

Title	Teaching students to read the news via representations of asylum seekers in British newspapers
Authors	White, Allen
Publication date	2004-07
Original Citation	WHITE, A. 2004. Teaching students to read the news via representations of asylum seekers in British newspapers. Journal of Geography in Higher Education, 28, 285-299. doi: 10.1080/0309826042000242512
Type of publication	Article (peer-reviewed)
Link to publisher's version	10.1080/0309826042000242512
Rights	© 2004 Taylor & Francis Ltd. This is an Author's Accepted Manuscript of an article published in WHITE, A. 2004. Teaching students to read the news via representations of asylum seekers in British newspapers. Journal of Geography in Higher Education, 28, 285-299. copyright Taylor & Francis, available online at: http://www.tandfonline.com/10.1080/0309826042000242512
Download date	2025-07-13 01:35:06
Item downloaded from	https://hdl.handle.net/10468/1076



UCC

University College Cork, Ireland
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh

Allen White, Department of International Studies Nottingham Trent University, Clifton Lane, Nottingham NG11 8NS, UK¹

Email: allen.white@ntu.ac.uk

This is the post-print (i.e. final draft post refereeing) version. This paper is published as: **White, A.** (2004) Reading the News: Representations of Asylum Seekers in British Newspapers *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*. 28(2) : 285 – 299.

See: <http://www.tandfonline.com/toc/cjgh20/28/2>

<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/0309826042000242512>

Abstract:

Research by geographers on using news media in the classroom has tended to concentrate on either content or discourse analysis of newspapers. These approaches hold in common an implicit understanding that *what* news stories say happened is not as important as the language, metaphors, images and representations used in news stories. In this paper I discuss Bell's (1999) approach to analyzing news stories, which lies somewhere between content and discourse analysis. This approach works through emphasizing the 'event' and 'time' structure of stories as they are presented to us in newspapers. Through building up the 'event' and time structure of news stories about asylum we can put ourselves in the position to see what the story does, and does not say. In turn this approach shows how our understandings of seemingly simple news stories are often based on assumptions, ambiguities and discrepancies which support and are based within exploitative power relationships.

Keywords: Representation, newspapers, classroom, refugees, content analysis, discourse analysis.

¹ Currently Research Officer, College of Arts, Celtic Studies and Social Sciences, University College Cork, Ireland. Email: allen.white@ucc.ie

Introduction

Asylum seekers and refugees occupy a particular space in everyday life in the UK. Barely a day goes by without a report in the UK press on the criminality of asylum seekers, the threat that large numbers of asylum seekers represent to the security of the state, or the threat posed by more entering the country through illegal routes and smuggling rings. For the majority of UK citizens the everyday presence of asylum seekers is entirely mediated through television and print media reports, specials and exclusives. Thus thinking seriously about media representations of asylum seekers and refugees is central to our teaching about asylum, geography and the challenges faced by asylum seekers and refugees across the UK. However, as the Refugee Council (2002) has pointed out “the British press is peppered with the use of negative language and misinformation around the issue of asylum”. In order to resist negative media representations and to explore, in our teaching, the relationship between truth, fiction, myth and reality and the politics of representing asylum seekers and refugees, it is important to understand and to interrogate the methodologies geographers use to analyse media texts. Furthermore the very ordinariness of popular media texts means they are woven into the fabric of people’s everyday lives and therefore their popular consciousness (see Burgess & Gold, 1988). In this way, national and international events and issues (like asylum) are articulated through local channels of communication and are part of the ways people understand the world around them. As geographers and teachers we play an important role in shaping these understandings and should seek to provide students with the tools and methods to critically evaluate and make up their own minds about the sources of information they use to understand their world.

In this paper I provide a brief account of the two principle techniques of newspaper analysis – content analysis and discourse analysis – with reference to research on newspaper representations of asylum seekers and refugees. I will discuss the ways in which the spatial context of the classroom imposes particular limitations on how we can use newspapers and media analysis as part of our teaching. I go on to outline an approach to analyzing media texts, (henceforth referred to as Bell’s approach) that lies somewhere between content and discourse analysis. Like content analysis Bell’s approach focuses on asking straightforward questions of the text. Like discourse analysis Bell’s approach is best understood as producing an analysis of a text upon which attempts may be made to unpack the ideologies underlying

the news (Bell, 1999). However unlike content and discourse analysis, Bell's approach takes media claims to factuality on their own terms. The point is not to measure the text against an external reality; rather it is to examine what we are told has happened. I use the experience of using Bell's approach in class with a group of undergraduates in the St David's College, University of Wales Lampeter to illustrate its particular strengths. I should note, at this point, that Bell's approach can (potentially) be used to explore the politics of representing issues beyond those surrounding asylum and immigration. Bell's approach can be used to explore the media representation of almost any issue relevant to teaching geography at third level.

Media representations of asylum seekers

Broadly speaking media texts can be analyzed using either content or discourse analytical techniques. In the following section I review the benefits and disadvantages of each method (or methods) by using examples from the literature on media representations of refugees and asylum seekers.

Content analysis

Content analysis focuses on the content of the messages communicated in a text and assumes that counting the frequency or pattern of this content can:

reveal the purposes, motives, and other characteristics of the communicators as they are (presumably) 'reflected' in the content; or to identify the (presumable) effects of the content upon the attention, attitudes, or acts of readers and listeners (Berelson, 1996, p.203).

Content analysis of newspaper representations of asylum seekers and refugees in the UK is uncommon, despite oft-repeated claims that the press's hostility towards asylum seekers translates into discrimination for asylum seekers and refugees (see Joly, 1996). Kaye (1998) offers a good example of content analysis of 'broadsheet' UK (**The Independent**, **The Guardian** and **The Times**) newspaper representations of refugees over the period from 1990 to 1995 [1]. Kaye's analysis focuses on the recurrence of particular keywords (e.g. 'bogus', 'genuine', 'economic migrant' etc.) and argues that the news media in the UK shape stories to fall in line with the defined agendas of politicians and government officials.

Similar content analysis studies of newspaper stories about asylum seekers explore ‘agenda setting’ in the media (i.e. the ways the media, through emphasising particular issues and events, shapes both their readers interests as well as the public, political agenda). d’Haenens and de Lange (2001) explore the ways agenda setting structures and shapes reports on asylum seekers in Dutch regional newspapers. Their study assumes each news story has a single determinate reading that can be placed within one (or potentially more) news frames. A news frame is defined as the ways particular events and issues are chosen and communicated “in such a way as to promote a particular definition of a problem, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendations for the item described” (Entman: quoted in d’Haenens & de Lange, 2002, p.849). Each story is placed in one (of five) different news frames: a conflict frame; a human interest frame; an economic consequences frame; a morality frame; and a responsibility frame. The authors conclude that there are no significant differences in the frames used by different regional newspapers and that some frames (in particular the morality frame) barely figure in most newspaper reports (ibid.). An alternative approach is used by Brosius & Eps (1995) to examine the pattern of newspaper coverage in two German broadsheet newspapers. Here the focus is on measuring the extent to which ‘key events’ (in this case specific notorious violent attacks on asylum seekers) shape the reporting of news over a particular time period. They conclude that specific incidents that are more like ‘key events’ stand a higher likelihood of being published (ibid.). They conclude that ‘key events’ structure what the media selects to report.

As these brief examples show, content analysis is not simply about numbers or quantification. Rather, its central concerns lie in following a natural science methodology in textual analysis (Rose, 2001). In each of the examples above, particular rules and procedures (about coding particular words in the UK press, about placing stories within particular news frames, about assessing the details of ‘key events’) are rigorously followed and large numbers of stories analysed. While this analysis may lend itself to quantification what is really being established is consistency, reliability and validity across a range of stories and news reports. Thus as Gillian Rose puts it content analysis is “methodologically explicit” (2001, p.56). Easy to explain and simple to understand, content analysis always seeks to subject large number of stories or texts to a ‘scientific’, consistent and ‘objective’ gaze.

Despite its apparent simplicity, however, content analysis is problematic. Each of the preceding examples contains specific methodological weaknesses. For example, Kaye (1998) only examines stories in broadsheet newspapers and focuses exclusively on explicit and unambiguous hostile language towards asylum seekers and refugees. Brosius & Eps (1995) cannot distinguish between perfect and weak examples of a 'key event' in individual newspaper reports. More generally, a particular theoretical weakness of content analysis lies in the assumption that newspapers are filled with stories and reports that contain a single determinate meaning. Content analysis assumes, as van Dijk points out, that newspapers are filled with transparently obvious 'facts' and "transparent 'messages' whose 'contents' may be analyzed in a superficial ... way" (Van Dijk, 2000, p.38). This basic assumption underlying content analysis mean it is unable to investigate multiple readings or interpretations of the same text.

Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis concentrates on the structure of a text, its unacknowledged rules, its intertextual references and its relationship to powerful institutions and specific social, political and cultural contexts. The differences between content and discourse analysis rest around the construction of meaning within texts, or to put it another way both approaches differ through the way in which they conceptualize the relationship between reality and the text. In content analysis meaning is unambiguous, straightforward and quantifiable; in discourse analysis meaning is more diffuse, multiple, and often contradictory.

Van Dijk (2000) argues that the analysis of media representations needs to allow for multiple readings of individual stories. The analysis of discourses in news stories on immigration offers insights into the underlying mechanisms of public discourse in the reproduction of racism (ibid.). In particular, daily news stories reproduce particular positive Self and negative Other images and representations in accounts about immigrants, refugees and ethnic minorities.

Constructions of 'dangerous' Others inform Worth's (2002) account of 'mediascapes' and HIV-positive African refugees in New Zealand. For Worth the term 'mediascape' is understood as the place where public understandings and significances about HIV-positive African refugees are (re)produced and transformed. This 'mediascape' is gendered, sexualized, and shaped by old-fashioned xenophobia and nationalism.

Malkki (1996) argues that the bureaucratic responses to asylum seekers and refugees (for example providing temporary accommodation or the registration of refugees) have developed in parallel with routine ways in which refugees and asylum seekers are represented in visual and textual media - most often as a 'sea of faces' or as silently suffering and vulnerable individuals. The visual prominence of iconic figures in reports on refugees, most often as mother and child, re-inscribes the passive and helpless characteristics of refugees that specific institutional practices and policies expect. In other words to be refugees people must be helpless and speechless, need protection, and need someone to speak for them.

Glover (1997) concentrates on the persistence of hydraulic metaphors, imagining 'inflows' and 'outflows' of migrants that have informed representations of population movements in the UK for over 100 years. Here the state is imagined as a reservoir or lake and its international borders as dams controlling the flows of people into and out of the state. The use of these metaphors suggests a series of meanings that shape the ways in which truth about immigration, refugees and asylum can be constructed. Flows can be 'out of control' threatening the livelihoods of all citizens, thus newspapers emphasise 'floods' of refugees that threaten to 'swamp' the state. A development of these hydraulic metaphors represents the state as a physical body, the population as the lifeblood and the policy maker as the physician, thus a threatening 'inflow' can be contrasted with the hemorrhage or uncontrolled outflow of migrants from specific places (for an example from Ireland see Hennessy, 1999). The incoming 'Other' represents 'infection' or 'disease', to be repelled by the most stringent means.

Discourse analysis, then, pays particular attention to the structures and intertextual references and connections that make up each text. Discourse analysis starts from the premise that newspaper reports are cultural products and that each text may have multiple (and sometimes contradictory) interpretations and meanings for different audiences. ***For example Worth's (2002) analysis of 'mediascapes' of HIV-positive asylum seekers acknowledges the existence of non-Western audiences, 'mediascapes' form part of the ways HIV- positive African refugees interpret and understand their own experiences*** (this is incomplete. Please reword this)

The acknowledgement of the role of power and different institutions in the construction of media texts means that discourse analysis is suited to a close examination of

the production of particular texts. Thus in Malkki's (1996) analysis the bureaucracies and institutions that penetrate into refugees' lives shape their media representations in particular ways. Representations of refugees and asylum seekers are reworked through a number of different practices (for example prioritising expert institutional voices over those of refugees and asylum seekers) which de-politicise and de-historicise refugees' and asylum seekers' reasons and motivations for fleeing specific social and political conditions and contexts.

Rose (2001) highlights a particular problem with discourse analysis, namely the higher the number of intertextual references that are part of discourse analysis the less empirically 'grounded' this analysis may appear. In other words discourse analysis can sometimes produce a series of intertextual references that may only be connected to the original text through a vague 'free-floating discourse'. For example Glover's (1997) discussion of anti-refugee sentiment finds intertextual references between Joseph Conrad's **The Secret Agent** and: the Royal Commission on Alien Immigration, 1903; The Aliens Act 1905; the Asylum and Immigration Act 1995; various letters to the **East London Advertiser** and the **East London Observer** in the early 1900s; contemporary xenophobic texts such as **The Alien Invasion** and **The Destitute Alien**; and contemporary Anti-Semitic texts such as **The modern Jew**. The range of sources is impressive but the extent to which these texts are all connected to each other in an empirically grounded way is lost to the reader. They only work together and around the reading of **The Secret Agent** through an appeal to a free-floating anti-asylum discourse.

Using newspapers in the geography classroom

The methods of analysing newspaper texts that can be used teaching geography to undergraduates appear pretty entrenched. Content analysis and discourse analysis have their strengths and, importantly, their weaknesses. There seems to be little debate amongst geographers about the potential use of newspapers as a pedagogical resource (by which I mean accounts of the use of newspapers in class as a resource in their own right and in classes on representation, politics and meaning). Discussion about content or discourse analysis of newspapers, and of media and textual analysis in general, locates the collection and analysis of newspaper texts as part of broader discussions about research methodologies

(see Aitken, 1997; Bell, 1993; May, 1997). These are usually concerned with student projects such as dissertations.

That said, accounts of using newspapers in geography classrooms do exist. Many of these have been structured by particular assumptions about the 'role' of the media and concerns with the ways media 'bias' distorts 'facts'. For example Vujakovic (1998) urges undergrads to collect newspapers to supplement their academic readings and keep up-to-date with events but to be wary of the sharp distinction between 'fact', speculation' and 'opinion'. Jackson's (1988) seminal account of using newspapers in the classroom to discuss racism makes very similar points about newspapers as a pedagogical resource, i.e. that they provide an accessible, up-to-date resource for looking at the languages and metaphors that constitute racism and racist ideologies; but, when taken out of context, newspapers can be read in deceptive and misleading ways.

Accounts of the use of newspapers in geography classrooms present the relationship between the newspaper and an external reality as relatively straightforward. In particular, facts can be distorted by biased and deceptive reporting. In these accounts the newspaper acts as the transparent lens through which 'up to date' information can be transferred to readers. In this way the newspaper acts as a medium through which the correspondence between an event and a description of an event ('bias' notwithstanding) is relatively unproblematic (May, 1997). In effect these approaches reproduce some of the questionable assumptions of content analysis.

Undoubtedly, content analysis has many uses in the geography classroom. It is relatively straightforward to explain and to understand. However, the 'sample' size (often measured in the hundreds) is too large to be practical in the classroom. As a result, time and resource limitations will often get in the way. There are also practical difficulties in using discourse analysis in the classroom. Though discourse analysis recognizes that newspapers are mediated cultural products, and seeks to produce multiple, often contradictory, readings of texts, this too is difficult to achieve under the constraints of the classroom. Describing and outlining the various structures and strategies of text in newspaper stories and relating these to social and political contexts (see van Dijk, 2000) is obviously important. However, for a non-expert audience (as the average class of undergraduates usually are) this may require such large amounts of contextual information and data that the constraints of the

classroom are impossible to overcome. The spatial context of the classroom thus imposes particular pressures and limitations on how particular (media) representations can be interpreted and challenged.

Because of these constraints, I have adopted an alternative approach to the use and analysis of newspapers in the classroom. Drawing on the work of Bell (1999), I favour an approach to media text analysis that lies somewhere between content and discourse analysis. Bell's approach works by emphasizing the 'event' structure of stories as they are presented to us in newspapers. Through building up the 'event' structure of a specific news story about asylum we can put ourselves in a position to see what the story does and does not say. In turn, this approach shows how our understandings of seemingly simple news stories are often based on particular assumptions, ambiguities and discrepancies.

Bell's 'Discourse structure of news stories'

The approach to media analysis outlined in Bell (1999) is based on building up the 'event structure' of a story. The event structure of a story takes into account the particular events that take place in the story, the times at which they took place, the locations of the events in the story, and the news actors (people names and involved in the events identified in the story). Being able to account for all of these means we can build up an 'event structure' for the story in question. Building the event structure starts by asking the (deceptively simple) question "what happened" in the story under analysis. This is not so we can measure/gauge its relationship to external 'factual' events; instead emphasis rests on taking the story's claims towards factuality on its own terms. What happened is not as important as establishing what we are told has happened. In other words this approach aims to establish, based on the fragments and bits of information available to the reader, what the story says has happened, when it happened and where it happened. This is achieved by concentrating on the four questions—what, where, when, who? Building an event structure should tell us what the story says happened: "what events occurred, where they occurred and when, and who was involved" (Bell, 1999, p.75). In theory, this process should establish the structures of the story – the events, the times, places and news actors – and how these aspects of the story fit together to form a single version of events. In practice, however, this is rarely the case. The disjunctures and contradictions exposed by the different aspects of the story can reveal clues

and information that may be used to unpack the sub-texts, institutional influences and power structures that discourse analysis concentrates upon.

The approach outlined in Bell (1999) is particularly suited for pedagogical use because it combines the strengths of both content and discourse analysis in a number of ways (see Appendix 1). Firstly, while Bell's approach is based on relatively straightforward questions about the text, it also treats newspaper stories as complex mediated cultural products. Secondly, Bell's approach also avoids producing misleading and potentially deceptive readings of specific words or phrases in headlines or leads (see Jackson, 1988). In fact it places the relationship between the headline, subheadings and the newspaper story at the centre of the analysis. Thirdly, unlike both content and discourse analysis the truth or falsity of the story are accepted or rejected on their own terms; in other words, instead of making the story's relationship to an external reality the centre of the analysis we put ourselves in the position to see what the story does, and does not, say happened. Fourthly, Bell's approach is especially suited towards the analysis of 'straightforward' 'factual' kinds of stories i.e. not 'opinion' or 'speculation' pieces (see Vujakovic, 1998). This reveals the complexity of apparently 'simple' stories and provides a good foundation for the analysis of a story's ideological structure. Fifthly, Bell's approach can provide clues and information about the production of news by media agencies. Like content analysis Bell's approach illustrates how particular stories are assembled in specific ways. Finally, this approach is suited to use in geography classrooms because locating the sources for a particular story (or part of a story) and the locations and places discussed in the story (or part of a story) are central to the analysis of the story. This can be important because the origins of sources for a specific story may in fact be unrelated and placed together to draw the reader to specific conclusions. Equally locations cited in the story offer clues about the kinds of audiences that are expected by the editors and journalists writing the story.

Using Bell's approach in the classroom

In order to show the efficacy of Bell's approach, I will illustrate how the event structure of a specific story about refugees in a UK newspaper is constructed (see Appendix 2). In doing so, I draw on experiences using this approach with a class of second and third year geography undergraduates in University College Wales, Lampeter over the academic year

2000-01. These students were taking a Level Two 20 credit option entitled 'Refugees and Asylum in the 20th Century'. The module was taught over 10 two hour sessions and was assessed by a journal (comprising at least 6 entries) that was handed in at the end of the semester. A total of 26 students took the module, which was divided into two sections. The first section followed a conventional lecture format and covered topics such as: the history and geography of main refugee movements over the second half of the 20th century in different contexts (two sessions); the development of international legal norms and definitions of refugees in the West, Africa and South America (two sessions); the evolution of post Cold War flows of refugees and asylum seekers in the West (one session); and the development of a range of academic responses to refugee and asylum seeker movements (which has become known as 'Refugee Studies') (one session). The second section followed a less 'scripted' format. Most sessions involved a brief outline lecture of no more than 15-20 minutes, followed by 1 hour workshops on specific topics. These topics were: the production and consumption of statistics on refugee and asylum seeker populations; the spatial structure and planning of refugee camps; representations of refugees and asylum seekers in films and TV; and representations of refugees and asylum seekers in the UK press.

In the session in question I began by outlining the limited amount of work on media representations of refugees and asylum seekers, despite the causal role the media is given inciting hostility in refugee receiving states. In class I briefly outlined Bell's approach to media analysis. In particular I concentrated on the ways an *event structure* of a specific story can be constructed. After this mini-lecture (which lasted no more than 15-20 mins.) I handed out a photocopy of a story from the *Sun* (a daily national tabloid) (see Appendix 2). The *Sun* is synonymous with nationalist, xenophobic and anti-immigration news reports in the UK; it is also one of the best selling newspapers in the UK. As van Dijk (2000) points out, any article in the *Sun* has potentially been read by millions of people. I asked the class to break into small working groups and to concentrate on specific questions from Bell's framework in order to build up an event structure for the story as a whole (see Appendix 2). Concentrating on just these questions helped focus the classroom session and at the same time allowed students to unravel the disjointed and implied linkages that make up most of this story. During the class I circulated between different groups answering questions, offering tips and advice; at all times I tried to ensure I was taking a 'back seat' in these discussions. After an hour and 15 or so minutes (including a ten minute coffee break) the class re-convened as a

group to discuss the disjunctures and contradictions in this story and the ways in which it is structured by particular assumptions about asylum, refugees, immigration and place. Our answers to three of Bell's questions (*What, where* and *when*) are outlined in the following sections.

Answering Bell's questions: What?

The headline appears to refer to two separate but interrelated events. The first is the addition of £20 to Council Tax charges. We are not told where this is happening, but we are told that these additional charges are in some connected to the presence of refugees. The second is the reaction to this additional tax charge. We are told that there is 'fury' in response to these tax increases, amongst who it is impossible to say. We can infer that it is local residents of somewhere in Britain, but to find out more we must read on.

The Lead (S2) simply re-iterates the headline. The story tells us more about the context of this Council tax rise. We see that this is yet to happen; we also see that the story is referring to the relatively prosperous South Western suburbs of London. The council's need to house nearly 1000 refugees in Richmond is blamed for the tax rise, however this figure does not necessarily tally with the small number of refugee families (50 in total) that have already been housed in Richmond. Thus a reading of the events in the story is that (1) numbers of refugees have moved to this part of London, (2) local London councils have altered and published their budgets and tax aims accordingly and (3) these tax rises have been criticized by different groups. There are two other events in the story that do not have any necessary relationship to these events, namely fights between motorists and 'squeegee squads' and people sleeping rough outside a council refugee reception unit. Since these do not have any logical relationship to the rest of the story and exist 'outside' the main event structure of this story we must assume these events come from a different source to the rest of this story.

Details from the rest of the story required us to re-evaluate the lead, since the evidence (figures and numbers quoted) in the story do not justify the addition to the Council Tax bill (of £20 or more) that is quoted. Nor do the numbers of asylum seekers involved (50 families, or an increase from 919 to 1,100). Subsequent information in the rest of the story,

the increase in the population of refugees, requires us to re-number the events in the headline and the lead. The increase in the Council Tax Bill appears to be the central event in the story as the majority of the story deals with it.

Answering Bell's questions: Where?

Particular kinds of places are referred to throughout the story: homes (S2); households (S3); the 'area' (S 11); the council's reception unit (S 13) ; an 'attractive area' (S15). These place terms are at the beginning and the end of the story, perhaps in order to strongly associate particular events with specific everyday and 'ordinary' spaces and places. They contain information that is specific to local audiences, for example where the local council reception unit is, but it cannot be taken for granted that all these places terms do in fact refer to the same localities.

Specific places are mentioned in the story: Richmond, South West London (S3); Twickenham (S7); 'close to Heathrow' (S9); Eastern Europe (S9); 'nearby Hillingdon' (S16); Kent (S17). These are spread throughout the story, they give clues about the range of different sources and locations that much of the information used in the story comes from; they also provide information that presupposes that the audience for this story has some knowledge of the geography of the UK but is not aware of specific local information (that Richmond is in South West London, that it is close to Heathrow, that it is an attractive area etc.).

Within a couple of sentences (e.g. S9 -11) the story presupposes certain shared knowledges that may be held by different readerships – local and national (or international). We do not know why this is although we can speculate it is because different parts of the story depend on different sources. On top of this it appears that the story has a number of different locations – tax rises in Richmond, tensions between residents and 'squeegee squads' somewhere in London and tax rises in Hillingdon and Kent. It is certainly possible (and probable) that the different elements of the story have been gathered from a range of different contexts and sources and reassembled to give the impression they are inter-related.

Answering Bell's questions: When?

We expected the time structure of the story to closely follow the event structure of the story. The chronology of events in this story is fairly straightforward - (1) numbers of refugees have moved to this part of London, (2) local London councils have altered and published their budgets and tax aims accordingly and (3) these tax rises have been criticized by different groups – but the time structure of the story and the way it is reported is more complex. The central event, the announcement by Richmond council that it needs an extra £2.6 million to house asylum seekers was ascribed a time number 0. All events that must logically have occurred *before* this (for example the arrival of refugees into the locality) were given time numbers -1, -2 etc. All events that logically must have occurred *after* the central event (for example the reaction of the local homeowners, the comments by the local MP) were given time numbers +1, +2 etc. Although we might expect a seemingly factual story such as this to report the story in a chronological fashion, a glance at the time structure of the story shows that this is not the case.

At first the time structure of the story appears simple, but as the story progresses its chronology is broken up and re-assembled. Indeed it was impossible to state with any certainty what the time structure of the second half of the story actually is. In fact it appears that the second half of the story (the resentment caused by 'squeegee squads, the angry local resident, the homeless people sleeping outside the council offices) has a time structure of its own (and it follows its own event structure). The more we look at the relationship between events in the story the less complete it seems. The story has been collected from a number of different sources, the figures and numbers quoted do not justify the tax rises quoted, the chronology of events has been broken up and reassembled in order to appeal to a particular interpretation (that Council Tax rises are due to the presence of refugees; that these refugees are resented by the 'local community'; that refugees 'drag down' an attractive area).

Analysing the event structure and Bell's approach

There are obviously other questions that could be asked about the story (especially about the sources attributed and people and institutions referred to and quoted in the story). However the analysis so far reveals how the hegemonic interpretation of the story is based on the

subtexts and implied linkages in the story (that refugees in Richmond are threatening, homeless, transient and operate within criminal gangs or ‘squads’) and a series of ‘truth claims’ about asylum seekers and refugees (that the UK is ‘full’ of refugees; that all asylum seekers are bogus; that asylum seekers are criminals and welfare scroungers) that do not stand up to any scrutiny. This interpretation depends on ignoring the social, political and economic exclusion of refugees and asylum seekers from mainstream life (and by doing so reproduces this exclusion). This story is in no way unique, it is like simply hundreds of media texts that are woven into and part of our everyday lives. However Bell’s analysis helps reveal how it is structured and shaped in order to appeal to a dominant and hegemonic reading despite its simple and uncomplicated appearance.

During the exercise the students were enthusiastic about building the event structure of the story and answering the questions posed by Bell’s analysis. Many were surprised about the amount that could be said about such a seemingly simple story. Most commented on the ways the story was shaped in ways to appeal to a particular interpretation. Students subsequently wrote journal entries using Bell’s analysis to examine other newspaper stories. This was significant as the students were free to choose what to write their journal entries on and thus produced journals that followed their own interests and motivations in the module.

The objective of this classroom exercise was to examine a story that purports to tell simple ‘truths’ about refugees and asylum seekers. Asking questions about the event structure of the story (about what the story does [not] say happened, about who was involved, where and when the events are supposed to have happened) reveals how the story comes from a number of different sources and has been (re)assembled in order to appeal to a particular dominant reading and interpretation. This interpretation is in turn based upon a number of ‘truth claims’ about refugees and asylum seekers that are neither supported by any evidence nor are consistent with the themes and issues dealt with in other sessions in the module.

Furthermore this exercise was important because the meanings and metaphors that surround social concerns like asylum and immigration are mobile and diffuse. They percolate through society and can quickly attain the status of ‘truth’ being (re)produced in everyday conversations and endlessly recycled through national and local media. However the ambiguities, discrepancies and uncertainties that surround discourses about asylum mean

that resistance to these dominant truth claims lie in ‘tit-for-tat’ exchanges of truths and counter truths. Smith (1994) calls this the *evidence game* and argues that resistance to power may have the effect of reinforcing the *game* itself. For example right-wing commentators and politicians claim nearly all asylum claims are bogus, supporters of asylum-seekers counter with statistics on people granted temporary status on humanitarian grounds or those who are granted refugee status on appeal. The unfairness and injustice of the determination procedures are overlooked in these exchanges. Through drawing attention to the ways the details of a story are assembled to support particular truth claims about asylum seekers Bells approach circumvents the *evidence game*. Using Bell’s approach shows how understandings of seemingly simple news stories about asylum seekers are usually based upon assumptions, ambiguities and discrepancies that depend upon and support exploitative power relationships.

Conclusions

International and national events, processes and issues (like asylum) are the very stuff of geography classrooms. These are articulated through local channels of everyday life, the national media are a central part of these channels and an integral part of the ways we understand the world around us. If Geography is to remain a modern, politically relevant and critical discipline we must seek to use a range of different sources in our teaching as well as be aware of the dangers and problematic nature of some of these sources. We need to encourage the use of newspapers in teaching and move from entrenched positions that newspapers can be ‘biased’ but are useful for ‘up to date’ information. Instead we should recognise that newspapers are cultural products and are structured and shaped according to particular social and cultural rules and patterns. Media texts (which newspaper stories are) are usually analysed using content or discourse analytical techniques. Each approach holds particular advantages and disadvantages. While content analysis is *methodologically explicit* and easy to understand, it is based upon questionable assumptions about the relationship between reality and the text. On the one hand discourse analysis pays attention to the structures of the text and its intertextual references and relationship to powerful institutions, on the other hand discourse analysis can appear empirically ungrounded and free-floating.

The approach discussed in this paper falls between content and discourse analysis. It is *methodologically explicit* and easy to understand, it asks the same questions of different texts in a consistent and methodical manner. It also reveals the complexity of news stories and is best understood as providing a foundation for uncovering the ideological structure of news stories. It is suited to the analysis of 'factual' news stories, concentrates on what we are told has happened, provides important clues about the ways news can be produced and looks explicitly at the geographical origins of a news story as well as the places and spaces that are part of the story.

As geographers and teachers we should be exploring the ways we can provide students with the conceptual and critical tools to evaluate the sources of information they use to understand their worlds. This paper has argued that Bell's approach provides such a conceptual and critical tool.

Footnotes

[1] During this period, a General Election took place (1992) and a major piece of asylum and immigration legislation was passed, enacted and implemented (the 1993 Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act).

Bibliography

- AITKEN, S. (1997) Analysis of texts: armchair theory and couch-potato geography, in: R. FLOWERDEW & D. MARTIN (Eds.) **Methods in Human Geography**, pp? (London, Arnold).
- BELL, A. (1999) The Discourse Structure of News Stories, in: A. BELL & P. GARRETT (Eds.) **Approaches to Media Discourse**, pp?(London, Blackwells).
- BELL, J. (1993) **Doing your research project**, (Buckingham, Open University Press).
- BERELSON, B. (1996) Content analysis in communication research, in: P. MARRIS & S. THORNHAM (Eds.) **Media Studies: A Reader**, 2nd Edn , pp?(Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press).
- BROSIUS, H. & EPS, P. (DATE>???) Prototyping through Key Events: News Selection in the Case of Violence against Aliens and Asylum Seekers in Germany, **European Journal of Communication**, 10(3), pp. 391 – 412.
- BURGESS, J. & GOLD, J. (1988) **Geography, the Media and Popular Culture**, (Beckenham, Kent, Croom Helm Ltd).
- D'HAENENS, L. & DE LANGE, M. (2001) Framing of asylum seekers in Dutch regional newspapers, **Media, Culture and Society**, 23 (6), pp. 847 – 860.
- GLOVER, D. (1997)_Aliens, Anarchists and Detectives: Legislating the Immigrant Body, **New Formations**, 32, pp.22 - 33.
- HENNESSY, B. (1999) Refugees and Immigrants in the Irish Media, in: DEPARTMENT OF ADULT EDUCATION CORK, **Media Studies Reader** (Cork, University College Cork). Also available at <http://www.ucc.ie/acad/appsoc/epapers/rfgmediahtml> <accessed 1/6/2000>
- JACKSON, P. (1988) Beneath the Headlines: Racism and Reaction in Contemporary Britain, **Geography**, 73(3), pp. 202 – 207.

- JOLY, D. (1996) **Haven or Hell? Asylum policies and refugees in Europe**, (London, Macmillan).
- KAYE, R. (1998) Redefining the Refugee: The UK Media Portrayal of Asylum Seekers, in: K. KOSER & H. LUTZ (Eds.) **The New Migration in Europe: Social Construction and Social Realities**, pp? (London, MacMillan).
- MALKKI, L. (1996) Speechless Emissaries: Refugees, Humanitarianism and Dehistoricization, **Cultural Anthropology**, 11(3), pp. 377 - 404.
- MAY, T. (1997) **Social Research. Issues, Methods and Process**, (Buckingham, Open University Press).
- REFUGEE COUNCIL (2002) Press Myths. Available at <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/news/myths/myth001.htm> <accessed 12/8/2003>.
- ROSE, G. (2001) **Visual Methodologies**, (London , Sage).
- SMITH, A.M. (1994) **New Right Discourses on Race and Sexuality Britain 1968 –1990**, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press).
- VAN DIJK, T. (2000) New(s) Racism: A Discourse Analytical Approach, in: S. COTTLE (Ed.) **Ethnic Minorities and the Media**, pp?? (Buckingham, Open University Press).
- VUJAKOVIC, P. (1998) Reading Between the Lines: using news media materials for geography, **Journal of Geography in Higher Education**, 22(2), pp.147 -155.
- WORTH, H. (2002) Dissonant Discourses: HIV-Positive Refugees and the Media in New Zealand, **Feminist Media Studies**, 2(1), pp.63 – 79.

Appendix 2 News story from *The Sun* 13/3/2000

Sentence No.	Story The Sun 13/3/2000	Event No.	Time structure
Headline	FURY AS REFUGEES ADD £20 TO TAX DEMAND	2, 3	0, +1
S1	EXCLUSIVE by John Coles		
S2	HOMEOWNERS are being hit by a £20 Council Tax hike to pay for soaring numbers of asylum seekers.	2	0, -1
S3	Better off households in Richmond, South West London will have to fork out even more.	2	+ 1
S4	Officials say they need an extra £2.6 million this year to house refugees.	2	0
S5	They blame the government for failing to cover the shortfall.	2	0
S6	Other councils are set to follow Richmond's lead.	2	+3
S7	Vincent Cable, MP for Twickenham, said: "There is very strong feeling about this as it comes after years of cuts in services.	3	+2
S8	"People are already paying a relatively high Council Tax in Richmond and now they have got this on top".	3	+2
S9	Richmond, a magnet for refugees, because it is close to Heathrow, currently looks after 919 - mostly from Eastern Europe.	1	-1
S10	The number is set to rise to 1,100 this year.	4	+4?

S11	Fifty refugee families have been relocated to less expensive housing, but resentment is mounting in the area.	1	-1, +2?
S12	Fights have broken out between motorists and 'squeegee squads' of refugees offering to clean windscreens.	1 ?	-2?
S13	And the council has had to bankroll another reception centre to process the growing number of refugees.	2	-2?
S14	Some even sleep on the steps of the offices.	1 ?	-2?
S15	One angry local resident said: "These people are dragging down an attractive area and we are having to pay for the privilege".	3	+2?
S16	Nearby Hillingdon is also bracing itself for a 4% rise in Council Tax because of the refugees.	2	+3
S17	Kent County Council has already announced an average £3 increase.	2	0?

Appendix 1

Bell's Guide to analysis of the discourse structure of a news story. Adapted from Bell (1999) pp.76 – 80.

What?

1. Headline

What events take place in the headline? Summarize these and number each event.

2. Lead

What events take place in the lead or intro? Summarize these and number each event.

3. Events

What events take place in the story? Summarize and number these, then enter the numbers alongside each sentence of the story.

Re-number the events in the headline and lead as necessary to correspond with the fuller picture you now have from the story as a whole.

What is the central event of the whole story?

4. Headline, lead and story

What is the relationship of the headline to the lead?

What events in the lead are included/excluded in the headline?

What news values lie behind these inclusions and exclusions?

Is the headline a valid representation of the lead?

What is the relationship of the lead to the story as a whole?

What events in the story are included/excluded in the lead?

What news values lie behind these inclusions and exclusions?

Is the lead a valid representation of the whole story?

Is there any information that is given in the lead but not returned to in the rest of the story?

How does the lead begin telling the story as well as act as an abstract for it?

Who?

5. Story attribution

Is the story as a whole attributed? To whom (agency or journalist)?

6. Sources attribution.

Is there any attribution within the story? Who is attributed? List these.

Precisely what is attributed and to whom? Note this down beside each sentence.

Are sources attributed explicitly (in the text) or implicitly?

What speech verb is used in the attributions? List these.

What claims do these sources have to authority?

Who is quoted (in)directly?

Why have particular speech verbs been used?

Where is attribution clear/unclear? Does this have repercussions on the rest of the story?

7. News Actors

What news actors are mentioned? List these (e.g. people, organizations etc.).

How are these labelled or referred to?

What kinds of people are mentioned in the story?

Why are they in the news? Are these actors elite?

Is the news story personalized

Are there patterns in the way the story refers to these news actors?

Does specifying who the news actors are modify the event structure you have developed?

Where?

8. Places

What place expressions are used? List these.

Where do they occur in the story?

9. Place Structure

What locations does the story take place in? List these

Does the story stay in one location or move from place to place and back? Why?

Is it clear what is happening in which location?

What sort of places are the events happening in? Is there a pattern to this?

Does specifying the locations in this way modify the event structure you developed earlier?

When?

10. Times

What time expressions are used in the story?

Where do they occur in the story?

11. Time structure

What is the time structure of the story? Take the time of the central event as Time 0. Label earlier events as Time -1, -2 etc., and later events as Time +1, +2 etc. in the chronological sequence in which they actually occurred.

Beside each sentence note down the number of the time or times at which the actions mentioned there occurred.

How does the order in which the story is told relate to the chronological order of events?

Why has the story been written in this order? What values lie behind the order?

Does the order help or hinder a reader in understanding what is going on in the story?

Does specifying times of occurrence in this way modify the event structure developed earlier? Is this deliberate?

12. Background

Is any background given (events prior to the central action – either recent previous events or more historical events)?

Does any of the background indicate any particular ideological frame behind the story?

13. Commentary

Is there any commentary on events? – evaluation of events (editorializing)?

Context for what has happened? Expectations of how the situation will develop?

Does any of the commentary (especially evaluation) indicate any particular ideology behind the story?

14. Follow-up

Is there any follow-up to the central action of each event (subsequent events, either reaction [verbal] or consequences [non-verbal])?

Does any of the follow-up indicate any particular ideology behind the story?

Event and Discourse Structure

15. Event Structure

Collate your successive re-categorisations of what happened in the story, drawing on news actors, place and times as well as the actions themselves.

List in chronological order the events and their associated actors, times and places and the sentence numbers in which they occur. This represents the event structure as you finally assess it to be.

Note any alternatives which represent discrepancies or unclarities in the story itself.

Is the story told in instalments? That is, do the events follow one after another or are they interspersed with each other?

