

Criminal or Naive?: News Headlines on Young Offenders in the Japanese and Thai Press

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Abstract: The discourse of mass media is considered as a site of power, a site of social struggle and a site where language is apparently transparent. Media institutions usually 'naturalize' things and disguise themselves to be as neutral as possible. They attempt to show that they reflect states of affairs disinterestedly and that they give the whole perception and arguments. In the recent studies of 'sociopolitical' discourse analysis where language, ideologies and power relations are closely examined, 'youth' has been viewed as one of the powerless and disregarded social groupings. This article takes critical approaches to discourse by extensively employing Fairclough's critical discourse analysis and van Dijk's sociocognitive approach as a theoretical framework to explore the relationships between language use, discourse practice and the sociocultural practice of news headlines on young offenders in Japanese and Thai press in order to provide an explanation of how media's headlines on young offenders are produced, how they are interpreted, and how they reflect and manipulate the attitudes toward young offenders in Japanese and Thai society as a system of social domination. It can be remarked that language use in Thai newspapers has created a considerable negative viewpoint on young offenders by having strong connection with the social contexts and have psychological influence on the people in a society consequently while Japanese newspapers tend to focus on different issues and use more neutral linguistic strategies.

Keywords: Language, Linguistics, Discourse, Media, Newspaper, Press, Power, Youth, Delinquency, Critical Discourse Analysis, CDA, Japanese, Thai

Introduction

LANGUAGE IS FAR more than just a tool of communication. Referring to the interdisciplinary theories of language-power-ideology developed by a group of notable scholars (e.g. Teun A. van Dijk, Norman Fairclough, Ruth Wodak, Roger Fowler, Gunther Kress), language is a socially and historically situated mode of action, in a dialectical relationship with other facets of a society. It is socially shaped but also socially shaping. It is constitutive both in conventional ways which help to maintain and reproduce existing system of knowledge and belief, social relationships and social identities, and in creative ways which help to transform them.

This conceptual function of language has been described as 'discourse'. 'Discourse' is a term variously defined by social theorists (e.g. Foucault 1972, Bourdieu 1977), linguists (e.g. Saussure 1959, Schiffrin 2001) and other scholars. As a point of departure, this article, however, takes 'discourse' as a form of social practice (Fairclough 2001) and as a part of a communicative event (van Dijk, 1997), which *mediate* ideologies in a variety of social institutions and exerts a large amount of influences on culture and power circulation in the society simultaneously.

From this point of view, undeniably like every other form of discourse, news reporting is mediation

and news is a socially constructive practice. An event, of whatever kind, is mediated from the viewpoint of the perceiver to someone who is assumed not to have been a direct perceiver of that event. This kind of communication sometimes results in 'misrepresentation', that is, a mismatch between reality and the view people have of this reality that functions ideologically. For example, when an event happens, the intention of the causer may be interpreted as an 'accidental bump', or a 'deliberate push'; or the event itself may be classified differently either as a nudge or as a push. Hence, it follows that the reports exist only in and through language and consequently, the perception of the listener or the reader depends entirely on language.

The discourse of mass media is, therefore, considered as a site of power, a site of social struggle and a site where language is apparently transparent. Media institutions usually *naturalize* things and disguise themselves as being as neutral as possible. They attempt to show that they reflect states of affairs disinterestedly and that they give the whole perspective and all sides of the arguments as an objective newsmaker who knows 'the facts' and has the legitimate right to tell them.

The Hidden Power Enactment

Power and dominance are usually *organized* and *institutionalized* (van Dijk 1993). It is, on the one hand,

formulated and legitimated by varied social institutions such as schools, laws, justice courts or such dominant social group members as police, doctors, teachers or politicians. On the other hand, it is sustained and reproduced by the discursive practice of media discourse which always appears as common and 'natural' as it could possibly be.

Media discourse has certain special properties that distinguish it from other forms of communicative events. First of all, it is an event of 'one-sidedness' (Fairclough 2001), where a sharp divide between producers and interpreters can be found. Besides, since it is a permanent and reproducible source of communication, it is likely to be consumed in various sorts of place and at various times while being potentially reused for a variety of purposes as a 'cultural commodity' (Fairclough 1995). This temporal and spatial setting of media properties, then, leads further to its crucial function as a medium of communication from the public domain to the private domain. For instance, it brings public domain source materials such as political or criminal events to be consumed in the home private domain through the broadcast of news on television or the reporting in newspaper.

Media discourse also points out a significant difference in terms of social interaction. For a start, it is a type of communication which essentially involves many categories of participants; for example, reporters, as mediators, audiences as receivers and most importantly, 'third parties' from various categories of public domain. Furthermore, media communicative events are, in a sense, monologues. Unlike face-to-face discourse in which particular participants exist, media discourse is based on the total lack of simultaneous feedback from co-participants. As a result, media producers have to construct their own 'ideal' audiences, and this is consequently why each of the actual audiences in media discourse is, in principle, required to negotiate their relationship with that 'ideal subject'.

Media discourse, with such particular properties discussed above, has then become a site of power struggle, where people can be manipulated by the hidden power relations without being conscious of, as in the well-known statement of Pierre Bourdieu.

... It is because subjects do not, strictly speaking, know what they are doing that what they do has more meaning than they know ...
(Bourdieu, 1977)

A crucial point for critical analysis is to *denaturalize* the hidden ideological power in media discourse by unravelling what kind of linguistic strategies are associated in conforming and reproducing ideologies, how discursive practice is constituted by sociocultural structures and how it in turn actively constitutes them. This critical analysis is ultimately geared to

raise people's critical awareness of discursive media practice and, if possible, to establish effective resistance against the power abuse and social inequality perpetuated upon them.

'Youth' in Media Discourse

Media discourse, along with the distribution of new technology, has developed certain particular features that distinguish it from other forms of communicative events. It has a major impact on the boundaries between public and private life and institutions, redrawing them in fundamental ways (Scannell 1992, Thompson 1990). In addition, unlike face-to-face discourse, communicative events in media discourse involve participants who are separated in place and time; or in other words, the time and place of production of media discourse usually differs from the time and place of consumption. Accordingly, the relations of power have often been overlooked and ignored.

In the recent studies of sociopolitical discourse analysis (van Dijk 1993) where language, ideologies and power relations are closely examined, 'youth' has been viewed as one of the powerless and disregarded social groupings, alongside women, people of colour, and gay people (Fairclough 2001). While a 'youth' as an interlocutor of conversational speech toward an 'adult' in face-to-face discourse has a limited discursive rights, for they have certain obligations and constraints on contents, relations and subjects through transient interaction of spoken language and non-verbal communication (e.g. Vadeboncoeur and Luke, 2004), 'youth' as a 'third party' one-sidedly referred to in media discourse has also struggled with similar constraints but yet totally different in their time and space parameter through various kinds of media channels where relations of power are far more implicit.

There has been considerable critical research on relations of struggle between dominating and dominated groupings focused on gender, class and race relations (e.g. Mullany 2004, Wadak 1985, Billig 2001), as well as descriptive research on youth and their media consumption (e.g. Mastronardi, 2003). Nevertheless, there has been surprisingly little work done on critical relations of power and social inequality in terms of age relations in media discourse. Furthermore, even less work has been done in a cross-cultural comparative study, especially focusing on non-European language such as Japanese and Thai.

This article takes a critical approach to discourse by extensively employing Fairclough's critical discourse analysis (henceforth CDA) and van Dijk's sociocognitive approach (henceforth SCA) as a theoretical framework to explore the relationships between language use (text), discourse practice and

sociocultural practice of news headlines on young offenders in Japanese and Thai press. More specifically, this article attempts to provide an explanation of how news headlines on young offenders are produced, how they are interpreted, and how they reflect and manipulate attitudes toward young offenders in Japanese and Thai society as a system of social domination.

However, the main focus of this article is not on the news text but rather on news headlines for it is a part of the ongoing study of media discourse on young offenders. The reason why this article limits itself to news headlines is because they are the most conspicuous part of a news report. In addition to summarizing the most important information of the report, headlines also have cognitive and ideological functions (van Dijk, 1988a, 1988b, 1991 quoted from Kuo and Nakamura, 2005). Van Dijk (1991) suggested that news headlines may bias the understanding process and influence the interpretation made by the readers, because they summarize what the journalist considers the most important aspect of a news event, and such a summary necessarily implies an opinion or a specific perspective on the event.

After describing the data and the analytical methods, some selected news headlines on young offenders in Japanese and Thai press are illustrated respectively and compared. In conclusion, the distribution in relation to each of the social impact resulting from the news reporting in the Japanese and Thai press will be discussed

Methodology

This article uses a critical approach to discourse by extensively employing Fairclough's CDA and van Dijk's SCA as a theoretical framework. This framework is different to other paradigms in discourse analysis and textual linguistics because it focuses not only on texts, spoken or written, as objects of inquiry but also requires a theorization and description of the social structures which give rise to the production of text, and of the social structures which individuals or groups as social historical subjects, create meanings in their interaction with texts.

The data sources for this article are mainly taken from *Shimbun Daijesuto*, a Japanese monthly journal consisting of news articles from 6 major daily Japanese newspapers, namely Asahi Shimbun, Yomiuri Shimbun, Mainichi Shimbun, Sankei Shimbun, Nihon Keisai Shimbun and Tokyo Shimbun; and *Matichon e-Library*, a digital news library providing news clippings from over 30 Thai newspapers includ-

ing Thairath, Matichon, Daily News, Kom Chad Luek, Khao-Sod, Siam Rath, Thai Post, etc. News headlines used as research materials were selected from the news reports on youth crime as well as juvenile court cases during 1 January 2006 to 30 June 2006.

In addition, news headlines reporting on young offenders from *Yomiuri Shimbun* and *Asahi Shimbun*, the first and the second highest circulating daily newspaper in Japan¹, dated from 1 January 2006 to 30 June 2006 are also supplied as another data sources in order to supplement the clipped articles from *Shimbun Daijesuto*, which are fewer in number compared to those from the *Matichon e-Library*.

Since the original sources of information are written in Japanese and Thai, the nearest English equivalent translations are attached to the original text wherever necessary. All of the English translation is by the author, and it should be noted that the lack of fluency in the translation is deliberate and attempts to retain the characteristic style of the headlines, e.g. the avoidance of verbs in Japanese headlines, the omission of subjects, etc.

Analysis

As well as being the world's second largest economy, Japan also boast the largest number of newspapers per 1,000 people among the major industrialized countries with 70.4 million a day, according to the 2005 issue of World Association of Newspapers (WAN). With a stable readership based on home delivery subscriptions as well as the high adult literacy rate in Japan, the statistics show that more than 80% of the Japanese read newspapers every day, and the national dailies tries their best to satisfy the readers' needs by launching the very latest news coverage in both morning and evening editions.

On the other hand, Thailand, with a population of almost 63 million, is considered the largest newspaper market in South East Asia² with an estimated circulation of at least 13 million copies daily in 2005³. Newspapers have long served the Thai people from the distribution of information developed from official announcements of the royal court⁴ in the mid 1840s to coverage of local and international issues on politics, economics, crime, social events, celebrations, people and business in modern times.

Newspapers in both Japan and Thailand are, furthermore, considered nationally to be a reliable source of information which has an immense impact on people's general attitudes and perceptions. According to the Japan-U.S. Joint Opinion Poll 2006

¹ Refer to *Japan Reference* as of 1 July 2008:

² 2005 issue of World Association of Newspapers (WAN)

³ Circulation figures are based on the newspapers' claimed average daily circulation figures.

⁴ The first Thai-language newspaper is "The Bangkok Recorder", published bi-weekly in Bangkok during 1844-1845, and 1865-1867.

conducted by Yomiuri Shimbun and Gallup, Inc, the organizations that Japanese people trust most are newspapers (67.6%), followed by courts (61.3%) and self-defense forces (59.4%). In Thailand, 41.5% of people have trust in newspapers with the first reason given that “newspapers reveal the fact to the public”⁵.

This article will examine how news headlines on young offenders in Japanese and Thai press are produced and interpreted through an analysis of the certain linguistic strategies used to construct and organize ‘the fact’ for the readers; such as themes or topics, lexical options, the use of quotations, and other aspects of linguistic features that are ideologically significant in news headlines.

Theme

Headlines are themes or topics of the news article that may or may not be summarizing the news texts. Rather than a summary, they often give an ideological implication of what the news producers or the journalists consider important, or want readers to consider important. For example,

(1) *Oosaka chisai / “ Shounen-in ga nozo-mashii ” / Neyagawa no kyoushoku-in sasshou jiken*

(Translation: Osaka District Court / “Detention center is preferable” / Case of kill and wound teaching staff at Neyagawa)
(*Asahi - Morning Edition 24/02/2006*)

(2) *Ruap3 joe / ken sop klii kadii kaa maam*
(Translation: Arrested 3 teenagers / (and) pressed (them) for inquiry to solve the foreign lady murder case)
(*Naew Na 08/01/2006*)

(1) is a Japanese news report on the court trial for a case of juvenile delinquency which happened a year earlier, whereas (2) is a report from Thai newspaper on a well-known foreigner murder case. In (1), the news producers intentionally picked up a message from one of the witnesses in court who was a professor in clinical psychology of delinquency to give a framework or a vivid hint to the readers that “In this case, detention center is more preferable (than putting them in juvenile prisons or else)”. In (2), on the other hand, the news producers topicalize the news article by stressing the ‘fact’ that “It is confirmed that one or more of these three teenagers are proved to be a murderer and we (the police) will soon be successful in forcing them to confess”.

The themes provided by the news producers are ideologically set up deliberately in order to *reconstruct* the frame for interpreting what is to follow

and to *naturalize* the ideas of what the news producers want their reader to perceive or recognize.

Lexical Options

The systematic use of words or lexical options also provides readers with cues for interpreting events. For example, in (2), the selection of the words *Ruap* (to arrest, to seize), *Joe* (slang word used to refer to teenagers delinquents), or *Ken* (to constrain, to press on) labelled the actions of the police as a ‘hero’ and the teenagers as a ‘murderer’, as if the teenagers were already proved guilty while it was evidently still in the process of inquiry. The similar strategy has been illustrated in (3) for the strong sense of word choices; *laa* (hunt), *ai huun* (a pervert), and *rum soom* (to gang-rape).

(3) *Tamruad reng laa 9 ai huun / rum soom naksuksa sao*

(Translation: Police rush on a hunt for the 9 perverts (lit: men full of disgusting sexual lust) / gang-rape a university female student)
(*Kao Sod 27/01/2006*)

The lexicon option here not only implies legitimacy of the media discourse, but also creates a ‘stereotype’ to readers and encourages them to picture nothing but the suspected young offenders as a group of violent criminal offenders.

On the contrary, Japanese newspapers tend to be more prudent on the choices of words. They remarkably avoid the use of certain groups of words that may possibly link to any damaging image of the victims or even of the suspected young offenders.

(4) *Joshi kousei ni ranbou no shounenra o taiho / Keishichou*

(Translation: Arrested boys who committed violence on highschool girl / Metropolitan Police Department)
(*Yomiuri - Evening Edition 17/01/2006*)

(5) *Satsujin yougi de 4 shounen taiho e / No-jukusha shoushi / “ Kaenbin nageta ” / Hyougo, Himeji*

(Translation: Arrested 4 boys with murder suspicion / Outside-sleeper (= a homeless person) killed in fire / “(I) threw a petrol bomb” / Hyougo, Himeji)
(*Asahi - Evening Edition 14/03/2006*)

Example (4) shows a cautious choice of word in Japanese newspapers. The word *ranbou* (violence, wildness) is an oblique word, widely known for its practical use in order to describe the specific nature

⁵ ABAC Pool 2007, conducted by ABAC Pool Research Center and Thai Journalist Association.

of the sex crime in the context of Japanese news reports, despite the fact that the word *goukan* (rape), which is considered too forthright in Japanese culture, exists. Similarly, the word *nojukusha* (lit: a person who sleeps outside) in (5) has been carefully selected to mention the homeless who was a victim of the case in Asahi. However, it can be noted here that the Yomiuri newspaper, which is known for more sensationalist stories on crime and accidents than Asahi, uses the direct word *hoomuresu* (the homeless) on the similar cases for its own report.

The Use of Quotation

The use of quotation in news headlines is another special feature of Japanese news reports in sharp contrast to the headlines in Thai newspapers. According to the analysis, the high frequency use of quotation can be remarked in Japanese news headline whereas none of these were found in those from Thai newspapers. Instead, Thai newspapers often used a group of set phrases such as “according to the relevant source” or “according to the report”, whenever there is a need to refer to the information they receive from primary sources.

The use of quotation or direct speech report from primary sources in Japanese news can be noted in a variety of patterns, e.g. from eyewitness reports, from expert knowledge such as in (1), from official accounts such as police, lawyers or judges, from the bereaved family as in (6), or from young offenders themselves as in (7).

(6) *Yamaguchi no Kousensei satsugai* / “*Ikite tsukamari, hanashite hoshikatta*” / *Ryoushin, yariba nai ikari*

Translation: Murder case of technical college student in Yamaguchi/ “*I wish he had lived and been caught. I wish he had told us (the reason why he killed our daughter)*” / (said) the parents with a suppressed fury.

(*Yomiuri – Morning Edition 08/06/2006*)

(7) “*Taihenna koto shita*” / *Riidaa kaku kou 3, yuujin ni / Himeji-nojuku seikatsusha shoushi*

Translation: “*(I) did a terrible thing*” / Leader of third-year highschool told his friend / Outside-sleeper (= the homeless person) killed in fire at Himeji.

(*Asahi – Evening Edition 15/03/2006*)

Although it is remarkable that no quotation is used in Thai news headlines; we can still find the use of quotation or direct speech report in Thai news texts, particularly when they are a statement from official sources such as royal courts, police or judges. The exclusion of quotation, or in other words the use of summary in reports of a statement from victims or

suspected young offenders, reflects an attitude that sees the opinions and statements of primary sources as being unimportant, showing also an uncaring attitude towards accuracy in summarizing, and also the lack of respect to a specific group of primary sources (youth) who are considered as powerless and therefore disregarded in the Thai social context.

Other Aspects of Linguistic Features

There is a linguistic distinction that is especially shared by Japanese and Thai press. That is, the news producers in both countries tend to place the ‘authorities’ in the subject position, though not obviously mentioned, within the sentences, e.g. in (8) and (3).

(8) (*Omission of Subject*) *Kou 1 no musuko taih o / Satsujin yougi , / kubi ni shimeta ato / Morioka-Josei itai*

(Translation: *Arrested first-year highschool son / under suspicion of murder / Signs of strangulation on neck / Morioka woman’s body*)

(*Asahi - Morning Edition 28/01/2006*)

(3) *Tamruad reng laa 9 ai huun / rum soom naksuksa sao*

(Translation: *Police rush on a hunt for the 9 pervers / gang-raping a female university student*)

(*Kao Sod 27/01/2006*)

This syntactic structure reveals the common ground of ideological assumptions in media discourse toward the ‘real world’ that ‘authorities’ are often in a position with power and always in control of efficient enforcement over all cases.

There are still other aspects of linguistic features that are ideologically significant in news headlines, for example; transitivity, the mention of certain participants, nominalization and the choices of syntactic structures found in the analysis. However, they will be further elaborated in the full paper of this article.

Concluding Remarks

According to the analysis, the linguistic strategies found in Japanese news headlines can be summarized as follows:

1. Themes are usually taken up for a young offenders’ side; that is, to raise a juvenile delinquency case as a result of the social structure for which every adult should be responsible
2. Lexical options are limited to general terms in order to avoid strong senses of harsh words to victims and suspected young offenders

3. High frequency use of quotations or direct speech reports, especially from victims and suspected young offenders

On the other hand, the linguistic strategies found in Thai news headlines can be summarized as follows:

1. Themes are usually taken up for an adults' side; that is, to blame individual young offenders for their immoral behaviors and irresponsible actions upon society
2. Lexical options are very vibrant and dramatic with high frequency use of slangs and harsh words on young offenders
3. Remarkable exclusion of quotation or direct speech reports from victims and suspected young offenders

These linguistic features significantly reflect different discursive practice of media discourse toward young offenders in the Japanese and Thai press. The analysis of news headlines in this study has revealed that the Japanese news media conceptualize young offenders as 'naive'. They are giving special care and atten-

tion to news headlines on young offenders more than any other kinds of similar social news in respect that 'youth' in Japan represents a subject which is always needed to be handled with care and empathy. Therefore, the news headlines tend to use more neutral linguistic strategies on the reports while principally placing their main focus on different issues such as parent and school education, courts judgement, social reformation and so forth.

On the contrary, it can be remarked that language use in Thai newspapers has created a considerable negative viewpoint regarding young offenders by having a strong connection with the social contexts. Thai news media producers have shown an attempt to construct stereotyped portrayals of teenagers as 'criminals' by providing a 'misrepresentation' to readers through discursive practice. They tend to behave like a superior who has a legitimate right to blame and preach to the youth for their behaviors, just like their parents and teachers. This manipulative power sustains and reproduces a specific ideological assumption toward young offenders as well as reflecting and reproducing a crucial aspect of inequality in Thai society.

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