

A Linguistic Study of News Values in Iranian Press

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Received: 5/7/2006

Accept: 17/8/2007

Abstract

How does a journalist or an editor decide which news is worthy and which is not?

According to some media researchers, they refer to a set of news values. One of the best known lists of such news values have been supplied by Johan Galtung and Marie H. Ruge. An analytical discussion on news values always refers to this list, which initially intended to cover international events. These factors include: 1- Frequency 2- Threshold 3- Unambiguity 4- Meaningfulness 5- Consonance 6- Unexpectedness 7- Continuity 8- Composition 9- Reference to elite nations 10- Reference to elite people 11-Reference to persons 12- Negativity. The current research collected 303 headlines from the front pages of four widely circulated Iranian newspapers: Hamshahri, Keyhan, Shargh and Iran. Out of these headlines, 426 news were distinguished and considered. As such, results show that the factors like reference to elite people (F10) and consonance (F5) play main role in Iranian press. Further Iranian press do not focus on Galtung and Ruge's news values although, in general, headlines possess one or more of above factors. However, two factors (F10 and F5) show that Iranian press follow traditional process in news selection.

Keywords: Communication, News, News values, Communication models.

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Introduction

Every event, which is reported in the news, goes through some kind of "gatekeeping" process. How does a journalist or an editor decide what is newsworthy and what is not?

According to some media researchers, they refer to a set of so-called "News Values", which enable them to determine whether a "News Story" has followed up in the first place and whether it makes it into the news, competing all other possible items.

News values are those professional codes used in the selection, construction and presentation of news stories in corporately produced mainstream press and broadcasting.

News values are a result of the productive needs of industrialized news corporations. It is clear that people who work for such corporations will display mixed ambitions, allegiances, politics and abilities as individuals. Within the corporation, they are subjected to an extensive division of labor. Beyond the corporation, there are its competitors, and the occupational ideology of the journalist and the broadcasting profession.

Within these contexts, news values operate to produce a standard product out of the contributions of all such people, practices and beliefs.

Language, as the main material of news, is the main subject of linguistics so it is obvious that linguists are eager to work on the process of broadcasting. Recently many well-known

linguists such as Noam Chomsky (1988), Roger Fowler (1991), Van Dijke (1998), Allan, Bell (1991), Norman Fairclough (1992, 1995, 2003), Guy Cook (1992), Michael Hoey (2001), Paul Chilton (2004) and Marina Sbisa (2005) ... have been working on the so-called subject of "language of the News" and the term "News Values" is of great importance.

Edward S.Herman and Noam Chomsky (1988) in their pioneer book of "Manufacturing Consent" have mentioned five news filters and they believe that these filters are now controlling all broadcasting process in the West. This research is going to introduce news values and especially twelve news factors, mentioned by Johann Galtung and Mari Ruge, which are the most famous list of news values around the world and to see if these factors are working in Iranian press.

Theoretical Discussion

There is no suggestion, of course, that journalists and editors refer to a list pinned on the wall of the office, however, they unconsciously measure a potential news item against these criteria. Numerous attempts have been made over the years to pin down news values more specifically. But it is hard to collate these into a hard and fast list of values, because different studies have approached the whole idea from different standpoints, using different assumptions and terminology. One of the best known lists of news values is supplied by Johann Galtung and Mari

Ruge. Any media analyst's discussion about news values will always refer to their list, which was initially intended to cover international events.

Johann Galtung is a Norwegian professor who is seen as the pioneer of "peace and conflict research" and founded the PRIO-International Peace Research Institute in Oslo. He is also one of the authors of the influential article entitled "the structure of foreign news" published in *Journal of Peace Research* in 1965. Roger Fowler (1991) believes that: "a widely accepted analysis of news values in the following list of criterial factors formulated by Galtung and Ruge; are worth studying in detail and in particular. It is worth reflecting on the great extent to which the factors are "cultural" rather than "natural". The values they identified are:

- (F1)¹ frequency
- (F2) threshold
- (F3) unambiguity
- (F4) meaningfulness
- (F5) consonance
- (F6) unexpectedness
- (F7) continuity
- (F8) composition
- (F9) reference to elite nations
- (F10) reference to elite people
- (F11) reference to persons
- (F12) reference to something negative

[Fowler, P:13]

Now, Let's have a more detailed look to

each of these factors:

(F1): Fowler writes: "F1 says that an event is more likely to be reported if its duration is close to the publication frequency of the news medium. Since newspapers are generally published once a day, a single event is more likely to be reported than a long process", (Ibid).

In other words, frequency is the time-span of an event and the extent to which it fits the frequency of the newspaper's or news broadcast's schedule.

(F2): Threshold means how big an event should be reported. Is an event big enough to make it into the news? That, of course, depends on news organ.

(F3): How clear is the meaning of an event? The mass media generally tend to go for closure, unlike literature, where the polysemy of events is exploited and explored. As Fowler says: "unambiguity is self-explanatory though, it must be added that mysterious events, as well as clear ones, are newsworthy if they can be related to cultural stereotypes."

(F4): By meaningfulness, we mean how meaningful the event will appear to the news receivers.

(F5): Consonance means, if the event matches the media's expectations or not. Journalists have pretty good idea of the "angle" they want to report an event from, even before they get there. It is said that if the media expect something to happen, then it will be.

1. "F" means Factor

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(F6): If an event is highly unpredictable, it is likely to make it into the news piece. The unpredictability does, however, need to be within the confines of meaningfulness and unambiguity. Journalists say that "a man bites dog is news but a dog bites man is not".

(F7): Once an event has been covered, it is convenient to cover it some more-the running story. Apart from anything else, it allows media organizations they already put in place to cover the original event. This, however depends very much on the nature of event.

(F8): Composition is a matter of the news balance. It's a matter of the editor's judgement, more than anything else. If there's a lot of foreign news around, some of them will be dropped in favour of domestic news.

(F9): Reference to elite nations relates again to a cultural factor, which is called "cultural proximity". Those nations, which are culturally closer to our own, will receive most attention and coverage. Some nations, formerly called super powers, are more important in terms of news coverage. In part, of course, this is conditioned by the fact that news organizations will have reporters already stationed in European countries and in the USA so that when a story arises, there's someone to cover it.

(F10): It is a rule that the media pay more attention to important people. Anyone the media pay attention to, must be important.

(F11): Personalization connects with

unambiguity and meaningfulness. Events are seen as the actions of individuals.

(F12): Bad news is good news. Bad news has other characteristics as well-it may be unexpected, unambiguous,

Data Analysis

In this research, four Iranian daily newspapers, Shargh, Iran, Hamshahri and Keyhan, were studied during one month (October 2006) to find out the news factors mainly seen in the process of news coverage in Iranian press.

About 303 headlines were collected from front pages of the above newspapers, in which, 426 news factors were considered (some titles contained more than one news factor). These 426 factors were sorted based on 12 news values discussed before to see which of them are more important. The following list shows news values and their portion in the process of news selection:

Table 1 Distribution and percentage of the titles

Percent age	Frequency of titles	News values factor
%29	136	F10
%25	117	F5
%11.5	54	F4
%9.5	44	F6
%7.5	35	F12
%5.5	26	F1
%4.5	21	F9
%4.2	20	F2
%3.2	15	F7
%0.2	1	F11
%0	0	F8
%	0	F3

As it is obvious, F(10) with 136 frequencies of titles is the most important news factor. It means that the media pay more attention on important people. In other words anyone the media pay attention to, must be important. According to Galtung and Ruge (1991, 15), F10 is one of culture- bound factors influencing the transition from events to news. F10 refers to elite persons, encode a superpowers ideology. The media infatuation with the elite persons illustrates perfectly this preoccupation with notable paradigms. Chilton (2004, 111-128) points out that the encoding elite persons is a type of constructing an authority figure. In other words, it's a kind of self- legitimization and related to values and group identity.

F(5) is in the second place. According to this research we may conclude that:

In Iranian press, reference to elite people (F10) and consonance (F5) play the main role. We have discussed about and touch in detail later on. But, the two subsections (predictability and demand) of F5, 'consonance' refers to categories of events which people expect to happen. As such, expectation plays a main role in producing, accepting and understanding a text (Hoey, 2001). Therefore, the readers of Iranian newspapers expect to and need to hear some particular events as news based on their socio-cultural background.

This research shows that Iranian Press do not focus on Galtung and Ruge's news values

factors although most of the headlines have one or more of these factors.

The importance of these two factors (F10 and F5) proved that Iranian press are following traditional process of news selections.

Four other factors of (F11) (F7),(F2) and (F4) altogether with about only 10% ,play a minor role in news selection process.

The most important factors i.e. (F5) and (F10) are collocated with other factors . The following tables show these collocations among total 426 news values of 303 titles .

Table 2 Collocation F10 with other factors

Rank	Frequency	Collocation
1	36	(F10)-(F5)
2	16	(F10)-(F12)
3	13	(F10)-(F4)
4	5	(F10)-(F9)
5	4	(F10)-(F6)
6	2	(F10)-(F1)

Table 3 Collocation F5 with other factors

Rank	Frequency	Collocation
1	36	(F5)-(F10)
2	14	(F5)-(F1)
3	6	(F5)-(F6)
4	5	(F5)-(F7)
5	5	(F5)-(F2)
6	5	(F5)-(F12)
7	3	(F5)-(F4)

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The ranks (1, 2) of both tables show that for Iranian Newspapers based on the Galtung and Ruge news values, the most important collocational factors are F10 and F5 or in other words; ‘reference to elite people’ and ‘consonance’ consisting of predictability and demand with other factors. The F12 (in Table 2) i.e. ‘reference to something negative and F1 (in Table 3) i.e. ‘frequency’ are placed in second important collocational rank.

Based on sociological analysis, high frequencies on the F10 indicates that the Iranian society is a kind of authoritarian. But why does the F12 or ‘reference to something negative’ is important for Iranian journalists and people? The same question is true about the F1, or ‘frequency’ or the F10 and F5.

It is true that reference to something negative and frequency do not merely devote to Iranian people and journalists, rather belong to all nations throughout the world, relatively. Fowler points out that F1 (frequency) of newspapers and television bulletins, for example, the latest news about miners’ ‘strike’ is more likely to be a report of an incident involving picketing individuals than explanation of issues and principles (Fowler, 1991: 14)

I think such news is a kind of symbol of personalization. Most commentators on the media regard personalization as dangerous. The obsession with persons and using them by

media as symbols, avoids serious discussion and explanation underlying social, political and economic factors. Therefore, for example, the brick-throwing rioters have been imaged over and over again, but unemployment and poor social services are rarely documented-and then only appeared low-circulation newspapers like the ‘Guardian’. It is clear that personalization is an aspect of ideology, and a very creative one, too. (ibid).

Galtung and Ruge also stressed that the final ones of the four factors (F9-F12) are culture-bound and ‘negativity’. (F12), is a value rather than anything more natural; there is no natural reason why disasters should be more newsworthy than triumphs.

What is not so clear, on the surface, is that most of the first eight factors (F1-F8) above (Tables 2 and 3) are cultural, too. For example, we discuss here on ‘F4’ in raw three of Table 2. The ‘F4’, according to Galtung and Ruge refers to “meaningfulness”, which, with its subsections of ‘cultural proximity’ and ‘relevance’, is founded on the principle of ethnocentrism, namely, a preoccupation with countries, societies and individuals perceived to be like oneself; with boundaries; with defining ‘groups’ felt to be unlike oneself, alien, threatening. Presupposed is what several media specialists have identified as a consensual model of society. This is the theory that a society shares all its interests in common,

without division or variation. Consensus is the affirmation and the plea of all political parties, expressed in appeals for ‘one nation’, for people to ‘pull together’, and so on. According to the frequencies of data on F1-8 in Tables 2 and 3, this kind of discussion and judgement is true to Iranian press.

In the Iranian press, the ideology is the source of consensual ‘we’ ‘pronounce, which is used often in editorials claiming to speak for ‘the people’. How ‘we’ are supposed to behave is exemplified by the regular news reports of stories, which illustrate such qualities as fortitude, patriotism, religion, sentiment and industry. Although consensus sounds like a liberal, humane and generous theory of social action and attitudes, in practice, it breeds divisive and alienating attitudes, a dichotomous vision of ‘us’ and ‘them’. Allan Bell and Peter Garrett (1998, 33) cited from Van Dijke has pointed out such dischotomous vision in newspapers as a strategy of polarization-positive in group description, and negative out group description.

Conclusion

In this research, 303 headlines were collected from the front pages of the four Iranian daily newspapers: Hamshahri, Keyhan, Shargh and Iran. Out of those headlines, 426 news distinguished, considered and analysed. This linguistic research about news values in Iranian

press has shown that:

(1) F(10) with 136 titles is the most important news factor.

(2) F(5) is in the second place. According to this research we may coclude that:

(3) In Iranian press, reference to elite people (F10) and consonance (F5) play the main role.

(4) This research shows that Iranian press do not focus on Galtung and Ruge’s news values factors although headlines have one or more of these factors.

(5) The two factors, (F10 and F5) prove that Iranian press are traditionally in process of news selection and the Iranian society is a kind of authoritarian based on sociological classification.

(6) Four factors of (F11) (F7),(F2) and (F4) altogether with about only 10% ,play a minor role in news selection process.

The reason of the different factors distribution in Iranian newspapers is based on ideology or the specific group attitude, social identity and the interests of social group, religious belief, patriotism and sentiment.

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تحلیل زبان شناختی ارزشهای خبری در مطبوعات

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تاریخ دریافت: ۱۳۸۵/۱۱/۱۴

تاریخ پذیرش: ۱۳۸۶/۴/۲۶

مقاله حاضر به بررسی زبان‌شناسانه عوامل گزینش و نگارش اخبار در مطبوعات ایران بر مبنای شاخص های دوازده گانه گالتانگ و روژ می پردازد. تحقیق با طرح این پرسش که عوامل اصلی گزینش علمی خبر کدامند و مطبوعات ایران در اخبار و اطلاع رسانی به مردم تا چه حد از این عوامل استاندارد تبعیت می نمایند در صدد بوده که با جمع آوری پیکره زبانی در غالب سیصد و سه عنوان (تیترا) اصلی از چهار روزنامه کثیر الانتشار کشور به تحلیل زبان شناختی آنها بپردازد. نتایج حاکی از آن است که اولاً در بسیاری از موارد مطبوعات ایران در فرایند گزینش و نگارش خبر از اصول گالتانگ و روژ تبعیت نمی کنند و بیشتر متأثر از شیوه های سنتی هستند ثانیاً مطبوعات ایران از میان شاخص های دوازده گانه به دو شاخص "ارجاع به شخصیت های برجسته" و "همخوانی" بیشترین وابستگی را دارد و این از نگاه تحلیل گفتمان انتقادی نیز نشانگر نقش تعیین کننده عامل "دسترس" در رابطه با زبان و قدرت است.

واژگان کلیدی: ارزشهای خبری، گزینش خبر، تحلیل زبان شناختی، گالتانگ و روژ

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