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UNVEILING THE OTHER – THE PRAGMATICS OF INFOSUASION

Abstract

The present paper, starting from the assumption that television news is “the main source” (Robinson and Levy 1986) and a key player in the democratic process explores the media-politics interface, along with the ideological conditioning and cultural embedding of the news discourse, understood both as a process and as a product. The objective behind it is threefold. Firstly, it is to examine the media mechanisms accounting for the process of ‘infosuasion’, i.e. persuading the viewers under the guise of delivering information in the form of neutral and balanced reporting, thereby shaping their perceptions of the self and the “Other”. Secondly, it is to demonstrate the dialectics between the news media and political elites, visible in the CNN representation of Iranians and its contingency on the anti-nuclear discourse of the Bush Administration. Finally, it is to maximize the validity of an eclectic approach, combining pragmatic and semiotic perspectives, in the domain of news media discourse along with the processes within this discourse and the practices behind it.

Keywords

Discourse, implicit meaning, entailment, presupposition, implicature, infosuasion, news, representation.

1. Introduction

Positioned in the center of contemporary society, the news media, with good reason called the Fourth Estate, are deemed the most influential of all mass channels of communication (cf. Bahador 2007; Cottle 2003; Robinson 2005; Schaap 2008; Thussu 2007) and considered “a formative agent in social, cultural and political processes” (Verschueren 2001: 60). The representation of the world they offer, created through a careful combination of previous experiences with the new events and foregrounding/backgrounding selected aspects of reality, has been used by the masses and individuals as the basis for action, allowing, every now and then, for the legitimization of the power of the dominant groups and the

“manufacturing of consent” (Torfing 1999: 210, see also: Devereux 2003: 96-114; Herman and Chomsky 1988; Thompson 1990; Van Dijk 1998a). Hence, they have been regarded as the social agents responsible for creating, consolidating and preserving values, cultural myths and symbols, and thus shaping social behaviour and providing the material for constructing identities in terms of race, nationality, and religion, as well as distinctions between the West and “the Rest”.

In addition to being ideology-constitutive, the news media have been ideologically-conditioned, too. While Lewis (1991: 159) describes the act of watching television news as experiencing a complex interplay of ideologies, Bignell (2002: 128) even suggests that the impression of neutrality exuded by television news is ideologically inspired, since what is represented as factual and unbiased is, in fact, a mythic construction of what the dominant ideology constructs as an unbiased perception. What precludes objectivity here is obviously the very notion of discourse, which is never neutral, but conditioned by the social, cultural, and historical factors (cf. Blommaert 2005; Martin and Wodak 2003; Verhagen 2005; Weiss and Wodak 2007). Likewise, as pointed out by Hodges and Nilep (2007),

The process of meaning making is inherently political in that it is imbued with relations of power that come together to maneuver, contest and negotiate the meanings at stake. (Hodges and Nilep 2007: 2)

News discourse, culturally constructed and functionally defined, is thus the ‘report’, ‘representation’ or ‘recontextualisation’ of the social actors and events (cf. Caldas-Coulthard 2003; van Leeuwen 1996).

In view of all the above, the news media have often been linked to the concept of ‘mediatizing politics’, or, to use Ekström’s words (2001: 564), “mediating between the politicians and the public.” This has resulted in numerous discussions concerning the process of mediatization, from both linguistic (cf. Borchers 2005; Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1999; Fairclough 2000) and political/mass communication studies perspectives (Asp 1990; Bennet and Entman 2001; Ekström 2001; Hjarvard 2008; Lilleker 2006; Schulz 2004), as well as a whole body of research on the media-politics interface (cf. Bazzi 2009; Fetzer and Lauerbach 2007; Hodges and Nilep 2007; Okulska and Cap 2010; Triandafyllidou et al. 2009).

Thematically situated in the field of public discourse, this study is an attempt to explore the dialectics of what could be called the mediatization of politics and the politicization of the news media. Rather than reiterating the age-old complaint about media bias, and criticizing a priori their manipulative practices in the service of the elites in power (in a somewhat neo-Marxist manner), it sets out to identify and describe the pragma-semiotic mechanisms involved in conveying ideological meanings in informative (by definition, at least) texts, and account for the process

of 'infosuasion'. There are several methodological points to be made at this point, concerning both the material analyzed, data collection, and the analytical framework. Firstly, the genre of television news is understood here as encapsulating two key components: the language of the news story and the images accompanying the narrative, both of equal importance to the generation of meaning (cf. Cotter 2001; Lassen et al. 2006). Another duality to be reckoned with is the news discourse as a product and a process, the latter including the norms and routines of the community of news practitioners (cf. Cotter 2001; Jacobs 1999). Furthermore, news as a product is treated as 'televised communication', characterized by 'secondary orality' (Slembrouck 2009: 51) and 'embedded talk' (Bell 1991: 52). Hence, despite the complexity and multi-layering of addresser/broadcaster and addressee/audience roles, Jakobson's (1960) model could be applied here, much like in the context of interpersonal communication¹. The semiotic properties of television news apparently validate its conversational nature (cf. Kopytowska 2010a). Last, but not least, an important feature of the genre in question, ranking second to immediacy and picture effect as far as the effect on the audience is concerned, are its "mythic meanings of balance and objectivity" (Bignell 2002: 115-116). In the words of Tuchman (1978: 110), "news films claim to present facts, not interpretations" with a resulting semblance that neutrality is inherent in the genre (see also Allan 2010; Cotter 2010; Drew and Heritage 1992: 163; Roeh and Cohen 2006).

Such a perspective on television news discourse translates into theoretical and methodological choices. Accordingly, an eclectic pragma-semiotic approach will be adopted here to account for the multimodal dimension of news and its role in the process of cooperative meaning-making by the media producers and the audience. Starting with the premise that a crucial factor responsible for preserving the apparently neutral and objective character of the news is the interplay between the implicitness and explicitness in the generation and transfer of meaning, with the unquestionable dominance of the former, the author will analyze several 'news items', which were broadcast by the CNN, from the perspective of Grice's (1975) theory of conversational logic, as well as semantic and pragmatic approaches to other forms of implicit meaning (Levinson 1983, 2000; Verschueren and Östman 2009)². This framework, supplemented with Multimodal Discourse Theory (Kress and Van Leeuwen 1996, 2001, 2002, Lemke 2002, Van Leeuwen 2000, 2005) will also be applied to the visual dimension of news. Communicating beliefs implicitly,

¹ For the discussion of communication models and the news genre characteristics see: Kopytowska (2007: 29-65).

² The 'news item' is understood here as one thematic story within the television news bulletin, encompassing both the text and the accompanying visual data. It will be used interchangeably with the terms 'news story' and 'news report'. As regards the video footage, only certain screenshots will be analyzed in terms of camera work and editing.

without actually asserting them, means less chance that they will be challenged, and more chance that they will be taken as read. On the other hand, as psychological research shows, inferred information is remembered and recalled as if it was stated explicitly (cf. Harris 2004). Apparently then, with numerous propositions which are implicated or presupposed rather than asserted, the viewer is being continually involved in the process of inference drawing and encouraged to adopt the perspective of those “behind the headlines”. This is strengthened by the visual mode, and modulations, among others, in terms of colour, focus, and depth.

The data analyzed is a corpus of five news items, which were aired by the CNN television news channel and which discuss the issues related to the Iranian culture and society.³ The videos, from which the screenshots are taken, were obtained from the CNN website and so were the transcripts available at <http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/>. All reports were broadcast in 2005 and 2006, i.e. during the time when tensions between the U.S and Iran over nuclear power issues began to arise, and, as the following paragraphs will demonstrate, this nuclear power discourse was not without effect on the news coverage of apparently unrelated issues. Such thematic focus also has its methodological justification: it situates the study firstly in the context of previous critical research on the media representation of Otherness, and, secondly, within the literature on media-politics interface. At the same time it highlights cultural, institutional, and ideological determinants in the news as a process/product construct, namely news values (conflict, proximity, eliteness, etc.) as guiding principles in news selection and transformation, the Orientalist framework, and its apogee, the accelerating post-9/11 trend towards a global polarization of society into “Western” cultures and Islam, resulting in the representation of the latter as being associated with violence, terrorism, fundamentalism, and backwardness (cf. Reynolds and Barnett 2003)⁴.

³ Being part of a larger project on the representation of Islam in the Western media and in the Al-Jazeera English, the present study presents only partial findings and reduced thematic material (see also Kopytowska 2010c; Kopytowska (in progress)). The news items analyzed here were chosen randomly from among the CNN news stories devoted to Iran, which were broadcast in 2005 and 2006, and are available in the form of transcripts and videos on the CNN website. The thematic focus, for the reasons explained above, is restricted to cultural/societal issues.

⁴ Although it is acknowledged here, that the CNN discourse cannot be treated as synonymous with all American media, let alone Western media and their perspective, it has been chosen (and sometimes used interchangeably with ‘the U.S. media’ or ‘the Western perspective’) for two reasons. Firstly, the network is one of the major news providers, not only in the U.S., but also internationally. Secondly, it has often been pointed out that its perspective closely resembles that of the American Administration and that it has the potential to influence public responses and actions (cf. Bennet 1990; Herman and Chomsky 1988; Robinson 2002, 2005; Kopytowska 2010 a, b).

The question that looms large in connection with the role that the medium of television plays in reporting on such issues is to what extent the views presented are already shared by the audience and to what extent the audience is made to take them for granted. Is this an attempt to adjust to the audience's expectations or a means of shaping the viewers' opinions and perspective on current social and political events⁵? Are presuppositions informative or are they persuasive? Finally, what is the role of images in conveying the underlying, yet unasserted meanings to the audience? These are some of the questions that the present study will try to answer. Importantly, it is also an attempt to apply conversational logic to the visual dimension of the news discourse. Hence, it will be postulated here that certain camera shots and techniques can be analyzed in terms of conversational implicature, understood as flouting the maxims of conversation.

2. Iran, Islam and the veil in the media

The construction of an image of Islam in the media (in America characterized by a clear pro-U.S. government bias) has been substantially influenced by the rise of anti-Islamism, first after the Iranian revolution in 1979 and then after 9/11 (cf. Dorman and Farhang 1987; Cohen and Solomon 1993; Said 2001; Sreberny 2002). Bringing into the coverage a whole range of issues concerning civil liberties, minority rights, multi-culturalism and human rights, not to mention religion and, more recently, security and terrorist threat, Islam and Muslim societies have provided a contrastive image against which Western values could be redefined (cf. Nossek 2005). As indicated by Hall (1992: 318), in the discursive construction of "the West and the Rest", "the Rest was [...] essential to the West's formation both of its own sense of itself – a 'Western identity' – and of Western forms of knowledge." The media have eagerly embraced the dichotomous idea of the world, perceived in terms of West and non-West, in terms of modernity represented by civilization, democracy, rationality and freedom, and non-modernity, represented by barbarism, irrationality, despotism and slavery, in terms of incompatible forces

⁵ It is an important consideration if we take into account the fact that CNN has been considered (and has considered itself) the leading global news network and thus its coverage (and, in consequence, ideological/cultural perspective) has been offered to both American and international audiences (Flournoy and Stewart 1997; Gilboa 2005; Volkmer 1999). With 72 million viewers per month it has the largest cumulative American audience for broadcast cable news and approximately 24 million online visits per month (Annual Report on American Journalism, 2007). CNN International (with which the coverage is shared to some extent) is distributed to over 198 million households around the world, with the largest broadcast news audience in Asia, and a strong online presence in Europe, Latin America, the Middle East and Africa (CNN International Press Release 2006).

placed on the opposite sides of Van Dijk's (1998a, b) ideological square. Viewed as alien, intrusive, and aggressive, the Muslim world has thus been approached in terms of how it differs from and conflicts with the West (a concern voiced by the post-colonial media theory).

Associated with the adherence to pre-modern systems of belief and an unwillingness to make concessions to contemporary westernized culture, presented as showing a total disregard for the value of individual human life, and described as either morally lax or as too repressive, Muslims have invariably been represented in opposition to current Western thinking, and often as a monolithic group of "religious fanatics" and "extremists", uniformly intolerant and anti-democratic (cf. Ahmed 2003; Lewis 1992; Kopytowska 2010c; Poole 2002; Poole and Richardson 2006; Said 1979, 1981). When the media present a "positive" image of "some" Muslims, it usually means portraying them as "more Western" than their more backwards counterparts, which leads to reinforcing the negative stereotypes as the presupposed norm. The Muslim way of acting and thinking, not deriving from the Western tradition, is represented either as being inferior and substandard, or illogical and irrational (cf. Ahmed 1992).

The image of a veiled Muslim woman has apparently become one of the most popular Western ways of representing such problems of Islam as the denial of women's rights to education and to free movement or the brutal treatment of any woman caught infringing the sacred codes of sexual conduct (cf. Mabro 1991; Watson 1994). The veil (*hijab*) has acquired a status of a symbol of silencing and depersonalization of women, or at best a sign of "otherness".

3. Infosuasion, implicit meaning, and inferential communication

One of the vehicles of media infosuasion, defined by Savarese (2000: 363) as "persuasive information", is arguably the interplay between explicitness and implicitness. While the former serves to convey authority as the mythic meaning of news, the latter enables the semblance of neutrality and pure observation with simultaneous transmission of value judgements. The audience engaged, both verbally and visually, in cooperative meaning making, is led to draw upon their background knowledge, make judgements about the salience of issues, and draw particular inferences (cf. Bertuccelli Papi 2009; Blakemore 1992; Levinson 1983; Mey 1993; Verschueren 1999).

Hence, Östman (1986) sees implicitness as a major object of pragmatic analysis, Bertuccelli Papi (2009: 139) regards it as "a powerful instrument of communication", while Van Dijk (1998: 120) points out that "discourses are tips of the icebergs of information represented in their underlying models, of which most information remains implicit." The ways to link explicit content with relevant

aspects of background information and convey implicit meaning include presuppositions, entailments, conventional implicatures and conversational implicatures. While the first three rely on conventional means to convey implicit meaning, and being manipulable can be strategically exploited, the last one has to do with the strategic avoidance of explicitness (cf. Verschueren 1999: 31).

The strategic role of entailment, or logical consequence, residing in its automaticity of the relationship allowing the newsmakers to give less rather than more information cannot be denied. Yet, it is presupposition that seems to play a major role in the media process of infosuasion. Semantic presupposition, defined in terms of truth conditions is lexically and grammatically triggered by: definite descriptions (including proper names), factive predicates (including epistemic verbs like know, realize, ignore and emotive predicates like be surprised, regret, mind, forget, etc), implicative verbs (like manage, remember, bother), change of state, inchoative, and iterative verbs (like stop, start), verbs of judging (like accuse, blame, criticize), syntactic forms of the sentence (including clefting and pseudo-clefting), prosodic emphasis, temporal clauses and counterfactuals (cf. Bertuccelli Papi 2009: 141-147; Levinson 1983). Pragmatic presupposition, in turn, can be defined in terms of common ground or background knowledge (cf. Karttunen 1974; Stalnaker 1973, 1974).

Not being, contrary to assertion, an illocutionary act, presupposition does not apparently have “any obvious purposes defined in terms of consequences of changes brought about in the hearer” (Van Dijk 1998a: 363). Practically, however, being a major tool in constructing an “ideal viewer” with particular intratextual experience, it enables the news producers to manipulate the audience members by attributing to their experience things which they want to get them to accept, and which do not necessarily have to lie within this experience. Hence, Sbisà (1999: 501) writes about the addressee’s “default tendency” to take what is presupposed for granted and Bertuccelli Papi (2009: 148) posits that “speakers treat presuppositions as non-controversial, even though they may in fact be controversial”. Even more importantly, presuppositions seem to evade critical analysis since propositions expressed in this way are not made explicit, which makes it difficult for people to identify them, and, if they wish, to reject them (cf. Fairclough 1989: 153; Lambrecht 1994: 52; Sbisà 1999: 506; Simon-Vandenberg et al. 2007: 66). Agreeing with certain arguments automatically entails accepting the presuppositions that are connected with them, even though they may be controversial or even may not be true at all. Accordingly, Simon-Vandenberg et al. (2007: 65-66) see “taken-for-grantedness” as an important rhetorical strategy, whose power lies in the fact that “the yet-to-be persuaded will not recognize the tactic of taking-for-granted tactic as such and accept the implication of general knowledge”, while Lambrecht (1994:70) goes even further, pointing to “devious cases of exploitation”, intended to create “a fictitious

presuppositional situation.” Furthermore, presuppositions are one of many linguistic devices allowing for the hierarchical distribution of meaning in the text, that is distributing information into the background and foreground, and thus control over the salience of issues (Eco 1987). While what is asserted is foregrounded as new, presupposed material can be backgrounded as old information. In this way the attention of the news audience may be shifted away from potentially controversial issues.

Likewise, conventional implicatures, as pointed out by Potts (2005: 7), “are used to guide the discourse in a particular direction or to help the hearer to better understand why the at-issue content is important at that stage”, thereby providing a clue as to how a given piece of information should be understood. Conventional implicatures are associated with *but*, *even*, *therefore*, as well as ‘supplements’ (appositives, non-restrictive relative clauses, parentheticals, subject/topic oriented adverbs, speaker-oriented adverbs, and utterance modifiers), and ‘expressives’ (e.g. epithets, honorifics) (Potts 2005).

Finally, we have the nonconventional implicature of the conversational type, identified and discussed by Grice (1975) in relation to the Cooperative Principle (CP), ideally observed by the participants of the communicative interaction, and the Maxims of Conversation, requiring that the speaker should be sincere (quality maxim), informative (quantity maxim), relevant (the maxim of relation), and perspicuous (the maxim of manner)⁶. By flouting the maxims the speaker generates conversational implicature, thereby conveying a different meaning from what is literally said. The four properties of conversational implicature, namely negation tolerance, cancellability, context-dependency (which means that it gives rise to different inferences in different contexts) and calculability, make it an equally useful discursive tool frequently exploited by the newsmakers. The factors behind it are both functional and ideological in nature; functional as television news shares certain characteristics with face-to-face conversation (interpersonal distance, shared meaning making, parasocial relationships, etc.)⁷ and thus Grice’s concepts of the Cooperative Principle and the Maxims of Conversation ensure communication flow and the exchange of information; ideological as leaving the

⁶ Although Grice applied his logic to ordinary conversation, it seems to be universal across various discourse genres (cf. Lakoff 2009: 109).

⁷ For various perspectives on the status of the newsreader/reporter-news audience interaction see: Bell 1991; Bignell 2001; Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1999; O’Keeffe 2006; Tolson 2006. While acknowledging the differences between media interactions and everyday conversational exchanges (the former being ‘institutionalized’, ‘mediated’, ‘televised’, ‘secondary-orality’ form of talk), the author of the present article espouses the view that certain semiotic properties of television news are meant to enhance their “face-to-face-interaction-like” character, and thus involve the audience both cognitively and affectively (cf. Kopytowska 2010a).

viewer with the task of inferring the meaning implied by flouting the maxims allows the newsmakers to convey stereotypical and controversial messages in a less overt way and with a lower degree of salience, thereby minimizing the opportunity for critical judgement and media responsibility for the issues presented. Lakoff (2009: 110) links adherence to CP to the purpose behind discourse, claiming that the more it is oriented towards the exchange of truth- and information, the less expectation participants will have of the use of implicature, and the less complex will be the inferencing process. The presence of conversational implicature in the news discourse (though less conspicuous than that of other carriers of implicit meaning), however, may be accounted for by the fact that the informative function of the news is more and more often conflated with persuasion and entertainment (or even manipulation, as argued by Kress and Hodge 1979: 6).

Considering the duality of the television news genre, we cannot ignore the role of images in the inferential process, generation of meaning, and, in consequence, the infosuasive impact. Such a role has been discussed by the multimodality theorists as well as those from the field of communication studies (cf. Ensink 2006; Fiske and Hartley 1978; Kress and Van Leeuwen 1996, 2001; Messaris 1997; Van Leeuwen 2000, 2005). Since, as has been pointed out, the power of television news lies in its “reality effect” and “picture effect” (Caldwell 1995: 152), the availability of the visual material, referred to as ‘visualness’ is often one of the factors determining the newsworthiness (and thus inclusion) of the events (cf. Berkowitz 1991; Brighton and Foy 2007; Freedberg 1989). It is, however, not only what is shown, but how it is shown that matters. Hence, Corner (1999: 45) speaks of “figuration”, which refers to the capacity of the image to generate associative resonance beyond literal depiction. Indeed, research has shown that since viewers are frequently more aware of the content than the style and form of images, the latter can be used as a relatively more subtle or indirect way of suggesting certain meanings, evoking emotional reactions and eliciting value judgements (cf. Ensink 2006; Kraft 1987; Messaris 1981; Walma van der Molen 2001). Lacking propositional syntax, they cannot be explicit about logical connections and thus considered to make explicit claims. In this way, as postulated by Anthonissen (2003: 301), they may have similar functions and effects to indirect verbal representation. Furthermore, as argued by Meyrowitz (1986 cit. in Messaris 1997: xiv), conventional uses of images are modelled on people’s real life experiences of interpersonal space, orientation, angle, and point of view. Hence, implied distance at which the viewer is positioned (panoramic shot, long shot, close-up, etc.), the angle of view (bird-eye-view, low angle, high angle, etc.), the use of subjective point of view (i.e. point of view shot) and camera moves (e.g. panning, tilting, dolling, zooming, tracking, etc) have the potential to conjure up real-world optical experience and the accompanying cognitive and affective responses. Close-ups,

for example, are usually used to increase attention and elicit stronger emotional engagement on the part of the viewer, which is apparently based on the real-world association between interpersonal closeness and involvement (cf. Messaris 1997: xv; Philo 1990; Zettl 1998; Zhou 2005). Likewise, various modes of editing (e.g. dissolves and fades) and special effects (e.g. slow motion or blurred images), allowing for the manipulation of space and time, are also responsible for generating meaning and regulating viewers' engagement.

The indirectness, "taken-for-grantedness", and exploitative potential of visual communication, on the one hand, and the structural and functional aspects of the news product/process (including the infosuasive intentions of the producers) give grounds to claim that television images could be analyzed from the perspective of conversational logic, with certain camera techniques and light/colour solutions being departures from the four maxims, intended to make the audience infer certain meanings as pre-generated by the newsmakers⁸. The cases of such departures, the motivations behind them, and the implications they have for the audience's judgements will be discussed in the following section.

4. The implicit (re)construction of the Iranian society

In the words of former U. S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger (2001: 197), "[t]here are few nations in the world with which the United States has less reason to quarrel or more compatible interests than Iran". This is perhaps the reason why both political and media discourse in America has demonstrated a tendency to represent Iran in a stereotypical way, triggered off by the Iranian Hostage Crisis (November 1979 - January 1981), and strengthened by the WTC attacks, and by the Iranian 2005 presidential elections won by the conservative candidate, Ahmadinejad, an outspoken critic of the Bush Administration, who refused to stop Iran's nuclear program, regardless of the demands of the UN Security Council. For over three years, then, the news concerning American-Iranian relations has been dominated by the discourse of nuclear conflict, emphasizing Iranian president's defiance, potential threats and possible military action of the U.S. This conflict-centered discourse has to a large extent echoed the discourse of the American-Iraqi conflict, with similar strategies of legitimization, demonization of the enemy, and unification of the American society. This is the reason why we are interested here

⁸ A similar perspective can be found in Forceville (2005), where the author applies Sperber and Wilson's Relevance framework in the analysis of visual data.

in the news coverage of the socio-cultural themes rather than the ongoing tug-of-war between Iran and the U.S.⁹

The five CNN reports chosen for analysis focus on the issues we might broadly classify as societal. The very recurrence of such problems as women's rights and government or religious restrictions confirms previous research findings that these aspects are treated as the most classic and "problematic" as far as Islamic countries are concerned. The reports will be examined in terms of how the demarcation line between the West and "the Rest" is drawn, how "the Other" is re-created by emphasizing the Islamic nature of Iran, and how the positive self-image of the U.S. is constantly reinforced, Western values universalized, and an ethnocentric perspective imposed. Most importantly for the purpose of this analysis, it is interesting to see how political issues creep into the reports, and how the news value of co-option is constantly exploited¹⁰. "How" indeed is a key word here, and the objective is to show that this is done through exploiting the interplay between explicitness and implicitness in the generation of meaning.

4.1. A rare American in Iran

The first news item that I intend to analyze in terms of implicit meaning is the story of an American basketball player in Iran broadcast on 4th May, 2006. At first glance, as the headline suggests, the report concerns *a rare American* and is an account of a personal experience of an American basketball player making his living in Iran by playing for the local basketball team. *Rare* gives rise to numerous inferences, especially as the viewer is provided with visual evidence (Fig. 1). Is he *a rare American* because of his height, the colour of his skin, because of the very fact of his being in Iran, or because there are no other Americans there¹¹?

⁹ For the ideological representation of U.S. policies toward Iran's nuclear program in media discourse see: Izadi and Saghaye-Biria (2007).

¹⁰ As mentioned before, news values, the journalistic criteria of news selection need to be considered if we understand news discourse not only as a product, but also as a process. The value of co-option, meaning that something gets into the news because it is related to other important themes; this relatedness, being either explicitly, or implicitly exposed, is often at heart of the media-politics interface. For discussion on news values see: Bell 1991; Galtung and Ruge 1965; Brighton and Foy 2007; Kopytowska 2010.

¹¹ I am grateful to Professor Bruce Fraser (personal communication) for his comments on the racial aspects of this news item.



Fig. 1. Source: CNN 4/5/2006

1. **A rare American** in Iran. This American **stands out in Iran like no other**. CNN's Aneesh Raman reports.(CNN 4/5/2006)

The statement above can be seen as generating conversational implicature due to the flouting of the maxim of manner and the resulting ambiguity. Again, it is up to the audience to infer whether he *stands out* physically, as the visual footage apparently suggests, or whether there are other reasons for his uniqueness.

2. RAMAN (voice-over): **At 7'2", it's hard for Garth Joseph not to stand out**, especially as an American basketball player in Iran. (CNN 4/5/2006)

It could be argued that later in the narrative (2), where Garth's height is given, the implicature is cancelled since the meaning of *stand out* is linked explicitly to his physical appearance. The second part of the sentence, *especially as an American basketball player in Iran*, however, being the supplementary CI, directs the viewer's thinking in a certain direction. The implication is that what really makes Garth different is his nationality, rather than his height, or at least that the former is equally important as the latter. This line of reasoning seems to be supported by the evidence at some other point:

3. ANEESH RAMAN, CNN CORRESPONDENT: Wolf, **it is hard, as you would imagine, to find other** Americans in Iran, but we found **one** on the basketball courts of Tehran. (CNN 4/5/2006)

Importantly, in (3), the addressee is reassured, by means of conventional implicature of the supplement type, that the presence of Americans in Iran is not a usual thing, prior to the reception of the actual message. On the other hand, as stated by Cap (2002: 202), such a strategy is often adopted by participants of

debates and consists in presupposing the addressee's knowledge of certain truths supporting the speaker's point. At the same time, *other* testifies implicitly to the uniqueness of Garth's presence, while *one* implicates 'only one and no more' (scalar implicatures, see Gazdar 1979).

The implied incongruity of the presence of an American in Iran from the very beginning divides the world into "American" and "non-American", "our" and "other", binariness to be exploited throughout the whole report. As the narrative continues, there is a lot to infer about the "other" Iranian reality. To this end, multiple presuppositions are embedded in the assertions, which dominate the news report. Right at the beginning of the report, the viewer is provided with a very important piece of information, which will guide his inference-making throughout the whole story:

4. GORANI: And an American in Iran. A basketball player makes a life in **the Islamic republic**. (CNN 4/5/2006)

definite>> there is the Islamic Republic;

Although it might be argued that the full official name of the country is the Islamic Republic of Iran, it was the journalist's choice to shorten it to the present form. Hence, in (4) the definite article points to the presupposed existence of a country under a particular form of government based on the Islamic criteria. I would also posit that conversational implicature is generated here, as the assumption of adherence to the maxim of quantity leads one to infer that there is something special or problematic about *making a life in the Islamic republic*. The information concerning current political situation and American-Iranian relations is also encoded in a definite description (5). Assuming that definite article here might be the sign of familiarity, one can conclude that the audience is encouraged to take for granted the fact that current relations between the U.S. and Iran are tense, and that the latter harbours nuclear ambitions:

5. GORANI: Well, with **the current tension** between Washington and Tehran over **the country's nuclear ambitions**, this may not be the best time for an American and an athlete, to boot, to be in Iran.(CNN 4/5/2006)

definite>> there is tension between Washington and Teheran

definite>> Iran has nuclear ambitions

definite>> tensions concern Iran's nuclear ambitions

It is then through entailment that the viewer gets to know about the possible implications of the conflict:

6. BLITZER: The leaders of the United States and Iran are locked in a nuclear struggle and **sanctions, even military action, have not been ruled out.** (CNN 4/5/2006)

entailment > *sanctions and military action are possible*

Additionally, *even*, conventionally implicates that military action is the least likely, or perhaps, the most radical, solution in that case.

With political context explained, the audience is prompted again to draw inferences concerning the Iranian reality:

7. RAMAN: But last October, Garth came anyway, **leaving behind his life in New York and becoming one of 20 foreign basketball players in Iran, a country very much at odds with his own, a situation his family finds more and more troubling.** (CNN 4/5/2006)

The flouting of the maxim of manner in (7) leads to ambiguity. Is it the fact that Garth left New York that his family finds problematic, or the fact that Iran and the U.S. are so different? Even if the former option is true, the audience may be led to infer the latter. While the viewer is once again encouraged to take for granted the issue of nuclear struggle, the “troubling” contrast between the two countries is accounted for further on, by a set of presuppositions triggered by pseudo-cleft constructions:

8. JOSEPH: They always call me asking me something like, **the nuclear** - you know, nuclear struggle that's going on, they call me and ask me about this all the time. And I'm like, well, I don't see that, I don't hear that. RAMAN: **What he does see are restrictions** everywhere. **And a lifestyle** that to this American is a bit boring. (CNN 4/5/2006)

definite>> there is nuclear struggle

pseudo-cleft >> there are restrictions

pseudo-cleft>> there is a certain lifestyle

In this way, it is implied that restrictions are the most pronounced aspect of life in Iran and that living there can be seen as boring. Such an implication is strengthened by another presupposition induced by *also* (see Zeevat 2003):

9. RAMAN: As we head to his apartment...
(on camera): Man, they've got to give you some extra room.
(voice-over): There are **also** some physical restrictions. (CNN 4/5/2006)

iterative>> there are other restrictions

In fact, as Garth and the reporter head to Garth's room, the concept of restrictions is also manifested visually, with the low camera angle being employed to provide the visual evidence.



Fig. 2. Source: CNN 4/5/2006

Although it is asserted that alcohol and pork are forbidden in Iran and ordinary in the U.S., in the former case it is strengthened by the entailment of the word *contraband*, and the counterfactual-triggered presupposition *would seem ordinary*. What is also implied is the difference between the two countries in terms of civil liberties, obviously to the disadvantage of the former.

10. And inside a quick tour of **contraband, things that would seem ordinary in the U.S.** But **here in Iran, alcohol is forbidden and bootleg bacon.**

counterfactual>> they do not seem ordinary here

11. RAMAN: But Garth says **it is the Iranian players and people here that keep him sane.**(CNN 4/5/2006)

cleft>> something keeps Garth sane

Since it was not stated earlier what makes him insane, we could argue for the flouting of the maxim of quantity, which triggers the implicature that living in a country with so many restrictions (the ban on alcohol being one of them) can drive people mad.

At the end of the report (12, 13), the viewer is again encouraged to infer that tensions between America and Iraq are rising. Although the reporter's question is

12. It is perhaps an ironic twist. An American coming to Iran to make a living, **here amid the brewing international conflict**; staying away from politics, though, and sticking to what he does best.(CNN 4/5/2006)

13. RAMAN: And I asked Garth as well if he's worried he might have to, one day soon, leave, if **tensions continue to rise** between Iran and the U.S. (CNN 4/5/2006)

addpositions (CIs) > rock and roll is the universal language of youth
> rock and roll is not approved of in Iran
> the universal language of youth is not approved of in Iran

Then a connection is made between the situation of the young musicians and their political sentiments, including the forthcoming election. Although only one of them is asked about his opinion, the presupposition induced generalizes his attitude.

15. The band is called Oriental Silence, and **like all of them**, drummer Amir Ali Kaheri will not be voting Friday.(CNN 17/6/2005)

comparison >>all of them will not be voting

Apart from the disaffected musicians, another group of young people appears, apparently more satisfied with their lives in Iran. Here, however, presuppositions are exploited to imply that the success of these people and their current status is partly due to their “Western” experiences:

16. AMANPOUR: 23-year-old Mohsen Lutsi is **among the company’s young employees who returned from the United States and Europe to work here**. (CNN 17/6/2006)

change of state verb >> the employees worked in the U.S and Europe

The situation of young people allows the broadcasters to comment on the current economic situation and express judgement as regards the presidential candidates. Presuppositions in this case are induced mostly by definite descriptions. Of particular interest are those related to the current president of Iran. Although both *reformist* and *hapless* are highly subjective descriptions, the audience is required to take them for granted.

17. AMANPOUR: With another million young Iranians about to hit the job market, presidential candidates this time are talking mostly about the economy, not Islam.
(on camera): With **the high unemployment** and **sensing deep social dissatisfaction**, even the **conservative candidates** are speaking **the language of reform and democracy**. This is **the legacy of the outgoing reformist but hapless president**, Mohammad Khatami. (CNN 17/6/2006)

definite>> there is high unemployment

factive>> there is deep social dissatisfaction

definite>> there are conservative candidates

definite>> there is a language of reform and democracy

definite>> Mohammad Khatami is an outgoing reformist

definite>> Mohammad Khatami is a hapless president

As the report ends, presuppositions are used to comment on people's attitude towards the political situation and the people in power in Iran:

18. The mournful lament of Oriental Silence perhaps sums up feelings about a campaign that's been marred by threats of boycott and predictions of a lower turnout than usual by **the Iranian people, who hope but don't believe their vote will change much.** (CNN 17/6/2006)

non-restrictive>> people hope

non-restrictive>> people don't believe their vote will change the situation

4.3. Iranian women's rights

This news story, aired on June 15th, 2005, also in the pre-election period, focuses on the issue which, as mentioned in the introductory section, has been treated as one of the most representative as far as the Iranian "problems" are concerned. Right at the beginning, modal verbs along with adverbs are used to challenge the idea of possible changes in Iran. What is more, the reporter uses rhetorical questions which are semantically equivalent to an assertion of the opposite polarity of what is apparently asked (cf. Sadock 1971, 1974). A possible explanation of the polarity reversal effect as regards the speaker's expectation towards the answer in these yes-no questions may come from Gricean maxims (cf. Grice 1975), in particular the maxim of quantity. Hence, rhetorical questions flout quantity maxim by being about the obvious and are thus informationally redundant. The rhetorical questions in (19) and (20) thus signal the presumption that the hearer already knows a negative answer and doubts the possibility of changes.

19. Plus, **can** change **really happen** in Iran?(CNN 15/6/2005)

20. Coming up next on "360", the push for more freedom in Iran: **Could** Friday's elections **actually** lead to more women's rights? We go inside in a struggle in **the country often at odds with the U.S.**(CNN 15/6/2005)

definite >> Iran is often at odds with the U.S.

The presupposition triggered in (20) shows off the contrast between Iran and the U.S., elaborated on as the report continues, and the conventional implicature triggered by *even* displays an inferior situation of Iranian women.

21. ... look ahead to 2008, already many people are saying a woman, Senator Hillary Clinton, has the best shot to win the Democratic presidential nomination. It's a much different story in Iran, which is holding a presidential election on Friday. There, **women aren't even allowed** on the ballot. Now, some are hoping this election will spark change, but change moves very slowly in Iran. (CNN 15/6/2005)

Interestingly, whenever the examples of women enjoying more freedom are mentioned, they are followed by counter-arguments. Usually it is the argumentative connective *but* that contradicts the value orientation declared in the preceding fragment (22). In (22) however, the reporter simply anticipated what the interviewee is going to say. It is then the presupposition that partially accounts for such assertion; the audience is supposed to take for granted that pressures and limitations indeed affect people.

22. Authorities allow women to wear ever-tighter overcoats, show ever more hair and makeup and they tolerate women like Laleh Seddigh competing in car races. **But** she, too, believes that women should pursue their rights more.
23. GOLDSHIFTEH FARAHANI, ACTRESS: I like to work in Iran. I like it because I think it makes me more creative because of these, you know...AMANPOUR: **She's trying to say pressures and limitations:** political, religious and social, **which force** everyone here, especially the women, into subtle forms of self-expression.

non-restrictive>> pressures and limitations force everybody into subtle forms of self-expression

4.4. A heads-up for women's rights

The report, aired on May 3rd, 2006 focuses on the issue that comes to the fore whenever the discussion concerning Islam starts, namely the veil (*hijab*) treated as a symbol of the silencing and depersonalization of women. Interestingly, the report starts not with the women who feel discriminated or subjugated, but with a "vocal minority" opting for stricter laws. The definite description in the following passage triggers the presupposition that the hijab is part of the Islamic tradition. It is also

presupposed that many Iranian women are adopting Western values, and thus in the eyes of conservative Iranians they are *too Western*. Likewise, it is entailed that becoming Western has something to do with the way of wearing this traditional attribute of Islamic culture.

24. They march by the thousands, clad in a strict black Islamic veil. **Stern faces** underscoring **a stern belief that Iranian women are becoming too Western, that more and more, they are only loosely wearing the traditional hijab, or head scarf, which is required by law.** (CNN 3/5/2006)

definite >> hijab is traditional

non-restrictive >> hijab is required by law

25. **The debate** has now come to the streets. **These people, who are members of a vocal minority, are pushing Iran's government for stricter laws on the hijab.**(CNN 3/5/2006)

definite >> there is a debate concerning hijab

non-restrictive>> people demanding stricter laws constitute a vocal minority

It is perhaps interesting how the advocates of stricter laws are presented, or how an implicitly negative portrayal of this group is created. The repetition of *stern* in (24), which can be treated as the flouting of the maxims of quantity and manner triggers conversational implicature. Iranian radical beliefs and reality as such seem to have a somewhat “stern” and thus scary and negative quality¹². What deserves attention is a set of visual implicatures triggered by flouting the maxims of quality and manner.

¹² Various authors see the main function of repetition in reinforcing the message and providing consistency (cf. Bublitz 1996; Johnstone 1987, 1994; Norrick 1987; Tannen 1989). What is reinforced in the present case, is once again the negative character of the Iranian reality (this, in turn, enables consistency of the representation).



Fig. 3. Source: CNN 3/5/2006

The wide camera lens distorts the actual size of the group of protesters thus impinging on both the truth value and clarity of the visual evidence, and creating the impression that the crowd is almost endless. A low camera angle (flouting the maxims of quality and manner) in Fig. 4 and 5, on the other hand, presents the women as more powerful and scary than they really are and imposes a particular spatial orientation on the viewer, which is meant to evoke fear, apprehension, and a negative attitude of the audience. The dominance of the black colour is not without significance, either (cf. Kress and Van Leeuwen 1996).



Fig. 4. Source: CNN 3/5/2006



Fig. 5. Source: CNN 3/5/2006

More explicit meaning is conveyed by a mid-shot of a woman with a clenched fist (Fig. 6), the image which since 11th September 2001 has come to symbolically represent Islamic violence and hostility. Finally, a close up (Fig. 7), flouting the maxims of quality (distortion), quantity (bringing too much into the frame) and manner (making the distance uncomfortably close) is also intended to affect the emotions of the audience.



Fig. 6. Source: CNN 3/5/2006



Fig. 7. Source: CNN 3/5/2006

The report ends with a conversation with one of Iran's feminists. While it was previously emphasized that the advocates of the veil constitute a minority, here the impression is created that the interviewed woman with her progressive ideas represents the feelings, fears, and expectations of the Iranian women. The verb *concerned about* is used to imply that there are reasons for anxiety and the shift towards radicalism is not necessarily something desirable and positive. Additionally, with the presupposition triggered by a definite description in (27), the viewer is expected to take for granted the fact that wearing the veil is part of *the old rule*, and that the women's calls for less strict laws in this respect result from the desire to adapt to *new times*. The lack of adherence to strict rules, in this case those concerning *hijab*, is implicitly linked to modernity. It is also presupposed (28) that fighting for progress in Iran entails *being beaten or disrespected*.

26. Simin Behbahani is a leading poet in Iran, a leading feminist as well. One who is **concerned about where things are heading**. (CNN 3/5/2006)

27. Since this hijab became law, Iranian women have made it part of their **increasingly modern look, adapting the old rule to new times**. (CNN 3/5/2006)

definite >> wearing a hijab is an old rule

28. "For this small progress," she says, "women will fight and stand for their rights. **They don't mind being beaten or disrespected**. They will never retreat." (CNN 3/5/2006)

4.5. A plea for life

Another news report, aired on 13th April, 2006, and featuring a former Miss Canada who is trying to save the life of an 18-year-old woman convicted of murder and sentenced to death for defending herself against three rapists, addresses the issues of human rights and the death penalty. As pointed out in one of the previous sections, the American media frequently portray Islam as possessing no respect for human life, particularly whenever women are concerned. In the present news item this information is encoded in definite descriptions. In (29) the audience is expected to be familiar with the fact that the death penalty, whether it is deserved or not, is sanctioned by the state.

29. So, who can stop **the state-sanctioned execution**? (CNN 13/4/2006)

definite>> the execution is sanctioned by the state

It is implied that the issues of civil liberties and human rights are not a uniquely Iranian problem – rather they are something peculiar to the whole Islamic world. Hence, the news value of cooption allows the broadcasters to link the story of Miss Canadian and her mission to save the life of an Iranian woman with a piece of information on Iraq, thereby enabling them to make generalizations concerning the plight of Muslim women. Such generalizations can be found throughout the report, and it is interesting that references are made only to the countries which are involved in the conflict with the U.S., or which America invaded in the name of freedom and eradicating terrorism.

30. **Miss Iraq is missing**, or, **more accurately, hiding**. Silva Shahakian is an Iraqi Christian who won her title by default when **Islamic militants reportedly threatened to kill** other contestants in last week's pageant in Baghdad [...] Well, **Miss Canada 2003 is definitely not missing**. In fact, she is trying to make as much commotion as possible, in hopes of saving a life of a woman she has never met. (CNN 13/4/2006)

31. They are trying to say, this is a social, grassroots movement to bring awareness to the cause of this problem, especially because of all the issues with Iran and **the nuclear program** [...] It's just to raise awareness and social... PHILLIPS: **Human rights**. NAMDAR: **Human rights**. But, if you talk about **human rights**, there's a lot of countries around the world that have... PHILLIPS: Sure. NAMDAR: ... **a human rights issue**. PHILLIPS: **Look at how women are being treated in Afghanistan, Iraq**. (CNN 13/4/2006)

32. There is **a serious, serious human rights crisis** in Iran, the death penalty, discrimination against women, and a whole host of other concerns. And **it - it really** is time for the international community to put those issues right at the top of the agenda. (CNN 13/4/2006)

The repetition of the phrase *human rights crisis*, along with the adjective *serious*, which could be seen as the flouting of the maxim of manner, serves to highlight the problem and to reinforce the message (see 4.4. of the present article). It also evokes a sense of continuity, or permanence of the problem. Last but not least, it is a sign of the reporters' emotional attitude towards the presented issue, which, in turn, is likely to prompt an emotional response on the part of the audience.

33. Under Iranian law, girls over the age of 9 and boys over 16 face the death penalty for murder. **But the Iranian government says it does not execute juveniles, but, under the law, women must choose between two horrifying options.** If a woman does not resist rape, she could be imprisoned, flogged or stoned as an adulterer. And, if she acts in self-defense, she could be hanged. (CNN 13/4/2006)

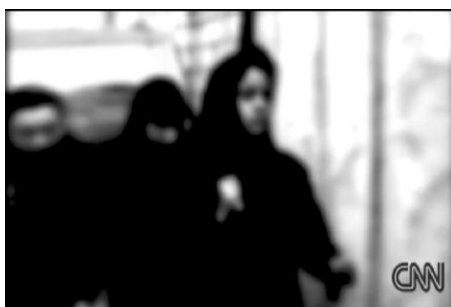


Fig. 8. Source: CNN 13/4/2006



Fig. 9. Source: CNN 13/4/2006

Throughout the report it is implied that the situation of women in Iran is disastrous, although the government pretends to respect human life. The argumentative connective *but* in the fragment (33) seems to flout the maxims of manner and relevance. It introduces confusion into the report, as it is hard to find any logical connection between the juxtaposed facts. What is then implied is the absurdity of the situation in which many women in Iran are bound to find themselves sooner or later. The implicature is also triggered visually, by flouting the maxims of quality and manner. The defocused, grayish images of the Iranian women (Fig. 8) are meant to convey the idea of a grim and scary reality. The effect is strengthened by the slow motion in the visual footage giving the impression of indeterminacy and insecurity. The image showing a woman behind the bars (Fig. 9) gains a somewhat iconic status, with the bars standing metonymically for all the restrictions on the freedom of the Iranian women. At the same time, the editing (maxim of quality) introduces the atmosphere of hyper-reality, while the blurry mode (maxim of manner) evokes the feeling of uncertainty and anxiety.

5. Conclusions

As many linguistic and nonlinguistic approaches to mass communication have shown, the news discourse is not a set of events, but a set of journalists' representations of these events, determined by a wide range of social structures, as well as cultural and ideological factors. While not always deserving the label of a "devious manipulator", the institutions of mass communication, including television, do indeed "mediate" the presentation of reality to their audiences, acting as a filter that, as Kenneth Burke (1966) said, selects, reflects and then deflects the concrete reality of the five senses as it is packaged for delivery to the consumer. In this way, the news serves as a social agent in its own right, shaping public opinion and setting public agendas. Rather than analyzing these media

effects, I have set out to demonstrate, firstly, the extent to which the content of television news is underlain and conditioned by the discourse of political elites, and secondly, how the newsmakers engage the audience (verbally and visually) in the process of the cooperative meaning-making.

Presuppositions and implicatures, infused into words and images, or perhaps imposed on them, the constant interplay between explicitness and implicitness, the combination of the visual and the linguistic, the meaning generated in context and left to be inferred, and the conceptualizations construed by the speakers and listeners - all this awaits an average viewer turning on the TV set to watch the news bulletin in the evening. Presuppositions, implicatures and entailments are strategically exploited here to transmit the content which might be called ideological – the assumptions about the socio-political reality, not necessarily conscious, but liable to be brought to consciousness – and thus serve not only informative, but also persuasive aims. As the analysis has shown, they are also a useful tool for leveling accusations or criticism without spelling them out explicitly. This is in fact how the Iranian government is criticized in the analyzed broadcasts. Rather than in the form of assertions, the negative attitude towards the government's policies is expressed in presuppositions, triggered usually by definite descriptions and non-restrictive clauses. The viewer is often encouraged to take these ideas for granted, while the newsmakers can make a pretence of objectivity.

Another important finding in this analysis concerns conversational implicatures, which are realized not only linguistically, but also visually. Whether it is a close-up, or a low camera angle, the maxims of quality, quantity and manner are flouted. The viewer is thus presented with a “distorted picture” – a particular, ideologically and culturally conditioned representation - of reality. Still, taking conversational cooperativeness on the part of the broadcaster for granted, the audience is likely to infer the (hidden) meaning and “glimpse beneath the veil”.

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