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Abstract

Journalists are frequently used as a source of information for those studying news production and practice and as a means of describing the 'real' world of news. However, these conversations between researcher and journalist have often largely been treated as a transfer of neutral, transparent information about news practice rather than a discursive practice in itself. Discourse analysis has been extensively applied to the output of news yet is underdeveloped in the area of production studies. This paper argues that a more discursive approach to news production studies yields a more nuanced understanding of journalistic culture and practice. This is illustrated by using the tools of discursive social psychology to analysis interviews with 23 broadcast journalists about the nature of news. The analysis helps with the identification of the use of empiricist discourse to construct a 'natural' journalism and to justify certain constructions of journalistic practice.

Keywords: Discourse analysis, news production, journalism, discursive social psychology, empiricist discourse, television news

Biographical note:

Sally Reardon is Senior Lecturer in Journalism at the Bristol School of Film and Journalism at the University of the West of England, Bristol, UK. Her research interests include discourse analysis, international news production, news agencies, journalism education, media ethics, and the construction of professional identity in journalism practitioners and journalism students. Prior to moving into academia she worked in television news for Reuters Television, Sky News and Associated Press Television news for over 20 years. She was awarded her PhD from Cardiff University in 2013.

Introduction:

News has been theorised as a product of routines structured from above and within the news environment and as a practice carried out by journalism professionals. Structured routines left little place for the 'cogs' or journalists in the process. More recent practice-centred studies have reintroduced the practitioner as an agent in the process. In the study of routines the talk of journalists has been largely ignored or in the practice-centred studies the talk of journalists has been often treated at face value. Discourse analysis has been extremely productive in unpacking how news articulates certain ideologies but has seldom been applied to those making the news. This article argues for a more discursive approach to the study of news production. In this model the talk of journalists is central to understanding how macro issues of production and values and practices in the newsroom are articulated and circulated and how micro issues of practice evolve. It is also 'analytically sensitive to the 'mediating' agency of the cultural producers' (Cottle, 2003: 13).

Hanitzsch and Vos in their recent attempt to create a framework for understanding the various articulations of journalistic roles, both external and internal to journalists, sees the value of examining on a discursive level what journalists say, stating that 'the dynamic nature of journalists' identity can be understood as a discursive repertoire that enables the selective activation of contingent forms of journalistic roles' (2017:121). This discursive approach is needed in studies of news production since it can give insight to how certain repertoires of explanation are emphasised at the expense of others, which in turn can inform the news agenda.

To illustrate how this approach can work towards a more nuanced understanding of how television news is discursively constructed I draw on interviews carried out with television journalists from BBC, Channel 4 News, Sky News, Associated Press Television News (APTN), and Reuters Television (RTV). I will illustrate how this kind of analysis helps identify the 'interpretive repertoires' of journalism and news work. Specifically I will concentrate on

the dominant discursive construction of news identified to illustrate how this approach to the talk of journalists can reveal patterns of explanation. It is important to note that the use of interviews here is not concerned with building a picture of *actual* newsroom processes and procedures in the way an ethnographer would seek to do, but to build an understanding of how journalists talk about values and processes.

Journalism as a discursive practice

News production is a complex process and journalism as an activity is indeed what John Law would call 'messy' (2004). Many theoretical frameworks in the explanation of news work carried out over the last decades have brought some theoretical order to this mess. Early newsroom studies formed seminal works on the routines and processes of news work (cf. Tuchman, 1978, Gans, 1979, Schlesinger, 1987) and did much to reveal the order behind the myth of the chaos of news. These studies have detailed many aspects of production from the deployment of resources, the choice of beats, the use of sources, and the employment of news values, journalistic professional ethics and ideology. However, the emphasis on overarching routines has perhaps led to neglect in examining the journalists involved in the process and their agency. Also, they do not fully explain how it is that practices and values are propagated and circulated through the news production process over time. To investigate this several scholars have been calling for a more linguistic approach to news production studies to unravel how news is 'talked into being' (Catenaccio et al, 2011).

Many studies have augmented observations with interviews with journalists or taking interviews as a primary resource for understanding news production. However, in studies where journalists were interviewed what they said was largely treated as a transfer of neutral, transparent information about news practice rather than a discursive practice in itself. However, more recent studies of newsrooms have moved from 'routine' to 'practice'

taking in Foucault's ideas of social process and discursive practice within news-making. As Cottle says:

...negative ideas of power, control and regulation imposed from outside or from above, are also broadened to include a more discursive appreciation of the role of human agency and meanings within prevailing administrative procedures and /or 'regimes of truth'. (Cottle, 2003:7)

Work being carried out by a growing number of academics is attempting to account for the complexity and nuance of practice. These new studies draw on a number of approaches including traditional ethnography, engagement with journalists in interviews and a variety of analytical tools including conversation analysis (Gravengaard and Rimstad, 2012), Actor Network Theory (ANT) (Hemmingway, 2008), progression analysis (Perrin, 2011) and discourse analysis. Although often quite different in method and theory they do share in common a more 'bottom up' approach to news practice and stress the importance of this practice as fundamental to an understanding of news both at newsroom level and in a wider social context. They also seek to look at the 'mess' of practice in a more detailed fashion.

The role of language in news production is a growing area of interest. Catenaccio et al (2011) for example, argue for a linguistic approach to the study of news production saying that: 'a great deal of discourse-analytical research on the news has disregarded the production process' (Catenaccio et al, 2011:1846). This approach highlights the multi-directional production process and how discursive practice as well as cultural and social context brings news into being. Catenaccio et al see the value added of a linguistic approach at the conjunction of 'production' and articulation' of news discourse' (Catenaccio et al, 2011:1847). Using practice based ethnographic work combined with extended interviews and 'careful, close, linguistically sensitive micro-analysis and rich observation of the way news values are articulated in the actual writing and speaking processes and vice versa' can bring news production into sharper focus (Catenaccio et al, 2011:1847).

Daniel Perrin also concentrates on the linguistic evolution of news production. Through progression analysis (PA) combining keystroke programming, participant observations, interviews and overheard news room discussions he illustrates how good and bad practice can be achieved by individual reporters working in newsrooms (Perrin, 2011). This level of detail can show the construction of the story both in the writing but in the handling of the social situations in the newsroom. Van Hout and Jacobs also utilise key stroke technology to look at how a story is identified and developed as well as participant observation and interviews – following Peterson's (2001) idea of news, moving away from structures to a more contingent, 'interpretive practice' (Van Hout and Jacobs, 2008). Peterson himself attempts to capture a different area of discourse – that of spoken contact with sources. He examines the 'un-writable' discourse of journalists as they negotiate and interpret their sources and move from the spoken to the written story. As stated above, Peterson sees news practice as an 'interpretive practice' saying journalism 'embodies social creativity' (Peterson, 2001: 201).

All these approaches put the journalist centre stage as a site of interpretation and articulation of values and practices. These approaches use fieldwork but also rely heavily on interviews with the journalists often asking the practitioners to reflect on their activities. However, at times in this type of work it is unclear exactly how the discourse of the journalists is analysed. Sometimes the words are taken at face value. In Perrin's study (2011) a journalist's claim that he changed newsroom practice on many previous occasions is treated as a description of reality rather than a rhetorical account.

Other work has taken a more systematic approach to the analysis of news talk both in the production of news and in reflection on practice. Laura Ahva has used interviews to ask Finnish newspaper journalists about practice, specifically public journalism projects which allowed for 'professional reflexivity' (Ahva, 2012:790). The participants constructed journalism as having a number of roles which appeared in the study to be shifting as journalists became more involved in public journalism, leading Ahva to conclude that the

journalistic identity can be re-articulated. This work is interesting in that it suggests that the discourse of professional journalistic norms is 'highly *contextual*', shifting across time and place, and that enduring images and notions of the journalist can be dislodged (Ahva, 2012, p796). Gravengaard's work on the language structure of concepts around news makes a more subtle point about journalists' discursive construction of the role of journalism. Using interviews with journalists to analyse the metaphors used to conceptualise their work Gravengaard, found that several 'multi-layered conceptions of news work' were described in the discussions and that rather than being mutually exclusive they were indeed 'co-present in the journalist's consciousness' (Gravengaard 2012:1064).

Other recent work has centred on talk in action *inside* the newsroom. Cotter's work draws on interactional sociolinguistics and ethnographic traditions again using newsroom observations but also extensive interviews with journalists to interrogate the construction of news (Cotter, 2010). She looks at specific 'speech events' in the production process such as the 'morning meeting' where editorial staff gather each day to discuss which stories to pursue and which to drop. Using discourse level analysis she traces how news values are invoked to argue the case for story inclusion/exclusion. She argues that news values are 'easy to see' in the output of news but 'less apparent is the role of news values in practice, or the multi-stage process of reporting and editing that leads to the fully formed story.' She goes on to say that: 'Even more back-grounded, but essential, is their display in recurrent discursive activities within the news room' (Cotter, 2010: 95).

Work by Gavengaard and Rimstad (2012) has also looked at the morning meeting and takes language use as a central focus. They employ the tools of conversation analysis to look at how stories are eliminated from the news agenda during the editorial meetings. Here the methodology is systematically applied which affords close attention to the architecture of the exchanges revealing patterns of editorial selections. This and other work by Gravengaard discussed above, starts to peel back the layers of discursive work being done by journalists

both reflecting-in-action and reflecting-on-action (Schön, 1983). This begins to recognise the role of the journalist in the production process.

As discussed above there are many threads of research using language as a starting point to examine news production practices. Here it is important to emphasise that what journalists say is central as a means of understanding practice in terms of values and professional identity. Here I argue a systematic analysis of the repertoires utilised to construct a subject or set of opinions is a useful way to unpack the discursive work being done by journalists to construct their values and practices.

Discourse in action:

In order to fully investigate and capture news values and professional practice a discourse analysis approach is needed. Many past 'routine' explanations of news production have written out the role of the journalist. Instead the workers become a cog in an all-powerful machine with little agency or part to play. In this study using a discursive approach the journalist is written back in. This is not to say that the journalists become the sole driving force of news but that they do have a role to play in production. This is not to argue that we should believe everything that journalists tell us but instead to propose that we should be looking at what they say with a more systematic analytical eye. A discourse analysis approach to news production is a fruitful way into the study of how news values and practices are articulated in relation to the production process, with an emphasis on discourse rather than just routines. I argue that patterns and shifts in the discursive construction of news values and practice are inextricably interwoven with practice. Practice is constituted in and through discourse and practice is reflected in discourse.

In interviewing journalists it is important to avoid attempting to 'read between the lines' of the interviews to see how it matches up to some notional 'reality'. Research that does this is predicated on the idea that what people say can be measured against some independent objective 'truth'. That is, that some accounts are 'true' and some not. I want to

move away from this realist approach that separates some accounts from others and instead turn to a more relativistic approach, one in which discourse is treated as the subject of study for itself rather than as a window to an objective reality. I intend to move the journalists' discourse to centre stage rather than an afterthought. It is important to do this because this discourse not only *describes* news production but also, I would argue, in part, *constitutes* news production. It can allow certain meanings, or ways of talking to thrive or disallow alternative meanings. This means that what people say may have a bearing on what people do – for example what kind of news stories are chosen or ignored, what can be spoken of and what cannot.

Discourse analysis has been used extensively to examine the text of news products and has been extremely useful in unpacking the narrative structures of stories and dissemination of ideological messages embedded within the discourse (cf Bell, 1991, van Dijk, 1988, Fairclough, 1995, Fowler, 1991, Conboy 2006, Matheson, 2005, Hutchby, 2006, Montgomery, 2007). However, this method has not been fully exploited in production studies. Yet discourse analysis can have a greater role to play in the study of news production. As Cotter points out, the discourse of news is made up of 'two key components: the dimension of the text or story, and the dimension of the processes involved in the production of the text' (Cotter, 2003). In other words, discourse analysis can be utilised to examine how news is talked into being by the producers.

In this analysis I draw upon the work of Jonathan Potter and Margaret Wetherell. In Potter and Wetherell's influential book *Discourse and Social Psychology* they lay out a proposal for a new type of psychology with discourse analysis at its heart (Potter and Wetherell, 1987). Potter and Wetherell move to a functionalist approach to language rather than realist. That is, they see language as being used to do things rather than just as a description of an objective reality. Traditional social psychology has used language as a window into the interior world of the individual. Potter and Wetherell argue against this epistemology, saying

that language itself needs to be looked at because it is constitutive and has consequences, or, as they describe it:

...we are not trying to recover events, beliefs and cognitive processes from participants' discourse, or treat language as an indicator or signpost to some other state of affairs but looking at the analytically prior question of how discourse or accounts of these things are manufactured. (Potter and Wetherell 1987:35)

They attempt a marriage of macro and micro analysis, taking in post-structuralist ideas whilst also using some of technical tools of conversation analysis. Wetherell explains this as 'critical discursive social psychology'.

It is concerned with members' methods and the logic of accountability while describing also the collective and social patterning of background normative concepts....It is a discipline concerned with the practices which produce persons, notably discursive practices, but seeks to put these in a genealogical context. (Wetherell, 1998:405)

This approach steers a course between seeing language as fluid and contextual, but also understanding that language use is bounded by certain functions and limitations on meaning. In other words there is a limited amount of discursive resources we can call up in our own conversation yet what we do with these resources is not completely bounded by these resources, being able, as we are, to use them in all sorts of different ways dependent on context and the goals we are attempting to achieve. Jan Blommaert uses a similar idea when he talks about the individual's ability to 'mobilise specific resources for performing specific actions in society' (Blommaert, 2005: 58). Therefore, on the one hand 'although we talk 'in our own words', these words may not actually be 'ours' at all, in the sense they are not original or unique to any one individual' (Cameron, 2001:15). On the other hand discourse does change contextually and over time, meaning we as individuals have the means to use these resources in new and unusual ways. Michael Billig describes this as the 'general paradox of language' where the 'speaker simultaneously is in charge of language and is captured by it' (Billig, 1991:8).

In this piece one of the tools of discursive social psychology, the notion of 'interpretive repertoires', is drawn on to untangle the discourse around news values and news work. First coined by Gilbert and Mulkay in *Opening Pandora's Box* (1984) an interpretive repertoire is a set of linguistic terms, a grammatical style and usually one or more metaphors to explain certain practices or opinions. These repertoires are the 'building blocks' (Wetherell and Potter, 1988) for constructing a coherent explanation for thought processes and actions and are built from a limited range of linguistic resources – often metaphors – and a certain style of speaking. As stated above, this kind of analysis owes much to the work of Gilbert and Mulkay (1982, 1984) in the area of Sociology of Scientific Knowledge (SSK). In interviews with scientists they identified two main competing repertoires for accounting for and justifying scientific theory choice – the empiricist discourse and the contingent discourse. They also identified variations within and across different accounts. They described how the use of each repertoire formed a pattern, each being used at specific junctures when a scientist was justifying his or her own views and those of similar views and undermining the views of oppositional scientific positions and advocates. This work lays bare the social construction of discourse and what work is being done by the discourse in different contexts.

This work on repertoires has been taken up and developed by researchers in other areas of study and has been employed across a number of settings such as issues of race (Wetherell and Potter, 1992, Foster, 2009), career choice (Moir, 1993), and gender construction (Gill, 1993). The emphasis for the identification of these repertoires is to look at what function they serve for the speaker in conversation and semi-formal interviews but also their function in written texts (Edley, 1993) and in formal spoken texts such as television broadcasts (Potter, 1996). What this work has done is to examine the architecture of accounts and how they are constructed to make sense. It also highlights the contingent nature of the accounts and what these repertoires achieve ideologically (Edley and Wetherell, 2008, Wetherell and Potter, 1988). This is particularly useful when addressing issues of journalistic practice.

This analysis uses extended face-to-face interviews carried out with 23 broadcast journalists from BBC, Channel 4 News, Sky News, Reuters Television (RTV) and Associated Press Television (APTN) who filled the roles of reporters, editors or producers. They ranged from senior editors and correspondents to news desk producers and reporters. Those who took part were all practicing journalists at the point when they were interviewed. Most were either in the middle of their day's work or had just finished a day's work. This 'on-site', that is, still employed in the industry, type of interview enabled a more immediate response to events as they are developing rather than talking to those who had retired or left the industry (off-site) and were speaking from a distance (Hannerz, 2004). Participants were asked about their personal journey in journalism, and about what made an event a news story. Each participant was asked about the last five stories with which they were involved and to explain why each was newsworthy. Talking about stories the person actually worked on was intended to keep the discussion focused on the journalist's lived working life rather than asking them to hypothesise on practice and values. Interviews were then transcribed for analysis.

Analysis was carried out through a repeated close reading of the transcripts to identify patterns and structures of accounts. For example participants in total described over 300 stories during the course of the interviews and these explanations were looked at for clusters of repeated rhetorical structures and subject. As Stephanie Taylor describes this kind of analysis, one approaches the data with a 'certain blind faith, with a confidence there was something there but no certainty about what' (Taylor 2001: 38).

A close and repeated reading of the data led to the identification of a number of interpretive repertoires around the needs of journalists and journalism. The empiricist discourse discussed below is not the only construction of news work but it is by far the most prominent and widespread within the interviews. This kind of analysis often means that a range of possible avenues emerge and as Taylor points out 'it will almost certainly be necessary to

focus on some at the expense of others' (Taylor 2001: 39). Here I have concentrated on one very prevalent and coherent repertoire.

It is extremely important to stress that I do not claim that the following discourse identified is a description of *actual* practice. Instead I argue that the discourse *itself* is interesting in that it can in part constitute practice and can illuminate the dominant hegemonic constructions of news at the expense of more challenging constructions.

News as 'found' object:

Throughout the interviews each participant was asked to talk about stories they had been working on in the previous few days or weeks and to explain why each was newsworthy. Editorial judgement or a person's 'nose' for news is a powerful indicator of a 'good' journalist, as any manual on how to be a journalist will attest (cf. Boyd 2008, Ray, 2003). Therefore accounting for how this judgement is exercised is a loaded activity for participants.

One of the defining qualities of the journalists' accounts of news work is how they build the accounts as factual and therefore inevitable. There are a number of rhetorical tactics used in fact-building but what is most defined here is what Potter terms 'out-there-ness' where the focus of the discourse is to 'draw attention away from the concerns of the producer's *stake* in the description – what they may gain from or lose – and their *accountability*, or responsibility, for it' (Potter, 1996:161, original italics). Language is used to construct a 'real' world by pulling the listener into the situation being described. The listener is asked to see the situation described in the same way as the teller positioning them both as looking 'out-there' at the 'real' world. This out-there-ness is achieved through a number of rhetorical tropes or 'externalising devices' (Potter, 1996:159). Here I will concentrate on one in particular, that of the use of empiricist discourse, as it illuminates how discourse constructs news in certain ways and excludes others.

In the course of the close readings of the transcripts it became apparent that key to constructing distance from news work was the use of the empiricist discourse theorised by Gilbert and Mulkay. The empiricist discourse identified by Gilbert and Mulkay worked to create a factual, realist account of the world, free from any taint of the scientists' own subjectivity and was used when the scientists were discussing their own scientific position. Gilbert and Mulkay (1984) identified three main qualities of an empiricist repertoire used by the scientists they interviewed both in their formally written papers for publication but also in the semi-formal interviews. These qualities consisted of grammatical distancing or impersonality, the primacy of the data, and the following of accepted procedure. They found the grammatical distancing was more prevalent in written papers but also leaked into conversation and drew attention away from the speakers' involvement or possible bias by removing all references to themselves by using phrases such as 'tests were carried out' rather than 'I carried out some tests'. The second quality, of the primacy of the data, took the form of the construction that data speaks for itself. The researcher is merely a cipher or 'neutral medium through which empirical phenomena make themselves evident' (Gilbert and Mulkay, 1984:56). The third quality of following of procedure further removes the researcher's subjective part in the process. Instead they were following universally accepted methods.

These rhetorical tropes frame accounts as neutral and out-there. All three serve to eliminate the producer of the accounts, as summarised by Gilbert and Mulkay: 'Empiricist discourse is organised in a manner which denies its character as an interpretive product and which denies that its author's actions are relevant to its content' (Gilbert and Mulkay, 1984:56).

Whilst Gilbert and Mulkay were looking at 'hard' science theory their work has been developed in other types of accounts and subject areas. Potter points out that Gilbert and Mulkay's notion of an empiricist discourse was proposed as a 'seamless whole' (Potter 1996: 154). However, it is possible to investigate if certain parts of this discourse are in evidence in

non-scientific settings. The main elements of fact construction and the transferal of agency from the scientist to the data have been found in other professional areas – in particular journalism. Scholars have found aspects of the empiricist discourse utilized in journalism both in the output of press (Edley, 1993) and broadcasting (Potter, 1996). In Edley's examination of the coverage of Prince Charles the press made use of empiricist discourse constructed through grammar to make certain reports seem 'true' and about a world 'for all to see'. Potter (1996) also shows how the use of impersonal grammar in radio reports removes the producer's stake in the report and positions the report as merely reflecting the 'real' world.

In this article's analysis, the use of an empiricist discourse was identified across the interviews with marked consistency regardless of the demographics of the participants or their employment situation. The discourse of news production and editorial decision-making was to construct a factual and 'natural' account which worked to remove the journalist from the process. The three main qualities, grammatical distancing or impersonality, the primacy of the data, and the following of accepted procedure discussed above, were prevalent and will be discussed in turn below:

1. News as discrete object: Grammatical distancing or impersonality.

The most significant characterisation of editorial work was to construct news as a 'found object', lying about waiting to be spotted by someone – perhaps a journalist, perhaps someone else. News is rhetorically constructed as 'out there' (Potter 1996). This construction works to minimise the involvement of the journalists in interpreting or creating news and therefore minimises accountability for decision-making. It works to distance agency and thus responsibility for coverage from the producers of news and places the responsibility on the shoulders of the events.

News in the interviews is objectified grammatically. A range of vocabulary and phrases are used to make stories concrete, discrete entities. Stories are 'found' or 'missing', they are 'picked up' and 'uppicked', or they are 'dropped', 'shot down', or they have 'money thrown' at them. Throughout the interviews the participants constructed news as grammatically out in the world.

The news stories are typically described in the singular – there is *the* Middle East story or *the* Peru earthquake or *the* Iraq War or *the* Iran story. Stories are talked of as separate single entities lined up in a row, rather than a set of interconnected, on-going situations. The lack of explanation for the complex interplay of events and issues has often been criticised by scholars of the media, particularly television news. A lack of context leads to the audience not having the means to make connections or understand ongoing conflicts, as shown in focus group discussions with both audience and producers, for example on the conflict in the Middle East (Philo and Berry, 2004). The construction of news as a series of discrete, separate objects would seem to reinforce this.

As single objects the stories have a life of their own. In these accounts news stories have agency. Stories 'struggle' and 'sink' or 'turn violent'. Here, for example, is an editor talking about a situation in Georgia:

1A: And then, come Saturday, it was obvious that it [Georgia] wasn't going away.

'It' was the story that was stubbornly standing its ground on Saturday so that the journalist could no longer ignore it. Rather than the journalist being active in the creation of this story it is 'Georgia' who is making the running. Grammatically the journalist is written out of this account.

In the following description by another editor, they describe an ongoing situation in the Middle East:

2B: So there's all those things going on, it's pictorially a good story, it turns into an even better story because of the riots. And I don't mean better and good in terms of good and evil, I mean in terms of visually being interesting and getting an idea of what's going on. That's what matters, that's good and better.

Again, this story has a life of its own: 'it turns into an even better story'. The journalist is grammatically removed from any involvement. It is the story that turns itself into a better story rather than the journalist choosing to apply and emphasise news values of negativity (Galtung & Ruge, 1970) or violence onto the narrative of the events. The speaker is making explicit news value judgements in terms of the quality of the visuals yet it is the story grammatically making the running rather than the journalist framing the story as such. Agency is discursively constructed as laying with the story not the journalist.

In each case the story is grammatically structured as taking the lead as this extract exemplifies:

1A: Another one recently was Thailand, and I can't remember the detail of it, but again it just sank to the bottom.

Again, grammatically the journalist is removed from the action. 'Thailand' 'sank to the bottom' rather than the journalists deciding not to broadcast it.

With the news turned into a series of objects the role of the journalist shifts. Instead of taking an active role in creating stories the agency of the journalist is reduced to gathering, ordering and corralling these objects. In the extract below by an agency editor, the journalist's job is 'just' to keep them in some sort of order.

3C: Let's see. That would be Editor of the Day. Er... though there's some other title to it, but anyway. Um Editor of the Day and then you just – you're, you're the traffic cop for the stories of the day. That's what you have to do...

Interviewer: (laughing) so that's what you have to do...

3C: Like the traffic cop, you know, or like the control tower for stories. (Laughing) some can land, some can't, some have to stay on hold.

Thus, as shown above the news is grammatically constructed as being made up of lots of small but whole entities which have their own life and agency, with the journalists being largely absent from the activity except to keep order, with stories 'flying' in fully formed. . The transfer of agency from the subject, that is the journalist, to the object, the story, is strongly reflective of the grammatical distancing employed by Gilbert and Mulkey's scientists (1982). In places the journalist can put a stop to the arrival of a story – when it is 'shot down' or cannot 'land'. Again this agency is grammatically removed. The speaker says some cannot land, not that she decides what can land. There is implicit but unacknowledged agency and the story remains a concrete object, which may have missed its chance for airing due to being pushed out by other objects which have 'landed'.

2. News is 'obvious': Data speaks for itself

The second characteristic of empiricist discourse is the use of the notion that the data speaks for itself and this is very marked in the news work discourse. Accounts of why events were 'news' followed a structure of a statement of 'fact' followed by a list. Here the 'data' is constructed as the 'fact' of the 'real-world' present in the news object. Where Gilbert and Mulkey's (1984) scientists would cite the data as speaking for itself, the journalists cite the real world as speaking for itself. So, stories are 'no-brainers' and news is 'obvious'. This 'obviousness' is accompanied by listing some of the actual elements of a story as the following extracts from Channel 4, BBC and APTN employees show.

4D: because there's obviously some stories that are immediately obvious.

- 5E: Well, it's managing the stories, the treatment of them. If it's a bang bang story in Afghanistan, it's obvious.
- 5E: So there are certain things you've got that are 'must dos'.
- 6F: it's going to be a huge story because either Mugabe loses and it's going to be massive or even if he wins it's you know, it just one of those obvious stories.

These two rhetorical tools - the use of the 'obvious' and listing of story elements is enough to discursively construct an argument to warrant coverage. This works rhetorically as a way of shutting down discussion as the 'reality' of the news is unequivocal. It deflects the onus for explanation back on to the questioner. It is a way of stating that of course it was a story, and if you the interviewer cannot see that you must be lacking some 'normal' real world acuity. News is effectively black-boxed where 'a matter of fact is settled' and one only needs to 'focus on its inputs and outputs and not on its internal complexity' (Latour, 1999:304). News needs no further explanation. There are a number of news values being alluded to in these accounts such as violence ('bang, bang') but these are not rhetorically ascribed as subjective evaluations. Instead they are grammatically connected to the 'obvious' with the 'internal complexity' glossed over.

Within journalistic practice and ideology there is the notion of the search for the non-obvious or the story behind the story. However this is not the prevalent construction of news work in the interviews. Whilst saying certain stories are obvious could be seen to imply that some stories are not obvious, this kind of story was absent within the discourse rendering the non-obvious rhetorically non-visible. In this discourse conformity to the industry norms is chosen over the more maverick non-conformist mythology of journalism. Media scholars have consistently argued that no news story is objectively 'obvious' but instead chosen based on a shared set of culturally specific news values. Yet, the discourse of journalists is that news is a naturally occurring phenomenon which is obvious.

3. I was only following orders: News as procedure

The third facet of empiricist discourse is the following of universally recognised and approved procedures. This kind of construction was evident in the descriptions of news work. There are a set of rules to be followed to make news. Sometimes these procedures are explicitly expressed, as for example below when the interviewer explains the subject of her research and gains this response:

Interviewer: It's about how television journalists see what they do, and why they think a story is a story.

2B: The second bit I like; why we do what we do. I mean the second bit is actually quite easy, why we... That story is obvious because of a, b, c, you can explain why you do it, why it's important, where it fits in, but the first bit about why you do it...

Here is another example of how coverage routines are 'obvious'.

8H: When breaking news stories happen there's obviously logical ways of covering them.

As well as the 'logic' of the routines, the procedural nature of news work was often expressed in long lists of activities and processes outlined by the participants in describing the development of news stories and daily routines. The overwhelmingly predominant construction of work followed a set pattern. It started with a claim that news work was difficult to detail due to its varied nature, its unpredictability because it 'varies hugely from day to day'. This was then followed by a detailed outline of a rigid set of tasks and duties constructing a work day that is highly procedural and routinized. This happens when asked specifically about their daily routine but also throughout accounts about specific stories.

Here, for example, is a chief correspondent's account of his day.

9J: I suppose that perhaps goes to the root of what a lot of journalism is, there is no average day, and you're really fortunate if there isn't because then they become very un-average, or they become really average. I suppose it's split in two. If it's quiet and nothing's been happening and I've had time off, because it's likely I've been on a break, I will then have to go into the office, get in the morning and they'll assign a reasonable sized story, usually it will be the lead or something they want some work on for that day, and then we'll put it together with the producer, do some of the interviews. Usually these days there has to be a live element to it, you know, 5 o'clock, and I'll aim to work towards the 5, 6 and 7 programmes...

In spite of the above interviewee saying there is no average day he then goes on to describe a very specific routine. No matter what the story he is assigned he will have a package and live coverage for the 'five' show.

This pattern is repeated across the job spectrum as this editor's and reporter's accounts illustrate:

10K: There's really no such thing as an average day.

Interviewer: But say you're in the office like today.

10K: Average day here would be I'd get up and tried to read as much as I can about what's going on. I get the Herald Tribune delivered at home [indistinct] of American related stories, for example, America's take on what's happening in [indistinct] and then I'll try where I can to at least cruise through the websites and newspapers while I listen to World Service and probably the Today programme... and I listen to the radio on the way in, so by the time I get in I've gone a day's work. When I get in and look at... I'll take ten minutes to see what the agencies and Reuters is reporting, and I'll talk to someone in the newsroom about what pictures are available for particular stories.

1A: Well, it varies hugely from day-to-day but it's all intake, it's no sort of writing or cutting, or anything like that, it's all intake. What I do is planning and Senior News Editor shifts, and then sometimes the DNE [Duty News Editor] shifts, or on the road. So it sort of falls into four different categories, if you like. But I suppose essentially, I'd say the majority of my time is the 6/6.30 starts, and you're reading in the day before. I'm normally up around 4.45 and then just flick through internet and TV at home, kind of thing, just scribble a few notes, and then in work for 6, and then 7 o'clock meeting is the first one. And that's when you sort of start to pick up on a few of the things that other people have seen, or want to do. And then 8 o'clock meeting is then, that's when you've got... that's when you have your comprehensive list which you are presenting for all output programmes, well, aside from the news at 10, but certainly the daytime outlook programmes.

This routinized procedural account is woven into discussion about news practice and specific events. The following of procedures for news coverage is framed as a positive activity in that it provides the best service to the audience and takes out subjectivity. The three extracts below are by two news agency journalist and one broadcast journalist:

11L: I really like that thing about the agencies, that they can't afford to muck about.... Get the pictures, deliver the pictures to the clients, move on, and get the next set of pictures, do the same thing all over again.

12M: If I was on as Output Editor which I often am, then my day would be really designating who was going to do what, which stories they should concentrate on.

Interviewer: Right.

12M: Liaising with intake to find out when pictures are coming in from around the world, and then pushing them out, and making sure that the right people are doing the right jobs.

13N: The classic, again with Hurricane Dean for example, yesterday we were on, it got down-graded to category 3 we put it on air, flashed it, you know, did a little phoner with the National Hurricane Centre to just kind of mark it and then we moved on to the rest of the news.

These accounts are mundane and matter of fact. The speaker is just carrying out normal, routine procedures for getting stories out on air. Bringing the stories in and pushing them out.

These lists of daily procedures tell the researcher very little about the journalist's agency in news production, if one was trying to piece together a realist picture of how a newsroom operates. However this paper is not concerned with attempting an ethnographic account of a newsroom routines, instead it is concerned with identifying how rhetorically journalists represent what they do and why, and how or if these are reflective of wider concerns of journalism. The lack of detail of the editorial decision-making process or the construction of stories is what is interesting here as it poses the question of why the discourse of the journalists concentrates on what appears a very dull list of timings governed by external structures over a more detailed explanation of individual thought processes and decisions.

One explanation is that the calling up of lists and the repeated use of obviousness frames the procedures of journalistic practice as common sense and inevitable. This adds rhetorical weight to the 'natural' course of journalism. The implicit application of culturally and ideologically founded news values such as originally described by Galtung and Ruge (1970) and others are embedded in the accounts yet these are not explicitly acknowledged. Instead the turn of events are grammatically and systematically constructed as a given, outside the subjectivity of the journalists involved. This again reinforces the 'natural' nature of journalism and works to fend off the accusation of subjectivity and bias.

Here it is important to remember that I am taking a functionalist approach to language rather than realist. That is, language as being used to do things rather than just as a description of an objective reality. By 'doing things' I mean that language is not neutral but rather called into action by the speaker to perform a variety of functions depending on the specific situation. I do not mean that a speaker necessarily has consciously devised a plan of 'action' every time they speak, rather that people over a lifetime of use have become practiced at using language, rather like riding a bike. One can be pedalling and obeying traffic laws yet one's mind is not necessarily consciously engaged in the activity.

I am also not claiming that the discourse describes reality and that for example when the discourse configures news as being obvious that it is indeed in reality obvious. Instead I am interested in how and why the participants chose to employ this discourse so prevalently in conversations about their work instead of other constructions such as that of a self-reflected one.

Discussion:

Taken together all three rhetorical tropes described above work to create a powerful interpretive repertoire of news as the produce of a natural process. It is as Stuart Hall wrote: 'Journalists speak of 'the news' as if events select themselves' (Hall, 1981:234).

The effect of this construction of news work and news is that the journalist is to a great extent 'written out' of the decision-making process and instead becomes a gatherer of pre-existing stories where the agency for selection lies with the story. By standing at a distance the subject remains unsullied by awkward questions about the ethics and values of editorial decision making. News as an object is constructed as a natural and factual account. This repertoire taps into a long standing avowed quality of journalism – that of objectivity. The journalist is written out of the process and news is constructed as an objective reality.

This discourse taps in to wider discourses around news and journalism. This kind of construction can be seen as connected to notions of journalistic objectivity whereby the

journalist is merely reporting facts and is removed from making subjective judgements. Whilst it is argued that journalists have evolved to understand that 'facts' may be manipulated, McNair argues objectivity is maintained by journalists following an agreed routine of reporting – an unwritten code of professional conduct which lives up to the objectivity required by journalism (McNair, 2003). This following of procedures ties in closely with the repertoire of 'found object' described above. Sticking to the rules discursively protects the journalist from criticism of subjectivity or distortions. Tuchman calls the use of the idea of objectivity a 'strategic ritual' where journalists 'evoke their objectivity almost the way a Mediterranean peasant might wear a clove of garlic around his neck to ward off evil spirits' (Tuchman, 1972:296).

This kind of narrative of news work is also reminiscent of the metaphor of journalism as a mirror (Zelizer, 2004) whereby journalism is merely reflecting reality back to the public rather than employing any subjective involvement. There is no explicit identifiable reference to the mirror but the rhetorical construction of news attempts to draw in the listener to see the world in the same way as the journalist - both looking out at reality.

The use of empiricist discourse, works to construct the impression of a fact-based reality of news work – work in which the figure of the journalist is largely absent. It also configures journalism as natural and therefore immutable. Whilst this does diminish the role of the journalist it does free them of responsibility and shield against criticism, a kind of stake inoculation where a journalist is only doing what anyone would do as the news itself dictates the course of action.

There is an obvious tension within this framing of journalism. If the journalist is merely a traffic cop, whilst this removes the subjectivity of news production it also removes any unique role for the individual journalist. The journalist's identity as somebody especially skilled to carry out the job of journalism is compromised. Whilst the quality of story-teller is a lauded

attribute there is a danger that this story-telling may stray in to the realm of *making up* stories, a challenge to notions of journalistic professionalism. Giving the 'facts' and telling the 'truth' about the world has long been one of the tenets held by journalism and journalists (Allan 1999). Stories framed as objects found living independently reinforces the notion of journalists as mirrors – just reflecting the truth back to the public. However, if a journalist starts to relate how they were instrumental in making a story – this moves dangerously close to making things up – which is the ultimate transgression in journalism. As MacGregor notes, for journalists: 'Suggestions that they are creating a social construction, a man-made product, are almost always seen by journalists as a criticism of their professional abilities rather than an explanation of what they do' (MacGregor 1997:52).

Conclusion:

This paper has sought to illustrate that discourse analysis is a useful tool in the researcher's armoury for examining news values and practices within news production. The systematic examination of the talk of journalists helps understanding of how news is talked into being and how values and practices are normalised or resisted. This talk is an important factor as so much of news work is enabled through discourse. The analysis helps to identify how journalists construct their accounts of work and their identity and the pool of discursive resources available to them in order to do this.

This is not about 'blaming' journalists for being inarticulate or for failings in practice. Instead it is about examining what repertoires are called up and how they may reflect wider issues in journalist practice and values. This analysis attempts to connect the macro context of journalism to the micro of individual discursive resources. At the micro level, in the interviews, journalists employ certain frames which are perceived as acceptable to the audience (in this case the researcher), and shows the speaker in the best light. What is interesting is which frames are chosen for journalism over others. In this instance it seems predominately more often acceptable to remove oneself from the news 'machine' rather than

to highlight or unpack one's own involvement. This reinforces a notion of 'objectivity', so key to the normative values of journalism.

The analysis also raises questions about possible missing repertoires. At the outset of the interviews it had been presumed that journalists would be articulate and reflective about practice but this was not characteristic of the discourse. A lack of any discursive tools to do this kind of reflection may have consequences on the practice in the news room. If practitioners cannot talk about how news is constructed and the journalist's role in that construction then how does the profession defend or challenge itself?

Whilst the use of empiricist discourse is not the only interpretive repertoire use by journalists in the interviews, it is the major chord of the construction of news values and news work and it powerfully dominates any discussion. In the wider context, journalism's claims to empiricism and objectivity have long been critiqued by media scholars, alongside the lack of self-reflection. However, it is worth pondering that in the present situation with journalism being under attack as a pedlar of 'fake news' and bias, it is not surprising journalists deploy rhetorical devices to reinforce their position as part of a 'community of practice' (Cotter, 2010) with claims to empiricism. However, a lack of discursive tools with which to reflect on values and practices leaves the profession vulnerable to less nuanced criticisms about veracity and legitimacy.

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