Discourse analysis and role performance

Tom Van Hout & Eva De Smedt

Discourse analysis is a qualitative research method that examines social action through the prism of language use. Rooted in a European tradition of critical linguistics, discourse analysis provides empirical evidence about what people accomplish when they communicate. Discourse analysis bears on language use in the broadest possible sense: when researchers analyze transcripts of spoken interaction ('talk') between two speakers or more, they may do so to understand what explicit and implicit meanings are being expressed (Weizman 2008). When discourse analysts examine written language ('text'), they may do so to gauge its ideological slant (Van Dijk 1998) or to qualify the knowledge claims the text makes (Bednarek 2006). And when researchers examine two or more modes of communication ('multimodality') such as gesture and gaze, or image and language, they try to understand how these modes operate together to construct meaning (Oddo 2013). Underlying this research method is the assumption that discourse is implicated in people's actions, viewpoints, and beliefs. When journalists decide which stories to run on a news website, they do so with a particular commitment to their audience and to their craft (Cotter 2010). And when people talk about the news they consume, they not only express ideas about the world they live in, but also about the role and quality of journalism in society and how they see themselves (Peterson 2015).

Agreeing with Mellado (2015: 597) that "expanding the scope of research on professional roles by including the dimension of performance is an important contribution to the field", this chapter

argues that discourse analysis offers researchers a versatile research method for the qualitative analysis of role performance, both in its textual manifestation and as a social practice. Like content analysis, discourse analysis is a logocentric enterprise but rather than measure *what* professional roles are inscribed in news content, the version of discourse analysis outlined here asks *how* professional roles are performed in interaction between journalists and in the texts they produce. To this end, we describe four approaches to analyzing professional roles in context.

News discourse analysis

Following Blommaert (2005: 3), the term discourse "comprises all forms of meaningful semiotic human activity seen in connection with social, cultural, and historical patterns of use." One such pattern of use is journalism. Reporting the news is a communicative practice that depends on the semiotic operation of language at two distinct levels: "language is inevitably used in the actual reporting; and the reported events themselves may be basically communicative or dependent on verbal interaction. Thus news reports constitute a natural object for linguistic inquiry" (Verschueren 1985: vii). Put differently, both the reported event and the news report hinge on language use to represent social life. The instrumental relation between language use and news media has yielded productive lines of inquiry in critical discourse analysis, conversation analysis, corpus linguistics, sociolinguistics, applied linguistics and linguistic anthropology. This vast body of work (for a recent overview, see Cotter 2015) has taught us about the narrative structure, form, style, and functions of news discourse. It has also described how news discourse makes particular worldviews seem commonsense, what cultural values are encoded in the text, under what conditions these texts have been produced and consumed, and how audience concerns impact the look and feel of news discourse.

Despite considerable methodological range, news discourse analysis is firmly grounded in qualitative approaches to analyzing text. Some analyses are concerned with the small stuff of news discourse such as the interaction between journalists on the nightly news. This is known as little "d" discourse, to mean concrete instances of meaning making. This is also how we will use the term discourse here: as a mass noun referring to specific instances of language use, spoken, written, or a combination thereof. Other analyses are concerned with big "D" discourse and examine what is socially acceptable to say or think in specific social or historical contexts (Gee 2005). Discourse then becomes a count noun, as in the discourse of refugees. Regardless of the way the term is employed, a discourse analysis is interpretive and open-ended, yielding detailed empirical descriptions that lead to theoretical claims, which can then be measured quantitatively or further qualified. News discourse analysis typically arrives at such claims by working in a bottom-up fashion, characteristic of much qualitative research (e.g. Silverman 2013):

- 1. *collecting data*: recording authentic interaction in the workplace or collecting textual data such as tweets or multimodal data such as YouTube videos.
- 2. *reducing data*: transcribing selected elements of the recorded interactions or otherwise organizing a dataset into a systematically organized dataset using computer software.
- 3. *analyzing data*: this involves repeated and focused data sessions in which analysts try to understand which social actions are going on in the data.
- 4. *developing interpretive arguments*: evaluating empirical observations in light of relevant literatures.

Like content analysis, discourse analysis is concerned with the symbolic representation of social reality. However, while complementary (Galasinksi & Marley 1998), both methods differ fundamentally in how they study social reality. Content analysis derives meaning from manifest content such as textual features, which it then reduces to numbers or topics (Van Hout & Van Leuven 2016). Discourse analysis tries to understand how social reality is produced and what social actions are accomplished. To this end, news discourse analysis engages with three elements: text, context, and interaction (Van Hout & Cotter 2015: 2-3). Text is the actual news story (in print, audiovisual or digital form) and analyses at this level show which readings are allowed. Whose views are presented? What is implied or left unsaid? What sense of time is inscribed? Context refers to specific patterns of use which situate news discourse professionally, socially, historically, or politically. Analyses at the contextual level authorize claims made at the textual level and uncover constraints on participants, producers, and actions that are made relevant by the discourse. Interaction refers to the people who produce or consume news discourse and the meanings that texts come to communicate. Analyses at this level examine how texts reflect the norms of the people who produce or consume them, how meanings are debated, contested and altered, and what professional roles are enacted throughout this process. Regardless of the element that is being examined, news discourse analysis is always attentive to the socially situated nature of discursive practices (e.g. Krzyzanowski 2014).

Role performance as discursive practice

Performing a professional role implies specific communicative action that journalists recognize as exclusive to and in line with the norms and values of their community of practice. Fact-checking information online, cutting through corporate spin during a press conference,

maintaining a neutral stance during adversarial interviews (Clayman 1992), these are all observable acts of journalistic practice that are learned at some point, authorized by particular institutions, and organized around specific ways of knowing (*role concepts*). It was Charles Goodwin (1994) who coined the term *professional vision* to identify how members of a professional group make sense of phenomena within their area of expertise. Thus, reporters use professional vision to recognize a good story (Schultz 2007), data journalists rely on it to turn spreadsheets into motion graph visuals (Flew et al. 2012), and news agency editors apply it to coordinate incoming and outgoing news flows in real time (Boyer 2011). This brings us to a crucial point: in contradistinction to content analysis, which is often criticized for making claims about a journalistic process based on the analysis of journalistic texts (Reich 2006), discourse analysis studies role performance as a discursive practice. Goodwin (1994: 606) specifies:

"Discursive practices are used by members of a profession to shape events in the domains subject to their professional scrutiny. The shaping process creates the objects of knowledge that become the insignia of a profession's craft: the theories, artefacts, and bodies of expertise that distinguish it from other professions."

Discursive practices thus authorize agents as experts, allow those experts to perform socially sanctioned and recognized professional roles and, in turn, spawn "the social configurations we call professions, craft, and discipline" (Carr 2010: 18). Rather than assume role performance to be "the collective outcome of concrete newsroom decisions and the style of news reporting" (Mellado 2015: 597), news discourse analysts examine role performance as a discursive practice, that is, reflective of the professional vision of its producers.

Since journalism draws on prior discourse (sources) to produce discourse (news) about discourse (who said what to whom about what), professional vision emerges intertextually in journalism practice. Intertextuality can be defined as the conceptual links between texts, both past and present (Hodges 2015). Consider how much of journalism animates what others have said through reported speech and how this gives journalists the opportunity to evaluate and distance themselves from what is being said. In a classic study of political journalists' stance towards morally transgressive political behavior, Wortham and Locher (1999) show how news reporters exploit a linguistic construction known as embedded metapragmatics. For instance, instead of claiming that 'French President François Hollande lied', a statement which would hold the journalist responsible (and accountable) for what is being said, journalists outsource negatively charged statements to other voices: 'Nicolas Sarkozy told reporters that French President François Hollande was lying.' Metapragmatic speech is speech about speech and here we see two metapragmatic statements, namely 'French President François Hollande was lying' embedded in 'Nicolas Sarkozy told reporters that ...'. Wortham and Locher (1999: 119) explain the use of embedded pragmatics in terms of journalists' professional roles as information brokers.

"First, embedded metapragmatic constructions provide particularly rich potential for characterizing and evaluating (i.e. voicing and double voicing) the quoted speakers. Accusations about lying can be dramatic political news, and reporters draw on the most powerful devices they can in presenting this topic. Second, and perhaps more importantly, these constructions allow reporters to describe highly charged evaluations

of the second embedded speaker (...), while placing the responsibility for such evaluations on the first embedded speaker. Thus reporters appear neutral, while nonetheless reporting politicians' alleged lies."

That journalists outsource subjective claims is, of course, wholly in line with what Tuchman (1972) called the strategic ritual of objectivity. However, rather than simply reporting 'the view from nowhere', journalists make use of speech about speech to report 'the view from here' (Van Hout, Pounds, Vertommen 2012). In other words, the use of embedded metapragmatic statements authorizes an accusatory stance by reporting (rather than ignoring) alleged moral transgressions, as well as other claims that journalists cannot take responsibility for. Embedded metapragmatics statements thus allow journalists to perform two professional roles in one and the same news article: that of the objective, invisible animator of public information and that of the ventriloquist giving voice to subjective truth claims as a public service.

So far, we have argued that news discourse analysis sees role performance as authoritative social action which emerges intertextually. In what follows, we show how news discourse analysis can be used to extend the range of analyzable role performances beyond the genre of hard news. Analytically, we draw on established approaches to news discourse such as conversation analysis (Ekström 2007) and linguistic ethnography (Van Hout 2015). Thematically, we organize the chapter around four intertextual, discursive practices of role performance: socialization, authentication, institutionalization, and naturalization. We take each practice in turn, linking each one with the audience dimension of role performance (Mellado 2015).

Socialization: becoming an expert

Role performance is not a matter of simply having knowledge or being knowledgeable. Performing a professional role is also, and always, a process of doing, and thus, of becoming. It is learning when – and how – to be adversarial, servile, or inquisitive. In short, it is acquiring the (big D) Discourse of news journalism. As anyone involved in journalism education can attest, the 'journalistic gut feeling' (Schultz 2007) is acquired rather than naturally endowed. Cotter (2010: 50, emphasis original) specifies that journalists' professional socialization takes place in

"three primary realms: first, through (...) *doing* journalism (i.e., the actual acts of reporting and editing); second, (...) by *being* a reporter, by incorporating a professional stance, role, position, and worldview as one engages in news practice; and third, (...) through education and performance within and outside the newsroom."

Inevitably, becoming a journalist also involves learning how to talk like one. That means asking the 'right' questions during interviews with news sources or knowing how to pitch a story idea during story meetings. Story meetings are repetitive, observable episodes of journalistic practice 'which ritually celebrate the limited discretion involved in news selection" (Golding & Elliot [1979] 1999: 113). Story meetings thus delineate the social structures and hierarchies that organize and order journalistic agency. As such, they provide rich empirical opportunities for analyzing how journalists enact professional vision, perform roles, and debate story selection.

A logical bedfellow for analyzing the performance of professional roles is conversation analysis. Conversation analysis is the study of talk-in-interaction (Ekström, 2007). Originally developed in

sociology, conversation analysis makes theoretical claims about the organization of naturally occurring spoken interaction, based on the fine-grained, interpretive analysis of such interaction. Analyzing interaction requires transcripts. These are line-by-line representations of what and how people say things. In their study of professional socialization, Gravengaard and Rimestad (2012) use conversation analysis to study the elimination of ideas for news stories during newsroom meetings at two national newspapers in Denmark. We reproduce a data transcript from their study to illustrate how the elimination of a story idea socializes an apprentice journalist into the craft ethos (Cotter 2010) of journalism. The extract was translated from Danish into English by the authors and is loosely transcribed (capitals and punctuation are used, pauses, gestures, false starts, and hesitations have not been transcribed). We have added line numbers but have made no other changes to the transcript.

Extract 1. Can we not tell a different story?

- 1. Journalist trainee: I would like to write a story I have read in [an anonymised newspaper]
- 2. about some leading hospital nurses and hospital doctors who perform the same job, but
- 3. who are paid different wages. They even have the same job description.
- 4. Editor: Can we not tell a different news story than [the anonymised newspaper]? It is
- 5. not cool to copy a news story from other newspapers. Then we will just lag behind.
- 6. Journalists should not spend an entire working day repeating a news story. Instead you
- 7. should spend time writing your own stories and unique stories. This idea is not a news
- 8. story that kicks ass!

In lines 4 and 5, the trainee's story idea is dismissed on the grounds that 'It is not cool to copy a news story from other newspapers.' This reprimand has two effects: it reinforces existing norms of proper newswriting to the other, more experienced reporters and takes the journalist trainee to task (lines 6 and 7: 'you should spend time writing your own stories and unique stories.') for not being original. Herein lies the socializing effect. Journalists are expected to know what constitutes a good story. On this occasion, the journalist trainee's suggestion in lines 1 through 3 betrays his unfamiliarity with these unwritten rules. Conversely, the editor emerges as the expert in lines 4 through 8 not only because (s)he does know but also because the explanation ratifies the dismissal as an authoritative one, effectively closing down the dialogue. As the extract shows, knowledge of the craft of journalism is taught and "tempered by encounters with, and regards, the views of significant others in the profession; and (...) aged by encounters with, and regard for, the facts of the world. There is no text for this" (Schudson 1978: 192). If expertise is accomplished interactionally - knowing how to articulate professional vision, knowing how to frame a story pitch - then it is also open to evaluation. This brings us to the second way of analyzing role performance during the news production process.

Authentication: establishing expert knowledge

If becoming an expert involves "learning how to define and frame, as well as to interpret and engage objects in an expert way" (Carr 2010: 20), then being able to do so successfully implies the ability to evaluate, validate and authenticate objects of expertise. Work on news discourse has shown how authenticating expertise depends on the interactional management of multiple voices. To put some empirical flesh on this claim, we turn our attention to the business newsdesk of a newspaper in Belgium (Extract 2). The scene is a story meeting held at the business

newsdesk, the intricacies of which are analyzed in more detail in Van Hout and Van Praet (2011). We join the action as desk chief Michiel (a pseudonym) introduces the day's main news story: initially reported by rival business newspaper *Het Financiële Dagblad*, Dutch bank ING is looking into its 'strategic growth options', fueling market rumors about a banking merger and causing financial shares to soar. Big news, in other words. Of particular interest is how banking and insurance beat reporter Rudy (a pseudonym), frames his own knowledge of the situation as uncertain but actionable nonetheless.

Extract 2. But let's not overshoot this.

1 Rudy	But let's not overshoot this. At this moment [] is eh []
2	well, says everybody I've called so far
3	that they don't know whether something concrete is ongoing
4	now that's what they said as well when [] DEX-
5	when FORTIS [DEXIA
6 Michiel	[Yeah, that's what they always say.
7 Rudy	And if only one of them shoots his mouth off
8	then all of a sudden there is something so, but at this
9	moment I have no evidence that something really concrete is
10	going on because what, indeed a number of Belgian, not
11	only Belgian but all banks are doing at this moment is
12	monitoring closely, what are the options, eh to be able to
13	react fast if they have to eh but yes there is a growing
14	nervousness and eh it is I think it's as I say it is

By using the technical term 'overshoot' in line 1, Rudy warns his overhearing audience of peers against a common criticism leveled at business journalists: boosterism, the creation of "irrational exuberance (which) may lead to damaging 'bubbles' and painful market corrections" (Tambini, 2008: 12). Notice also how, throughout the extract, Rudy calibrates an interpretive frame that, in spite of the uncertainty of the situation, underlines the immediacy of the story. In lines 3, 9 and 15, Rudy repeats that 'nothing concrete is going on'. In doing so, Rudy casts his voice as just one of a number of possible voices. Expressions of ignorance (*I don't know*) and the use of downtoners (*only, just*) introduce other voices, only to be shot down by swirling market rumors and precedents. As such, Rudy displays not only an awareness of competing viewpoints but also manages to project an ethos of factuality and verification. Through the evocation of alternative voices, Rudy anticipates possible counterarguments, thereby authenticating his own position, and, in turn, justifying front page news coverage of the story.

Institutionalization: authorizing and contesting ways of seeing

If to speak is to perform an act of power (Thompson 1984), then defining what counts as (im)proper public speech constitutes a superlative act of power. This is a professional task that often goes unnoticed but one that cuts straight to heart of journalism: the representation of social life. For instance, research on the sociolinguistics of mediatization has explored how tweets and other bits of language get recontextualized as news. For instance, regarding how sources are quoted in the news, Squires & Iorio (2014: 334, emphasis original) write:

"As much as journalistic sourcing decisions are about *who* gets to be quoted, and what communicative practices produce legitimate quotations, those decisions must also be about how quoted sources get to *sound* - that is, which linguistic styles are permissible ways of speaking to the public."

Sound bites are a case in point. These omnipresent one-liners offer journalists the chance to reproduce newsworthy claims as well as highlight the verbal spats, bloopers and 'no-(s)he-did-not' moments of the institutional and cultural elite (Van Hout & Burger, in press). For instance, Belgian newspaper *De Standaard* runs a weekly feature that satirizes 10 interview quotes 'that should not have made the news (but which did, of course). The feature, called *Ongehoord* ('Unprecedented'), offers a tongue-in-cheek review of public figures whose comments have made local and international headlines during the past week. What makes this type of news discourse stand out from the perspective of role performance, is that it casts journalists in the role of jury members and politicians in the role of game show contestants. Here are two examples, translated from Dutch into English. We get a reproduced quotation from a news interview followed by the journalist's light-hearted metapragmatic comments.

(1) 'When journalists ask us questions, we try to answer them in the most serious manner.'

European Commissioner Karel De Gucht explains in De Ochtend why his European colleague Olli Rehn spoke too much about the banking crisis and depositors' efforts.

Journalists and the European Commissioners' seriousness are to blame.

(2) 'What I don't understand is that while your party member Wouter Beke is taking heat as 'informateur', you're in the high command bunker launching 'meat balls'.'

Sven Gatz (Open VLD) employs lovely tropes to rebuke minister-president Kris Peeters.

What we get are "calculated bundles of pungent, eye- (...) catching phrases" (Silverstein 2011: 70), no longer than a tweet, stripped of their original context and recycled as infotainment that polices politicians' verbal and moral performance. The selection criteria for inclusion are not made explicit, or are deemed self-explanatory. In any case, the audience is presumed to know the characters involved, their current status, and the rules of mediatization, i.e. who can say what (and how) to whom, and why. Note the juxtaposition between the claim expressed in the quoted source and the interpretive comment written by the journalist. This is clash of two forms of journalistic representation: the 'objective' news practice of attribution, whereby the journalist expresses a viewpoint through reported speech and the subjective, evaluative metadiscourse that signals its own ironic purpose while also providing some background information.

In the eternal tug of war between politicians and journalists, Strömback and Esser (2014: 381) see two fields, each with their own logics, or "appropriate behavior that is reasonable and consistent within the rules and norms of the respective institutional context". In example (1), the politician's attempt to encroach on the journalist's prerogative is frowned upon. The implicit message is one of boundary work: *you provide the content, we decide on the format.* In example (2), the politician's idiosyncratic use of language is deemed infelicitous. The trope does not make sense. Here we see journalists as arbiters of standard language, as protectors of the language (Cotter 2010: 187). Both examples bespeak a media logic that journalists impose on political

actors: we see journalists trying to control the moral and verbal range of politicians' public use of language; its form, not its content.

Naturalization: mastering role performance

The accomplishment of professional roles is tied to expectations of professional naturalness. To master role performance, one must master the ability to professionally stage a sense of spontaneity and easiness. Consider how journalists construct expert identities in their on-air role performances during a political television talk show. As media professionals, journalists are faced with a particular professional challenge to enact their expertise in such a way that the onair performance becomes a smooth and spontaneous event. In political television talk, journalists are put to the test to show a repertoire of expert roles that reach beyond traditional journalistic skills. Three roles can be discerned. As interactional managers, they are expected to lead the broadcast interactions in the form of ensuring a balanced turn-taking; as political journalists, they are required to act as watchdogs and public servants in their interactions with politicians; and as television producers, they need to keep audiences engaged through the creation of a fluent and attractive television show. It is an open secret that journalists routinely fall back upon extensive pre-planning and scripting to manage these professional tasks in the frontstage development of political television talk (Goffman, 1981: 198; Kroon Lundell, 2009: 286; Ytreberg, 2002: 489; Ytreberg, 2006: 423).

Journalists are faced with the performative challenge of effortlessly integrating and accomplishing the off-air game plan that underlies their professional roles as interactional manager, political journalist and television producer in their on-air effectuation of a political

television program. More particularly, it requires an ability to spontaneously effectuate interactional roles and backstage preparations, in the form of scripts and television formats, in a natural and unobtrusive manner into the development of the broadcast talk. Journalists are tasked with creating an appearance of naturalness in the front-region of political television discourse, while in fact "very little happens during the interview that is not planned and approved in advance" (Kroon Lundell, 2009: 286). The naturalization of expertise and its associated ability to be spontaneous on live television is often seen as a kind of fixed quality, a prerequisite of media professionalism (De Smedt, 2015).

Extract 3 is taken from a conversation in Belgian political talk show *Terzake*'s newsroom between the editor-in-chief and an anchor from the Belgian news program *Het Journaal*, in the presence of a *Terzake* reporter, on the occasion of the former's alleged lack of naturalness in his live two-way interview (Montgomery, 2006) from Norway on the Breivik trial in Oslo.

Extract 3. Part of your charm was missing.

1 Editor-in-chief It looked too much as the agitated television reporter and, because of this, a part of your charm was missing.

(An anchor from Het Journaal enters the Terzake newsroom and joins the conversation: the editor welcomes the anchor and contextualizes their ongoing discussion)

3 Editor-in-chief At some points he appeared too prepared or was it because of the

4 stress.

5 Anchor It is always a bit like dying when you, as a reporter, have to tell

6 your story when you are on-site.

•••

7 Editor-in-chief I think you just have to tell your story.

In this extract, the editor-in-chief and the news anchor are involved in mutual negotiations over the reporter's ability to naturalize journalistic expertise. The reporter's performance of an "agitated" (line 1) version of himself during the live interview is jointly oriented to as a breach of his professional journalistic skills. More specifically, the reporter appeared to be lacking a sense of spontaneity during his live report from Oslo, which is taken by his fellow media professionals as a problem situation that needs to be tackled and reflected on. Excessive preparation ("too prepared", line 3) and potential stress ("or was it because of the stress", lines 3-4; "it is always a bit like dying", line 5) are referred to as the main grounds for the reporter's breach of professional naturalness. Through their conversation, the editor-in-chief and the news anchor articulate the expectation of professional naturalness in the mastery of a skill to perform a spontaneous self by "just...tell[ing] your story" (line 7) and staying away from frontstage nervousness or the blind following of scripts.

The professional staging of spontaneity forms an essential part of the discursive construction of expertise, as well as of the successful delivery of an apparently effortless and flawless media product, in this case a professional instance of television talk. Political television journalists see themselves faced with a particular challenge to create a feeling of authenticity, i.e. an impression of naturalness, in the discursive accomplishment of their professional roles. Quite paradoxically, however, the flawless and on-the-spot enactment of these roles inherently involves the bringing into practice of thoroughly prearranged media formats and pre-planned scripts. Because of this

contradiction between the professional need for naturalness and spontaneity, on the one hand, and the professional need for control and preparation, on the other, it is perhaps more accurate to think of naturalization as the ability to *stage* naturalness - 'doing being natural' – rather than the ability to *be* natural in the case of political television discourse.

Concluding remarks

The discursive turn in media and journalism studies has shifted our gaze from social systems and structures to the momentary, fleeting interactional processes of news production, circulation, and appropriation. Within this body of work, journalistic role performance is seen as authoritative social action which emerges intertextually. Drawing on four intertextual practices of expertise during the news production process, this chapter has illustrated how discourse analysis can be used to explore how journalists acquire professional vision, how they validate and evaluate their ways of seeing as not only different but also better than those of lay people, how journalists self-present as institutionalized arbiters of politicians' moral as well as verbal behavior, and how political television journalists are expected to flawlessly perform the roles of interactional manager, political journalist and television producer. Such discursive processes hinge on the semiotic operations of language. The underlying premise is that producing (and consuming) news is a socially constituted activity which reflects the norms, routines, and practices of news producers. Thus, ways of doing journalism (role performance) invariably point to ways of seeing journalism (role concepts).

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