THE CYCLE OF IDENTITIES WITHIN THE SOCIAL PRACTICE OF ELECTIONS

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Linguistics is part of the attempt to find explanations for human behaviour and to formulate a theory of social action. A cognitive, intentionalist theory captures some aspects of language behaviour: language is individual, intentional and creative. But this is only half of the picture. Language is also social, partly unintentional and routine, based on social conventions which are not open to introspection.

Individual human agency and social structure are different sides of the same coin. Social structure is both the medium and the outcome of the behaviour it organizes. Social systems are created by human actions, but provide a context for those actions.

The interpretation of texts is thus inseparable from social relations. Theo van Leeuwen's networks hint exactly at the textual representations of the 'actors' involved in such social relationships and at their specific actions that disclose certain ideologies and hegemonies. This paper makes reference to van Leeuwen's articles [4, 5] on the representation of social actions and respectively, of social actors. I introduce only a few types of actions and actors, which I consider helpful for my conceiving the analytical section, both selecting original examples and adapting some of them from van Leeuwen's articles.

In several articles, van Leeuwen [4:81-106, 5:47] focuses upon one of the ideological and hegemonic effects of discourse mentioned by Fairclough [3:92], i.e. social identities ('selves') and suggests a two-approach in order to analyse how they are constructed at the level of racist discourse. He aims to draw up a 'sociosemantic inventory' of the ways in which social actors can be represented and only then to analyse their linguistic or rhetorical realizations.

The theory of representation that he attempts to develop is based on the idea that what is represented in a text is always a social practice. In Fairclough's terms, discursive practice contributes both to reproducing society, as it is (social identities, social relationships, systems of knowledge and belief) and to transforming it.

The representation of social actors

In his 1996 article on the representation of social actors, van Leeuwen analyses a conservative newspaper article dealing with attitudes towards immigration in Australia, with the help of a network or inventory of 'sociosemantic' categories. On the basis of this analysis, he draws interesting conclusions about the way in which immigration and attitudes towards immigrants are constructed for the public from the newspaper's particular point of view. The network is intended to provide an exhaustive inventory of the possibilities of representing social actors in the English language, various combinations of which are actualized in any given text.

The first distinction van Leeuwen makes is the one between *exclusion* and *inclusion.* Representations are generally intended for certain categories of readers, having specific interests in relation to these readers. Depending on their purposes, representations may explicitly include or totally or partially exclude social actors. There may be two cases of exclusion. The first is when both the social actors and their activities are excluded ('*radical exclusion'*) from a new representation of a single social practice, which has already been represented before. The second case deals with the inclusion of the activities and the exclusion of the social actors. Here van Leeuwen distinguishes between a case of *suppression* – whenever there is no reference to the social actor in question - and *backgrounding,* when the agent can be retrieved by the reader, being present in a particular portion of the text. Within the sociosemantic category of inclusion, a further distinction is made between *activation* and *passivation*. Social actors can be represented as active forces in an activity or, alternatively, as passively undergoing it. In both cases, the active roles of the

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social actors are foregrounded by 'participation' (grammatical participant roles).

Both the activation and the passivation of a social actor can also be achieved by *possessivation*, whereby the social actor is represented by a possessive construction, in the form of either a possessive pronoun (*Their behaviour was objectionable,* instead of *They behaved objectionably*) or a prepositional phrase with *of* postmodifying a nominalisation or process noun (*An intake of some 54,000 skilled immigrants is expected this year*).

Another important distinction is that between *genericisation* and *specification* which amounts to the choice between generic and specific reference. Specific reference is typically associated with definite expressions.

Van Leeuwen speaks of *individualisation* whenever reference is made to a specific individual and of *assimilation* if social actors are referred to as groups of individuals. Further on, the assimilated social actors may be represented either with the use of quantifier expressions, i.e. they are *aggregated* (*A number of critics/ Fourty per cent of Australians*) or by means of plural nouns, mass nouns and collective nouns, i.e. they are *collectivised* (*The children/ The team/ The crew said that…*).

Determination and *indetermination* have to do with whether the actors' identity is specified or not, thus the social actors may be anonymised or transformed into a kind of 'impersonal authority' (*They won't let you go to school until you are five years old.*).

An important distinction is that between *nomination* (social actors are represented in terms of their unique identity, for instance by the use of a proper name) and *categorization* (in terms of the identities they share with others). Nomination can be more or less formalized depending on whether the writer mentions only the surname, with or without honorifics (*formalisation),* the name and the surname (*semiformalisation*) or only the name (*informalisation*). Van Leeuwen distinguishes three main types of categorisation: *functionalisation, identification* and *appraisement.* Categorising somebody as a teacher, an interviewer, a guardian and so on, are instances of *functionalisation* because the social actors are

identified in terms of their acquired occupations or roles. Categorising someone as a white male or a black woman are instances of *identification*, because it is based on more or less intrinsic features. *Classification* of social actors according to age, gender, class, wealth, race, religion and so on is historically and culturally variable as social structures kept changing over time.

The third type of categorisation is *appraisement*, when reference to a social actor is made in evaluative terms, indicating positive ('darling', 'gorgeous') or negative ('stupid', 'bastard') appraisements.

Finally, all the examples above have dealt with *personalised*, that is human actors. Social actors can also be *impersonalised*, that is represented by expressions which do not denote human participants, for instance by replacing them metonymically with names of places ('Australians' is a case of *spatialisation*), names of parts of the body ('Mary Kate's shoulder' – *somatisation*) and so on.

A special category is that of *overdetermination* because the social actors are represented as being involved simultaneously in more than one social practice.

This paper attempts to demonstrate that through linguistic and social representations, discursive practices serve to establish or conceal relations of power and dominance between interactants, between national, ethnic, religious, sexual, political and cultural majorities and minorities.

The analysis focuses on a front-page article in *The Guardian* (2000) – **When the winning is easy/Running Russia will be the difficult bit** – emphasizing the way in which such linguistic representations conceptualize self-images promoted by different political trends within the social practice of elections. For lack of space I designed the following table that indicates how the results of the application of van Leeuwen's semantic network to this text can be systematized. For each of the social actor involved, I am analysing in detail all the linguistic realizations. Using distinctions such as *Specific / Generic Reference, Individuated / Assimilated, Determinate / Indeterminate, Differentiated / Undifferentiated, Personalized / Impersonalized* and *Nomination / Categorization,* I will try to investigate the possibilities or choices that the journalist had at his disposal in order to refer to the "characters", according to his specific interest, ideological position and power relations, and yet remaining apparently neutral and objective as his job requires him to be.

	REALIZATION	*GENERIC/* SPECIFIC REFERENCE	INDIVIDUATED/ ASSIMILATED	DETERMINATE/ INDETERMI-NATE, DIFF./ UNDIFFERENT	NOMINATED/ CATEGORIZED; TYPE OF CATEGORIZATION	PERSONALIZED/I MPERSONA-LIZED	OBSERVATIONS
VLADIMIR PUTIN	*When the winning (whose?) is easy (for whom?) Running Russia (by whom?) will be the difficult (to whom?) bit. The degree of certainty (for whom?) about the outcome… Reconciling Russia's need (by whom?)… Winning (whose?) this non-election is the easy (for whom?) bit…*						Instances of PARTIAL EXCLUSION-Vladimir Putin as AGENT is BACKGROUNDED, represented only by his actions, being present later in the text.
	a successor	specific	individualized	det.	Categorized: Functionalisation	personalized	Passivated: VLADIMIR PUTIN as Patient of the process('to choose a successor'); yet, Backgrounded.
	Vladimir Putin	specific	individualized	Det.	Nominated: Semiformalized	personalized	Experiencer of the process ('Vladimir Putin is ahead in the opinion polls').
	Mr Putin	Specific	Individualized	Det.	Nominated: Formalized	Personalized	Agent or Experiencer of the process.
	Russia's prime minister; acting president; an anti-establishment candidate; an oligarchs' frontman, a reformer	specific	Individualized	Determinate and different in relation to the other politicians	Categorized: classification + Functionalization	personalized	
	Yeltsin protégé; Tony Blair's newest pal; doting family man	specific	individualized	det. and diff.	Categorized: relational identification + Appraisement	personalized	
	He will attract votes/presents himself/has deigned/has produced/controls/has eschewed TV debates/has avoided ideological battles/ takes office/knows/ has ridden the power/jumps	specific	individualized	determinate	(implicitly nominated by means of indexical pronoun)	personalized	activated: Vladimir Putin is Agent or Experiencer of the process.
	He has been portrayed	specific	individuated	determinate		personalized	Passivated: Vladimir Putin is Patient of the process.
	A new, young, energetic face	specific	individuated	det. and diff.	Categorized: identification (classification + physical identification + appraisement)	Impersonalized (semi-objectivated by metonymy 'face')	
	his political base/decision/ policy/success/ toughest challenges/promise/ befriending	specific	individuated	Det. and diff.		Semi-objectivated	Activated by possessivation
	A neo-Stanilist; ex-KGB apparatchik; Dog lover/vodka trippler/karate choper/ladies' man/ one helluva of a fun guy	specific	individuated	Det. and diff.	Categorized: identification + classification + appraisement	personalized	
THE RUSSIANS	*Running Russia/holding Russia together/ reconciling Russia's need*	specific	assimilated	Det. and undiff.	Nomination (informalization)	Impersonalized by abstractization	Passivated: Patient of the process.

	*The result is already known(**to whom?**)/ defence(**whose?**) spending/a miserable(**for whom?**)post-Communist decade/it may be greater repression(**among whom?**)/cannot bring greater prosperity(**for whom?**)*						Instances of PARTIAL EXCLUSION-THE RUSSIANS as AGENTS/ PATIENTS are BACKGROUNDED, represented only by actions, being retrieved by the readers.
	***Russia's** prime minister/national pride/**its** interests abroad/the **country's** chaotic economy/its rusting industrial base*	specific	individuated	Det. and diff.	Nominated (informalization)/ Categorized (negative appraisement)	Impersonalized by abstractization	Passivated:Patient (beneficialization)
	At home/Kremlin-centred clique/the media/TV debates	specific	assimilated	det. and diff.	Categorized(identi-fication + functionalization)	Impersonalized (semi-objectivated by metonymy)	Passivated: Patient of the process (eg. 'He controls much of the media')
	Of power brokers, business men and media tycoons	specific	Assimilated (collectivized)	Det. and diff.	Categorized: classification + identification + functionalization	personalized	activated
	We and the Russian people	specific	Assimilated (collectivized)	Det. and undiff.	Categorized	personalized	
	Life for ordinary Russians	specific	Assimilated (collectivized)	Det. and undiff.	Categorized (appraisement)	personalized	Passivated: Experiencer
	Including the 50m in poverty	specific	Assimilated (aggregated)	Indet. and diff.	Categorized (identification)	Impersonalized by abstractization	Passivated: Patient.
OTHER POLITICIANS	*President Boris Yeltsin; Hosni Mubarak; Margaret Thatcher Michael Foot; Communist Gennady Zyuganov Grigory Yavinsky, the liberal's standard bearer*	Specific	Individuated	Det.	Nominated(semi-formalization) + categorization (functionalization/ classification)	personalized	Passivated/ activated
	Ideological battles/ controversial commitments/ well-man-aged western help/ the west/ the new nationalism	Specific	Assimilated (collectivized)	Det.	Categorized through identification (classification)	Impersonalized (objectivized by metonymy)	passivated
THE JOURNALIST AND THE READERS	*Unusually (**for whom?**)/the problem(**whose?**)/ the only real(**for whom?**)question/remains unclear (**for whom?**)/ is as uncertain (**to whom?**)/ The answer (**whose?**)/unenlightening/sadly (**for whom?**)*						Instances of EXCLUSION-the journalist and the readers as AGENTS/ PATIENTS are BACKGROUNDED, being retrieved by the readers.
	*Last month, **we** asked/we shall see*	Specific	Assimilated (collectivized)	Det. and undiff.		personalized	Agents or experiencers of the process.
THE ELECTION	*A democratic election/this election/an election/most unenlightening of elections/ this non-election*	Specific	Individualized	Det. and diff.	Categorized: identification + negative appraisement	impersonalized	
	The winning/ the outcome/victory/more a referendum	Specific	Individualized	Det.(overdetermination: symbolization)		Impersonalized by metonymy	

Discussion and conclusions

My analysis of main 'characters' in the newspaper article proves that, through discourses, social actors constitute objects of knowledge, situations and social roles as well as identities and interpersonal relations between different social groups and those who interact them.

If Fairclough considers the text as a significant form of social activity thus entering a dialectical relationship with wider social structures, van Leeuwen's networks clearly hint exactly at the textual representations of the 'actors' involved in such social relationships and at their specific actions that disclose certain ideologies and hegemonies.

In my opinion, social actors, as van Leeuwen conceives them, are the producers, the consumers and the interpreters of other social actors' discourses and the 'social actions' are, in fact, their own discursive and social practices. That is why I included also the journalist and the readers among them.

One could have guessed from the beginning the main categories of actors, only by thinking at the election as social practice, involving generally several candidates (VLADIMIR PUTIN, the only candidate referred to here) and the voters (THE RUSSIANS) as agents in the process of going to the polls and patients or experiencers within and after the process of election itself. Of course, all the OTHER POLITICIANS irrespective of their allegiance are activated in relation to this process.

Besides, the cognitive concept of *schema* as *a portion of background knowledge relating to a particular type of object, person, situation and event* [1] will always guide us in the selection of the participants be they backgrounded or explicitly included in the text.

A closer look at the linguistic possibilities actualized here in order to represent these actors will reveal important meanings about what journalists generally understand of these actors, including their own. Let me summarize here the most interesting and frequently encountered of them.

The representation of government agents and experts tends to be made specifically and that of 'ordinary people' generically if it [the newspaper] is intended for middle-class readers, in order to suit the purpose of acknowledging the correct power relations, i.e. between the governed and the governors [5:47].

Newspapers generally allow the individualization of 'elite persons', enlarging the displaying of their titles and institutional affiliations and the assimilation of 'ordinary people' as if they were all the same and no one could differentiate among them. Hence the subtle interplay between levels of categorization (*functionalisation, identification, appraisement*) which throw an interesting light on human identities and relations in all the cases. With Vladimir Putin, it seems that all these roles become means towards the achievement of the final goal, while the other actors are only passivated, i.e. subjected to his actions or beneficializing from them.

The instances of partial exclusion will always remind us of the actor in the shaddow. One reason for which suppression (radical exclusion) or backgrounding may happen is because the readers are assumed to be able to associate the respective activity with a certain actor they already know. Another deeper implication is that of an intended blocking access of readers to detailed knowledge of the given social practice. Sometimes the roles played generally by some authorities *have to* be obscured.

Against such a misty (or, better, mystical) background, the journalist will always stand by his readers, providing more or less subjective judgments, in a sense of togetherness, a sense that it is always a collective 'we', never just a solitary 'I'. In fact, as Firth [3:66] says: *We are born individuals. But to satisfy our needs we have to become social persons...*

APPENDIX

When the winning is easy
Running Russia will be the difficult bit

Russia goes to the polls tomorrow to choose a successor to President Boris Yeltsin. Unusually in a democratic election, the result is already known in advance. The degree of certainty about the outcome does not match Egypt where Hosni Mubarak recently took over 95% of the vote, or indeed Margaret Thatcher's 1983 contest with Michael Foot. But it would a foolish kulak indeed who bet his roubles on a victory for Communist Gennady Zyuganov or Grigory Yavlinsky, the liberals' standard bearer. The problem with this election is that it has hardly been an election at all – more a referendum on one man's popularity.

Vladimir Putin, Russia's prime minister, acting president, Yeltsin protégé, hammer of the Chechens, and Tony Blair's newest pal, is so far ahead in the opinion polls that the only real question is whether he will attract sufficient votes (50% or more) to avoid a second-round run-off. Mr Putin has achieved the American politician's trick of running as an anti-establishment candidate while enjoying the backing of the establishment. He presents himself, when he has deigned to campaign at all, as a new, young, energetic face ready to break with the past, restore Russia's national pride, stand up for its interests abroad, and

crack down hard on crime and corruption at home. But his political base comprises essentially the same Kremlin-centred clique of power-brokers, business men and media tycoons which pulled Mr Yeltsin's strings in his later years.

Whether Mr Putin is his own man, or an oligarchs' frontman, a reformer or a neo-Stalinist, remains unclear. He has produced no manifesto or economic programme. He effectively controls much of the media and has eschewed TV debates. He has avoided ideological battles and controversial commitments. His decision to raise defence spending and pensions, on the other hand, is not one that any true patriot could contest. But while their candidate has skated over the issues, his managers have worked hard to broaden the appeal of their uncharismatic, dour-looking charge. To soften his image as ex-KGB apparatchik, he has been variously portrayed as doting family man, dog-lover, vodka tippler, karate chopper, ladies' man, and really, one helluva of a fun guy to be around. Whether all this is actually true is as uncertain as his policy on relations with the Ukraine. Last month, we asked: "Who is Vladimir Putin?" The answer is that after this most unenlightening of elections, we and the Russian people still do not know.

The problems facing Mr Putin once he takes office in his own right will not, however, be so easily avoided. The Chechnya war – sadly, the single most important reason for his success – is far from over. Nor is separatism confined to that devastated Caucasus nation. Simply holding Russia together will be one of his toughest challenges. Another will be how to revive the country's chaotic economy, particularly its rusting industrial base and primitive agriculture. On this rests his promise that, after a miserable post-Communist decade, life for ordinary Russians, including the 50m in poverty, can be better, safer, and fairer. Strengthening the "organs of the state", although it may bring greater repression, cannot bring greater prosperity. For this Mr Putin will continue to need well-man-aged western help. He knows this very well – hence his befriending of Mr Blair. Reconciling Russia's need for good relations with the west with the new nationalism on which he has ridden to power will be Mr Putin's biggest test. Winning this non-election is the easy bit. Then we shall see which way he jumps.

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