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Smith, Angela, & Higgins, Michael - *The Language of Journalism – A Multi-genre perspective*, Bloomsbury, London, 2013, ISBN: 9781849660662

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The nuances of language are endlessly fascinating to journalists and journalism academics alike. But while such professionals often have an excellent facility with words, they do not always recognise the infrastructure of language that underpins their work. This book provides a useful framework to examine the language of journalism using linguistic analysis techniques.

Many lay people also feel equipped to assess – and pass judgment – on journalistic performance, but the authors argue that to discuss journalism in a systematic, informed and evidence-based manner requires a particular set of tools. These, they contend, provide a means to compare journalism texts and to evaluate the history and practices of the profession. A central premise is that the news agenda is not randomly assembled, or the outcome of a natural order, but rather is the product of informed selection by journalists and their employers.

The book is useful as a teaching resource to explain basic news values as it articulates these concepts clearly. But it also offers a more challenging analysis for those seeking to understand the subtleties and power of the language of journalism. Its analysis of language helps to understand how journalists build stories, forge arguments and how linguistic construction shapes understanding.

While many media books focus on the tasks of investigating, interviewing and fact-checking, this book examines how journalists can manipulate when using language, in the words of the authors, how journalism achieves its “emotive thrust”. They contend that power and identity are important components of journalism, and that journalists can influence how people think by setting the public debate. An example provided is how a right-wing British newspaper reinforced negative public beliefs about immigration.

The book also analyses how language is used to persuade, argue or inform. The authors argue that while journalists may strive to be neutral or objective, linguistic analysis shows they often fail. As an example, the language of war illustrates the layers of meaning embedded in the use of certain words. For example, the US ‘liberation’ of Iraq was later referred to as the US-led ‘invasion’ when the outcome of the conflict became uncertain. Similarly articles about adolescents can insidiously demonise youth by describing them as ‘drunken’ or by labeling young women as ‘ladettes’. The latter, the authors argue, has contributed to a moral panic about the lapsed moral code of young women.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is used as the main model for linguistic analysis. Newcomers to this approach will find the explanation accessible, with its key concepts of power, history and ideology. The reader is also introduced to theoretical models of ideology, including those of Michel Foucault (1981), John Frow (1989) and Myra Macdonald (1995).

Theory is applied to contemporary examples. James Helmer’s argument (1993) that women are forced to play the “patriarchal game” to gain economic and political advantage is illustrated by a female actor turning up to a red carpet event in a provocative outfit knowing this would attract media attention. The authors refer to the media discussion over Hollywood star Nicole Kidman wearing a short skirt at the UK premiere of the movie *Nine*,

whereas actor Daniel Day-Lewis attracted no comment in the *Daily Mail* for his unorthodox attire at the same event.

The book is also useful for researchers in that it outlines the three-prong model that Norman Fairclough (1997) developed for CDA: text or discourse; analysis of discourse practice (which examines how a text is constructed, interpreted and distributed) and also the different discourse practices, such as the language of political or business reporting. It also analyses social practice, with particular regard to the relationship to power and ideology, noting how self-censorship by journalists can be evident in their choice of language. Journalists can also send coded messages to the reader through their careful selection of words.

The BBC's former chief news correspondent, Kate Adie, wrote of being on a "guided tour" when reporting on the American bombings of Tripoli, the capital of Libya, in 1986. Adie chose to report what she observed, which included two young boys checking out an unexploded land mine, rather than the story that the US and UK governments had expected when they assisted her with access. Her focus on civilian casualties led to censure from both governments.

Digital convergence has led to new trends, with the authors contending that live audience feedback is creating genuine interaction between the media and its audience through phone-ins, text messaging, twitter and email. Their analysis of broadcast journalism explores the use of language to create an informal tone, including the light-hearted banter typical of television breakfast news programs. They noted how the journalist uses language to align with the viewer, to seem like an ordinary person trying to make sense of the news.

Also identified is a broadcast toolbox of interviews: the interviewee as eyewitness (experiential interview); as specialist editor in business or some other field (the affiliated interview) or as spokesperson (the accountability interview). The accountability interview is often structured to become confrontational, but it is observed that even when this occurs, the participants are expected to remain agreeable to the audience. The authors reported a marked decrease in deference to interview subjects, with increasingly adversarial questioning. They also noted the entrenched practice of broadcast scripts being written for and geared to the "over-hearing audience". They further reminded how contemporary broadcast journalism requires turn taking, with a mention of Andrew Tolson's 2006 work on the pre-allocated role of sequencing.

The chapter on the language of magazines also highlights how the use of the pronouns 'us' and 'you' is in keeping with what Fairclough describes as "synthetic personalisation", the drive to address unseen mass audiences in the sympathetic tones of individual conversation. Magazines also often use warm or stylish images of the editor and contributors to convey either friendliness in the case of a mainstream women's magazine, or perhaps glamour in an architecture magazine. Here they refer to Deirdre Brown and Stephen Levinson's (1981) work on 'positive politeness'.

In the online and citizen journalism chapter, the authors highlight three challenges to journalism practice – the de-professionalism of news provision, ease of access from a wide variety of sources and the 24-hour news cycle. It is clear that these changes will continue to alter the language of journalism in yet to be understood ways. This book provides some tools to observe and understand that journey.

About the reviewer

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