

CHINED III – Third International Conference on Historical News Discourse
“Changing Genre Conventions in Historical News Discourse”

Rostock, 18-19 May 2012

CONFERENCE REPORT

First held in Florence (2004), and then in Zurich (2007), the 3rd International Conference on Historical News Discourse (CHINED III) was held in the beautiful Hanseatic city of Rostock, Northern Germany from 18-19 May 2012. The friendly and relaxing atmosphere of the place offered an ideal frame for what proved a very productive and enjoyable exchange among researchers from different countries. The conference programme was intense and extremely interesting, stretching over more than five hundred years of news discourse explored from a variety of methodological perspectives.

After a lovely welcome reception on Thursday evening, the conference officially opened the next morning at the Internationales Begegnungszentrum of Rostock University with a session entitled “Historical news discourse: Theoretical aspects and methodological challenges”. The first speaker was the conference organizer Birte Bös (recently moved to the University of Duisburg-Essen), who gave an overview of 300 hundred years of news discourse by exploring the Rostock Newspaper Corpus (600.000 words) containing British news reports from 1700 to 2000. In particular she showed how a corpus-based analysis of keywords and collocations can help us detect changes in the concept of news and news procedure. For this purpose, she analysed a set of relevant keywords (i.e. news, advice, letter and message) and discussed them diachronically in relation to the increasing professionalization of news production. She also inquired into the adjectival premodification of the keywords in order to get a deeper insight into the news values characterising the three hundred year span covered by the corpus.

The second paper was given by Nicholas Brownlees (University of Florence) who examined metatextuality in early modern news. In particular, he examined the frame and endophoric markers news writers themselves adopt in relation to their own publications. By combining a corpus assisted discourse analysis with reflections on the socio-historical context of news publication, Brownlees provided a quantitative and qualitative investigation of metatextual keywords such as “bookes”, “Relations”, “Pamphlets”, “Mercury”, “Intelligence”. His research is based on three digitized corpora (Florence Early English Newspapers Corpus, the Lancaster Newsbooks Corpus and the Zurich English Newspapers Corpus) and electronic archives (the Burney Collection and Early English Books Online).

The keyword analysis shows that there was much variation at the time in the use of metatextual terminology as a result of political censorship and editorial choices. The uncertainty of news production in early modern

England was such that there was not an institutionalised word that authors used in relation to their publication.

Before proceeding to the next speaker, the conference organizers announced the coffee break which was served in the adjacent room with tea, coffee, biscuits and fruit. After a reinvigorating cup of coffee, the morning session closed with the keynote lecture held by Irma Taavitsainen (University of Helsinki). Taavitsainen investigated medical and scientific news discourse from 1650 to 1800 with special attention to the dissemination of scientific news among the general community and to differences between professional and lay texts. During the period analysed, professional journals developed and multiplied along with other channels of distribution for lay audiences such as newspapers, gazettes, pamphlets and broadsides. Taavitsainen's research is based on two corpora: the *Early Modern English Medical Texts* (2010) covering the period from 1665 to 1700, (including, for example, the *Philosophical Transactions*, general treatises, specialised texts, surgery, health guides) and the *Late Modern English Medical texts 1700-1800*, comprising the *Gentleman's Magazine* (addressing non-professional audiences) text-books, recipes, surgical and anatomical journals, special publications and health guides. By combining a qualitative study with a corpus-based methodology, Taavitsainen draws a comparative analysis between keywords in the *Philosophical Transactions* (1665) and in the *Gentleman's Magazine* (1731-1800) in order to investigate the transition from the thought-styles of the earlier periods to more modern approaches to the making of scientific news. The results show that the *Gentleman's Magazine* adopts an emotive and eloquent tone more in line with the polite society of the time, whereas the *Philosophical Transactions* opts for a more neutral and objective style. Furthermore, in the *Gentleman's Magazine* there are no longer boundaries between lay and professional audience as the public was represented by upper educated classes.

It was now time for lunch and the participants scattered among the many delicious bakeries surrounding the venue to taste their specialities, from sandwiches with fish to mixed salads, from yoghurts to a wide choice of cakes. After lunch there was still time for a bit of socializing and strolling around the town before heading back to the conference building

The afternoon session opened with a set of papers analysing news writing from gender and critical discourse perspectives. The first speaker was Gabriella del Lungo Camiciotti (University of Florence) who gave a paper on news communication in a gentry network as documented in the private correspondence of Lady Cornwallis Bacon (1613-1644). The investigation of Lady Jane's correspondence seems to show that in the early modern period the function of exchanging news in personal letters, also public news, seems increasingly to serve the function of creating an epistolary world where participants express proximity by exchanging news and gossip relevant to the correspondents' world. Furthermore, it reveals significant differences between women and men's news reporting. While male correspondents give information as to public events, women tend to exchange gossip about court life and private events.

There followed the presentation of Elsa Simões from the University of Fernando Pessoa (Portugal) on the Royal and belligerent propaganda in *Mercúrio Português* (1663-1667). Simões, who was presenting on behalf of her research colleagues, Jorge Pedro Sousa and Sandra Tuna, carried out a qualitative discourse analysis in order to assess whether the *Mercúrio Português* – published in the context of the Independence war against Spain and of the palace intrigue which led to the overthrow of the king Alfonso IV - was a propagandistic or informative periodical. For this purpose she examined the way in which both the king and his prime minister were portrayed in discourse. The results of the analysis show that information took the guise of propaganda in favour of the Royal power from the very first number of the *Mercúrio* . Against the popular idea of the king as a mentally instable and violent person, the periodical attempted - without succeeding though – to bias people’s minds through a very positive portrayal of the king and his Court.

After the coffee break, the session closed with a contribution by Rita Luis from the University of Pompeu Fabra (Spain), who analysed the Spanish reaction to the Portuguese revolution of 1974-1975 as represented in the daily press. The topic is part of her PhD research project. For the purpose of the analysis she has compiled a database containing major newspapers from Madrid and Barcelona and has scrutinized their numbers from February 1974 to April 1976. Her aim is to show the way in which title choice, language display and use of pictures contributed to meaning construction. Particularly useful to their argumentation is Benedict Anderson’s notion of “imagined communities”, which assumes a strong connection between the style of news reporting and the newspaper’s understanding of its own country.

The rest of the day was devoted to a guided tour of Rostock. The sunny weather and the agreeable temperature made the walk particularly enjoyable. The organizers and the guide escorted us along the picturesque streets of the town to show us the major sights. Our first stop was the brick gothic church of St Mary’s with its famous astronomical clock built by Hans Düringer in 1472. We then continued to the New Market Square with the Town hall and the six beautifully restored gable houses in Hanseatic style. Strolling along the main pedestrian street we reached the major building of Rostock University founded in 1419. The tour finished at the Convent of St Catherine, an old Franciscan Monastery founded in 1243 within what remains of the medieval city wall.

After the tour a lovely dinner awaited us in a typical restaurant near New Market Square. Welcomed with a rich and tasty buffet, we had a great time toasting and chatting in a very friendly atmosphere.

The second day of the Conference opened with a morning session devoted to text-types and genres: “from prototype to periphery and back”. The first presenter was Udo Fries (University of Zurich) who outlined the development of home news from 1665 to the end of the 18th century using the ZEN corpus. After drawing a distinction between foreign and home news – the latter including all the news from London and the country – Fries took a closer look at the kind of information reported in the home news text-class. His analysis is based

on 4 periods of 30 years each and shows a large variety of news accounts from crime reports and ship news to Court circulars and Parliament Proceedings, from promotions and festivities to weddings, building erections and sports. From a text-linguistic point of view, he noticed that early home news consisted of one paragraph of one sentence only (about 20 to 40 words). This text-organization pattern remained quite stable throughout the period with a few exceptions in the early 18th century with accounts of more than one sentence and one paragraph.

The following speaker was Elisabetta Cecconi (University of Florence) who examined 17th century crime news as reported in four major text-types: broadsides, occasional news pamphlets, newsbooks and *The London Gazette* as an example of early newspapers. In her comparative analysis she investigates similarities and differences in the layout of content pages, their proto-lead, which is inspected at the structural level of discourse and the body of the news which is analysed in terms of distribution and relevance of authorial commentaries, metadiscourse and factuality. The results show a certain degree of interrelatedness in news presentation especially among forms of cheap print and newsbooks. Structural changes – such as condensation and cropping in news reporting – occur in *The London Gazette*, where metadiscourse completely disappears and commentaries – when occurring – are confined to adjectival premodification with a consequential predominance of factuality over rhetoric.

After the coffee break, the next paper was given by Isabel Ermida from the University do Minho (Portugal). She analysed a series of spoof articles by Mark Twain as a form of parodic news satire which blends together social criticism, humour and intentional deception. Ermida provided a model for inspecting the linguistic organization of parodic news satire in terms of intertextual component (referring to syntax and lexis), critical component (i.e. the judgemental nature of satire) and comic component (deriving from incongruities at the semantic, pragmatic and rhetorical level). Then she applied the model to Twain's sketches and showed how the three components are actualised in news discourse. The results reveal that Twain criticised 19th century American society through a set of linguistic and discursive strategies based on a set of oppositions between reality and imagination, fact and fiction, humour and violence.

The morning session closed with a paper by Minna Palander-Collin from the University of Helsinki who explored the variation and changes of person reference in 19th century newspaper advertisements in relation to the socio-cultural context of advertising production and reception. In particular she noticed that *The Times* and other early British newspaper ads contain frequent person reference including the advertiser, the audience and third parties. The advertiser is mainly referred to by 3rd person, the audience is generally mentioned by 3rd person or by reference to its ranks, profession and gender as a way to promote the prestige of the product. Third parties are referred to by (title) name, as competitors or as respectable groups bringing credibility to the ad. Palander-Collin's analysis shows that towards the end of the century the role of the

person reference disappears presumably as a result of a change in advertising discourse from a person centered to a more product centered style.

The afternoon session entitled “Periods of transition – Transition of styles” opened with a contribution by Claudia Claridge from the University of Duisburg-Essen. She analysed the encoding of space and time reference in news discourse adopting the ZEN and the Rostock corpus. The computational research conducted over the period from 1660 to 1860 shows that there is a tendency for time reference to be expressed with deictics, while place reference is more frequently encoded with names. Places however do not receive full explanation unless the event occurs near home, as the closer the news, the more intriguing its content. The significant use of time deictics in the running text reveals the clear influence of the letter genre which might have caused problems of understanding for historical news readers. Claridge’s research reveals little reader-focus in the news discourse of the time though the computational analysis of data suggests a fairly slow change towards the end of the century—a tendency which deserves to be inspected further, using corpus methodology.

There followed the talk by Erik Smittenberg from the University of Uppsala. On account of the colloquialization process characterising the latter half of the 20th century, Smittenberg analysed similar forms of colloquialization in 19th century English newspapers. In particular he investigated the frequency of phrasal verbs, the progressive, the *not*-contraction and the conjunction “and” at the superphrasal level in the Corpus of 19th Century Newspaper English (from 1830-1850 and 1875-1895). The increasing use of the progressive and the superphrasal “and” in the corpus provides evidence for colloquialization in 19th century newspapers, whereas little or no evidence of colloquialization comes from phrasal verbs and *not*-contractions, which remain stable or even decrease in number in the course of the century. Smittenberg suggested that this may be due to the 19th century censorship of features strongly marked for orality in news discourse.

The next contribution was by Lena Gialabouki from the University of Thessaloniki who explored changes in the generic structure of Greek television news by adopting a sociolinguistic perspective and a Conversational Analysis methodology. Her data consist of 14 bulletins broadcast in 1999 and 2011. The comparative analysis between older and more recent bulletins shows the inclusion of dialogic forms in present day news broadcasting. The increasing use of interactional patterns occurs at the inter-personal level with a shift of role of the presenter from disseminator of information to questioner and at the intraprofessional level featuring presenter and journalists in the studio discussing and commenting on the news. The journalist’s answers to the presenter show markers of propositional attitude, modality, conditionals and colloquial speech which further testify to the shift from a narrative to a dialogic mode of news broadcasting in present-day Greek TV news.

The conference closed with a talk by Elizabeth Prommer (University of Rostock) who is a researcher in media communication. She examined twitter, blogs and facebook as forms of networked journalism. In particular she focuses on twitter showing that it is not so largely used by the general public but is rather a precious source of information for journalists who rely on it for continuous updating. Twitter, in fact, provides various links to blogs of opinion leaders and determines a multi-step flow of communication from different experts, professionals and opinion makers. Prommer shows how in contemporary news communication, the traditional dissemination of information changes into a form of non-linear journalism where information is networked through complex patterns of interaction.

It was now time for a relaxing trip to the sea-side. The organizers took us on a train excursion to the nearby fishing village of Wandemünde, situated on the Baltic Sea, just north of Rostock. The picturesque sea resort impressed us for its enchanting and peaceful atmosphere. Strolling along the canal we saw typical fishing boats selling their specialities to passers by, bars, restaurants and ice-cream shops. Some of us didn't resist the temptation and sat at the table to taste a local ice-cream which was no way inferior to the Italian one! The walk continued up to the beach and the lighthouse. Our farewell dinner was served in a lovely restaurant along the canal. While eating and drinking we took the chance to thank the organizers for the wonderful job done. The return journey to Rostock marked the end of a very stimulating conference where an enriching scientific debate combined with the pleasure of good company.

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