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NewsTalk&Text Research Group
*Position Paper: Towards a Linguistics
of News Production*

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1. Introduction

In this paper, we sketch the contours of a linguistics of news production. Our aim is to bring linguistic analysis to bear on the discursive processes that shape the news product, and, in this way, fill in a blind spot in news scholarship. Crucially, we argue that linguistic interest in the news has been limited to close analysis of what can be referred to as news products, skating over the production process. Until fairly recently, very few researchers with training in linguistics would have considered venturing into a newsroom to observe journalists going about their daily business of making news[1].

It is beyond the scope of this position paper to review the field of media and communication studies or sum up all the possible methodological approaches to news production practices in general. Instead, this paper is aimed at consolidating a number of emerging research efforts[2] which focus on the interplay of language use and journalism, media and society – and at opening up and bringing the discussion to larger awareness.

In Section 2, we spell out what can be considered news and how this conceptualization supports a case for the analysis of the news production process. In Section 3 we look to various fields in linguistics and discourse studies to detail some of the relevant methodological frameworks that can be incorporated in a linguistics of news production. Section 4, situates our production focus within the larger media research context and suggests how it can bring added value to ongoing efforts in four related fields outside of linguistics per se.

2. News, context, and process

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[1] Notable exceptions include the work of former journalists like Bell (1991), Perrin (2006) and Cotter (2009).
[2] This position paper is the collective writing effort of the NewsTalk&Text Research Group, including in alphabetical order: Paola Cattenacio (University of Milan); Colleen Cotter (Queen Mary University London); Mark De Smedt (Ghent University, Belgium); Giuliana Garzone (University of Milan); Geert Jacobs (Ghent University); Felicitas Macgilchrist (Georg Eckert Institute); Lut Lams (Hogeschool-Universiteit Brussel); Daniel Perrin (Zurich University of Applied Sciences); John E. Richardson (University of Loughborough); Tom Van Hout (Ghent University); Ellen Van Praet (Ghent University).

Strictly speaking, news is only one of a wide range of genres in journalism, which also includes features, opinion columns, photojournalism, letters to the editor, and so on. All genres of journalism can be examined: their histories; their formal, thematic, and argumentative features; the wide variation between different media institutions, publications and nations involved; and – crucially – the processes through which they are continuously being (re)produced. Indeed, it would be unwise to exclude from our research scope any of the interesting journalistic genres that do not correspond to the prototypical news report if only because of the strong links, intertextual and otherwise, between different kinds of news. As we argue later, it is these links which are at the heart of what the news (and hence news production) is about. Thus, in what follows, we will use the term *news* to refer to a broad spectrum of journalistic activity. Clearly, our interest is not limited to newspapers or the written media in general; the research agenda presented here is applicable to any type of news in any domain or technological modality (including radio, television, online news sites, and internet-based social media).

Of course, defining the news is a great deal more difficult than pointing to the wide range of genres and media that it encompasses. A number of questions can be raised here. To start with, *who's defining the news*? Media researchers see phenomena differently from news practitioners in this respect. Interested sources like public relations professionals have their own views on what is (or should be) reported. We argue later that a production perspective on the language of the news should integrate all of these 'stakeholders' perspectives. Another question is: *whose news are we talking about*? It should be clear that any attempt at categorizing the news is closely linked to one or more of a number of culturally and politically determined perspectives on the media's role in society. For example, unlike western media, state-run news organizations in the People's Republic of China are conceived of as tools to serve politics; they are supposed to "faithfully reflect the government's perspective and disseminate official pronouncements, while keeping investigative reporting to a minimum" (Lams, 2005:111). Similarly, whenever a crisis occurs, Chinese media are instructed to downplay its magnitude to maintain political, social and economic stability and focus on 'good news' (Min Wu, 2006). Therefore,

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we propose that a production-oriented news research agenda allows for divergent professional, cultural, and political perspectives on what counts as news[3].

Irrespective of these issues, we would like to propose two key characteristics of the news that make a production perspective a productive area for research and understanding.

First, news is commonly defined through its relation to time. News is about novelty, contemporary events, the most recent, should be timely, fresh, and pertinent. Otherwise, it will not sell or be relevant to the reader or listener. Of course, some new stories are not as contingent on the time element and are held back until an appropriate moment. As Arthur (2008) puts it: "news is what the reader doesn't yet know, but you can persuade them they want to" [no matter if it is] ten minutes, ten days or ten years (even ten decades) old". In other words, novelty is a relative notion, which can be reframed as a short period of validity (Adamzik, 2004:78-79), meaning that once a news message has been released, it quickly loses its primary function as news, although it may still remain relevant when the event it communicates has such an impact that it gets integrated in a society or community's collective memories.

Second, news is all about retelling, intertextuality, and, by extension, entextualization (cf. Bauman & Briggs, 1990; Silverstein & Urban, 1996), i.e. the extraction (decontextualization) of meaning from one discourse and consequent insertion (recontextualization) of that meaning into another discourse. In different ways the centrality of these notions has been pointed out by sociologists like Gaye Tuchman (1978) and variationist sociolinguists like Allan Bell (1991). More recently, Jacobs was one of the first to show how press releases are written in a prefabricated journalistic style so that reporters can reproduce them in their news stories (1999). Similarly, Perrin (2006) and Van Hout & Macgilchrist (in press) have illustrated how newswriting is a technologically contingent process in which reporters extract discourse from one context and then re-insert it into a new context. Ideologically based transmutations between input from wire services and output in newspapers are discussed in Lams (this issue).

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[3] Note that the overall characterisation of the news in this paper is deeply embedded in the authors' western media environments(for cross-cultural examples, see Cotter 2009, Peterson, 1996).

The notions of novelty and intertextuality are further appropriated in Messner & Watson DiStaso's (2008) concept of intermedia agenda-setting: news is not just what others speak and write about but also what the media themselves speak and write about; what makes an event worth reporting is that it has been reported on before[4]. Cotter (2009), finally, reports how some of the big US newspapers, including the New York Times and the Washington Post, share their next-day story budgets (cf. Thompson's 1995 notion of 'extended mediazation') and how the notion of the 'scoop' is integral to profession-internal agenda-setting. In terms of journalistic practice, Van Hout, Pander Maat & De Preter (this issue) show how a business news editor starts writing an article by pasting an entire press release into his own blank document and how he typically first browses through his own newspaper's archive for related stories that have already been published.

Intertextuality and entextualization make it clear why a production perspective has an edge over a product-only perspective: it allows the researcher to scrutinize the complex back-and-forth between journalists and the world out there and, in doing so, to unravel the details of institutional contexts, conventions, and procedures as they impact on the news product[5]. Indeed, we posit that our central business should be to investigate the real-time, ethnographically situated, process-oriented actions and dynamics of editorial routines and how journalists reinforce or deviate from them, as well as to consider "[t]o what extent [social actors can] shape the social environment in which they interact, and to what extent [their capacity to choose and act is] delimited by social structures and institutional practices" (Manning, 2001:53). Clearly, the production perspective that we call for in this paper is one that makes context integral, and is a theoretical and methodological consideration in interactional sociolinguistics, ethnography of communication, community of practice, linguistic anthropology, and pragmatic paradigms. The production process underlying the news text is an essential constitutive component of news contexts and lack of attention to the news production process is bound to generate

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[4] For one of the earliest critiques see Verschueren (1985) who said that `linguistic work' on the media is "not sufficiently contextualized, ignorant of the structural and functional properties of the news gathering and reporting process" (vii). See also Fairclough (1989).

[5] We are limiting ourselves to the production process here and we are not taking on the reception process as such. This is not to discount the impact of the audience. On the contrary, we believe that the audience is indeed a relevant component in the practice of newswriting and reporting and it should be clear that our view of the production process is an all-inclusive one, starting at the PR end of the spectrum and the complex multi-party interactions typical of press conferences as well as the intricacies of the writing process and the interactions with the 'outside world' that are attendant on that. For example, we are interested in news reception as news producers construct potential audiences in their minds and reflect upon them, for example in newsroom meetings.

weak hypotheses. The text-only-based work on the use of passives and nominalizations in newspaper language, for example, has led various scholars to speculate about how news-institution agency is hidden within a grammatical form and hence supports the asymmetrical distribution of power between the media and the people. We argue that linguistic phenomena can be described in less simplistic and monocausal ways. We suggest that a more inclusive contextual analysis of everyday editorial practices will yield a very different picture of what is going on and to whom responsibility can in truth be ascribed.

Generally speaking, the study of news discourse advocated here is one that rises to the challenges posed by Blommaert (2005) to take the "dimension of contextualisation seriously", treating it as a key issue in the examination of meaning making, which should be brought centre-stage rather than remaining a mere backdrop to essentially text-linguistic analysis. The full meaning of a news text will never be "fully tapped by deploying the rules of linguistic analysis" alone (2005:235), since such texts are the outcome of a series of discourse processes. The ineffectiveness of relying solely on journalistic texts or a corpus of news stories alone to make claims about the work of journalists is evident in critiques of Galtung & Ruge (1965). They analysed media reports about three international crises to devise a list of 'news values' which, they suggested, were employed by journalists in gauging an event's newsworthiness and could be used as predictors of what would be more likely be reported as news. However, more recently Harcup & O'Neill (2001) have argued that some of Galtung & Ruge's news values are in fact a product of the way in which events are written about – the way that journalists construct news – rather than the characteristics that an event needs to possess in order to be reported. Similarly, Cotter (1996, 2003, 2009) has pointed out that journalists' lists of news values are at variance with academics' lists, and has demonstrated the corollary impact that newswriting routines have on deciding what is news as well as on the shape of news discourse itself.

In this paper we also support Richardson's (2007) call for an integrated analysis across the three levels required of Critical Discourse Analysis (textual practices, discursive analysis, and social analysis) as well as Cotter (2001, 2009), Perrin (2003), and Van Hout & Jacobs (2008) in calling for an ethnographic approach to the analysis of news that integrates text, practice, and interaction. As scholars, we need to 1) examine the values and principles of journalism as a profession (as a socialised community of

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practice, discourse community, or occupational community) and of media as a business, as well as 2) the specific legal system that surrounds, regulates, and restricts the work of media organizations, and of 3) journalists as socially embedded individuals within communities. We need to know about the discursive processes underlying the actual putting together of the news as a "text that embeds and produces multiple text". Consequently, as section 3 will argue in greater detail , we go beyond both classic linguistic and sociological analyses of the news by combining, in the words of Coupland & Jaworski (2001:134), "the detailed analysis of language, in particular instances of its use, with the analysis of social structure and cultural practice."

Although as early as 1979 Hodge identified an analysis of the "news transmutation process to the point of its final shape" (1979:158) as one way to study journalism, this focus has not defined the field subsequently (except see Bell, 1991; Cotter 1999, 2009). Firmstone (2008) is a case in point. In proposing a model for describing the production process for editorials on EU-related matters, she distinguishes three stages: the first stage is issue selection, the second is deciding on the content and the editorial line, and the third is the "article written by the leader [editorial] writer". Crucially, Firmstone mentions the completed article, but she fails to refer to the discursive or interactional processes involved in writing – missing the fundamental linguistically situated production stage (Perrin, this issue). As we argue later, we believe that this is where ethnographic, field-based, interaction-oriented news production research is needed: with the researcher sitting in on the story meeting, looking over the journalist's shoulder at the computer screen, out on assignment, and listening to watercooler or coffee break chat. One line of inquiry that speaks directly to this need, is writing process analysis (e.g. Perrin, 2003; Van Hout & Macgilchrist, in press). By recording writing processes electronically through keystroke logging and screen recording software, micro-level discursive events such as writing a lead can be linked to macro-level ethnographic issues such as journalists' engagements with technologies of production.

So far we have insisted that a great deal of discourse-analytic research on the news has disregarded the production process. At the same time, it should be clear that there is also a significant gap with most non-linguistic research into news production which has disregarded the textual, discourse-based, or language-based dimension of the media. Since communication patterns define communicative

competence within every community (cf. Hymes, 1972), and language in all its spoken, written, signed, or symbolic variations is an important means to communicate, linguistic analysis is a conditio sine qua non for virtually any of the social sciences. Its value is specific. In fact, drawing on Blommaert's discussion of "forgotten contexts" in discourse analysis (2005:58), two classic areas of linguistic investigation which are relevant to news production can be singled out in particular:

1. Linguistic resources: for instance, how mastery of particular registers (or lack thereof) impacts the news process, ranging from adversarial interview styles to newsroom decision-making to source-media interaction.

2. Text trajectories: this refers to the shifting of texts between and among contexts (e.g., newsroom recontextualization practices). In essence, text trajectories are discursive transformations which materialize in social action. For example, news stories are typically discovered, sourced, reported, edited, published, commented on, followed up, etc.

3. Analytical paradigms

While the approach to news production presented here is not based on a common methodology, we believe it is possible to extract a shared ontological perspective. We see the individual as immersed within a larger network of relationships; we stress the importance of process and participation, and at all times pay careful attention to the fluidity, complexity, and intricacies involved in jointly negotiating meaning. In that sense, the research called for in this position paper is conducted from the epistemological position of social constructionism: its central idea is that there is no inherent or genetic knowledge base or uncontested reality; people actively construct knowledge and incorporate new information into what they already know, building on their prior experiences, combining it with reflection and social interaction, and creating different understandings of ideas and concepts.

Further, although we are open to a diverse array of approaches to the linguistic study of news production, this diversity is underpinned by a shared view that "language and the social world are mutually shaping, and that close analysis of situated language use can provide both fundamental and

distinctive insights into the mechanisms and dynamics of social and cultural production in everyday activity" (Rampton et al, 2004:2). We approach news discourse not as *text*, but as *text-in-co(n)text* (Silverstein & Urban, 1996), viewing it not as a static reflection, affirmation, or re-affirmation of context, but as a process, or a series of processes of entextualization and contextualization. We strive to avoid a binary opposition between text and context, since we feel it does not adequately explain the complexities inherent in the co-construction of discourse, let alone those of human experience in practice. In this respect, we share the theoretical perspectives of linguistic anthropology, interactional sociolinguistis, cultural semiotics, and context-oriented and Gricean pragmatics. We also draw on ethnography of communication traditions (Hymes, 1996, Gumperz & Hymes, 1972) which aim to account for the ways in which language shapes social life as well as the patterns of communication and cultural and communicative values that constitute membership in a community or group (Heath, 1983, Briggs and Hallin, 2007).

Our approach clearly approximates the critical realism of much recent work in CDA, its recognition of a dialectical relationship between text and context, and its assumption that "the discursive event is shaped by situations, institutions and (other) social structures, but it also shapes them" (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997:258; cf. Weiss & Wodak, 2003; Wodak & Meyer, 2001). Regarding journalism in particular, CDA recognises that 'the news' is "the outcome of specific professional practices and techniques, which could be and can be quite different with quite different results" (Fairclough, 1995:204), appreciating that news discourse occurs in social settings (of production and consumption) and the construction of discourse "relates systematically and predictably to [these] contextual circumstances" (Fowler, 1991:36). However, in the rush to analyse the "relationships between concrete language use and the wider social cultural structures" (Titscher et al, 2000:149-50), CDA has tended to skip over the complex, and often messy, work that goes on in any discursive event (Barkho, 2008b; Berglez, 2006; Richardson, 2007; Richardson & Barkho, forthcoming).

At this point, the relevance and value of ethnography comes into the picture. We suggest that a fuller, more insightful examination of news discourse can be achieved through adopting "an ethnographic eye for the real historical actors, their interests, their allegiances, their practices, and where they come from, in relation to the discourses they produce" (Blommaert, 1999:7). In contrast with traditional

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highly text-dependent approaches to media discourse, ethnography assigns a much more active role to the language user and communicative participant. Ethnographers consider an exclusive focus on the text to be problematic because it leaves out of the communicative process the active work done by participants as well as the cultural context that underpins the action. Rather than an "agency implied in the text", ethnography brings speech-community members into focus as real people with actual identities who actively construct social meaning. Through various fieldwork efforts – including observation, participation, semi-structured interviews, informal conversations, collection of contextualising textual data, etc. - "the researcher learns to interpret and follow the rules that govern the practices of the field and to understand (and make explicit) its structures of meaning" (Oberhuber & Krzyżanowski, 2008:181). Combining ethnographic interpretation with fine-grained or text-dependent analyses of meaning draws the participants into the investigation and helps researchers gain analytic leverage to arrive at a more nuanced understanding of institutionalized discourse processes. In that sense, we consider our approach to be part of a larger plea for accepting a participant-oriented approach in media discourse analysis, building on seminal work by Bell (1991) and Verschueren (1985), and recent ethnographic work by Briggs (2007), Perrin and Ehrensberger (2008) and Cotter (2009).

Viewing journalists, sub-editors, editors, readers, etc. as active and dynamic participants in the research process implies accepting the issues that go along with fieldwork, including the resistance and complexities inherent in the researcher-consultant (or observer-observed) relationship. Attendant on anthropological methodologies is the recognition that the observer, the ethnographer's self, is a consequential presence and thus an appropriate object of study (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 1995). Or, put in Hymes' words: "there is no way to avoid that the ethnographer […] is a factor in the enquiry" (1996:13). Discussions along these lines are essential to ethical academic practice and de rigueur in human subjects applications. Given the distancing filters that some research methodologies provide, our position requires explicit articulation: A researcher is not merely an instrument of data collection, but must recognize his or her active role in the interpretation of a community's actions. Similarly, we treat journalists not only as producers of text, but also as interpreters, whose standpoints we are eager to know, opening up our research perspective away from the empirically observable facts of language visible in the text, trying to retrieve at least acknowledged intentions and interpretations (by means of, for instance, observation and interviews).

In other words, we argue that contexts of news production are not to be taken for granted as merely 'out there', full of neutral, objective, observable facts. Nor should journalists'/editors'/readers' points of view be considered "plums hanging from trees, needing only to be plucked by fieldworkers" and passed on to eager (academic) readers (Van Maanen, 1988:93). Rather, social facts, including our informants' points of view, are "human fabrications, themselves subject to social inquiry as to their origins" (ibid.). In short, the ethnographic approach to news discourse that we propose here sees research as "a hermeneutic process", acknowledging the fact that "fieldwork is an interpretive act, not an observational or descriptive one" and that this process begins with the explicit examination of our own preconceptions, biases, and motives, "moving forward in a dialectic fashion toward understanding by way of a continuous dialogue between the interpreter and the interpreted" (ibid.).

In a way, it could be argued that our approach revitalizes the ethnographic methodologies of sociologists who entered newsrooms in the 1970s and 1980s. These observational studies of news organisations provided us with greater understanding about the ways in which news stories were chosen, processed, and communicated (e.g., Burns, 1969; Golding & Elliott, 1979; Schlesinger, 1987; Tuchman, 1978). Following a tradition which was started by these early newsroom ethnographies, we aim to fill an identified gap in the field by offering ethnographic descriptions and providing insider perspectives on the actual practices and values of news production, documenting how these often differ from the claims of theorists, while simultaneously exploring new theoretical frameworks to better understand and analyze news production practices. Of course, we are not alone in advancing this approach to news analysis. Work has also been published by more recent proponents of newsroom ethnography, each providing greater understanding of the editorial practices, values, and beliefs that shape news, whether produced in the local press (Aldridge, 2007), local radio (Niblock & Machin, 2006), national television news (Born, 2004; Harrison, 2000), or in relation to a specific news story (Barkho, 2008a; Cottle, 1993). Such studies not only demonstrate that journalistic organisations "have a range of aims, from primarily making a profit to prioritizing the public interest, with shades of grey in between" (Harrison, 2006:128), they also show how such aims – and the values which underpin them – are actualised, reinforced, and challenged on a daily basis in both the routines and outputs of journalists. "The point", as Harrison (ibid.) argues, "is to analyse both the way these messages are

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produced (their values and material/economic base) and the way they are articulated (their linguistic and symbolic structure)".

It is precisely at the conjuncture of 'production' and 'articulation' of news discourse that the added value of our approach resides. Whereas our emphasis on newsroom ethnography is in itself not methodologically innovative, the combination with 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, is indeed innovative – and overdue – in its kind. We join Rampton et al. (2004:4) in their UK Linguistic Ethnography Forum position paper when they point to an important tension emerging at the conjuncture of linguistics and ethnography accounting for linguistic ethnography's fairly distinct methodological position when compared with applied linguistics, education studies and a good deal of linguistic anthropology. They characterize this tension in terms of a challenging dynamics of contrast/contradiction:

1. "Tying ethnography down": pushing ethnography towards the analysis of clearly delimitable processes, increasing the amount of reported data that is open to falsification, looking to impregnate local description with analytical frameworks drawn from outside. [...]

2. "Opening linguistics up": inviting reflexive sensitivity to the processes involved in the production of linguistic claims and to the potential importance of what gets left out, encouraging a willingness to accept (and run with) the fact that beyond the reach of standardised falsification procedures, "[e]xperience... has ways of boiling over, and making us correct our present formulas" (James, 1978:106, cited in Willis & Trondman 2001:2).

In an attempt to respond to the sometimes contradictory pulls of the two disciplines, a linguistically sensitive, ethnographic approach to news production embarks on a balancing act, "carrying linguistic frameworks into the description of the news and ethnographic sensibilities into the analysis of language" (Rampton et al, 2004:4). It is this balancing act which constitutes our methodological identity.

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4. Theoretical and practical relevance

As outlined above, a holistic, situated (i.e., context-sensitive) linguistics of news production provides specific means to transcend the product-process dichotomy by placing the news text at the central nexus of analysis within (and not against) an institutional context which shapes and is shaped by professional ideologies, production routines and power concerns. This, we argue, is what lends our approach to news production scholarship interdisciplinary appeal. In what follows, we show how our approach feeds into current debates and literatures in other fields. In distinguishing between the disciplinary, ontological, political, and applied levels, we refer to research in journalism, poststructuralism, phronetic social science, and knowledge transfer projects respectively.

4.1 Journalism studies

In their recent political economy of print journalism and information subsidies, Lewis, Williams & Franklin (2008) found that 1) news media rely heavily on public relations and news agency copy, 2) digital news technologies enable this source reliance and 3) the use of news agency wire-service copy is more acceptable to journalists than the use of public relations material. These findings, in particular the first, formed the basis of a strong argument that contemporary journalism is facing a 'terminal' illness (Davies, 2008:397) which shocked much of the journalistic establishment (Oborne, 2008; Taylor, 2008). Drawing on the agenda that we have proposed in this paper we argue that Lewis et al's findings are not unproblematic. To track down the influence of PR and establish textual precedents to news reporting, they conducted a number of interviews and performed keyword-based content analyses. However, that an article shares keywords with particular public relations material need not automatically imply that the author of the article drew directly on the material (cf. Van Hout et al, this issue). There could be a more diffuse discursive process at work here than direct "churnalism" (i.e. the churning of PR materials into journalism). It is widely recognized, for example, that journalists carefully watch their competitors, drawing story ideas by scanning other media (Doyle, 2006); it is also widely acknowledged that journalism tends to draw on a particular style of lexicogrammar (Richardson, 2000; McLaren-Hankin, 2007; Jansen, 2008). It could therefore be argued that when particular issues circulating in (hegemonic) public discourse are deemed newsworthy, it is likely that journalists will cover the issues,

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irrespective of their access to PR materials. Since this coverage is bound to draw on similar lexis, keyword searches are not a suitable means to capture the difference between a journalist drawing on public discourse circulating around her and one copy-pasting a PR text sent to her inbox. Instead, with the help of current technology, we can get closer to the actual production of the text and explore what we referred to above as the "news transmutation process". By tracking electronically and/or ethnographically shifts and changes in the text as it develops (locally and globally) towards its final version for publication or presentation, we can provide detailed empirical evidence for the journalistic use of source media (cf. Sleurs, Jacobs & Van Waes, 2002). Research in this tradition will encompass a range of news media and enable comparative analysis of, for instance, public/for-profit/not-for-profit media, professional/citizen's weblogs, television/print news, etc.

4.2 Post-structuralist research

A central value of much post-structuralist work on discourse drawing on, inter alia, Foucault, Bakhtin, Derrida, Laclau & Mouffe, is to destabilize the notion of fixed relations between lexis and meaning, to historicize language use, and to pay attention to the fluidity, complexity and contingency involved in meaning-making. A common criticism of post-structuralism, on the other hand, is that 'anything goes', i.e., they assume 1) "that texts can mean whatever audiences interpret them to mean", 2) "that the producer of a text can describe the world in an infinite number of ways" and 3) "that there is no recourse to an agreed reality to evaluate the description" (Philo & Miller, 2001:49-50).

A signal strength of the text-in-context news production research that we call for in this paper is that it navigates the terrain between these two apparently antithetical positions. While opening up to the fluidity of post-structuralist ontologies, it also ties 'meaning' to specific instances of text in order to 1) investigate the relatively broad, but not unbounded, meaning potential of any given news text and to 2) explore exactly which strategies, practices, routines, conventions, norms, etc. stop or constrain text producers from describing the world in an infinite number of ways. Such research is rooted in the materiality of texts (including interview transcripts, field notes, meeting protocols, etc.) without succumbing to the temptation of seeing language as a transparent medium providing insights into the actor's 'real' thoughts, perceptions and opinions. Similarly, from a linguistic/pragmatic perspective, we

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argue that although speech events such as news reporting are characterized by variability and change, they are still based on a large degree of conventionalisation and stability. In Levinson's words, the goal-defined, socially constituted nature of speech events imposes constraints on the participants, on the setting and above all on the kinds of "allowable contributions" (1979:368). Because of this high degree of conventionalisation, readers can for example easily distinguish generic differences between hard news accounts and editorials, both of which employ textual strategies to cue readers to expect a particular kind of discursive experience.

4.3 Phronetic social science

A linguistics of news production connects with academic and public debates about the quality and political and societal role of journalism. As such, it has the potential to raise public awareness and encourage social change through what has been called phronetic research. Bent Flyvbjerg (2001:56-57) argues that social scientific research should no longer try to emulate the falsification procedures of the natural sciences, aiming to establish general truths, as it has in the past; instead, he suggests, it should turn to what Aristotle termed phronesis, i.e., practical knowledge, practical ethics and situated practical wisdom. This leads to a rich, reflexive analysis of power, ethics and values.

We believe that the approach to news analysis that we have called for here, emphasizing - in Flyvbjerg's words - the "pragmatic, variable, context-dependent", attending to "ethics" and "oriented toward action" (2001:57), has the potential to contribute to the destabilization of traditional hierarchies of knowledge dissemination. On the one hand, this can be linked up with the increasing public distrust towards news workers, due in no small part to increasing awareness of the significance of language in producing, maintaining and changing power relations in society. On the other hand, it fits in with active processes of disintermediation, i.e. the removal of professional media workers from their traditional intermediary role between institutions (government, business, etc.) and news consumers (Deuze, 2007:156). Instead, individuals are increasingly turning to grassroots or citizen's journalism (Gillmor, 2006). By exploring the relatively fine line between professional and grassroots journalism, linguistically sensitive ethnography sets out to detail the specific merits of grassroots journalism, which, for instance, relies far less on elite sources than mainstream news (Reich, 2008).

4.4 Knowledge transfer projects

Finally, we would like to argue that a linguistics of news production has the capacity to engage in a broader discussion of social issues. Selected findings can be productively used, for example, to 1) stimulate public debate on the political, social, economic and cultural functions of journalism, to 2) advocate citizen's journalism, peace journalism, critical investigative journalism and development journalism, and to 3) help develop specific knowledge transfer projects for journalism education, non-governmental organisations' public relations work, grassroots journalism, and transitional as well as developing democracies. In each case, localized presentation of research findings should encourage practitioners to engage with media language issues. At the same time, the transdisciplinarity at the heart of our approach implies that knowledge transfer projects should be bidirectional in that researchers can identify knowledge implicit in organizations and learn from journalists' professionalism (Perrin, this issue).

Therefore, in line with our ethnographic stance, we wish to look at our own research processes and feed back our results, not only to media practitioners but also to the community in general. Insights into the linguistics of news production processes also have a potential for didactic transfer (see Barkho & Richardson, this issue on the integration of linguistically sensitive discourse analysis into journalists' training programs)[6]. Finally, we encourage critical reflection on the use of the news in linguistic research more generally, since data taken from news stories or media discourse have far too often been used unreflectively to make generalizations about language structure and function, using what Richardson calls a "one-size-fits-all-approach" (2007:76) that fails to take into account the discursively situated professional motivations of newsworkers.

5. Conclusion

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[6] Felicitas Macgilchrist is involved in actively assisting non-governmental organizations like Attac in drawing on academic resources for their public relations work. Geert Jacobs has helped the University of Antwerp's Calliope on-line writing project with linguistic work on preformulation. Colleen Cotter has worked with US university journalism educators and students on language attitudes, stereotypes, and linguistic myths, and developing an advisory for Headway, the brain injury charity in the UK, about representation in the media.

Filling in blind spots starts with localizing these spots, and that is where we have started. The next step is to relate situated language activity in newsrooms to contextual resources, social settings and the psychobiographies of journalists, reporters, editors, anchors, news researchers etc. And of course we have to develop research designs which combine knowledge generation and transfer. Further on we need methodological frameworks to collect, analyse and validate data on relevant cognitive, social, and intertextual aspects of news text and talk production. Last but not least, we have to keep ethical, legal, epistemological, technological and financial restrictions in mind. Could this be one of the reasons for the blind spot, for the "dearth of work on the production of news language", as Allan Bell (2006) puts it? On the other hand, doing fascinating research is not a question of doing it all at once, but of going in the right direction. The position has been identified, the compass adjusted - for first steps see this issue.

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