Abstract

In the UK, newspapers do more than just spread the news; they influence readers by entertaining and engaging their emotions. To do this, journalists use language that conveys emotions and creates rapport. This type of interpersonal language has been analysed in terms of evaluation, appraisals and stance (Bodnarek 2006; Hunton and Thompson 2000; Martin and White 2005). Prior research has focused on challenging assumptions of objectivity and impartiality in news reporting. However, little research has been conducted on evaluative language in institutional editorials, including those of British tabloids and broadsheets. This study, therefore, offers new insights into the nature of authoritative and non-authoritative evaluations in leading the articles in popular and quality British newspapers, the targets of these evaluations and the discourse functions they serve. The study develops a framework of evaluation that can be applied to evaluative lexical items in newspaper discourse – it builds on and modifies previous frameworks of evaluation such as appraisals theory and parameter-based approaches – and data-driven – it elicits the evaluative categories from the analysis of the corpus. 494 leading articles were taken from four broadsheets (Guardian, Times, Telegraph & Independent) & three tabloids (Mirror, Mail & Sun) covering the same 62 topics. The preliminary findings reveal that the broadsheets expressed their stance in more indirect ways, through implicature, mitigation, uncertainty, and clarity of understanding. On the other hand, broadsheets emphasized the significance of the entities and propositions they evaluate. Human behaviours, characters, values and ethics were the preferred targets for expressing stance in the tabloids, while abstract entities, states of affairs and propositions were the preferred targets for the broadsheets.

Problem Statements

• Most previous studies have focused on hard news, challenging traditional assumptions about objectivity and impartiality. Very few have analysed stance or evaluative language in newspaper editorials.
• Very few studies have been conducted to compare the nature of evaluative language in British broadsheets and tabloids.
• No prior research has provided a systematic approach to analysing the targets of evaluation (who/what is being evaluated) and the sources of evaluation (who evaluates) and their role in shaping the evaluative meaning.
• Existing frameworks of evaluation are insufficient to investigate the complex evaluative discourse in editorials.

Aims

1. In what ways do leading articles in British broadsheet and tabloid newspapers use evaluative language?
2. What explicit and implicit discourse functions do these evaluative language serve?
3. What kinds of entities or propositions are most frequently the target of the evaluation in the selected newspapers?
4. How are non-authoritative evaluative adjectives embedded? Do we get to hear or experience what the external voice said, or do we get a paraphrase, a summary or interpretation by the newspaper itself?

Research Questions

• Data Sample (pilot study): A corpus of 494 leading articles were taken from 4 broadsheets (Guardian, Times, Telegraph & Independent) & 3 tabloids (Mirror, Mail & Sun). The newspapers were chosen according to their distinctive political orientations and ranking (3 left-wing & 4 right-wing newspapers).
• Size: Broadsheets: 248 articles (154,358 words), Tabloids: 246 articles (63,806 words).
• Subject matter: The subject matter is kept constant in all seven newspapers (62 topics in total, across politics, economy, education).
• Approach: both quantitative (counting and comparing the frequency of the evaluative categories across texts) and qualitative methods (manual/content annotation).
• Analytical framework: draws on two existing evaluative frameworks (Appraisal Theory and parameter-based approach) and incorporates my own categories (in bold). Example categories include:
  1. Ease/difficulty (easy/understand, difficult/understand, e.g. difficult, easy, clear, unclear).
  2. Critical/effective assessment (quality, morality, emotional impact) (e.g. good, honest, happy, depressed).
  3. Un/expectedness (expected, unexpected) (e.g. usual, common, shocking, amazing).
  4. Un/Importance (important, unimportant) (e.g. significant, insignificant).
  5. Generousness/Fakeness (Genuine, fake) (e.g. true, false, real, unreal).
  6. Quality/Intensity (size, extent of time/place, frequency) (e.g. big, long, continued).
  7. Modality (probability, necessity, ability) (e.g. certain, necessary, able).
  8. Severity/Negativity (e.g. severe, critical, serious, grave).
• Reliability and validity of the results: coder reliability test.

Methodology

• Authorial frequency of evaluative parameters
• Non-authorial characteristic of evaluative parameters

Key Findings

Authorial frequency of evaluative parameters

• Tabloid newspapers contained more instances of the category of critical/affected assessment with 50.6% than broadsheet newspapers with 42.4%. Significant p<.001.
• Broadsheet newspapers used slightly more instances of the category of un/importance with 13.14% than tabloid newspapers with 10.5%.
• Broadsheet texts were more concerned with the use of the evaluative category of Quantification [13.7%] than tabloid texts [11.7%].
• Slightly higher frequency of the use of modality (i.e. probability, necessity, and ability) found in broadsheets [13.2%] than tabloids [10.01%].
• Instances of the evaluative category of easy/difficulty were more slightly frequent in broadsheets [8.5%] than in tabloids [6.19%].
• The use of instances of un/expectedness is slightly more frequent in tabloids (3.77%) than broadsheets (3.26%).

Non-authorial frequency of evaluative parameters

• Instances of the category of critical/affected assessment were attributed to external sources more in tabloid texts [53.2%] than in broadsheets [48.7%].
• Instances of the category of quantification were attributed to external voices more in broadsheets [13.2%] than in tabloids [8.8%]. Significant p<.001.
• Instances of un/expectedness were slightly more frequent in broadsheets [3.6%] than in tabloids [1.4%]. Significant p<.01.
• Tabloids attributed slightly more instances of generousness/fakeness [2.5%] to external voices than tabloids [1.10%] and more instances of Easy/difficulty [6.7%] than tabloids [5.9%]. Significant p<.05.

Conclusions

• The high frequency of critical and emotional attitudes in tabloids (e.g. dishonest, immoral, good, satisfactory) indicates that they are more explicit and intense in expressing their stance than broadsheets.
• The higher frequency of the parameter of ease/difficulty in broadsheets (e.g. clear, understandable) particularly the sub-category ‘easy to understand’, indicates that broadsheets are more concerned to express their stance clearly, and tabloids, and without ambiguity, than tabloids.
• Evaluations of the epistemic modal adjectives (e.g. likely, uncertain, unlikely) are more frequent in broadsheets than tabloids because broadsheets are more concerned with mitigating their assertions than tabloids.
• Tabloids contain more cases of quantity adjectives (e.g. bigger more) than tabloids, part of a strategy of implicit evaluation of social actors (e.g. the UK government).
• Tabloids contain more cases of severity/negativity (e.g. serious, grave) because they tend to be more dramatized, negative, and intense in evaluating the severity of states or affairs.
• The high frequency of the adjectives of importance in broadsheets (e.g. this development is significant) indicates their concern with what situation is more important to target aides – it elicits the evaluative category of importance it is in reference to people or nations (e.g. on file figure).
• Tabloids are more direct in evaluating people and their behavior while broadsheets prefer to evaluate abstract entities and states of affairs in a strategy of avoiding evaluating people and their actions directly.

References


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