

Connection between News Narrative Discourse and Ideology--Based on Narrative Perspective Analysis of “News Probe”

Fangzhou Cheng¹

¹ School of Journalism, Jinan University, Guangzhou, China

Correspondence: Fangzhou Cheng, School of Journalism, Jinan University, Guangzhou 510632, China. E-mail: 619993017@qq.com

Received: June 27, 2012 Accepted: July 10, 2012 Online Published: September 20, 2012

doi:10.5539/ass.v8n12p75

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/ass.v8n12p75>

Abstract

There are various methods to interpret the TV text and narrative analysis is a deconstruction method that studies the internal form of a narrative text. Narrative discourse analysis regards the construction role of text as the focus and it has a close connection with ideology, especially in news report. That is, ideology controls news narrative discourse, whereas news narrative discourse helps to construct the existing ideology. This paper is going to take as an example the CCTV “News Probe”, the representative of news investigation programs in China, deconstructs the text from the perspective of narrative perspective and further makes clear the connection between news narrative discourse and ideology.

Keywords: narrative discourse, narrative perspective, ideology, news probe

1. Introduction

This paper is going to discuss the relationship between news narrative discourse and ideology. Narrative analysis, discourse analysis and ideology can all be regarded as the path of text analysis while a relationship of overlapping and interaction exists between the three. As an overlapping part of narrative analysis and discourse analysis, narrative discourse has a dual identity and more specific connotation. In order to make the discussion process clearer and more specific, this paper is going to classify narrative discourse into narrative analysis.

Firstly I will explain several concepts about narrative and ideology and their connections to introduce my research background and approach, then discuss cases in “News Probe”, the representative of news investigation programs in China from the narrative perspective, with the expectation to display the interactive relationship between news narrative discourse and ideology. That is, ideology controls news narrative discourse, while news narrative discourse helps to construct the existing ideology. Actually the connection between discourse and ideology was noticed as early as in 1979 when Fuller et al put forward “critical discourse analysis” in “Language and Control”, the framework “discourse, right and ideology” (Hu Chunyang, 2007, 173-177) is constructed on the basis of interaction between ideology and discourse practice.

2. Gate towards the TV World: Narrative Discourse and Ideology of TV Text

2.1 Narrative Analysis

TV narrative is a text type which plays a leading role in TV, which is defined as “telling a story that has happened recently or is happening with modern electronic technique being the dissemination means and with multi-element image and voice being the dissemination symbol.” (Shi Changshun, 2006) In short, narrative is to tell a story.

Narrative analysis is one kind of text interpretation method and it lays special emphasis on structure of text or positioning of readers (Shi Changshun, 2008). Although narrative per se is not necessarily complex, it is of great complexity to make clear how narrative proceeds and how people come to comprehend narrative. (Arthur Asa Berger, 2000)

The classification of narrative in this paper is mainly based on the TV narrative theory of Sarah Ruth Kozloff, which asserts that each narrative in TV can be classified into three levels. The first level is story, namely, who encounters what; the second level is discourse, namely, how this story is told; the third level is time arrangement, namely, in the discourse of a large scope of time arrangement in a television station, what kind of influences the

position of text has upon its discourse and story. (Sarah Ruth Kozloff, 2008)

2.2 Narrative Discourse

Narrative discourse is an important component of narrative analysis and refers to the expression of story content, which is “how the story is told” in statement by Sarah Ruth Kozloff, namely, a variety of means and skills that constitute narrative discourse (Shi Changshun, 2006).

The narrative discourse of TV text is just like a gate and even non-narrative TV programs have to run through it, which is because “the world we watch in the TV is one that is constituted by this rule of narrative discourse” (Robert C Allen, 2000, 47). Meanwhile, as the use of language is becoming more important as a tool of production and social control (Louise Philips & Marianne Jorgensen, 2002) which is often concealed in the construction of communication logic; it is noteworthy that discourse analysis should go deeper into the meaning of the discourse to observe the functions of language with attention to social cultural context and cognition.

Some past narrative discourse studies of “News Probe” have summarized its same characteristics based on different aspects of narrative analysis. For instance, one main characteristic of the narrator identity analyzed by perspective of narrative discourse in this paper are classified into the story of narrative in another study (Xing Pengju, 2008). While in other studies, mostly, story, discourse and time arrangement are all used to display its narrative features (Note 1), or behavior and strategy of narratology is re-defined (Note 2).

Nevertheless, this paper is going to lay particular emphasis to analyze the perspective of narrative discourse of “News Probe”, as it is aimed to analyze the expression mode of narrative content in order to probe how authority class and ideology are embodied behind news investigation programs with “News Probe” being the representative. Thus, special emphasis is laid to analyze the formation pattern of the story, namely, narrative discourse, and further summarize characteristics of the programs with narrative perspective as the entry point.

2.3 Ideology

The concept of ideology was, for the first time, put forward by Althusser. This concept of ideology is defined according to basic cognitions and beliefs which are the foundation of common social representation among all members in a social public. For instance, people’s ideological race and gender beliefs (eg. about inequality) are the foundation of the common racial and gender bias among the public and further determine their discourse and other social practices (Li Xiaojin, 2008).

Therefore, ideology plays a leading role in the production of discourse and ideology pervades in language. As we know, usage of language is the most common behavior, while this behavior belongs to basic “common sense”, namely, ideology. Thus it should be noted that, under no circumstance, is discourse neutral, especially news discourse.

In turn, the discourse helps construct the ideology. Language continuously consolidates ideology in a way people are quite familiar with to legalize the existing authority and belie social contradictions (Xin Bin, 1996, 21-26).

Teun A. Van Dijk disclosed constitution of news with the method of discourse analysis in his work “News as Discourse”, “Firstly, newspaper constructs us a cognitive world. Secondly, news discourse is product of a kind of ideological discourse.” (Li Xiaojin, 2008) That proves the relationship again: ideology controls the production of news discourse; while the news discourse, in turn, helps construct our beliefs and cognitions to the world, namely, our ideology.

In reality, implementation and maintenance of authority also benefits from the function of ideology in language. In the following, I will take the news investigation program “News Probe” as an example to further discuss the relationship between news narrative discourse and ideology.

3. Overlapping Narrative Perspective and Official Ideology Penetration in “News Probe”

3.1 Overlapping Identity of Journalist’s Individualism and Non-individualism

According to the classification method of Knight, narrative perspective can be classified into non-focusing perspective (omniscient perspective), internal focusing perspective and external focusing perspective. (Note 3) Narrator of news text starts out from the original point of perspective, draw a sector of narrative and then form a circle of the narrative world around the perspective.

In news investigation programs, camera lens should belong to “limited narrator” (focusing). That is to say, an on-camera journalist presents a fact with his/her own vision and from a limited but not omniscient perspective, or rather its narrative means should have such an effect upon the audiences. (Ni Wenjian, 2005) In CCTV’s official website, this narrative strategy of “News Probe” is stated as “probe the truth by means of journalist’s

investigation”.

However, as a matter of fact, there is a natural contradiction between “News Probe” at present and its self-proclaimed narrative strategy. That is, it seems to be limited narration by an on-camera journalist, but behind this narration, the audiences may quite obviously sense a sort of omniscient voice, a self-confidence in grasping the truth and presentation of right and wrong and black and white as clear as day.

More specifically, the narrative perspective of “News Probe” is changing and versatile:

- 1) In the process of narrating the event, the investigation part in which the journalism participates as someone who is unaware of the truth presents the journalist’s individualism with a focusing perspective.
- 2) Yet, in the process of narrating the background information with pictures, the journalist jumps into the occasion again turning to an attendee and makes a synchronous narration for the part which he did not participate in at all. Here journalist’s individualism disappears with the usage of non-focusing perspective (omniscient perspective).
- 3) Whereas when the program begins or comes to an end, the host of the program stands out to comment on the event as a seeming attendee who is actually absent from the event. This method disassociates the narrator from the event to leaves more space for the narrator so as to embody higher authority. Again, the non-focusing perspective (omniscient perspective) is used.

This overlapping identity and continuously changing narrative perspective lead to an identified chaos and also cause doubt. (Note 4)

3.2 Official Ideology Penetration in Overlapping Perspective: Replacement of Folk and Official Discourse

Since the journalist plays the superiority of individualized commentary, then why does he erase the individual characteristics and, instead, use an omniscient perspective? Superficially, this is a space with compression of debate and probe, and uses an excessively explicit structure with unimpeachable justice/injustice. However, a further analysis brings us to discover that, actually, “News Probe” employs an individualized commentary means of the journalist to acquire identification of the audiences. It seems to indicate an appeal of the ordinary people, but actually it obscures the individual identity and makes a speech in an official identity.

In this process, the distinct relationship between news narrative discourse and ideology emerges: the official ideology naturally penetrates into the text, skillfully realizing interpellation to the audiences (Ling Yan, 2006, 58-59), and on other hand, attempting to create context for the narrative discourse to construct ideology in natural. To further illustrate this point, I will discuss several representative cases of “News Probe” below.

“Thorough View on Irrigation Project in Yuncheng” is a landmark program in 1998, which is called a model program by the producer director Zhang Jie (Zhang Jie, 2000). However, the impact of the official ideology is overwhelmed. Like He Yanguang, the Photography Department director of “China Youth Daily” ever said, “What Thorough View on Irrigation Project in Yuncheng’ reflects are both common and serious social problems... But whether the principals (promoted in the program) undertook the due obligations or punished has not been explained, also the final concluding remark seems to have the suspect of official speech.” (He Yanguang, 2000, 332)

“Children of the Country” has been broadcast in “News Probe” and this program traced back to the end of 1950s and the beginning of 1960s, a historical incident that more than 2000 orphans with Han nationality from Shanghai and Anhui were sent to the Inner Mongolia Grassland and were adopted by the herdsman families. The concluding remark of the host in this program went as “In the inquiry of those orphans from the southern China, it is said by people on the Grassland that there have never been orphans and have only ‘children of the country’ came from the Southern... Because they have the feeling that the emotional connection between Mongoloid and Han nationality on them has already surpassed the boundary of nationality as well as ties of blood, and all in their life has been integrated into this vast expanse of land.” This is a signifying and signified narration. Without doubt, official media’s explanation of history has close connection with the contemporary society. The opportunity of rebirth of orphans is provided by the country, meaning of mother and country coincides and the cohesive force of the country and patriotism is latent under the manifestation of ethnic solidarity. Meanwhile, “Kang Keqing proposal and Wu Lanfu arrangement” indisputably embody superiority of socialist system and complete a second legalization process of ideology.

Furthermore, on August 6, 2011, the CCTV “News Probe” presented a program “The Red Cross in question” to investigate the Incident of Guo Meimei which had created a public sensation. At the beginning of the program, three questions were proposed which were also the framework of the program. They were “Whether there is a

connection between the Red Cross and Guo Meimei?”, “Whether the symbol of Red Cross has been used to draw water to one’s own mill?” and “Why the girl who flaunted wealth has led to crisis of trust in the Red Cross?”. These three questions are quite pertinent to cover almost all our inquiries about the Incident of Guo Meimei and go forward one by one. Nevertheless, the answers to these three questions we are given are disappointing, as only the first question has an explicit answer. With the two problems we inquire being gradually probed, it seems that the journalists who speak for “the ordinary people” still investigating the focus problems, but actually their omniscient perspective has secretly replaced the official discourse with the folk discourse. Participation and reflection of the audiences under this narrative perspective is extremely compressed and they have no other choice but to be led by the nose. Behind the inquiry of “people”, they are unconsciously imbued with answers of the official discourse and several previously thought-provoking problems are hastily wound up by being simplified and substitute stealthily.

3.3 Contrast with Other Programs and Brief Summary

Compared with other programs, the non-individualism of the journalist is obviously manifested:

Consider “60 Minutes” in US CBS which is simulated by “News Probe”, there is no special host for this program and each person in this program finds a story he/she discovers and manifests his/her personal characteristics. They are both journalists and hosts in the program, namely, “journalist host” in Chinese press circle. (Tan Tian, 2007) Also, individualism of the host Dou Wentao in the “The Bang-bang Trio” of PhoenixTV (it is a news commentary program, but still comparable in terms of individualism) is also quite obvious even in the declaration that “the above content only represents my personal opinion and does not stand for the standpoint of the TV station”, which emphasizes the individual language and image of Dou Wentao.

However, a further conclusion brings us to discover that domestic TV stations are all state-run stations and they speak on behalf of the country for ever. Most of the time, it makes ideology presented in an individualized language or image, but as a matter of fact, it brings the effect of obscuring the subject of utterance. (Ling Yan, 2006, 59) In the above part of the paper, we mentioned that the replacement of folk discourse with official discourse is realized by replacement of the individualized image of journalists and their official speech which erases their individualism. In this way, the official discourse was naturally penetrated into the narrative of the text and skillfully realized interpellation and integration of the individuals; as a result, the news narrative discourse constructs the official ideology in natural.

4. Concluding Remarks

“News Probe” as discourse of supervision by public opinion is a conversion of press freedom in China’s contemporary context. We would say that it is a mechanism of check and balance to avoid the authorities to depart too far from the normal track, rather than supervision and criticism on authority institutions by non-authority institutions with an explicit theoretical implication in classical journalism. Replacement of discourse strengthens the media image that “stands on the standpoint of ordinary people”, while it weakens the authentic standpoint of “speaking for the government.” (Ling Yan, 2006, 55)

Obviously, in “News Probe”, transfer of narrative perspective is exactly to better penetrate ideology. That is, here, narrative discourse forms an ideological “text practice” (Sun Weihua, 2009). Text of “News Probe” realizes interpellation or hailing to readers by letting the audiences believe that they are the “subject” of ideology, in the way that journalists simultaneously employ an individualized means (focusing perspective) to attract the audiences and a non-focusing perspective to erase individualism and realize official discourse. Nevertheless, at the same time, in the words of Althusser, the audiences “have a mistaken positioning of themselves” (Taylor, L. & Willis, A., 2005, 30), by which official discourse successfully realizes replacement with folk discourse.

Here, discourse represents authority and corresponds to specific authority institutions. Ideology successfully holds development of discourse through conversion of perspective so as to control and influence the text.

Just as Van Dijk pointed out, medium, in the essence, was not a neutral or rational social incident coordinator that had a common sense, but was to help re-construct ideology that was formulated in anticipation. Fairclough (1992) thought that news had an ideological function since it was able to maintain and re-organize relationship of authority. The pragmatism philosopher Dewey saw news as a tool to promote social development. Its instrumentality is manifested in the fact that it is able to “control the attention of the audiences at will and whether within a single country or between different countries, comparison of authority determines who is the disseminator of news and who is the audience of news” (Xin Bin, 1996, 21-26).

To sum up, in the above analysis of “News Probe”, ideology controls news narrative discourse, whereas news narrative discourse helps to construct the existing ideology. It seems to be impartial and fair, but actually it has

expressed a variety of ideological meanings without a trace and has exerted unconsciously influences upon readers.

References

- Arthur Asa Berger. (2000, November). *Narratives in Popular Culture, Media, and Everyday Life* (1st ed.), translated by Yao, Yuan. Nanjing University Press, 2.
- He, Yanguang. (2000, January). *Show Evidence with the Camera Lens* (1st ed.). First Scene (edited by CCTV News Commentary Department). Southern Daily Publishing House.
- Hu, Chunyang. (2007, August). *Discourse Analysis: New Path for Study on Communication* (1st ed.). Shanghai People's Publishing House.
- Li, Xiaojin. (2008). News Discourse and Ideology. *Science and Technology Information*, 2.
- Ling, Yan. (2006, January). *Visibility and Invisibility: Study of Chinese TV Culture since the 1990s* (1st ed.). Communication University of China Press.
- Louise Philips, & Marianne Jorgensen. (2002). *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method*. London: Sage.
- Ni, Wenjian. (2005, October). Camera Lens of News Probe Programs Should Belong to "Limited Narrators". *Journalism Review*.
- Robert C Allen. (2000). *Channels of Discourse Reassembled*, translated by Mai, Yongxiong, et al. China Social Sciences Press.
- Sarah Ruth Kozloff. (2008, June). *Narrative Theory and TV*. Peking University Press.
- Shi, Changshun. (2006, January). *Editing and Production of TV News* (1st ed.). Central South University Press.
- Shi, Changshun. (2008, February). *Interpretation of TV Text* (1st ed.). Wuhan University Press.
- Sun, Weihua. (2009). *On the Methodology of Media Cost Structure Analysis*. Contemporary Communications.
- Tan, Tian. (2007, August). Comparison of Sino-American Investigative Reporting --- Case Study of "60 Minutes" and "News Probe". *Journal of Zhanjiang Normal College*, 28(4).
- Taylor, L., & Willis, A. (2005, April). *Media Studies: Texts, Institutions and Audiences* (1st ed.), translated by Wu, Jing & Huang, Pei. Peking University Press.
- Xin, Bin. (1996, January). *Language, Power and Ideology: Critical Linguistics*. Modern Foreign Languages.
- Xing, Pengju. (2008, November). Deviation of Narrative Perspective of News Probe Program --- Case Study of "News Probe". *Youth Journalist*.
- Zhang, Jie. (2000, January). *Quality of "News Probe"* (1st ed.). First Scene (edited by CCTV News Commentary Department). Southern Daily Publishing House.

Notes

Note 1. Xing, Pengju. (2008, November). Deviation of Narrative Perspective of News Probe Program --- Case Study of "News Probe". *Youth Journalist*. Liu, Hongyu. (2003, September). Narrative Analysis of Investigative Reporting in TV News --- Case Study of "News Probe". *TV Research*. Both of the two authors discussed from the perspective of the three subjects of story, discourse and time.

Note 2. Qi, Aijun. (2006). Thought on Theoretical Framework of News Narratology. *Modern Communication*, 4. Here, news narratology is classified into three basic theoretical aspects, namely, news text and study of discourse structure characteristics, study of news narrative behavior and study of news narrative strategy.

Note 3. Shi, Changshun. (2006, January). *Editing and Production of TV News* (1st ed.). Central South University Press, 158. The following sentence "limited narrator" is interpreted here as focusing perspective. Most cases are external focusing, but internal focusing is also not impossible. However, obviously, all-known non-focusing perspective should not be adopted.

Note 4. Ling, Yan. (2006, January). *Visibility and Invisibility: Study of Chinese TV Culture since the 1990s* (1st ed.). Communication University of China Press, p.60. The second chapter "Subversion: Approach of Construct --- Comment on Integration of Chinese TV Ideology from the Perspective of News Commentary Programs" in this book is the primary source of inspiration of the writer. And the writer also refers to the framework therein in terms of discussion.