

*We do it our way;
the Algarve expatriate community in the local press*

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The aim of my paper is to examine a piece of news that was published in January 1997 in two different newspapers in Portugal, in *The Algarve Resident* and in *Visão* and to compare how the reader's position is designed in these two articles.

The news genre belongs to the specific group of our daily texts of which a high degree of factuality is expected, and thus objective language use. Media's task is to explain the surrounding world to the reader. This explaining involves two specific steps:

- i) the selection of the news, i.e. what is worth to pay attention to; and, by implication 'don't bother yourself with the rest', as Gunther Kress (1994:24) puts it;
- ii) the mediation of news, i.e. 'that's what this event is like, and that's how it is best understood'. An ideal piece of news is supposed to describe an event impartially without the interference of a journalist's personal opinions. But like all language users, so also reporters have to adopt a particular perspective. The task of critical analysis of media language is to show how these underlying ideological positions of values and beliefs are inculcated in these two moments of selection.

In media research it is common to refer to news as stories. Analysing news as narratives gets support at least from two instances: from text linguistics and literary theory. In both fields of study the analysis of narrative structures has been of central interest, even to the extent that narrative has become the primary text genre; text analysis has become in the first place the analysis of narratives¹.

¹ Brian Mechale observes the way a strong activity of narratology is taking place outside its original home discipline of literary studies: "... So story, in one form or another, whether as object of theory or as alternative to theory, seems to be everywhere. Historiography (...), psychology (...), philosophy (...), sociology (...), economics (...), and many other fields and disciplines of the human sciences - all have recently been affected by what Christopher Norris has called the narrative turn. A number of theorists (or what we would once have called theorists) have been influential in getting us to think in terms of "telling stories" rather than "doing theory", among them Richard Rorty, Fredric Jameson and François Lyotard." Mechale 1992:4

The theoretical frameworks offered by linguistics (Hasan 1989, Hodge 1990, Toolan 1988) and narratology (Bal 1985) have often been adapted to the analysis of news and media discourse (van Dijk 1988, Fowler 1991, Fairclough 1995).²

I will start by analysing the article that appeared in *The Algarve Resident* in January 24th 1997. But before that I'd like to say a few words about the journal in case you are not familiar with it. It is basically a local newspaper, as the name shows, aimed at the foreign community residing in the Algarve. Approximately 30% of the paper consists of advertisements, which indicates that also Portuguese Algarve residents consume this paper. As I have written in a previous communication³, this newspaper legitimates itself as Algarve's only English weekly news journal and is structured upon an opposition between the activities (=the news) of the Algarve resident and the difference expressed through the news on the Algarve and Portugal in general. In other words, a collective identity of the Algarve expatriates is based upon *the notion of otherness* in terms of the Algarvean Portuguese natural and socio-cultural geography.

The piece of news I am looking at in this paper, however, falls primarily into the first category, it is about defining the internal bounds of the community of *the Algarve Resident* readers and not directly about the residents relating to their Portuguese context. Or: the selection of an event dealing with the Finnish contemporary society, and more specifically, with the fact that a group of women became HIV-positive after having had sex with Steven Thomas, is revealing about the 'tabloid' quality of *The Algarve Resident*. Finland has not been a news item at least for the past ten months. The reason for this is that among the foreign Algarve residents Finns constitute a tiny minority. The British are the main readers and writers, and consequently represent the socio-cultural hegemony of the present journal.

Rapper Sets Off Wave of Panic in Finland

AN UNPRECEDENTED wave of panic has gripped hundreds of Finnish women, mostly residents of Helsinki after police authorities took the unusual step of announcing the identity of an HIV-positive man, an African American pop artist and an *habitué* of the Helsinki nightclubs and discos.

² Based upon this research tradition or even on mere daily experience, treating news as narratives may seem almost common-sensical obvious. Nevertheless, classifying news as narratives is not entirely unproblematic to some analysts. According to van Dijk (1988), the structure of a contemporary news article does not necessarily fit into the traditional category of narrative. Instead, van Dijk (1988:49-59) offers a specific news schemata and frames the functional part of the modern news within two obligatory elements; headline and lead completed by the main events in their context. Optional elements of his schemata include background categories, verbal reactions and a comment. However, my working definition of the traditional category of narrative is different from the one criticised by van Dijk. I see a narrative as a realization of two distinct levels of linguistic construction, that of the story (= the logically connected sequence of the events) and of the text (=the way the events are organized, i.e. who is doing what to whom).

³ See my unpublished paper *The Algarve Resident reader: expatriates, post-tourists? A systemic-functional approach*, presented in an international seminar "Linguística e Ensino de Línguas", July 15-16, 1996 at Universidade do Algarve, Escola Superior de Gestão, Hotelaria e Turismo.

The above text forms the *headline* and the *lead* of the news (van Dijk 1988:49-59). The classic definition of a successful headline is when the reader has no need to read the rest of the story: the main idea becomes clear even to the one who does not read anything else but the headline. The above title provides us with the minimum elements of the story level, of the perceived sequence of non-randomly connected events (Toolan 1988:7): as far as the Aristotelian concepts of *plot* and *character* are concerned, we have in the headline the character *rapper*, thematized and in the agent-position, initiating the following identity chain⁴ on the story level:

rapper - HIV-positive man - African American pop artist - *habitué* of the Helsinki night clubs and discos - the 35-year old man - Steven Thomas - Steven Thomas - the type of HIV virus in this man - Steven Thomas - the rapper.

The lexical choice of describing the protagonist through his professional epithet *rapper* (needless to mention that rap is a black music genre originating from the New York streets, a form of political speech accompanied by rhythmical movements), and repeatedly reinforcing this option by revealing such aspects as his state of health, gender, race, age, and name seems a straightforwardly racist discourse strategy (and thus a naive example of poor journalism).

On the level of textual realizations, on the sphere of who is doing what and to whom⁵, the headline appears to continue the line of discursive representation seen above: the title *Rapper sets off a wave of panic in Finland* contains the process *set off*, which is an actional verb (Kress, G. Hodge, R. 1979: *passim*) that may be used either transitively (he set off a bomb) or non-transitively (she set off for work). In this title it is transactive, the rapper being the agent who causes the action. Curiously enough, the second, affected entity related by the process *set off* is expressed through a metaphor of natural phenomenon or catastrophe (a wave of...). Then what does this metaphor stand for? In order to find this out, I need to examine the other participants in the text. The second identity chain of the narrative is formed by the Finnish women. Let us see what kind of participant roles the items of this identity chain present:

Rapper sets off a wave of panic (Ellipsis: *among women*, or a synecdoche) in Finland (circumstantial) - An unprecedented wave of panic has gripped *hundreds of women* (affected) - S.T. (...) is presumed to be (...) responsible for the spread of the Aids virus among *local women* (circumstantial) -

⁴ In an identity chain every item of the chain refers to the same thing (i.e. co-referential relation realized through reference and lexical cohesion), see Halliday & Hasan 1985.

⁵ In the systemic-functional transitivity analysis the semantic categories of process, participants and circumstances translate the ways the phenomena of the 'reality' are expressed as linguistic structures: to answer the question "who or what is doing what and to whom (or in relation to what)" could be taken as a foundation to a Hallidayan ideational functional study. The entire task of identifying types of process and participants aims at constructing a "reality" or as Halliday puts it, "the goings-on" which constitute "our most powerful conception of reality." (Halliday 1985:101)

Hundreds of women were checking in at nearby hospitals to test themselves (agent-affected) - The first tests conducted on women have revealed (circumstantial) - the police have instituted a special line of advice to would-be victims (beneficiary)

It is clear that women are not the protagonists or active agents in this narrative. They are always in the object roles and presented as a faceless collective. In the second clause above, the agent is the metaphor *a wave of panic* and establishes a cohesive lexical tie through repetition with the headline's lexis. Cataphorically then, reader will fill in the missing implicit *among women*. When looking at the first participant's roles in the text, unexpectedly Steven Thomas proves to be agent only in the title:

Rapper sets off a wave of panic (Ellipsis: among women) in Finland (agent) - Police announced: i) *the identity of an HIV-positive man*; ii) *an African American*; iii) *habitué of the night clubs* (verbiage) - i) *The 35-year old man*; ii) *Steven Thomas* is presumed to be single-handedly responsible for the spread of... (carrier) - ...the announcement was made identifying *Thomas* as a carrier... (affected) - *S.T.* was diagnosed HIV-positive... (affected) - Doctors have said the type of HIV virus in *this man* is... (verbiage; reported) - *S.T.* has been placed (affected) - *the rapper* may be charged (affected)

It is to be quite expected that women would be the victims, the affected ones of the narrative, but also Steven, the would-be responsible man, is revealed to be as victimized as the women! As I have shown before, women are being observed from the outside, not as individuals but as an unhuman collective mass that is comparable to an unavoidable natural phenomenon, such as the negative connotation implicit in the expression *a wave of (panicking women)* or *a wave of panic has gripped hundreds of Finnish women*, here in a self-reflexive way. The concept of Finnish women, aged between 16 and the mid-fifties, is loose enough to include Finnish women in general, but so vague that this in reality does not point out anyone specific. And not only: not even the presumed actor is represented as an agent on the text level. Reader's attention is drawn to the object; to the affected, beneficiary or the result of the action and she cannot make up her mind about the causal relations between these two participant roles. When reader becomes distant from the rapper, then his presupposed role as agent also becomes irrelevant. Consequently, he is not the responsible one for spreading the virus.

Then *who* is the agent in this text? The real acting agents are the representatives of the Finnish public institutions, such as:

...whose identity and photograph were made public at the insistence of *the Finnish police* (=the police insists through a passive construction) - the tests have revealed (=doctors in the labs do tests) - *doctors* have said - the number of Aids tests conducted (Ellipsis: by medical staff) - the number of calls for psychological counselling (=social workers) is so great... - that the police have instituted special lines (=the police) - *S.T.* has been placed in preventive custody (=the police) - *police* compile a file for the Finnish

prosecutor (=the police) - the rapper may be charged... (=the court) - could be sentenced (=the court) to 21 years...

However, the above constant nominalizations and passive constructions work as distancing elements from a clear agentive responsibility. Furthermore, signs of modality, such as *is presumed*, *the rapper may be charged and could be sentenced* also reinforce the writer's point of view about the propositional content in relation to the truth value about Steven's actual responsibility in the events. In other words, in spite of being the most agentive participants in the narrative, the institutional authorities are in the presence of a dilemma: *who did what to whom?* The situation is not 100% sure and the hypothetical character is 'doubled' by constructions such as *he is presumed to be responsible or the would-be victims*, for instance.

My conclusion is simple: this *Algarve Resident* article is coherent in its attempt to achieve the reading community's validation through the above artefacts in the constructing of the **suspension of disbelief**⁶. The news journal *Algarve Resident* is constituted by a conservative, elderly, leisurely and financially solid readership that expects and prefers the least interference of the institutional and state authorities. Implicitly, Finnish women are condemned as promiscuous and immoral: they are getting what they deserve. Steven Thomas is a poor victim of the lack of the prevailing sexual morals in Finland. In terms of stereotypes, to be a Finnish woman is worse than to be black. The message is this: poor guys, don't go to Finland. Where did Steven get the Aids in the first place? Probably from a female Finn.

I have intentionally avoided the most obvious considerations on the level of the choice of vocabulary, such as rapper (=easily confused with the word rapist), *unprecedented*, *single-handedly*, or the rhetoric of numbers. In all media discourse, quantification is a common strategy in order to create and reinforce the illusion of factuality. Twenty cases of contamination is far from hundreds, the number repeated several times in the first place. These choices in this text are not the most important strategy, since they function basically on the level of the whole exaggerated and sensationalist tone of the writing and emphasize the tabloid quality of the paper.

Visão, on the other hand, is directed to a quite different reading community. It is a factual, informative weekly magazine we can find in public or university libraries. Thus the discursive strategies used in *Visão* are more carefully chosen: it is essential to represent reality in terms of the illusion of democratic equality and all the rest of the values that go along with the political correctness of the present.

The same piece of news appeared in January in *Visão*, entitled as *Rap mortífero*. It is not necessary to discuss the selection criteria for news in a magazine like *Visão*. Maybe the purpose of this news is to show the lighter side of

⁶ Validation and suspension of disbelief are Rughayya Hasan's (1996) terms; I shall discuss them later in my paper.

this serious magazine. -The mediation of the article is apparently more 'neutral' than in *Algarve Resident*, that is, women are presented as goals, affected or beneficiaries of the actor agent Steven Thomas.

There are just two aspects I would like to call your attention to: why *rap mortifero* and not *rap mortal*? Both words *mortifero* and *mortal* mean *que produz a morte*, but *mortal* means also *sujeito à morte*. Secondly: although apparently less asymmetrical in the textual choices (Steven's ethnic origin is not lexicalized, for instance), the *collocation of the picture of the rapper next to the text changes everything*. Pictures, unlike narratives cannot be in the past tense, they are always in the present tense. Pleasure, entertainment and immediacy of apprehension determine how 'reading' is constructed here (...): implicitly this is a statement (...) that the world is a simple, straightforward place, as Gunther Kress writes (1996:30). In the *Visão* version of the event, Steven is undoubtedly the responsible one for spreading Aids in Finland.

For Michael Halliday, the system of language is a *meaning potential*: language is not simply a matter of summing up the sphere of expression plus the sphere of content, as an external reality. A clear rejection of lexicogrammatical categories as some kind of vessels into which meanings may be poured is, in my view, the definition of systemic-functional linguistics in a nutshell. Each linguistic choice is linked to the speaker's or writer's perspective, behind which resides a complex whole constituted by beliefs and values, an *ideology*. I gather that this is precisely what Rukaiya Hasan is talking about when describing language as *instrumental in sustaining the suspension of disbelief with regard to the artefact of constructed reality* (1996:20).

Language use, therefore, is not only about transmitting referential meaning, that is, information, but each expression reveals also something about the speaker's or writer's beliefs and values, feelings and attitudes in relation to what's being talked about or in relation to the other people. Beliefs, on the other hand, are not personal in origin; they must be socially legitimated. The underlying condition for this social legitimation is the concept of *validation*, a notion discussed by Hasan as essential to the success of language in operating as an instrument for the suspension of disbelief:

Shaped reality is validated reality; it is that which gets comprehended by the listeners and by doing so, achieves validation. Whatever the nature of my experience - and it is bound to be in some respects unique to me - only that part of it is validated which is expressible and is, thus, seen as expressed.

Hasan 1996:22

Following the Whorfian hypothesis⁷ (often called linguistic relativity: the designation refers roughly to the idea that the way people view the world is

⁷ Whorf emphasized the tie between the cultural organization and the reflection of this in the structure of language. He considered language the embodiment of a conceptual system and for this reason stressed the importance of language in ordering society: "... no individual is free to describe nature with absolute impartiality but is constrained to certain modes of interpretation even while he

determined by the structure of their native language), Hasan explains the intimate link between language, thought and society. Language use is the practical everyday awareness of the social reality, the partial and unmediated consciousness of the surrounding world and which Hasan points out as the sphere of the shaped reality, constructed and sustained by the suspension of disbelief⁸.

The purpose of my paper has been to analyse a piece of news that was published in two different newspapers in Portugal and to show how the reader's position, this suspension of disbelief, is designed in these two articles. My framework of analysis has taken a multifunctional view of texts, drawn from the systemic-functional theory of language. M.A.K. Halliday argues that what he calls the ideational, interpersonal and textual functions of language are always simultaneously at work in any text (or even in any particular sentence or clause). In other words, representations, relations and identities are always simultaneously at issue in any text: the ideational function of language is its function in generating representations of the world; the interpersonal function includes the functioning of language in the constituting of relations and of identities. - The value of such a view of texts is that it makes it easier to connect the analysis of language with fundamental concerns of social analysis: questions of knowledge, belief and ideology (i.e. representations of the suspension of disbelief, the ideational function) and questions of social relationships (i.e. relations and identities, matters of validation, the interpersonal function).

It is my thesis that the polyphonic nature of modern discursive strategies is a sign of the increasing complexity of societies and of the growing non-transparency of the power asymmetries, and not so much of a societal democracy. To offer the illusion of equality is becoming more and more difficult because to make power and dominance explicit is the ultimate tabu in modern society. And to draw serious conclusions about the underlying *suspension of disbelief aiming at validation* in the *Visão* version of the event, I will leave for my next paper.

thinks himself most free. (...) We are thus introduced to a new principle of relativity, which holds that all observers are not led by the same physical evidence to the same picture of the universe, unless their linguistic backgrounds are similar, or can in some way be calibrated." Whorf 1956:214

⁸ Kress and Hodge (1979) call this the sphere of ideology and propose to study the material practices of common language use and the processes by which individuals become constructed in the systems of representation which shape (=manipulate and distort) the hearer's mental view of lived experience.

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