

WORKSHOP

Investigating Journalism Practices: from Media Ethnography to Media Linguistics in the Newsroom

*University of Lausanne (Amphimax, room 415 & 412),
13-14 November 2014.*

Theme

The workshop assembles researchers in the field of media discourse analysis who have in common to focus both on news products and newsmaking processes. The aim of the workshop is to discuss and point out the possible added value that such a combining perspective represents for the study of media discourse by analysts and for the awareness and skills of practitioners (e.g. the journalists) as well. Does a double focus on products and processes lead to a better understanding of the news practices and to what is at stake with it?

A double focus on products and processes implies not only to rethink the methodology but the data collection of the research as well. More globally, the perspective favors a distinctive attitude of the researchers in the field of language and communication sciences. If we have observed a linguistic turn in the domain of social sciences (e.g. sociology and media studies) and a socio-praxeological turn in the domain of languages sciences (e.g. interaction and discourse analysis), the “mediated” position that results from such a re-positioning affects the linguistic perspectives: a classical “linguistics applied to” media practices perspective has moved to a realistic “applied linguistics” to media practices perspective. Currently, we consider a step further in terms of a research position with the idea of an implied linguistics perspective. It consists not only in “applying” theory to reality in order to describe and explain and eventually to establish a repertoire of “good” and “bad” practices, but merely resorts to a dialectical exchange between theory and professional practices (e.g. journalism): The practitioners gain from theory but the researchers gain from the practice itself. The relation between them is that of a partnership and the workshop also aims at discussing such an “implied” position of the practitioner-researcher (and the other way round).

As a matter of fact, contemporary social realities and professional practices – such as media practices – are constituted by paradoxical constraints, or “stretched out” between poles: economic vs. civic; global vs. local; multi vs. monolingual concerns etc. The resulting high tension – or polarization – is at the same time provoked, constructed, negotiated and possibly solved through linguistic practices in a variety of contexts (an editorial conference, a talk at work interaction between an anchorman and a journalist, an individual writing process etc.). As a result, both professional and linguistic practices are intertwined and therefore the study of the media practices and discourse cannot be achieved without an ethnographic view. Going backstage to the newsrooms to consider what journalist really do and what they say they do is a means to better understand the news products. In this sense, newsroom ethnographers (e.g. sociologists) do meet

discourse analysts (e.g. linguists): together they constitute a research team partnered with the journalists themselves.

All the papers presented in the workshop analyze various intertwining aspects of such a high tension affecting the newsmaking products and processes in a variety of media contexts and cultures: three different speaking areas of Switzerland, the media in Belgium and in Finland. All papers have a broad and at the same time a specific focus on newsmaking processes compared with news products: What kind of journalistic norms emerge in professional guidebooks, in semi-structured interviews with journalists, in talk-at-work interactions such as editorial conferences, in individual writing processes by journalist? Considering different genres of news products: interview, news bulletin, report, editorial etc. in different media: broadcast media and written press. All papers address the same kind of issues: how, why and by whom is this news item constructed as it is? What is omitted, deleted, suppressed, lost in the process? What expectations or rules emerge and what decisions are made and negotiated? What stylistic credos constrain the news items?

The data presented and analyzed are the result of ethnographic studies of the newsrooms. Part of the data collection is taken from a broad study of the public broadcast and written press in Switzerland (in three linguistic parts of the country: 2005-2015). Other data sets are taken from the Belgium public broadcast and from the Finnish media. Various aspects of backstage activities by journalists will be presented and analyzed in comparison to news products: editorial meetings where the topics and angles are discussed; preparatory sessions engaging journalists and assistants; biographic interviews leading to self-reflexive comments by the journalists themselves on the making of the texts; the writing processes recorded on the journalists computers. Published media products such as editorials, news bulletin's reports, hard news, Associated Press stylebooks etc. are also taken into account.

Goal of the workshop

- What is at stake with an ethnographic and linguistic perspective on newsmaking processes and products? What does it mean to combine a focus on products and processes?
- What theoretical and methodological implications are relevant or implied or favored by a double focus?
- What is the added value of an ethnographic "and" linguistic perspective on newsmaking processes for the study of news products and media discourse?
- What is the added value for the research domains? For the practitioners?
- How should an added value be presented, highlighted, promoted?

Organizers

Marcel Burger & Laura Delaloye, University of Lausanne.

Participants

Marcel Burger (UNIL), Jana Declercq (UGhent), Laura Delaloye (UNIL), Lauri Haapanen (University of Helsinki), Geert Jacobs (UGhent), Margherita Luciani (USI), Gilles Merminod (UNIL), Daniel Perrin (ZHAW), Andrea Rocci (USI), Astrid Vandendaele (UGhent).