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Colleen Cotter
(Queen Mary, University of London)

*Diversity awareness and the role of language in
cultural representations in news stories*

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Abstract

Behind news stories are reporting, writing, and editing actions and decisions that constitute everyday practice within the news profession. As part of this, journalists are conscious of providing relevant coverage of the communities in which they work. A consequence is that news discourse reflects both profession-internal and societal-external values. To illustrate the relation of news reporting to values in the larger culture, I examine an aspect of US news coverage that is actively discussed within the profession: reporting on “diversity,” described as “issues of class, race, ethnicity, culture, abilities and sexual orientation” (Poynter Institute). Beyond prohibitions against pejorative labels, the role of language and its indexing of social identity is seldom included in diversity awareness discussions, despite its function in that regard. I argue that this is because of the monolingual language ideology that suffuses mainstream America and the absence of specialist linguistic insight that might provide a counter-perspective. Ethnolinguistic examination of profession-internal discourse concerning the industry’s self-identified diversity reporting gaps can also lead to a more nuanced understanding of news practice, while looking at journalists’ outputs in topic-neutral contexts illustrates the larger sociocultural attitudes that the news community reflects when it engages in reporting about “diversity.”

Keywords:

Diversity, language ideology, news discourse, social deixis, representation and culture, practice

1. Introduction

For most of mainstream US journalism, the enterprise of daily news reporting is a series of discursive actions and decisions that are consciously situated within the community of journalists and the community in which the news product circulates. These actions have ideological, historical, and time-contingent entailments as well as discursive outcomes (see Cotter 2009). The actual content that results from the reporting process also incorporates aspects of the larger culture’s value system and norms in which the news practitioner concurrently “lives.” Thus, a single news story embodies a great deal of cultural and discursive complexity.

In this paper, I focus on one element of this practice-, value-, and story-based complexity: the US news community’s profession-internal concern with “covering diversity,” a concern that has entailments in practice in terms of *who* and *what* to report on and *how* to report it, as well as the socialization process of new and established members of the news community. Behind diversity coverage issues in the US is a sociopolitical history of awkward race relations, ones that inevitably manifest themselves in news content reflective of larger society. (See Leitner 1980 for early comparative work on the relation of sociopolitical history and news discourse outcomes in England and Germany; and Santa Ana 2002 for a case study of pejorative conceptual metaphors in news stories about immigration policy in the US.)

“Language” as such is not explicitly part of the news community’s diversity conversation, despite its relevance to culture and community identity and the fact that language and how it is represented is often a stand-in for social evaluations of “others” (e.g., Lippi-Green 1997, Baugh 2000, Hill 2001, etc.). Thus, I also address, and problematize, the extent to which “language” is explicitly dealt with in professional diversity-training contexts (very little). Suggesting that the larger society’s monolingual language ideology plays a role in this oversight, I discuss its societal relevance and



particularity in the American context, and how from a linguistic perspective language is connected to diversity, identity, a sense of place and belonging, and the conceptualization of the “other”/outsider (a point-of-view familiar to the linguist but not to the non-specialist).

To orient issues of language, diversity, outsider, and community to reporting practice and newswriting outcomes – to in effect orient these issues to one subset of the linguistics of news production – I examine a small set of stories taken from a range of newspapers serving a variety of communities that represent diverse (or divergent) linguistic and cultural contexts. These stories can be termed *culture-positive*; in them we can examine the positioning of diversity in more neutral contexts than diversity-sensitivity discourse intends to rectify. Many of these stories, flying beneath the profession’s diversity radar, mention language, metapragmatically situating the reporter’s language attitudes with the larger culture.

While “culture-positive” stories are not explicitly part of the diversity conversation that journalists engage in, they nonetheless highlight the position of “outsider/others” in a range of circumstances as well as embedded social attitudes toward outsider/others, positive and negative. I suggest that culture-positive stories bring as much to bear on the diversity discussion, as well as reflect relevant aspects of news process and practice, as more traditional reporting themes. They illustrate the extent to which culturally embedded attitudes and positions are represented in news stories, some of it quite subtle, but are not yet part of the news profession’s diversity discussions. The culture-positive stories show relatively neutral settings in which language is nonetheless part of the diversity equation. They also show a default monolingual language ideology that intersects with broader social attitudes about language, both positive and negative (for examples outside of the US, see Blommaert and Verschueren 1998, DiGiacomo 1999, Horner 2008). This larger cultural ideology is mirrored in news stories alongside news-community-internal process and practice conditions related to news reporting.

My data come from a corpus of news community-internal public documents I have been collecting for more than a decade and a “language ideology” database of contemporaneous news stories that I have more recently been compiling. I have drawn from personal familiarity with high school- and university-level foreign-exchange programs, and my journalistic and academic familiarity with the conventions of news reporting¹ and the salience of the “culture-positive” story genre (about, for example, exchange students and share-able ethnic traditions). As the majority of US newspapers, big and small, have an online component, the salience of the genre is evidenced by the simplest of restricted Google or Lexis-Nexis database searches, from which some of the examples come.

I do not look at the data as a journalist might: evaluating whether the profession’s ongoing diversity awareness activities have been “successful” or not (for that reason I do not analyze traditional “diversity” stories relating to ethnicity or race or minority groups within a community). Nor do I examine language in the news stories from a critical discourse perspective, focusing on the language of power and responsibility behind the institution of the media. My objective is to present preliminary data that brings language-related stories into the diversity discussion of the journalist; and to show that awareness of behind-the-scenes “practice” dimensions will for the linguist lead to an ethnolinguistic understanding of the news-community values behind news production, as well as news practitioners’

¹ In this paper I wear two hats: I approach this research as a former news practitioner and university journalism educator, and as a linguist who tries to understand the patterns and routines behind language in use, particularly in the news media. (In UK colloquial parlance, I represent the “über-ethnographer,” someone whose participation in the community or “tribe” under analytical scrutiny preceded the acquisition of academic tools and stances needed to subsequently observe and analyze (see also Bell 1991, Heath 1993, and Peterson 2001).



inter-connections with their lived social context or *habitus* (cf. Bourdieu, as discussed in Kulick and Schieffelin 2006). I analyze the discourse within an interactional sociolinguistic framework (Gumperz 1982, Schiffrin 1994), focusing on position, stance, and the social meaning that adheres to language in context, as well as a greater understanding of that context.

2. The diversity conversation

Diversity in the US news context tends to mean stories about ethnic minorities or non-dominant cultures within a news organization's coverage area. It relates to the widely acknowledged concern that reporters be able "to understand and report on issues of class, race, ethnicity, culture, abilities and sexual orientation" (as noted in seminar advertisements and training guides by the Poynter Institute; see also studies about newsroom diversity by the Knight Foundation, summarized in Dedman and Doig 2005).

That diversity is an important topic in industry publications and professional gatherings is significant for two ways. First, it tries to redress perceived gaps in comprehensiveness of coverage and relevance to the community (cf. Cotter 2009). Its aim is to make a difference in a journalist's thought process and practice behavior that will lead to a desired outcome in the news product. Second, while it is explicit in putting attention on practice, it does not talk about the instrumentality of delivery: language. Issues of language, and potential exclusions and pejorations inherent in social labels, are dealt with in the news practitioner's ongoing socialization process (at its most widespread are entries in The Associated Press Stylebook), but not primarily in the diversity coverage quarter.

To become aware of the fact that there is an ongoing conversation within the news profession about diversity, which is often raised in relation to primary news-community values of "fair and accurate reporting in [the] community" (*ibid.*) it is important to establish the extent to which "diversity" is discussed within the news profession. The topic is an active one within the newsroom, in the journalism-education curriculum, at training institutes, and in profession-specific trade publications. Two examples are The Poynter Institute and the Society of Professional Journalists, national organizations that nearly all mainstream journalists have some association with.

The Poynter Institute, an independent journalism think tank and training service, conducts seminars and conferences related to writing and reporting around the country and at their home base in Florida. On their roster are always topics related to diversity and its relevance to the daily practice of good journalism. Example (1) lists two recent offerings.

- (1)
 - (a) Reporting Across Cultures, Writing about Differences
Reporting Across Cultures deals with covering different cultures, communities and individuals **more accurately and thoroughly**.
 - (b) Reporting, Writing & Editing for the Ethnic Media
Elevate your reporting and storytelling skills so you can more completely cover your community.
- [The Poynter Institute, emphasis added]

The purpose of the seminar in (1a), dealing as it does with "covering different cultures, communities and individuals more accurately and thoroughly," is to enhance a reporter's sensitivities toward a range of contexts that fall outside of his or her experience or comfort level. These "difference" or diversity



contexts can occur on multiple levels, which the seminar description acknowledges: A range of responses can be developed on behalf of an *individual* whom the reporter may be interviewing, by design or chance; a *community*, which in the American news context would indicate geographical if not social proximity to the news outlet; or a “*culture*,” which very likely means the greatest range of “difference” from the reporter’s and news community’s social deictic center, embodying connections beyond the geographical community. Accuracy and “thoroughness” in the form of the informational range of the story are rhetorical production values that reporters aim to achieve on behalf of well-formed news discourse (cf. Cotter 2009). Note that the more attenuated diversity objective is made relevant not through moral or political argument but to internalized and familiar aspects of journalistic craft.

The craft dimension (see Cotter 2009 for a discussion of its central role) is a key focus of the seminar description in (1b), offering a prospective participant the opportunity to “elevate your reporting and storytelling skills so you can more completely cover your community.” This seminar is geared toward reporters who write for an “ethnic media” outlet, whether through community newspapers or radio or online sites. (This may or may not be in a “second language.”) The description relates newswriting and reporting skill sets to an individual’s subsequent ability to better cover a community (like the first seminar, thoroughness or completeness as a professional objective is highlighted). It also suggests that ethnic media reporters might desire or require more formalized training than they may have already obtained. (See Dedman and Doig 2005 for a summary of the Knight Foundation newsroom diversity report 2005 for support of this point.)

Similarly, the Society of Professional Journalists, the primary national professional organization for news practitioners, also runs workshops to enhance diversity coverage, as in Example (2).

(2)

Working with Ethnic Media, A Valuable Resource

Find out how accessing ethnic publications can help you cover immigrant communities better.

[Society of Professional Journalists]

Whereas Example (1b)’s seminar is set up for “ethnic media” reporters themselves, the workshop in (2) is to assist mainstream reporters: “Find out how accessing ethnic publications can help you cover immigrant communities better.” As with the seminars in (1), the objective is based on enhancing a reporter’s understanding and sensitivity: it is a practice-based attempt to bridge the “outsider/other” gap. (In this way the reporter engages with similar issues as does the ethnolinguistic fieldworker.)

Besides the national professional organizations, there are also nationally based minority journalist groups (e.g., the National Association of Black Journalists, Asian American Journalists Association, Native American Journalists Association, the National Association of Hispanic Journalists, South Asian Journalists Association, etc.) who work on behalf of explaining and exploring diversity in their news-outlet contexts, often with respect to hiring and institutional representation. On the discourse level and language-planning level (cf. Fasold 1990), these organizations develop tools like stylebooks and host conferences to deal with diversity issues in news coverage (and to promote intra-group solidarity within the organization). UNITY ’94, a seminal conference organized by UNITY: Journalists of Color Inc., at the time a new alliance of minority journalism groups, and its subsequent national meetings are one influential outlet. UNITY objectives from the beginning have been, in part:



(3)

- (a) Improving minority coverage and using sensitivity: The more familiar reporters are with a community the more aware and proficient they'll be.
- (b) Cover a variety of stories about minorities, **not just those related to race**.
[UNITY '94 handout, emphasis added]

Again, what is highlighted comes down to the journalistic equivalent of ethnographic sensitivity: familiarity with a community engenders knowledge about and understanding of its concerns. Community familiarity also enhances a reporter's ability and journalistic proficiency, making the argument for enhanced diversity coverage on journalistic production grounds. The UNITY conference organizers make the point that stories about minorities are "not just those related to race," suggesting that there are other aspects to "diversity," a point that is relevant in the culture-positive stories I discuss in Section 3.

Despite the various efforts by the journalistic mainstream to enhance reporting of diversity, either by hiring "diverse" journalists or reminding others of the need for sensitivity and awareness, in reality the social and professional issues remain, as noted in example (4).

(4)

Journalists hired for their diverse views [...] become worn down by countless attempts to explain a story to an editor who doesn't appreciate the basic idea that different people can be interested in different things. (Maynard 2006)

Maynard, who runs a key national institute that trains journalists of color in the US, argues that journalists of all sorts "as professionals must learn to talk across the fault lines of race, class, gender, generation and geography" (Maynard 2006). She correlates professionalism – awareness and application of the protocols behind journalism production – with diversity acumen.

Beyond race and ethnicity, Maynard also lists "generation" and "geography" as relevant parameters in the discussion of diversity, attempting to expand the scope of "diversity" coverage to beyond what is often restricted to race and immigration reporting, the issues of ongoing concern and newsworthiness (and sociopolitical relevance) to news professionals. Her efforts to delink the topically contentious (e.g., race), from the profession's default assumptions about diversity coverage and awareness, also relate to the UNITY organization's consciousness-raising objectives. Which brings us to language and the default assumptions journalists and fellow members of society maintain.

2.1 Default language ideologies

Despite the actual linguistic variety and diversity in the United States (see Wolfram and Ward 2006, Finnegan and Rickford 2004), what predominates in public discourse and governmental policy decisions, both local and national, is a monolingual ideology (Crawford 2000). These are most visibly represented in the English-Only and English First movements and bilingual education policy discussions, which argue against any sort of bilingual utility in the public arena (see Finnegan and Rickford 2004, Crawford 2000, etc. for extended discussions of the complex nature of US language history).

This monolingual ideology is internalized by most English-speaking Americans to some degree (whether they profess to affiliate as politically liberal, socially progressive, highly educated, well-meaning, pro-immigration, pro-diversity, or not). While sociolinguists have repeatedly emphasized



that language is often the bellwether of social and political opinion (cf. Hill 2001, Baugh 2000, Milroy and Milroy 1999, etc.), in the larger culture language attitudes and ideologies – when they are not used to denigrate the non-English speaker – at their most benign are an unexamined reflex of the assimilationist ideals that held sway in the early 20th century and persist to this day, both culturally and linguistically. Reporters, to a large degree, follow the larger culture’s course of thinking.

Monolingual ideologies might be seen as functionally akin to standard language ideologies (cf. Lippi-Green 1997) which are often an idealization of the position of a variety of language in society. Reporters are not linguists and thus reflect the attitudes the larger culture has about language, rather than a specialist understanding of linguistic phenomena (cf. Cotter 2003, 2009). This becomes evident when reporters interview linguists, or when they cover a story that may have technical linguistic dimensions, as in example (5). Here the two-paragraph *lead* or introduction to a newspaper story on bilingual education illustrates the default monolingual ideology being referenced and reinforced by the news reporter.

(5)

Imagine being bilingual, but always making your living in your native tongue.
Imagine going to work, then writing and conversing in a second language, whether it’s
Spanish, French, German, **Latin, whatever.**

Heck, imagine even trying to put it all into **Pig Latin.**

[*Pittsburgh* (Pennsylvania) *Post-Gazette*, emphasis added]

In (5), the reporter sets up an imaginary scenario. In terms of journalistic positioning, imaginary scenarios are those tangential to the everyday reality of the perceived audience of readers but are intended to invite a reader to consider an alternative setting or situation as a prelude to getting to the actual news. They are a discursive mechanism to make the news “relevant.” In this case, the situation imagined is “being bilingual,” certainly tangential to the everyday reality of many readers. At the same time, the imagined scenario is made relevant by reference to everyday tasks. Journalistically, in terms of genre form, the reporter is working according to newswriting principles by making the lead (or intro) of the story of relevance to the reader by characterizing a larger issue in terms of a single individual. (That said, in terms of what counts as well-formed news discourse, the “imagine”-type lead is to be used sparingly).

As the reporter in (5) constructs it, the imagined bilingual speaker (nonetheless) goes through her daily affairs in her “native tongue,” ostensibly a positive option. But then the imagined bilingual speaker, as depicted in the reporter’s second sentence, has to speak and write in her second language. The multi-functionality of the connective “but,” which propositionally sets up an opposition and pragmatically introduces a contrasting option (cf. Traugott 1988, Cotter 2003), begins to introduce the *angle* or positioning of the news story: the effort involved in being a non-native speaker in one’s workplace. The two-sentence lead also separates and sets up a contrast between one’s “native tongue” and a “second language.” (While the meaning of the first sentence is initially ambiguous, it is clear that the default “native tongue” is English, a point supported in subsequent paragraphs.) This contrast is enhanced by the specification of familiar second-languages: at the secondary school level US students, depending on the school district, are often offered Spanish, French, German, and Latin.

Reference to the language options of “Latin” and “whatever” both situates the second language as secondary (Latin being irrelevant to the modern world and “whatever” in colloquial contrast diminishing the seriousness, and literalness, of the preceding list items in the imagined case) and opens



it up to other options (e.g., Mandarin, Farsi, Hebrew, etc.). Simultaneously, it disavows the reporter's alignment with second-language speakers themselves, further intensified by use of the ultra-colloquial discourse marker "heck," which intensifies the illocutionary force of the subsequent utterance, and reference to the common-place childhood play language "Pig Latin" – a variety most monolingual English schoolchildren in the US will be familiar with. (On a more critical level, the reference can be read as either making it clear that it does not matter what language is being referred to, or as diminishing the relevance of the second language. The former reading is supported by the rest of the story.)

This strategy puts the reporter in line with the perceived monolingual language ideologies of the target audience. At the same time, the reporter nonetheless knows and understands a fair bit about the complexity of the US language situation and is attempting to convey this to a reading populace that may not be as aware. The reporter is trying to appeal to her audience, requisite in feature stories and a factor behind culture-positive stories.

3. Diversity and the culture-positive story

Issues of diversity – particularly as they reflect outsider/otherness and index larger social perspectives on what is culturally meaningful – arise in less topically contentious contexts (such as culture-positive stories about visitors and non-native residents) and in less marked discursive contexts (such as feature stories that are less time- and issue-sensitive). Nonetheless, in these types of stories, diversity and difference are often represented, explicitly or implicitly, through language and through depiction of culturally instantiated pragmatic and communicative norms.

The culture-positive stories referred to here are from a variety of media sources that indicate the discursive range of representation of linguistic and cultural difference. There is similarity across media contexts, and thus examples come from different media sources, all of which are mainstream discourse contexts in the US: High school newspaper paper, university newspaper, small-town daily, small-town weekly, metropolitan daily, university alumni magazine, trade publication, and education journal. On the discourse analytical level, the stories can be further differentiated according to 1) story type and 2) the manner in which outsider/otherness is represented.

3.1 Story types

Story types can be viewed in terms of the participant subjects, which I have designated as Newcomer, Visitor, Immigrant, and Heritage Learner. Culture-positive feature stories that involve some element of "diversity" or outsider/otherness often revolve around "newcomers" to the community and their efforts at cultural and linguistic integration; visiting foreign-exchange students and professionals, their comparative descriptions of life "back home" establishing their position as transient; longtime members of a region's "immigrant community" and their production of locally available foods and festivities; and "integrated Americans" who actively pursue heritage language-learning or maintain geographical dialect pride.

Example (6) lists headlines of stories about "newcomers" to a particular region who are on a foreign-exchange program.

- (6)
- (a) Foreign exchange student **enjoying** stay in Statesville
[Statesville, North Carolina, *Record & Landmark*]



- (b) Host family **welcomes** AFS students
[Keyser, West Virginia, *Mineral Daily News-Tribune*]
- (c) A lot **like home**: Foreign exchange student says Montana is **similar** to Kyrgyzstan
[Missoula, Montana, *The Lance*]
- (d) Turkish AFS student **loves** American experience/
Teksen finds many **parallels** between U.S. and Turkey
[Forest City, Iowa, *The Summit*]

From the beginning – from the headline – stories about “newcomer” exchange students are marked by language that connotes positive politeness and connection, from both sides. The foreign exchange student is “enjoying” her stay (6a); the host family “welcomes” students (6b). The experience the student has in an unfamiliar community and cultural context is predominantly presented as positive and focus on the positive effectively minimizes what can be a large cultural gap. Thus, in (6c), Montana is “a lot like home” and the visiting student from Turkey “loves American experience” (6d). Drawing attention to similarities further minimizes the gap, thus “Montana is **similar** to Kyrgyzstan” (6c) and a student “finds many **parallels** between U.S. and Turkey” (6d).

A subset of the Newcomer story type involves the dimension of travel, whether coming or going, as in Example (7).

- (7)
 - (a) Newport student **anticipates** exchange **journey** to Hungary
[Newport, Rhode Island, *News-Times*]
 - (b) A long **journey**/
German exchange student **returns** after 50 years
[Jamestown, New York, *The Post-Journal*]

The Newport student is about to leave for Hungary; the visitor to Jamestown is returning after a half-century away. Both headlines refer to a “journey,” evoking the metaphor of travel, exploration, transition, and discovery. The Newport student “anticipates” his journey from Rhode Island to Hungary; he is about to begin an experience that involves the unknown. He knows he will return home, able to mark the experience as bounded. The German exchange student to New York, who completed his student journey when he returned to his home in Germany, “returns (to Jamestown) after 50 years” – the elapsed duration of time marking “a long journey,” one that has meaning to the host community. Examples (7a) and (7b) are a unique narrative minimal pair, marking a narrative arc that begins and ends with a particular type of visit away from home (with 7b resituating the deictic parameters). They depict a youthful “native” student journeying to foreign lands before coming back home, and a mature “foreign” student returning to the land he had journeyed to as a youth.

Most foreign-exchange “newcomer” visits at the secondary school level are of a proscribed length: either a summer or a semester. The foreign exchange “visitor” is similar to a “newcomer” except he or she either stays longer or comes with a purpose beyond that of learning about a new culture, e.g., a professional reason or a degree at an American institution. Because of those differences, the



university-age student Visitor (or business, diplomatic, or military Visitor) who most often stays longer faces aspects of adaptation and transition, both to the host culture and to a changing self-identity.

(8)

- (a) University students **adapt** to American culture/
Two undergrads discuss **transition**
[Louisiana State University, *The Daily Reveille*]
- (b) Student exchange program brings **Thais** to the **Farm**
[Stanford University, *The Stanford Daily*]

In (8a), the LSU students “adapt” to American culture, and rather than discussing similarities with their home countries, as in (6), they discuss the “transition” to their new home. Similarly, the language of (8b) does not attempt to minimize the cultural gap, as in (6) and to a certain extent (7), but makes the differences clear: the exchange students, “Thais,” are from a distal place; they are coming to the “Farm,” the insider term of reference for the university.

Adaptation is also a feature of stories about “immigrants,” but is made more complex by the preservation of a home-cultural value, as shown the headlines in (9).

(9)

- (a) Asian immigrants **preserve** culture while **adapting** to western ways
[Associated Press in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, *Tribune-Review*]
- (b) Governor: **Adapting** to U.S. culture harder for Mexicans
[*Oakland Tribune*]
- (c) **Festival** pulls together Indian community
[*Oakland Tribune*]
- (d) Tofu **Festival**, growing Asian food appetite underscore L.A. trend
[*Nation's Restaurant News*, trade newspaper for the food service industry]

In (9a and b), the immigrant adaptation process is less culture-positive in the sense that it involves assimilation (Asians “adapting to western ways”) or is reportedly “harder” for some groups (e.g., Mexicans). From the melting-pot assimilationist perspective, adaptation by immigrants is expected and desired, and a societal worry if a group as a whole has a more difficult time (as connoted by the immigrant governor’s comparative perspective in (9b)). At the same time, more recent multicultural ideologies prioritize and privilege cultural preservation, aspects of which are noted positively, particularly when they relate to festivals and food. A festival “pulls together” the Fremont, California, Indian community, which includes first- through third-generation families. An annual “Tofu Festival” indicates the cross-over phenomena brought by former immigrants to Southern California. Festivals function as cultural exchange and reinforcement within and outside the immigrant communities.

Similarly, once former immigrants have integrated it leads to new cultural phenomena related to “heritage” or reclamation of the heritage culture lost to assimilation. Heritage issues, particularly ones involving language, are news stories, as in (10).



(10)

- (a) When foreign language isn't foreign
[*Inside Higher Ed*]
- (b) Embracing diversity leads to growth of "heritage" language courses
[University of Illinois *LASNews Magazine*]

In (10), language in its systemic totality is news. Foreign languages aren't foreign: they are being reclaimed and embraced by people who recognize them as part of their cultural and personal heritage and identity. "Heritage language" stories are about reclamation and about the positive expression of diversity by "integrated Americans" who actively pursue heritage language-learning. Numerous stories give positive weight to "heritage" languages or heritage-language contexts as in (11).

(11)

- (a) Sealaska releases new language tools/
Interactive Web program helps teach Tlingit skills
[*Juneau (Alaska) Empire*]
- (b) Chinese 'peasant' dialect redeemed/
Writer takes pride in earthy Toisanese
[San Jose, California, *The Mercury News*]

The headlines in (11) are from stories *about* language, with language as the newsworthy element: a Web program teaches Tlingit language skills to the Tlingit tribe in Alaska; a California writer "takes pride in" his heritage Toisanese dialect.

The stories *about* language are also stories about diversity, but for which dominant cultural attitudes also adhere. The stories in (6) – (11) follow the arc of assimilation, from the Newcomer for whom the exchange of cultural awareness is predominant and orients all parties to expressions of positive politeness; to the Visitor who comes for reasons that are often professional or educational and deals with adaptation and transition; to the Immigrant whose story revolves around adaptation and acknowledgement of the distal home culture; to the Heritage community member whose aim is adaptation to and preservation of what has been lost. In all cases, "diversity" is approached and reported on, a point that comes up again in Section 4.2.

3.2 Manner of representation

The manner in which aspects of "difference" can be represented in culture-positive stories is evident through a range of discursive formulations. The stories in my Lexis-Nexis-culled database contained examples of the following:

- reference to English fluency
- direct quotation of non-standard usage
- prescriptive reference (to home language)
- folk-linguistic concepts
- implicit judgments about national stereotypes
- reference to utopian end-results



Thus, the speech styles of interviewees can be represented through specific reference to English fluency, as in (12).

(12)

She chooses her words carefully in hopes of using them correctly.

[Statesville, North Carolina, *Record & Landmark*]

Unless the interviewee explained her hesitation and careful style, it could be construed that the journalist in a more stereotyped way is attributing her speech style to fluency issues she might have. (See extensive research on perceptions of fluency of non-native speakers, e.g., Anderson-Hsieh and Koehler 1988).

Meanwhile, direct quotation of non-standard speech is intended to either capture “authenticity” or set up the role of language authority, as in (13).

(13)

"I think it started in the gare-age! Please, ring up the fire brigade, me wife and baby grandchild are in 'ere!"

[*The Onion*]

I am using this example from the US parody newspaper *The Onion*, as it makes the point about “foreign-visitor” stories as a genre form more succinctly than less-obvious examples in my sample. Stories about outsiders can be patronizing and quotes that capture “different” accents (“gare-age,” “ere”), lexical choices (“ring up,” “fire brigade”), or grammatical patterns are a prime illustration.

In some stories, there is prescriptive reference to the home language or manner of speaking it, as in (14).

(14)

(a) It sounds rough, as though you have pebbles in your mouth.

(b) “Everyone said Toisanese was such an ugly language. Everyone.”

[San Jose, California, *The Mercury News*]

Example (14a) is an aesthetic response to the sounds of the non-English language, often used in criticism of non-native speakers. The second example, (14b), is a quote from the subject of the story, an American writer who learned his heritage language despite negative attitudes toward it in the home country (China) and immigrant community (US). Similarly, reporters convey factual errors or reflect folk-linguistic concepts about multilingualism and dialect variation in their stories, as in (15).

(15)

(a) He doesn’t speak Hungarian, but immersion tends to make students fluent.

[Newport, Rhode Island, *News-Times*]

(b) English is the hardest language to learn since it has so many words similar in meaning and many words have more than one meaning.

[Forest City, Iowa, *The Summit*]



In (15a), there is the somewhat problematic “sink-or-swim” language-learning ideology that is a dominant voice in US bilingual education debates: “immersion tends to make students fluent.” The second example is an amalgamation of error and folk-linguistic thinking, presented without contextual linguistic information or attribution.

Irrespective of errors about how language works, there are also implicit judgments about national stereotypes presented in news stories (see Horner 2008 for compelling examples in the Luxembourg press), as in (16).

(16)

Not surprisingly, Edney's newfound American friends sometimes have a bit of trouble understanding just what the funny fellow is saying.

[*The Onion*]

Again, I am using an example from *The Onion* story referred to in Example (13), as it succinctly captures the judgments that monolingual reporters especially make about someone with a “funny” accent. The culture-positive dimension is there – the visitor has “newfound American friends” who are ostensibly affectionate in their characterization of him – overtaking the actual news content (his house is on fire), suggesting a superficiality in understanding of the “other” and what “diversity” means.

Whether the story focus is language or the travel and life-changing perspective that comes with foreign-exchange experiences, there is often reference to the utopian end-results of the process, as in (17).

(17)

(a) The continued support of Tlingit language learning programs is helping create a better self-identity of being Native, Worl said.

[*Juneau (Alaska) Empire*]

(b) “Once you do travel, it’s just knowing you can do it,” Jane said. “Once you do, all those things you see on TV become a possibility. All those doors are open to you.”

[Newport, Rhode Island, *News-Times*]

In (17a), the support of the language programs is correlated to a “better self-identity of being Native,” a factor that has local value in the Heritage-type story. The utopian outcome is evoked in the Visitor-type story, (17b), by over-generalizing phrases (“all those things you see on TV...All those doors are open...”), which run surprisingly parallel to *The Onion* parody story. Thus manner of representation and story type work together to construct a “culture-positive” story as well as a sense of “other” or account of difference which has community-specific entailments.

4. Conclusion

In this paper, I looked at the issue of “diversity” in terms of its role in journalistic identity, professional socialization, reporting and coverage practice, and community-internal value-making. An explicit awareness of “diversity” is considered necessary to the news reporter’s training and practice and is intrinsic to the news community’s self-identity and aspects of practice. Thus, to understand this value is to understand some of the decisions that are made about what counts as a story, or why something



might not have been covered. Culturally embedded attitudes and positions are represented in news stories – from the “accuracy and thoroughness” craft values of the news community to the default monolingual ideology of the larger world in which journalists practice. Both community-internal and community-external values operate in news production processes, and make their way into the language of the news product.

I situated the profession’s diversity priority in relation to language as an indicator of difference and distance that is not actively pursued in diversity discussions, suggesting that the larger society’s default monolingual language ideology holds sway in most American newsrooms. Language is not a topic addressed in the profession’s diversity conversation. The news discourse examples nonetheless make clear that behind journalistic action and story content is the often backgrounded role of language. Thus, the ways reporters and editors are trained to report diversity within their local communities, and the manner in which stories about non-native-English or multilingual speakers (whether transient to the community or permanent residents) are reported can be seen as related. Indeed, language can expand the scope. As with Maynard 2006 and others, I am attempting to problematize what the news profession thinks of as “diversity,” introducing linguistic concepts as a way to extend the journalistic discussion and to point out that language plays a significant role in the cultural interpretation by reporters of non-native-English or multilingual speakers, as well as the subsequent interpretation by readers of their representation.

To turn the analytical focus away from stories about historically contentious diversity topics like race, I looked instead at “culture-positive” feature stories from a range of newspapers serving a variety of communities in the US. Feature stories such as these, which tend to focus more on the individuals than the issues, can in the process “acknowledge and valorize the diverse linguistic repertoires of real people” (Ricento 2008), as the examples made evident. The examples also illustrated how reporters deal with both individual and difference, the stories showing positive politeness to the Newcomer and Visitor, and issuing reminders about cultural adaptation and preservation to the Immigrant and Heritage language-learner.

“Culture-positive” stories as a subgenre show that there are other, less socially charged contexts in which representations of diversity and the “outsider/other” hold sway. They also indicate the extent to which reporting routines interconnect with societal attitudes and language ideologies as well as the inherent complexities of assimilation, diversity, language, and culture. In one sense, “culture-positive” stories can be seen to aid in reinforcing idealized images of outsiders and treasured cultural identities for insiders – as host, as open-minded, as polite “good American,” as tolerant – while the more everyday “lived” diversity work that journalists strive for is temporarily put on hold.



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