

# JOURNALISM AND DISCOURSE STUDIES

## WHAT CAN *JOURNALISM AND DISCOURSE STUDIES* DO FOR US?

### INTRODUCTORY ESSAYS:

#### THE MUTUAL RELEVANCE OF JOURNALISM STUDIES AND DISCOURSE STUDIES

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#### RECONSIDERING 'THE REPORT' IN A DIGITAL AGE

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#### COGNITIVE APPROACHES TO JOURNALISTIC COVERAGE OF NEWS EVENTS

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#### THE LEVESON INQUIRY, SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE FUTURE OF JOURNALISM

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## THE MUTUAL RELEVANCE OF JOURNALISM STUDIES AND DISCOURSE STUDIES

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The studies of discourse and journalism have much in common. In fact they overlap. True, the study of journalism is not only about text and talk in the mass media, but should also involve the psychology, sociology and economics of communication. Yet, whatever the other important dimensions of journalism, discourse is at the heart of the field and the profession. *Journalism and Discourse Studies* has been founded to specifically promote this interdisciplinary endeavor.

When I started to explore this area in the 1980s, I was surprised by the fact that both disciplines virtually ignored each other. Text Linguistics and Discourse Analysis (as they were then called) seldom studied the text and talk of the mass media that surround us every day. And perhaps even more remarkable, the study of journalism was about everything except about what journalists and readers are primarily concerned about: the news. And since news is a form of discourse, obviously a discourse analytical approach to the structures of the news should be prominent in both disciplines. At the same time, the 1980s saw the consolidation of the emergence of the cognitive psychology of text processing in the 1970s. Thus, a broader, multidisciplinary study of news was able to explore the cognitive processes and mental representations involved in the production, comprehension and memory of news.

Today, more than thirty years later, both fields have come of age. Journalism, whether or not in combination with Communication Studies, has broad institutional presence in special university departments — also because of its obvious relevance for professional education. Discourse Studies is present in nearly all disciplines of the Humanities and Social Sciences, but has less specific professional aims, and hence less institutional presence in academic departments. Rather, it appears as separate classes, programs and especially in the theory and methodology of most disciplines — for the obvious reasons that nearly all the humanities and social sciences in many ways deal with the most human of all activities: talk and text.

*Journalism and Discourse Studies* thus has a clear domain of publication. It is premised on the obvious fact that journalism and journalists deal with talk and text. In the last decades we have learned much about media discourse, but there are vast areas and problems that remain to be studied. There are now several books and many papers on news reports, but other media genres remain theoretically and analytically quite unexplored, as is the case for editorials, opinion articles and other genres in the newspaper, television, radio or the internet.

Applying current theories on the structures and the cognitive and social functions of discourse to the study of media genres thus leads to highly sophisticated methods of media analysis. Far beyond traditional quantitative content analysis, contemporary qualitative discourse analysis offers much more than counting words or topics, and is much broader than even the linguistic study of grammatical structures of talk or text:

- Discourse Semantics examines the subtle details of the meanings of media messages, such as their presuppositions, implications, actor and action descriptions, among many other aspects of text and talk.
- Genre theories have proposed theoretical schemas for the overall organization of many media genres.
- Conversation Analysis has offered sophisticated micro-analysis of news interviews, radio talk and interaction on television.
- Pragmatics has contributed to our insights about speech acts and politeness phenomena in the discourses of the mass media.
- Cognitive linguistics has explored the fundamental mental nature and the communicative power of metaphor.
- Corpus linguistics offers quantitative and qualitative insights into the structures of vast numbers of media texts traditional content analysis could only dream of.
- Multidisciplinary Discourse Epistemics has begun to explore how knowledge is activated, applied, expressed, presupposed or acquired in the writing, the structures and the comprehension of media discourse.
- The cognitive psychology of discourse processing has continued to establish the necessary links between the structures of media discourse and the ways readers or viewers construe mental models about news events — thus contributing to our understanding of the perennial issue of the ‘effects’ of the mass media.

No doubt these and many other approaches in the discursive studies of media messages also offer a theoretical and analytical alternative to the vague and (therefore) popular studies of the ‘frames’ of media discourse — which neither tell us much about the detail of the structures of these discourse nor about the cognitive structures and processes involved in their production and comprehension.

These approaches also show that the study of media discourse is essentially multidisciplinary, as are the fields of journalism and communication studies. Media messages function as parts of organizations, and hence can be studied in the framework of contemporary research on organizational discourse, on the one hand, and on knowledge management, on the other hand. Media discourse is produced by the Symbolic Elites, and its functions and effects in society a crucial aim of a multidisciplinary study of power, not only in sociology. Despite globalization and hence the international similarity of media discourse, news, opinion and interviews vary in different communities in the world, and thus involve ethnography and anthropology.

All these discourse analytical approaches to media messages also provide crucial feedback to the multidisciplinary field of discourse studies itself. Few discourse types are as prevalent, dominant and relevant as those of the media, and their detailed understanding offers empirical and theoretical insights into discourse in general.

All this and much more we hope that the papers of *Journalism and Discourse Studies* will bring to the readers.

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## RECONSIDERING 'THE REPORT' IN A DIGITAL AGE

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'The study of journalism history remains something of an embarrassment,' the late James W. Carey (1974) wrote in 'The Problem of Journalism History,' an essay widely regarded as a classic appraisal of the field in the mid-1970s. Despite ambitious objectives, the value of its contribution was proving to be decidedly underwhelming. 'Each generation of journalism historians has been dissatisfied with the nature of our knowledge and the forms of our presentation,' he maintained; 'the existing critiques of journalism history are superficial: they fail to get at a deeper set of historiographical problems' (1974: 86, 87). In Carey's view, historians – including himself, he admitted – recurrently chose to define their craft too modestly, thereby narrowing the range of questions examined (and claims derived from their analysis) to an unnecessarily restrictive degree. This tendency, in turn, made it more difficult to refute other, related types of criticisms, namely that journalism history 'is dull and unimaginative, excessively trivial in the problems chosen for study, oppressively chronological, divorced from the major current of contemporary historiography, and needlessly preoccupied with the production of biographies of editors and publishers' (1974: 87). In conceding there was truth in these charges, he issued a call for the guiding assumptions of history writing to be examined anew.

Foremost in Carey's mind was the importance of redressing the failure to develop a cultural history of journalism, one that would investigate the 'idea of a report' (and with it changing relations of meaning, even 'standards of reality,' between journalists and their publics). In other words, a history of reporting that reconceived journalism as a cultural form, as 'a way of apprehending, of experiencing the world,' would be able to provide fresh insights into 'a portion of the history of consciousness.' Notwithstanding the notable achievements of alternative histories of the press – with foci revolving around legal, institutional, technical and economic dimensions, amongst others – he was convinced that 'the history of reporting remains not only unwritten but also largely unconceived.' Indeed, he added, the 'central story in journalism has been largely banished from our remembrance of things past' (1974: 90). To secure substantive advances, then, prevailing interpretations of journalism history would have to be overcome through a 'ventilation of the field.' In addition to recommending that historians diversify their sources and methods, Carey (1985) insisted the barriers posed by traditional disciplinary distinctions and categories be dismantled. This would entail a reversing of the normative logics implicit to a documentary record which valued the interests of the powerful and privileged over and above the 'marginal, deviant and rebellious,' he argued, for it is the experiences of the latter that were in most urgent need of recovery and interpretation.

Matters have improved considerably over recent years, although much work remains to be done to realise the heuristic potential of Carey's research agenda. Viewed from a current vantage point, readers of this journal may be inclined to ask, what might the 'idea of a report' signify in the brave new world of digital media? Prospective responses to such a question will vary considerably from one emergent context to the next, of course, but even in posing it we invite closer inspection of how, to what extent, and why certain discursive forms, practices and epistemologies are gradually consolidating into

features recognisable as being consistent with an 'online news report' today. To commit to tracing the inchoate contours of genres and registers of reportage – or, more to the point, the largely tacit yet purposeful reworking of antecedent protocols, conventions, and priorities – is to welcome innovative modes of enquiry. History is too important to be left to the historians alone, so it will be necessary for critical discourse researchers prepared to elucidate this 'idea of a report' to draw upon interdisciplinary conceptual and methodological frameworks, and in a manner alert to the uneven, frequently contradictory imperatives of institutional inflections and contingencies. May contributors to *Journalism and Discourse Studies* interested in taking up this challenge be inspired by Carey's (2007) conviction that a better understanding of journalism's history is vital, not least because it 'might help journalists grasp the significance of this moment and perhaps to see directions of growth and reform in the practice of this valuable craft' (2007: 5).

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## COGNITIVE APPROACHES TO JOURNALISTIC COVERAGE OF NEWS EVENTS

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The link between critical discourse studies (CDS) and journalism studies (JS) is obvious. All journalism is discourse occurring in one modality or another (linguistic or visual) and much of the discourse that defines the way we understand social and political affairs belongs to one journalistic genre or another (be it traditional or new media genres). Media discourse has therefore been a frequent object of analysis in critical discourse studies. The two fields, however, have typically taken different approaches to analysing media discourses. While JS has more often taken a quantitative approach to the content of discourse, CDS has focussed more on qualitative analyses of the linguistic (lexical, grammatical, pragmatic and macro-textual) structures of discourse. The two fields have in common a concern with the ideological functions of discourse at the interface between texts and the wider social contexts which they simultaneously reflect and (re)construct. In terms of immediate communicative context, JS has taken seriously the conditions of production which affect news texts while recent developments in CDS have addressed the cognitive processes of meaning construction that are necessarily involved in understanding news texts. Such alternative approaches to, or perspectives on, the same material and communicative practices suggest fertile ground for interdisciplinary research. It is therefore surprising that up until this very welcome addition, we have not had a journal specifically dedicated to research which combines elements of both CDS and JS. In building a much needed bridge between the disciplines of CDS and JS, this new journal, thus, fulfils a clear intellectual demand.

In this short piece, I illustrate some of the insights which cognitive linguistic approaches to discourse analysis in particular have brought to bear on journalistic texts.

Cognitive Linguistic approaches to discourse analysis are concerned with the conceptualisations which linguistic structures in text invoke to construe the situation being described. It is an inherent feature of language that the system enables text-producers to invite, through micro-level choices in lexical and grammatical structure, alternative conceptualisations of the same target situation. Crucially, in the context of journalistic texts, competing conceptualisations constitute alternative ways of understanding events which may be ideologically vested, linked to wider patterns of belief and value (discourses). The ideological functions of discourse and conceptualisation show up most clearly in comparative analyses of the way a particular situation or event is reported by news agencies known to adopt contrasting political positions. Here, a number of specific conceptual parameters through which ideology may be enacted have been identified, including the basic event-structure conferred upon the situation, metaphorical framings of the situation, degree of salience or specificity given to actors and actions within the situation, and the point of view from which the situation is conceived. In many cases, it should be noted however, the discourses being challenged through CDS are so deeply entrenched (normalised or accepted as natural) within the culture that attested textual practices may not differ significantly across mainstream media. Two topics which receive considerable media attention and which have been fruitfully analysed from a cognitive linguistic perspective on discourse are immigration and political protests.

In media discourse on immigration, Hart (2011) highlights the ideological nature of force-dynamic conceptualisations. Consider the contrast between (1) and (2):

- (1) It's estimated that between 1,000 and 1,200 asylum seekers are coming into the country every month. (*The Mirror*, 10.05.2002)
- (2) Downing Street acknowledge that illegal immigration was an issue because of growing frustrations over the stream of people getting into Britain from France through the Channel tunnel. (*Daily Telegraph*, 21.05.2000)

In (1), the event is construed in terms of uninhibited motion. In (2), by contrast, the use of the verb *getting* suggests a force-interaction between migrants and some barrier to the process of immigration which, by whatever means, they are able to overcome or circumvent. Ideologically, this grammatical construction invites an image in which migrants are seen as forceful, stubborn or sneaky. Moreover, it constructs migration as an Us versus Them situation in which We have the right to try and prevent the movement of people thus reflecting and reinforcing nationalist-protectionist discourses. This view of immigration is extended in metaphorical expressions which describe immigration using militaristic language. Metaphor has been shown to be an important device through which the media can frame situations and events in different ways (Charteris-Black 2004). Metaphorical expressions in discourse prompt for the construction of rich and dynamic mental models which invite particular 'logical' and emotional responses to the target scene. Importantly, textual realisations of such mental models are not restricted to linguistic media genres but occur also in multimodal genres like the editorial cartoon (Bounegru and Forceville 2011; El Rifaie 2003; Hart 2014). Metaphor has been widely studied across a range of media discourses, including Europe (Musolff 2004; Nasti 2012), business (Koller 2004), the financial crisis (Bounegru and Forceville 2011) and immigration (El Rifaie 2001; Santa Ana 2002; Charteris-Black 2006; Hart 2010, 2011). In immigration discourse, one set of metaphorical expressions frequently used to talk about immigration point to a militarised understanding of the processes involved (see Hart 2010). Instances like (3) and (4), for example, draw on vocabulary from the semantic domain of war to conceptualise immigration as a 'battle' between Us and Them.

- (3) The army of asylum seekers flooding into Britain every year would populate the city of Cambridge, it was admitted yesterday. (*Daily Mail*, 04.03.2003)
- (4) The committee was also told that officials in the front line of the battle against illegal immigration have to consider around 50 cases every day. (*Daily Mail*, 14.12.2005)

Crucially, the metaphors used by influential media institutions not only shape public attitudes but also pave the way for material actions which accord with their elected metaphors. As El Rifaie states, the use of militarising metaphors in immigration discourse "makes it conceivable to treat defenceless human beings as dangerous enemies and seems to justify a war-like reaction to them" (2001: 368). Metaphor as a cognitive operation, then, plays a fundamental role in the constitutive relation between journalistic and political practices.



In media discourse on political protests, Hart (2013a/b) has similarly highlighted the role of grammatical and metaphorical constructions in promoting alternative conceptualisations of events. Linguistically, for example, the difference between (5) and (6) lies in the use of a regular transactive versus a reciprocal clause. Conceptually, the difference lies in the ideologically weighted conceptualisations which these competing constructions elicit. In (5), the regular transactive clause invites a conceptualisation in which only the protesters are active participants in the violent action with the police cast as innocent victims. In (6), by contrast, the reciprocal clause invokes a conceptualisation in which both parties share responsibility for the violent interaction. While (5) can thus be related only to a discourse of the deviant protester, then, (6) is related to a more general discourse of disorder and at least recognises a discourse of the domineering state.

(5) A number of police officers were injured after they came under attack from youths, some wearing scarves to hide their faces. (*Times*, 10.11.2010)

(6) Activists who had masked their faces with scarves traded punches with police. (*Guardian*, 10.11.2010)

Metaphor, too, can be seen to function ideologically in media discourse on political protests. Consider (7) and (8):

(7) [A] largely peaceful demonstration spilled over into bloody violence in the centre of London ... Clashes later erupted at Mansion House Street and Queen Victoria Street near the Bank. (*Daily Telegraph*, 01.04.2009)

(8) A riot that engulfed north London was sparked when a teenage girl threw a rock at police, it was claimed last night (*Daily Star*, 08.08. 2011)

In (7), the image invoked is of lava escaping from a volcano. Crucially, this conceptualisation suggests the need for the dangerous liquid to be controlled. Similarly, in (8), the image invoked is of a fire which needs to be 'put out'. When such metaphors feature systematically in media discourse on political protests, they can serve to sanction material actions including crowd-control techniques like kettling or the use of water canon in response to civil unrest.

What I hope to have illustrated in this brief overview is the utility of a cognitive approach to CDS/JS in showing *how* the language used by the media can lead to social action effects through the ideological and legitimating conceptualisations it asks readers to share in. It is my hope that *JDS* will provide a space for further research on the relation between media discourse, cognition and social action.

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## **THE LEVESON INQUIRY, SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE FUTURE OF JOURNALISM**

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As humans we enjoy meeting new people, making new friends; people who are different and interesting with fresh insights that help us to expand our understanding of the world we live in and our particular portion of it. A new journal is like that new friend and I'm sure this new journal will bring that same sense of excitement and new insights. Journalism is a relatively new academic discipline, particularly in the UK, and journals to support it from UK institutions have been relatively slow in coming although a flourish of important new journals at the start of the millennium provided a substantial opening for international scholars.

As a burgeoning new discipline of considerable importance to social life both internationally and nationally, journalism is a field well worthy of study. The recent brouhaha of phone hacking and the Leveson Inquiry; a political shock that is still causing seismic disturbances with the industry and political activism shows just how important journalism is to the functioning of a modern democracy.

Journalism's critical role in informing society and challenging political leaders is one strongly deserving of review and analysis itself. Widely accepted as the fourth estate, journalism's role is to hold power to account and inform the public of what is being done in their name and with their money. This is often a completely different role to the very media that communicates journalism and much confusion surrounds these two important yet separate roles. All too often, as we heard time and again at the Leveson inquiry, our national press in particular fails in its requirement to provide responsible journalism, telling the truth to its readers and challenge politicians to explain their policies and their actions in favour of circulation boosting semi-fictional tales of the antics of fashionable celebrities.

Are broadcasters any better at providing reliable journalism alongside the relentless hours of entertainment? We are lucky in the UK to have a strong mix of public service broadcasting and commercial broadcasting, and it should not be too much to hope that we would get the best of both these worlds. But all too often it seems the reverse is true. Commercial broadcasting is cutting back on quality journalism as advertising leaches advertising into new avenues changing the license to print money of the seventies into a struggle to make ends meet. Public service broadcasting in the shape of the BBC may not have the same struggle to make money, but its licence fee income has been regularly slashed by the coalition government. In addition mistakes over the past few years, leading to the Savile inquiry and other scandals have damaged the reputation of a once praised broadcaster.

But it is not just the publishers and broadcasters and their failings that require examination. The actual products and their method of production also require a thorough review if we are to understand how the news, on which we all depend to inform us about our world, is to reach us. With scores of journalists either jailed or facing trial we also need to consider the practice of journalism itself because the way journalists go about their trade makes a huge difference to the news we receive.

With a step change in practice being driven by the fallout from the Leveson inquiry there is plenty for any researcher to go at and the need for new journals will expand, but it is changes in technology that seem to me to drive the key role for this new magazine. Examination of journalistic discourse in traditional media is still a rewarding area of study but it is the new social media and their relationships with journalism that offer rich new fields for study. Journalists are relying more and more heavily on Twitter and Facebook and other social media in order to access sources and track stories. These new media are also becoming indispensable for interacting with the audience. No longer is journalism a one way street providing news to an audience whose only recourse to debate is their friends around the water cooler or a letter sent by snail mail to the paper's letter's column. Now anyone can respond instantly to a story or a reporter, adding information, questioning the sources or adding a unique (or even similar) viewpoint. It is this new approach that provides a real insight into journalism and the society it serves. Social media allows the bending of journalism to the likes of the audience who can now have an immediate impact on the approaches they make allowing an audience view both on what they are offered and the way it is presented.

The move to two-way communication adds a new dimension to journalism and the media and so opens up a much wider field to study how this discourse (now more of a discussion than ever before) has expanded society's ability to examine itself.

The study of social media as an extension of journalism should make this journal a real friend – a mentor whose advice can be considered carefully before using to add to our sum of knowledge.

I wish it well and hope that it goes from strength to strength.

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*Professor Chris Frost was a newspaper journalist and editor until he moved into journalism education more than 15 years ago. His research interests include media ethics and he has considerable experience in this field having served on the UK Press Council and as a long-term member of the National Union of Journalists Ethics Council. He has served on the NUJ's National Executive Council for many years and was NUJ President in 1992. He chairs the Union's Ethics Council, has given evidence to the UK House of Commons select committee on press regulation on several occasions, and also at the high-profile Leveson Inquiry. He is immediate past chair of the Association for Journalism Education, has published widely, and regularly speaks at international conferences.*