News Language

A Bell, Auckland University of Technology, Auckland, New Zealand

The language of news media has always attracted the attention of linguists (particularly applied and sociolinguists) and discourse analysts. The practical and principled reasons for this interest include the accessibility of language data from the media, the significance of the media as language-producing institutions, linguistic interest in the ways media use language, and the importance of media institutions and their discourses in shaping culture, politics and social life.

Linguistic research on the media has always emphasized this last concern, focusing where issues of ideology and power are closest to the surface. It has analyzed the macro level of discourse structures rather than phonological or syntactic structures and has concentrated mainly on the 'factual' genres (particularly news) rather than fictional or advertising content (an emphasis that is shared by sociological and communications research on media).

The principal lines of contemporary research on news language were established in the 1990s, mainly under the umbrella of 'Critical Discourse Analysis'. CDA represents an outgrowth of the work of the British and Australian pioneers of Critical Linguistics, particularly Fowler and Kress, in convergence with the approaches of the British discourse analyst Fairclough and Dutch text linguist van Dijk. Van Dijk began to apply his theory and methodology of discourse analysis to media texts in the 1980s. The first general textbooks in English on media language appeared in 1991, by Fowler and by Bell, to be followed in 1995 by Fairclough's text. Boyd-Barrett (1994) provides a clear summary and even-handed assessment of the approaches of van Dijk, Fowler, and Bell.

Some form of CDA has become established as the standard approach to media texts within European linguistics, although the paradigm is less familiar in the United States. The major work reviewed here is either explicitly a form of CDA or congenial to it where its concerns overlap (Bell, 1991, 1994). CDA is more a shared perspective than a single school or a methodology. It has an explicit sociopolitical agenda, a concern to reveal the role of discourse in reproducing or challenging sociopolitical dominance. The media are a particular subject of CDA analysis because of their manifestly pivotal role as discourse-bearing institutions.

The most comprehensive work on media discourse has been undertaken by van Dijk (1988a, 1988b, 1991). Van Dijk's framework aims to integrate the production and interpretation of discourse as well as its textual analysis. His approach to news discourse was proposed as a 'new, interdisciplinary theory of news in the press' (1988b: vii). *News as discourse* (van Dijk, 1988b) appeared as a primary theoretical contribution to the analysis of news stories, supplemented by a volume of case studies, *News analysis* (1988a). These are drawn mainly from a massive sample of international news reporting and a study of racism in the European press. His 1991 book *Racism in the press* analyzes the reporting of ethnicity in a large sample of stories from British newspapers. Van Dijk's later work (e.g., 1998) extends beyond news to genres such as opinion texts and editorials.

Van Dijk's main contribution has been a framework for analyzing the discourse structure of news stories. The thematic structure of a story consists of its topics and their organization within the story. This gives the broad semantic structure. Closely parallel is the syntactic structure, which van Dijk terms 'news schemata'. News schemata are thus a syntax of news stories, the formal categories into which news can be analyzed and their relations to each other. They can be tree-diagrammed to show the discourse structure of the story. Van Dijk's analysis of newspaper stories in many languages (1988a) found few significant differences in news discourse structure. There were some differences between papers in the 'First' and 'Third' Worlds, but the greatest differences were between 'quality' and 'popular' newspapers, for instance within West Germany and the United Kingdom.

Also working within CDA, Norman Fairclough has developed an approach that draws on Halliday's functional linguistic framework, but he adds a knowledge of recent social theory that is rarely encountered in linguistics. His framework was initially developed independent of a concentration on media language, although it is no accident that many of his example analyses are of media texts, because the media – whose business is discourse – play a crucial role in shaping and purveying discourses. His book on *Media discourse* (1995) ranges more widely across the media than just the news, covering a variety of nonfictional broadcast genres. In a wider text, Fairclough (2003) lays out his

approach to CDA in general terms, including some specific news examples.

Fairclough has worked with three dimensions in discourse analysis. Text analysis concentrates on the actual language text, examining vocabulary, syntax and cohesion, and the macrolevel of text structure. Secondly, analysis of discourse practice examines how the text is produced and interpreted, and also how it is distributed, with the media as a case of complex distribution of texts from other sources. This level of analysis also looks at wider issues of orders of discourse – the characteristic discourse practices of institutions such as the media. Thirdly, analysis of social practice focuses on discourse in society, institutions, and culture and in particular on the relation of discourse to power and ideology.

Fairclough has emphasized several trends toward change in the discourses of contemporary society, particularly in the media. Marketization is the increasing use of promotional language adopted from advertising by other domains. A second trend is toward the democratization or conversationalization of discourse in the media as in other institutions – a shift to increased informality of language. Fairclough (2000) covers the discourse of the Blair government in the UK in these terms. Fairclough's is probably the most influential of the approaches to news language, with published studies by others frequently adopting aspects of his approach and methodologies in their analyses.

Bell's text *The Language of News Media* (1991) draws on the author's experience as a journalist and editor, including analysis of news stories written or edited by himself or journalistic colleagues. Three themes are central in this approach: the processes that produce media language, the notion of the news story, and the role of the media audience.

Bell stresses that news discourse is the product of multiple hands. Journalists make use of a range of spoken and written sources in writing a story. Once the story leaves the journalist's hands, it then passes through multiple editing stages before being eventually published. Bell emphasizes that the idea of the story is central to news. Journalists do not write articles, they write stories – with structure, order, viewpoint, and values. Bell (1991) examined how news stories differ from other kinds of narratives, beginning with a summary 'lead' sentence and eschewing chronological order. News values drive the way news stories are structured, and the lead sentence embodies the character of the story. News discourse is analyzed in terms developed from analysis of personal narratives and van Dijk's framework: summary (headline and lead), attribution, events, actors, setting (time, place), followup, commentary,

and background. Bell has continued to work on the structure of news stories (e.g., 1995), more recently looking at how news discourse developed across the 20th century (Bell, 2003).

A fourth leading approach to news language is through the analysis of broadcast interviews, which is of interest largely because of the sociopolitical salience of the content and participants in political interviews. Since the mid–1980s a number of researchers have used Conversation Analysis to analyze broadcast interviews. The leading work is by Clayman and Heritage in the United States and by Greatbatch in the United Kingdom (e.g., Clayman, 1991; Greatbatch, 1998). Clayman and Heritage's book (2002) brings together much of the material in this area.

Useful overviews of media language research include Cotter (2001), which covers both discourse studies and more 'sociolinguistic' work focusing on the linguistics of news language in its own right below the discourse level (e.g., Bell, 1991, 2003; Biber, 2003; Jucker, 1992). The reader edited by Bell and Garrett (1998) brings together summary presentations and exemplifications of the main approaches to news discourse. Each contributor summarizes their framework and provides an illustrative analysis to show how it works. The apparatus involved in some of the approaches is formidable, and this text attempts to make them more accessible to students and other nonspecialists.

Most contemporary studies of news language claim CDA as their framework, although in many cases they work with only a small amount of the social or linguistic apparatus involved. The journal *Discourse & Society* (edited by van Dijk) is a particular forum for CDA and related work, and a significant proportion of the papers it publishes concern media discourse. These range across discrimination and stereotyping in areas such as sports reporting (Bishop and Jaworski, 2003) and coverage of ethnic minorities in Finland (Pietikäinen, 2003). Studies of 'news about the future' have been conducted by Jaworski, Fitzgerald and Morris (2003, 2004), examining how unscheduled leaks of news and the buildup to a scheduled future event are represented linguistically. The intertextuality or hybridity of media genres is the focus of Östman and Simon-Vandenbergen (2004), who brought together several studies that look at how discourse styles mix in the media.

With the growth of new media, particularly those that are based on the Internet, scholars have begun to research language use in these forms. For example, Richardson (2001) examined news and internet newsgroups, Richardson and Meinhof (1999) investigated how 24-hour channels affect news, and

Aitchison and Lewis (2003) covered a range of work on the language of new media. Nevertheless, the gaps in research on news language remain very much as identified by Bell and Garrett (1998) – there is a dearth of work on the production of news language and to a lesser extent on its reception.

See also: Critical Discourse Analysis; Language in Computer-Mediated Communication; Media: Analysis and Methods; Media and Language: Overview; Media and Marginalized Groups; Media, Politics, and Discourse: Interactions; Newspeak; Radio: Language; Television: Language.

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