



外语·文化·教学论丛

Western News Discourse in Cultural Context

文化语境中的西方新闻话语

吴越民 著



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吴越民 著

责任编辑 诸葛勤 (zhugeq@126.com)

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Preface

With the high-speed development of society and the acceleration of globalization, news discourse has demonstrated its increasing importance. As a public discourse, journalistic English differs from the common sense of linguistic discourse in that it displays some features distinct from discourses such as popularity, impersonality, systematization and newness, etc. News discourse can act as a mirror reflecting the society and cultural backgrounds as well as exert influence on people's values and social concepts by disseminating messages concerning people and events. Recently researches on news discourse have entered a prosperous period in full swing and have drawn wide concerns from academic circles. News discourse is the language embodying reporting contents as well as the manifestation of standpoint to certain extent, especially in reporting the important news, which considers mutual exchanges and influencing audiences' positions as its goals, transmitting evaluative messages and maximizing ideological penetration. As a discourse reflecting ideology, news discourse inevitably expresses the social and political attitudes of news producers, which involves various social and cultural elements. From the perspective of news discourse we should not only analyze the expressing styles of journalistic English, but also probe into the social and cultural elements embedded in news discourse. Research on news discourse in cultural context will be conducive to better understanding and avoiding misunderstanding among diverse cultural groups. Meanwhile by analyzing news texts in a more clear and systematic way we will no longer confine our research to the interpretation of news texts, but extend the research to the cognitive, social, cultural, political and historical contexts of discourse, gaining an insight into the interactive relationship between news discourse and social, cultural change so as to expand the research fields of communication and develop relevant cultural strategies.

This book intends to take news texts as the object of discourse analysis and mainly focuses on analyzing an important genre of discourse in media: news in newspapers. As the primary medium in traditional media, newspaper is undergoing the unprecedented revolution in terms of social practices, social audiences and the capacity of communication, with its political and cultural functions demonstrating more and more power of social

communication. It is through newspaper that people are informed of the truth about the events happening recently and get to know the life styles of people around the world, their customs and social cultures. News discourse is unavoidably influenced by the form and tinged with the color of the social and political systems it belongs to, embodying some political and cultural stipulations. Thus, news discourse in newspaper is not merely the discourse related to linguistic structures and communicative functions. This book places the research on news discourse in cultural context, illustrating that discourse is not only the carrier of culture but also has an impact on cognitive thinking as well as on culture, laying emphasis on the relationship between news discourse and social practices of human beings.

This book adopts the methodology of combining logical argumentation and case study to analyze the news texts collected from English newspapers, news agencies, some news magazines and TV news of the past twenty years, including the following: the *Times*, the *New York Times*, *USA Today*, the *Washington Post*, the *Financial Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, *Time*, *Reuters*, the *Associated Press*, the *British Broadcasting Corporation*, etc. We will discuss the disseminating situation of English news in newspapers, linguistic features of journalistic English and the communicative power of news culture. Meanwhile we will elaborate on the components and connotations of discourse analysis theory, analyze its characteristics and types and probe into its practical application.

This book discusses news, news discourse, news culture and news values, news headlines, news lead, news structures, lexical and rhetorical devices of newspaper reports to give readers a deeper insight into the Western news discourse. However, it is not merely a research on the systems and rules of linguistic signs in terms of grammar, phonetics, vocabulary and text, analyzing news reports at the simplex, nonrepresentational level. We will integrate the news discourse theory with the core theory of contemporary cultural study, social study and communication study so as to probe deep into contemporary meanings of news discourse analysis, studying the cultural semiotics of news discourse, exploring the political, cultural tradition of news discourse and the construction of social structures of discourse.

The book consists of nine chapters:

Chapter 1 is a brief introduction to journalism, main English newspapers and news services in Britain and the United States of America.

Chapter 2 explains the basic concepts of discourse, news discourse, ideology, and cultural semiotics.

Chapter 3 explores news, news functions, news writing, news culture, and news values.

Chapter 4 examines news genres, including the classification of news (hard news and

soft news), news formulas (the inverted pyramid form, narrative formula, simplified extended conflict formula), editorials, columns, reviews, and types of features (personality profiles, human interest stories, trend stories, in-depth stories, and analysis piece).

Chapter 5 discusses the functions of headlines, guidelines for writing headlines, the lexical and grammatical characteristics of headlines, and the rhetorical devices in news headlines as well as their cultural elements.

Chapter 6 illustrates the principles of news leads, the format of leads, and the types of leads (such as the direct lead, the delayed lead, the blind lead, the direct address lead, the direct quote lead, the contrast lead, the question lead, and the narrative lead).

Chapter 7 is an analysis of the lexical styles of English news texts, including news words, heavy use of attributes with hyphens, jargons, short and simple words, colloquialisms and idioms, fuzzy terms as well as their social-cultural reflections.

Chapter 8 is a study of rhetorical devices of English news texts, including metaphorical words, euphemisms, irony, numbers, quotations and attributions in cultural context.

Chapter 9 draws a conclusion of the book. It is followed by the glossary of phrases, terms, and concepts commonly used in journalism.

The whole book written in English intends for teachers and students in colleges and universities, journalists, foreign-related staff and those who are proficient in English.

Wu Yumin

April 10, 2013

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Chapter 1

Journalism, Newspapers and News Services

Journalism is the discipline of collecting, analyzing, verifying and presenting information regarding current events, trends, issues and people.

1.1 Journalism

Journalism is the collection and periodical publishing of news, which is any authored text, in written or visual form, which claims to be (i.e. is presented to its audience as) a truthful statement about, or record of, some hitherto unknown (new) feature of the actual, social world. Journalism is the timely reporting of events at the local, provincial, national and international levels. Reporting involves the gathering of information through interviewing and research, the results of which are turned into a fair and balanced story for publication or for television or radio broadcast.

People who write journalism are called “journalists”. They might work at newspapers, magazines, websites, or for TV or radio stations. Journalists inform society about itself and make public what would otherwise be private. The most important characteristic shared by good journalists is curiosity. Good journalists love to read and want to find out as much as they can about the world around them. Journalism is variously said to be the fourth estate of the realm, to be part of a public sphere, to support a free press or to inculcate us with the ideology of the ruling class.



1.1.1 The Purposes of Journalism

Journalism has four main reasons for being: to inform, to interpret, to guide, to entertain. It performs other important functions, such as the circulation of advertising and the dissemination of a vast mass of information and comment that hardly come under the general concept of news.

To broadcast news is the first concern of journalism. As the American Society of Newspaper Editors has put it, "It is the primary function of newspapers to communicate to the human race what its members do, feel, and think."

It is for this, the news function, that journalism enjoys the protection of the federal and state constitutions. Society extends protection because of the responsibility of the press for communicating the news. As James Russel Wiggins, former editor of the *St. Paul Pioneer Press* and *St. Paul Dispatch* and later managing editor of the *Washington Post*, has pointed out: These rights and privileges are warranted because civilization as we understand it could not exist if there were no facilities for the dissemination of news. Without the news, individuals in society would lack that sense of identity but for which the creation of formal and informal law are not possible...

H.G.Wells¹ once said the Roman Empire could not endure because there were no newspapers—no methods of apprising the outlying peoples of the behavior of the center.

Today, journalism's first purpose and responsibility is to make certain what the people shall know. This responsibility calls for complete objectivity in the news.

The need for interpreting and explaining the news in our day and age is readily apparent. Life has become so complex and its interests so manifold that even the specialists become baffled in their own field of knowledge. The ordinary human being caught in a maze of economics, science or invention needs to be led by the hand through its intricacies. Accordingly, present-day journalism sees to it that, along with its announcement of a fact, event, or theory, the reader or listener also gets explanation, background material, interpretation, and diagrams. These are all aimed at helping an individual to achieve a better understanding of the significance of what he reads or hears. In line with the growing trend toward specialization, the best journalism employs men and women who have an adequate background of knowledge in their particular fields to provide the average person with these explanations. A great part of today's journalistic writing takes the form of this useful and often able exposition.

¹ Herbert George Wells, better known as H.G.Wells, was an English writer best known for such science fiction novels as *The Time Machine*, *The War of the Worlds*, *The Invisible Man* and *The Island of Doctor Moreau*.

From earliest days journalism has sought to influence mankind. Journalism endeavors to control the minds of men through the printed word, cartoons, and pictures as they appear in newspaper, magazines, pamphlets, and books and through the spoken word over the air. To these ends it uses all the nuances of argument and all the devices of propaganda. News is “the raw material of opinion”, and opinion may be indicated without a word of comment being uttered—by the way in which the news itself is announced, either prominently or inconspicuously. Admittedly the newspaper strives to influence its readers through its articles of opinion, its editorials, its cartoons, its signed “columns”. Openly the radio seeks to influence through its commentators, interviews, and many speakers who advocate varying points of views, and television impresses its viewers and listeners through its panels and documentaries and its interviews.

Side by side with its more serious roles as a provider of information, interpreter, and molder of opinion, journalism puts increasing emphasis on its function as an entertainer. The newspaper and the magazine appeal to the fun-loving public by playing up the amusing aspects of everyday life in “human interest” stories, by printing humorous anecdotes and stories and by finding space for an increasing array of entertainment features which include such popular favorites as “cute sayings of children”, cross word puzzles, and comic strips. Journalism over the radio and on the screen has its comedians and its comedy shows, its “quiz programs” and its funny stories.

1.1.2 The Types of Journalism

Journalism includes five basic types:

Firstly, the news report, which aims simply to inform us about what is happening of importance and, of course, is in some sense new in the world around us;

Secondly, the feature article, which presents more in-depth reportage and analysis of a particular subject, and its broadcasting equivalent, the documentary and current affairs program;

Thirdly, the commentary or column, in which a journalist presents his or her readers with an authoritative viewpoint on a particular issue, and its equivalent in broadcasting, the output of the specialist;

Fourthly, the interview, probing the views and policies of those in the news, especially politicians and celebrities;

Fifthly, the editorial, in which a newspaper or periodical “speaks out” in its “public voice”.

Each of these discursive types, with their distinctive rhetorical styles, aesthetic conventions and communicative functions, contributes to the totality of what journalism is—at one and the same time a large, profitable, and ever-expanding sector of the media market, the key source of information about the environment in which we live (physical and social) and an essential element in the maintenance and management of political, economic and social relations.

That journalism is all of these things, as well as a resource for recreation and entertainment, became true when mass media were firmly established as central economic, political and cultural institutions at the beginning of the 20th century. The spread of the internet and digital communication technologies in the 21st century will see information confirmed as the most important global resource, and journalism as the dominant mode of cultural expression in advanced capitalist societies.

1.1.3 The Duties of Journalism

Accepting as it does the guarantees of freedom, journalism accepts also the obligation to deserve them. Self-respecting journalism in all its forms strives constantly to meet this obligation—to fulfill its duties to society.

1) The Press Must Be Independent

To be independent it must stand on its own feet, earning a profit without subsidies.

John Thadeus Delane, the great editor of the *Times of London* from 1841 to 1877, eloquently set forth this principle in the following words:

To perform its duties with entire independence and consequently with the utmost public advantage, the press can enter into no close or binding alliance with the statesmen of the day, nor can it surrender its permanent interest to the convenience of the transitory power of any government. The first duty of the press is to obtain the earliest and most correct information of the events of the time, and instantly by disclosing them, to make them the common property of the nation.

The press lives by disclosures. Whatever passes into its keeping becomes a part of the knowledge and history of our time. The duty of the press is to speak. Governments must treat other governments with external respect, however black their origin or foul their deeds; but happily the press is under no such impediments... The duty of the journalist is the same as that of the historian—to seek out truth, above all things.

In American Constitutional theory, this libertarian view is based upon certain values

deemed inherent in a free press:

(1) By gathering public information and scrutinizing government, the press makes self-government and democracy possible;

(2) An unfettered press ensures that a diversity of views and news will be read and heard;

(3) A system of free expression provides autonomy for individuals to lead free and productive lives;

(4) It enables an independent press to condemn abuses of power by government.

2) The Press Must Be Fair

Most individuals regard fairness as a virtue which they strive to achieve. Journalism sets fairness up as an ideal. The better writers and the better papers seek to avoid deliberate and intentional partiality. It is now a widespread practice to permit opposing sides to state their own cases. The ideal of fairness is achieved by journalism which avoids error, bias, prejudice and false color.

The glory of democracy, as many working journalists have pointed out, is that it is the one type of government which provides for the continuing rights of a minority not in power. Fair journalism is peculiarly the medium for the expression of these minorities because it is not under government control.

3) The Press Must Be Accurate

The effort for impartial accuracy is one of the measures of journalistic character, whatever the medium. To broadcast true and objective fact shines as the ideal in journalistic attainment. Journalism lays claim to the qualities of truthfulness and accuracy—properties often implied by the term objectivity, a concept used to legitimize the journalistic text while at the same time recognizing the multidimensional and elusive nature of “truth”. Journalism asks to be accepted as, at the very least, an approximation to truth, and certainly close enough to the truth to be worthy of our trust in its integrity. Of course, the accuracy of the daily press has a time element, as the late Louis Wiley, former business manager of the *New York Times*, once pointed out:

The news editor prints the most reliable story he can obtain of the event, bearing in mind that the presses must be running at a certain time, and that the witnesses who give the reporters the alleged facts are just human after all. If the newspaper were to wait until the final truth had been ascertained, the world might still be in ignorance of historical events of centuries past, for historians have not yet been able to agree on what was the precise truth.



4) The Press Must Be Honest

Good character is not easily acquired or maintained without a daily struggle. No business is subjected to such a multiplicity of changing contacts with the public, such shifting problems calling for immediate decisions as journalism. But the simple elements of character in journalistic media remain fixed. They are honesty in news and advertising.

5) The Press Must Be Responsible

As Grove Patterson of the Toledo Blade has observed, “A free press is vastly more than a meal ticket for publishers.” It enjoys this freedom because it is a semi-public institution. As such the press owes a duty to the community which it serves and which supports it. Disposing in his will of the *San Francisco Chronicle* which he founded, M.H.DeYoung said: “A great newspaper should be concerned with the accomplishment of great ends for the benefit of the public, rather than be designed simply and solely as a gainer of money for the benefit of the stockholders for the corporation.” With that declaration he created a trust, directing that his paper continue as during his lifetime “without being influenced, hampered, or controlled by any hostile interest, in carrying out its work for the benefit of the city of San Francisco and the state of California.”

6) The Press Must Be Decent

The duty to be decent concerns not only decency in the language and pictures which journalism uses, for the law sees to that, but in the way it goes about obtaining its news. As critics of newspapers have pointed out, there are situations occurring in human life into which no newspaper can decently justify intrusion. The better journalists impose upon their work as they impose upon themselves the censorship of good taste.

1.1.4 Journalism and Ideology

Journalism, therefore, like any other narrative which is the work of human agency, is essentially ideological—a communicative vehicle for the transmission to an audience (intentionally or otherwise) not just of facts but of the assumptions, attitudes, beliefs and values of its makers, drawn from and expressive of a particular world-view. The content of that ideology may be consciously and purposefully articulated, as when a newspaper proprietor uses his economic power to determine editorial viewpoint, or “bias”, or it may be (as in the case of a public service broadcasting organization such as the *British Broadcasting Corporation*) a loosely structured distillation of the values deemed socially