Consent-Inducing Devices in Soft News Articles

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1. Introduction

Newspaper news articles are generally divided into hard news and soft news (Bell 1991: 14, 147). Hard news consists of spot news, e.g., stories of disasters, crimes, serious accidents, military conflicts, and political and economical news. In hard news, immediacy is a very important element. Objective facts are dominant while the individual journalist’s opinions are not explicitly expressed but only implied in very subtle ways.

Soft news, on the other hand, is “not time-bound to immediacy” (Bell 1991: 14). It analyzes and explains the context, historical background, or follow-up, along with objective facts. These analyses and explanations are specifically given from the journalist’s point of view and they often involve his/her explicit opinions (van Dijk 1988b: 124).

This characteristic of soft news leads us to the following assumption: the journalist tries to write an article so as to elicit a favorable response from the reader. To do so, the journalist employs clearly definable writing devices. In the present paper, we will call such devices “Consent-Inducing Devices” and will aim to ascertain how they are interwoven and reflected in soft news articles, with special focus on articles written in a negative tenor.

2. Typification of soft news articles

1) Positive, negative or neutral tenor

As mentioned above, since the journalist’s point of view and opinions are more explicitly projected in soft news articles, it is easy to perceive whether a positive, negative, or neutral tenor dominates the article. It is obvious that the journalist can have favorable, critical, or neutral attitudes towards the issues brought up. Whereas a positive or negative approach is relatively easy to discern, in soft news
articles with neutral tenor, the writer does raise a matter to be analyzed and explained, but does not give an in-depth analysis and explanation.

2) The emotional approach vs. the rational approach

Whether a soft news article is written in a positive or negative tenor, the journalist is certain to favor a rational or emotional approach.

When selecting a rational approach, the writer restrains from writing in a way that directly reflects his personal attitudes and opinions. A lot of space is dedicated to objective facts which endorse these attitudes. The writer furthermore quotes people who share his/her viewpoint, although some space might be given to divergent opinions in order to secure a more balanced and objective view.

When taking an emotional approach, the writer makes use of a set of devices that attempt to win over the reader by appealing to his/her emotions rather than reason. We can picture various types of approach mentioned above, as shown in Figure 1:

![Figure 1: Typification of News Articles in Newspapers](image)

3) The importance of soft news article analysis

A clear understanding of various types of soft news articles is important from the following points:

It will help the reader

(a) to grasp rapidly the drift of a specific article,
(b) to discern the character of a specific newspaper company, and
(c) to develop critical and autonomous reading powers.

Furthermore,

(d) it will allow students of English to develop rapid reading skills and more discerning vocabulary skills, and
(e) it will provide teachers with a guideline when using newspapers as teaching materials.

3. News texts as object of analysis

Three soft news articles written in a negative tenor have been selected. As we shall try to prove hereunder, these articles offer typical devices journalists employ in their attempt to persuade the
reader:

4. Analysis

4.1. Lexical choice

1) Reflection of sociopolitical ideologies.

Specific words the journalist chooses to denote characteristics of people, things, and events may signal his/her attitudes and ideologies. This becomes especially evident in situations of conflict where the journalist selects either *terrorist* or *freedom fighter* to denote a person, as van Dijk (1988a : 81) and Bell (1991 : 194) mention.

The following words and phrases expose the writer's critical attitudes which derive from his/her social and political ideologies:

(a) But Japan’s public works program is a *powerful juggernaut*, not easily stopped.
(b) Public opinion polls indicate that voters are tired of the *party’s pork barrel politics* and wary of the bill they must eventually pay.
(c) . . . where dying towns get new city halls, soaring bridges, new roads and public museums to give them a *façade of prosperity* even as their populations dwindle. (Struck 2000)
(d) However, the attempt was foiled by a huge majority of countries, suggesting that, far from paving the way for the resumption of commercial whaling, Japan’s *antics* are hardening the rest of the world against its stance. (McKie 2000)

2) Charged words and phrases

Lexical choices are also controlled by the writer's rhetorical strategy when opting for words and phrases charged with emotion, intensity, and excitement.

Nouns

(a) Yatsuka saw the reclamation project as a territorial *imperative*.
(b) The debt is causing *jitters* among experts.
(c) . . . the first major project to be halted by a growing *outrcy* . . . . (Struck 2000)
(d) The fact that Japan has decided to kill Bryde’s and sperm whales — which are . . . — has provoked *fury*.
(e) The widening *rift* with Western nations shows that . . . . (McKie 2000)

Verbs

(f) . . . to carry out a task that will *engulf* Japan in criticism . . . .
(g) . . . Japan’s small but powerful whaling lobby now *threatens* to isolate the nation. (McKie 2000)
Adjectives
(h) ... by a growing outcry over exorbitant public works projects in Japan. 
(i) Japan’s public debt has grown to a staggering $6 trillion, ....
(j) The project has drawn fat political donations from ....

Struck 2000

Adverbs
(k) But these ships were on a mission that is far from being innocent. 
(l) ... they found 233 public works projects that should be canceled — although they identified only 24.

McKie 2000

Phrasal verbs
(m) ... the first victory for those who say it’s time to give up on Japan’s decade-long attempt to spend its way out of recession ....
(n) Some 900,000 construction companies feed on those project ....
(o) It lumbered on for years.
(p) ... reported 582 cases of people who were turned down for jobs or health insurance ....

Struck 2000

Borger 2000

The so-called basic verbs in phrasal verbs originated from Germanic and belong to the oldest stratum of English, OE. They are, therefore, indigenous, simple, and generally more emotionally charged than the Latinate equivalents of phrasal verbs in which they appear (e.g. “go up” vs. “increase”, “put out” vs. “extinguish”, etc.).

We should also pay attention to the linguistic device of modifying a charged word with another for further emphasis:

Adjective + Noun
(q) ... by a growing outcry over exorbitant public works projects in Japan.
(r) But Japan’s public works program is a powerful juggernaut, ....
(s) The widening rift with Western nations shows that ....
(t) ... , the attempt was foiled by a huge majority of countries, ....
(u) ... a task that will engulf Japan in criticism and bitter disapproval....

Struck 2000

McKie 2000

Verb + Adverb or Adverb + Verb
(v) Japan’s proposal to increase the intensity of its whaling missions was opposed bitterly ....
(w) Japan even pressed the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species ....

McKie 2000

Adverb + Adjective
(x) With memories of postwar hunger still painfully sharp, ....
(y) The tradition of pork barrel spending is deeply ingrained in rural Japan, ....
(z) ... , the world condemns their deadly 'scientific' mission.

Struck 2000

McKie 2000

4.2. Labeling
Labeling is applied to both things animate and inanimate. There are two types of labeling: labels of
genuine title or qualification and pejorative labels.

1) Labels of genuine titles or qualifications

When someone gets in the news story to talk and act, they are often named and labeled with their genuine titles. Such labels are useful to enhance the news value of what they do and what they say in the article:

(a) the New Zealand prime minister, Helen Clark
Fred O'Regan, president of the international Fund for Animal Welfare (McKie 2000)
(b) The United States equal employment opportunities commissioner, Paul Miller
(c) Francis Collins, director of National Human Genome Research Institute (Borger 2000)

Labels are sometimes a qualification of a person or a thing:

(d) Nobukatsu Handa, a construction worker helping to rebuild a concrete retaining wall by the water's edge. (Struck 2000)
(e) ... and tested positive for BRAC1, a gene linked to some breast and ovarian cancers. (Borger 2000)

2) Pejorative labels

Special attention is required when the journalist uses derogatory labels, reflecting his/her negative evaluation and attitudes toward a labeled person. In the following example, the labeling is intended to draw the reader's attention to the fact that the female politician was appointed construction minister because she was an actress and a woman:

(a) Not every one has embraced the governing party's newfound prudence. Chikage Ogi, a former actress who was recently named construction minister to help change the public works department's image, equivocated when asked about waste. (Struck 2000)

4.3. Subjectivization

Subjectivization is used by the writer to express his/her highly subjective viewpoint regarding some aspect of the news event:

(a) The four ships that slipped out of the Japanese ports of Shimonoseki, Inonshina and Shiyogawa last week provoked no interest, no crowds, and no announcement of their destination. They looked for all the world like boats heading for local fishing grounds. But these ships were on a mission that is far from being innocent. (Mckie 2000)
(b) The main area, still submerged, was contoured under water — all for rice fields that were no longer needed. (Struck 2000)

4.4. Distantiation

One of the functions of direct quotation is “to distance and disown, to absolve journalist and news outlet from endorsement of what the source said” (Bell 1991: 208). The attention of the reader is frequently drawn to a distantiation by special typographic devices such as punctuation marks, Italics, bold type, etc. In the following examples, distantiation by quotation marks signals the writer’s
disapproval of the wordings:

(a) The fact that Japan has decided to kill Bryde’s and sperm whales — which are much larger than the minkes that they have already hunted “scientifically” over the past years — . . . .

(b) . . . if such Orwellian practices develop at the same pace as the race to decipher the human blueprint they could create an unemployable “genetic underclass”.

(c) . . . people who were turned down for jobs or health insurance because of “flaws” discovered in their genes.

4.5. Evocation

In order to rouse the reader’s particular emotions, the journalist intentionally inserts in the article information with pre-calculated emotional implications as follows:

(a) Sperm whales — the giant toothed whales immortalized by Herman Melville in Moby Dick — have the largest brains of any mammal, and the most valuable flesh. The Japanese eat it raw — for $30 a slice.

In the following example, the journalist intentionally describes the whale hunting in a very vivid and cruel way:

(b) Three high-powered catcher boats will form the first wave of attack against the whales. As they approach a whale, a harpoon with an explosive head will be fired at its head, shattering its cerebral cortex. The carcass will then be pulled back to the catcher ship, before being brought to the fourth boat, the factory ship. The whale will be dragged up its main ramp and butchered. By the time the fleet returns to Japan in a few weeks, all whale meat will have been boxed ready for selling.

The expression ① is effectively employed to depict the whales as if they were enemies subject to military attack. ②, ③, ④, and ⑤ evoke a very vivid and ghastly image.

4.6. Galvanization

The body of hard news is structured in inverted pyramid style: the most important information comes first, followed by gradually widening but less closely related peripheral information. Soft news, on the other hand, is written in a quite different way and its last paragraph is far from the least important, but is considered to serve a specially important purpose: galvanization. This is the conclusive attempt by the journalist to impress the reader and try to galvanize the latent and/or unfocused ideas into a clearly formulated opinion along the same lines of the journalist’s:

(a) Their fears are justified in an unregulated market, where medical data are often treated as tradable commodity, bought and sold by medical centres and insurance companies. In the words of one executive at a medical data company: "There are more controls over the disclosure of your video rentals than your medical records.”

Another example is also in a direct quotation:
(b) “I’m happy it is canceled,” said Yoshio Kado, 75, casting a fishing pole into the water to catch small needlefish that he would delicately debone and eat raw. “Look at this beautiful water. It was so ridiculous to think they should dry this up and make fields. Once you destroy nature, it will never come back.” (Struck 2000)

5. Conclusion

By analyzing soft news articles in a negative tenor, we have extracted 6 types of “Consent-Inducing Devices” (CID): writing devices resorted to by the journalist to elicit a favorable response from the reader. Each of these CIDs is related to the rational or emotional approach favored by the journalist as shown in Figure 2:

1. Lexical Choice
   1) Ideology-reflected words & phrases

   2) Charged words & phrases

2. Labeling
   1) Titles or qualification

   2) Pejorative labels

3. Subjectivization

4. Distantiation

5. Evocation

6. Galvanization

Figure 2 Frequency of CIDs in Relation to the Journalist’s Approach
(Absent ⋮ Frequent ; ： Equal frequency)
REFERENCES


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