CAPS;
7. Collocations e.g. innocent victim; tragic accident.

Typical linguistic characteristics of broadsheets

1. Longer and more complex sentences;

2. Complex NPs;

3. Nominalisation e.g. producing a Ns from a Vs – legalise > legalisation; militarisation; mobilisation

4. Passivisation;

5. Quotations from authorities/official sources.

Tabloids vs. Broadsheets

http://www.theguardian.com/business/2015/jan/30/british-wage-slump-post-financial-crisis-uk

http://www.thesun.co.uk/sol/homepage/woman/health/health/5798889/How-to-get-a-bikini-body-in-just-two-days.html

Discursive stability

- News events themselves = 'unstable'/'unpredictable'.

- Stability in discursive form e.g. broadsheets: formal language, 'objective' reporting, longer articles, politics and international news vs. tabloids: colloquial forms, less in-depth reporting, shorter articles, celebrity gossip, personal stories etc.

Newspaper headlines

- Yacht a cheek (cost of Royal yacht, The Sun)

- Sheep rustling? Round up the ewe-sual suspects (The Telegraph)

- The Ups and Gowns of Tinsel Town
  (The Oscars, Daily Mail)

- I only have eyes for Roo/What a Heroo

(Reference to Wayne Rooney. Daily Star/Mirror)

Headlines

- Function = to draw attention and stimulate connotations.

- Can create polysemic meanings - work together to both open out and close down decodings of the story.
  E.g. MI5 headlines, narratives activated:
  - miscarriages of justice,
  - the work of MI5 & Whitehall;
  - the vulnerability of prisoners;
  - complicity between the US and UK forces etc.

Images

- (The photograph) 'is an object that has been worked on, chosen, composed, constructed, treated according to professional, aesthetic or ideological norms which are so many factors of connotation' (Barthes 1977: 19).

- Gain meaning from their context.

- Text & image work together to create meaning – but it is often the meaning of the written text that impacts on the meaning of the image.

Barthes' (1977) six procedures

1. 'Trick effects' - manipulation
   e.g. air-brushing; putting two people in one situation – load image with connotations

2. 'Pose'
   - gestures/facial expressions – denote cultural meanings – carry certain connotations

3. 'Objects'

4. 'Photogenia'
   - quality of photographing well
   - often played on (+)ly & (-)ly

5. 'Aestheticism'
   - photograph given an artistic quality e.g. life-style sections/holiday adverts

6. 'Syntax' – series of pictures placed alongside one another to depict an event e.g. tragedy; success (sporting event)

Concepts introduced

- Barthes' six procedures
- Linguistic characteristics of broadsheets & tabloids
- Narrative – discourse & event structure
- News value (s):
  - Frequency; Threshold; Unambiguity; Meaningfulness; Consonance; Unexpectedness; Continuity; Composition; Reference
- New media

Discussion

1. News: how do you inform yourself?
2. Do you subscribe to any newspapers?
3. Do you interact with other people using CMC?
4. What are the characteristics of your language use when you blog/post your ideas?

- Interesting article on code-switching and Facebook (Greek Cypriots)

http://www.languageatinternet.org/articles/2014/sophocleous/

New Media

- The internet: important source of information
- Email: source of information?
- Social media: sharing ideas, information, opinions (e.g. Facebook)
- Language use in CMC (computer-mediated communication):

Informality

Spontaneity

Immediacy

Presence of interlocutor

- Language deterioration: example of 'txtng' (Crystal, 2008)

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