On emotions and the journalistic ideals of factuality and objectivity—Tools for analysis

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Abstract

Reporting on emotions inherently challenges the journalistic ideals of objectivity and factuality. This paper presents two complementary approaches that can be used to reveal what is 'hidden' under news texts. One of them draws on central concepts of Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar, while the other is based on the Appraisal framework. My data come from the wire reports of two global news agencies, AP and Reuters.

Three central grammatical systems of Halliday's Functional Grammar – *transitivity, nominalization* and *grammatical metaphor* – are especially well suited for examining issues of responsibility. Nominalization transforms processes (verbs) or properties (adjectives) into nouns after metaphorical rewording. Nominalized emotions can then function as a participant in processes, according to various options of transitivity, or as a part of a prepositional phrase. When participant roles of the original (mental) process of feeling remain hidden, the language often becomes vague and obscure.

Appraisal is divided into three interacting systems: Attitude, Engagement and Graduation, and one of the sub-systems of Attitude, namely Affect, deals with emotions. Affect values can be explicit or implicit. The analysis of *implicit* values, in particular, can help to reveal the writer's subjective point of view; e.g., the strategies s/he has used to align the reader into feeling.
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Keywords: Emotions; Journalistic objectivity/factuality; News agency discourse; Functional Grammar; Appraisal

1. Introduction

This paper seeks to relate three problematic concepts – *emotion*, *factuality* and *objectivity* – to each other in a cohesive manner. The complexity of these concepts, however, is due to different factors. While journalistic 'objectivity' is generally regarded as a myth, and 'factuality' in reporting may be elusive, too, there is no doubt about the existence of emotions. But as the study

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of emotions, since the 1970s, has spread to include a wealth of researchers, representing several academic disciplines, finding common definitions for the concept of emotion has proven difficult.

Section 2 looks into 'factuality' and 'objectivity', which, over the years, have become established ideals of news writing (see e.g., van Dijk, 1988; White, 1998). Emotions will be discussed in section 3, which also seeks to demonstrate how the inherent 'subjectivity' of emotions can affect the journalists' quest for 'objectivity' or 'factuality'.

The main aim of this study is to introduce some linguistic tools for media analysis; tools that can be used to examine the challenge that reporting on emotions poses to journalistic 'objectivity' and 'factuality'. For this purpose, section 4 presents two complementary approaches; one of them draws on central concepts of M.A.K. Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar (Halliday, 1994), while the other is based on the Appraisal framework (see The Appraisal Website: Homepage), which is an extension of Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar. Halliday's grammatical systems of *nominalization*, *grammatical metaphor* and *transitivity* are especially useful tools when looking into 'hidden' responsibility and into some other issues that mostly depend on the routines of 'objective' writing (see subsection 4.1). The subsection of Appraisal (subsection 4.2) deals mostly with (invoked) Affect values, but also two longer texts are examined in order to retrieve patterns of evaluation and writer–reader alignment; and to reveal the news journalists' subjective points of view, accordingly.

My examples come from the wire reports of two big international news agencies, AP and Reuters, which together with two other news agencies (AFP and UPI) have had a central role in shaping the form and the (objective) style of news reports, and also the very concept of 'news' (cf. Boyd-Barrett, 1980, 1998). Examples from my data show that their language is not so objective or factual as it is often claimed to be, and as journalists themselves would like to believe.

2. News agencies and the ideals of objectivity and factuality

This section examines the concepts of journalistic *objectivity* and *factuality*. The pursuit of these ideals in news writing involves many kinds of rhetorical devices. Furthermore, what is regarded as factual or objective by a journalist, may look vague and obscure, or even ideologically determined, from a media researcher's point of view (cf. White, 1998:281 on 'objectivity' and journalists).

The two news agencies, AP and Reuters, have set high goals for themselves. This is the AP's "mission":

> AP's mission is to be the essential global news network, providing distinctive news services of the highest quality, reliability and objectivity with reports that are accurate, balanced and informed. (AP website: "Facts & Figures")

The following extract comes from the Reuters "Editorial policy":

> We are committed to reporting the facts and in all situations avoid the use of emotive terms. The only exception is when we are quoting someone directly or in indirect speech. We aim to report objectively actions, identity and background and pay particular attention to all our coverage in extremely sensitive regions. (Reuters website: "About Reuters")

As can be noticed, these extracts include the words "objectivity" (AP) and "objectively" (Reuters). Reuters also speaks about "reporting the facts" and about avoiding "the use of emotive terms". However, it remains unclear what is meant by *emotive terms*; at least *emotion*