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CRIMES IN MEDIA NARRATIVES

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***Abstract*:** *This article is set up to multiple goals which all come around the concept of 'narratives'. Though extensive, the research on narratives in general, especially literary ones, will be sieved through so that essential, relevant information is presented to the support of this article's hypothesis. It firstly postulates the idea that narratives in general and media narratives in particular play an important role in the (re)production of dominant discourses and secondly, it claims a socially perpetuated, rarely acknowledged, linguistically implemented and reflected representation of social actors (in our case, criminals) in media based on the gender criterion. In other words, this article intends to prove that media narratives on criminals suffer 'gender alterations' to the clear detriment of female criminals without ignoring though the gender of the narrative's producer on the one hand and the kind of publication that publishes the narrative on the other hand.*

Key words: *crimes, media, narratives.*

1. Statement of purpose

Starting from the already known and largely accepted 'gender theory' which claims women's being discriminated in and through language, criminals represent a special case as both males and females bear the blame of social disapproval which in women's case seems to add to the fault of being 'women'. In order to accomplish one's purpose in terms of theoretical covering and practical illustration, the article will include both theoretical and practical aspects meant to offer an image as complex as possible on the phenomenon. In short, the article focuses individually on the three major areas of study - media, narratives and crimes/ criminals - and jointly on the three phenomena as they intertwine. To begin with, media are viewed as a ground where power / dominant ideologies are formulated and transmitted and which, by repetition, can be labeled as 'real', or 'authentic', 'undeniably acceptable' for the readers. The means by which this is done is language. Secondly, narratives are language-based, well-structured productions which are targeted at 'persuading' the receiver. Last, criminals represent a category socially marginalized and lawfully convicted for breaking the law. Criminality and criminals have proved to be a fruitful source for media as they generate interest, from where the appetite for negative news (van Dijk, 1988). When further divided into males and females, the category of criminals reveals discrimination on the criterion of 'gender' as a woman criminal is guiltier than a male one. In a joint approach of the three components, the scope of this article is to

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identify how and by what elements media try and apparently succeed in creating, perpetuating and imposing within journalistic narratives the male-female bias in a domain which is anyway marked by extensive social prejudice.

2. Theoretical tools

The article grossly relies on two linguistic theories, although a clear delineation from other linguistic fields is almost impossible. First, there is the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) which proposes a critical view, as the name says it, on the way language is used for creating ideology-laden texts/ messages. CDA does not criticize the message, but what is hidden behind it as it attempts at revealing the hide-outs of messages. Fowler (1996, 43) states that CDA is 'a form of social practice which tries to identify the relationship between sign-words, phrases and the meanings they communicate'. Richardson (2007, 6) argues that CDA is 'an approach to language that aims to explore and expose the roles that discourse plays in (re)producing or resisting social inequalities'. Titscher (2000, quoted in Richardson, 2007, 26) focuses on CDA's interest in relations of 'disempowerment, dominance, prejudice and/ or discrimination'. Simpson (1994, 6) continues the argument by claiming that dominant ideologies become 'rationalized' as 'common sense' assumptions about the way things are and the way things should be. This is the reason, Simpson claims, for which the dominance is hardly, if ever, visible. In order to prove language's role in setting up and reproducing iniquitous power relations, CDA theorists identify the elements that contribute to it. Thus, Kress and Trew (quoted in Richardson, 2007, 20) highlight the important role that syntactic structures play in the ideological (re)construction of social reality. Gerbner (quoted in Richardson, 2007, 38) clarifies the issue by stating that the elements of vocabulary or grammar should not be given such great importance, as their function in the context is the one that really matters. Here the function refers to the role that a certain vocabulary or grammar element has in the creation of meaning of a text. Richardson (2007, 51- 55) illustrates what he means by function to context meaning creation with 'foregrounding' which grammatically can be a 'cleft structure' of the type 'it is s/he who …..' which within the CDA approach is a means often retorted to in order to emphasize negative features. Secondly, he refers to modality which he considers as indicative of the writer/ speaker's judgments, attitudes and beliefs.

Second, functionalism, also called systemic grammar, renders another aspect of language. Malinowski in the '20s and Halliday in the '50s (Morley 2000) took a different approach to language where central is the concept of 'meaning', namely how similar meaning is created by using certain language structures which emphasizes the wide range of options from which the speaker can choose. Systemic grammar stands for a step away from the word analysis which now 'accounts for the nature of the total system of linguistic meaning available to the native speaker of a language and for the selection of actual options which a person makes when using that language on any particular occasion' (Morley, 2000). Halliday (2003) contributes to the systemic grammar by pointing out the fact that meaning in a linguistic system is permanently created and (re)created, changed and exchanged according to the context/ situation where language is being used. Halliday clarifies the fact that meaning is not created by individual items which he calls 'minimal signs' and which he identifies as being the words, but in a context which presupposes

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a tying up of many 'minimal signs' that will confer meaning to the communication.

As to why functionalism is chosen as an analysis tool for this article lies in its keen interest in meaning and especially meaning creation and in its attempt at identifying why what and how is being said is done in the way it is done and to what purpose and whether the choices/ options that the writer makes justify a certain interest, preoccupation or ideology that s/he might serve. A second motivation as to why Functionalism is chosen as an analysis tool is provided by Fowler (1996, 11) who claims that the functional model of grammar 'respects the integrity and the individuality of texts rather than absorbing their contents into some grander, more abstract scheme'. The common point which brings the two approaches together, the CDA and the Functionalism, consists of the interest that they pay to the way in which messages are created and transmitted and mostly to the intensions that lie behind the surface meaning.

Narratives, of irrespective what nature, are linguistic productions which accommodate various approaches in order to serve their purpose; the study of narratives goes therefore beyond literary structures and borrows means and modalities of analysis which allow of deeper knowledge of narratives. Thus, both approaches, CDA and Functionalism, analyze narrative productions for which each devises and/ or identifies analysis tools.

3. Narrative background

Media narratives came into focus as a later concern after the media had proved its social influence and power over viewers and readers and after they had become opinion setters of the community. Previously, research had been done on narratives in general which aimed at clarifying the scope, structure, and components of narratives. There are many important contributors to the study of narratives who decisively contoured and established the framework for narrative studies. Toolan (1995, 5) notices the 'artificial' character of the narrative as it presupposes doing and re-doing, or as Toolan calls it 'a certain degree of prefabrication'. Another feature is mentioned by Chatman (quoted in Toolan, 1995, 604) who distinguishes between story and discourse as the first refers to what the narrative is about and the second refers to how it is expressed or put into words. Clearly, what it is about in the present research is media narratives on criminals, but how it is expressed is to be analyzed and discovered.

To proceed, the minimal condition for a text to be a narrative is to be 'a non-randomly connected' production which highlights the need for cohesion, coherence and referentiality that contribute to the homogeneity of a text. Ochs (2006, 189) adds the transitory character of a narrative which should 'depict a temporal transition from one state of affairs to another'. From this point of view, media narratives definitely satisfy the transitory character criterion as there is regularly a sequentiality in the presentation of news. Similarly, Labov (1972, quoted in Ochs, 2006, 189) argues that 'this transition is captured by a sequence of two or more clauses which are temporarily ordered'. In the same vein, van Dijk (1976, 554) defines narratives as action discourses because they presuppose the change of a previous situation. Yet, he claims that narratives suffer pragmatic constraints which particularize them: they are said in a certain context, for a specific reason.

Besides their internal constituency which will be dealt with at a later point, narratives have been analyzed according to guidelines which seem to share a recursive

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feature. The guidelines have permitted an easier classification and analysis of narratives. Time, character, setting, and point of view are guidelines which, by means of the verbal system (tense and aspect), frequency, duration, naming and co-reference, foregrounding and backgrounding, focalization, modality and transitivity, evaluative adjectives and adverbs, generic sentences, verbs of knowledge, prediction and evaluation, outline particularities of narratives. For clarity purposes, time, character and setting will be first dealt with whereas the component elements will be embedded in the larger presentation of the guidelines.

Of extreme importance and highly revelatory to the study of narratives is time, also called by Ricoeur (1988, quoted in Ochs 2006) 'chronological dimension'. To speak of time seems insignificant in comparison to the large variety of aspects that the term 'time' covers. Toolan (1995, 608) identifies some temporal characteristics of narratives which put their fingerprint on texts and contribute to their narrative nature. But first and foremost, Toolan states that time in narratives is not real time, as if in progression, it is just a representation of temporality, from where the variability and extension/ compression capacity of time. Approaching temporality, Toolan claims that past tense is favored, doubled by the preference for the simple aspect to the detriment of the continuous one. He equally identifies frequency and duration as time indicators. Important aspects that are worth paying attention to are acceleration and deceleration. Thus, the importance of events can be linguistically highlighted without being necessary to clearly state it by the use of acceleration and deceleration. Acceleration emphasizes the lack of importance of events whereas deceleration indicates the contrary.

Besides time, character is yet another essential element whose outlining significantly confers coherence to the text. The character is created by asserting co-reference in the form of name repetition, pronoun use and definite descriptions. Naming has therefore been identified as a major means of initiating and maintaining co-reference. Simpson (1994, 49) argues that 'the way that people are named can have significant impact on the way in which they are viewed'. In other words, naming, which is a matter of educational, background, or ideological choice, is a social label which greatly contributes to one's way of being seen. Researchers (Simpson, 1994; Fairclough, 1995) have identified 'foregrounding' and 'backgrounding' as means of postulating positive and negative features of the character. Moreover, these two processes greatly contribute to an indirect presentation of the character/ individual as, currently, showing is preferred since it gives the reader the possibility 'to infer, evaluate, and draw conclusions' (Toolan, 1998, 610). Equally important in the outlining of the character, fictitious or not, is the vocabulary or lexis used for naming. In this context, Fairclough (1995, 27) argues that vocabulary is essential in the process of categorization that functions on the assumption of assimilation of an individual to a whole category, thus, stereotypization. Fowler (1996, 25-6) claims that stereotypization is dangerous as it' inhibits understanding'. Moreover, he pretends that thought becomes 'routine, uncritical' and in this way the discourse becomes prejudicial.

And if the story is about somebody, it is told/ narrated by someone who is responsible for all the choices that are made in the text. It is about whose perspective and opinion is presented in that text. This leads to a crucially important element in the economy of a narrative, namely, the point of view. Surely, there is a double dealing with the point of view in

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literary and media narratives. If in a literary narrative, the point of view can be of the author or of one or several of the characters; in media narratives the point of view is authorial even though it claims 'objectivity'. Focalization can be both external and internal. External, as the author is exterior to the event and claims objectivity and impartiality and internal when the narrative contains quotes or opinions of viewers or witnesses. Furthermore, Simpson (1994, 11) details the point of view into three embedded types of point of view. The spatial point of view refers to the 'angle' from which the text is made up. Secondly, the temporal point of view refers to the impression that the reader/ viewer gets after having seen/ read the news. For both of them, the deixis play an essential role as they provide information about the place and the time of the happening. The last one, the psychological 'refers to the way in which narrative events are mediated through the consciousness of the teller of the story. It will encompass the means by which a fictional world is slanted in a particular way or the means by which narrators construct, in linguistic terms, their own view of the story they tell.' (Simpson, 1994, 11)

The point of view is intrinsically related to modality and transitivity as the three of them cover an important coordinate of the narrative: the 'who', the 'how', to/ on 'whom'. According to Mills (1995, quoted in Richardson 2007, 54) modality is transitivity's counter-part as the first refers to the judgments, comments and attitudes in the text whereas the latter describes the relationship between participants and their roles in the action. Mills (1995, 143 quoted in Richardson 2007, 54) claims that the study of transitivity is concerned with how actions are represented, what kind of actions appear in the text, who does them and to whom they are done. On the other hand, referring to a speaker's attitude towards or opinion about the truth of a proposition expressed by a sentence, it also extends to their attitude towards the situation or event described by a sentence'. Richardson (2007) indicates the means by which modality is foregrounded; he points to evaluative adjectives and adverbs (maybe, perhaps, possibly, probably, certainly, supposedly), generic sentences, verbs of knowledge, prediction and evaluation. Conversely, transitivity is concerned with the processes and the nature of the processes which occur in reporting: verbal, mental, relational and material processes. Already mentioned in the presentation of other narrative elements, foregrounding and backgrounding prove to be frequent tools for accomplishing different narrative processes. Foregrounding and backgrounding have received, besides their linguistic value, ideological interpretation. They are meant to highlight positive features by foregrounding processes and to demean 'negative' features by backgrounding processes. Both backgrounding and foregrounding function subliminally avoiding to openly indicate the real 'message'. Backgrounding, according to Toolan (1998, 624) can be contributed to by such factors as: tense, aspect, realization in subordinate clauses, word order, patterns in the use of anaphoras. Contrarily, foregrounding according to Fowler (1996, 104) is interpretation and an invitation to interpretation. Foregrounding functions thus as an intriguing element which should make readers start querying 'the singleness of meaning'.

Another element which has brought about extensive debate is nominalization. Van Dijk (1998), Fairclough (2008), Billing (2008) have all been involved in a vivid discussion about what nominalizations are and what their function is. Van Dijk (1998, 822) claims

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that 'nominalization is a means that news or government reports make use of with a view to hiding the agency or responsibility for (especially negative) action'. The consequence of this fact would lie in the distortion of the perspective on events and thus in the distortion of the public perception. Thus, nominalization, among other elements, is considered by CDA theorists a means by which the agent or the doer is intentionally deleted in order to hide or to disguise responsibility for certain deeds. The intentional deletion is thought to be ideologically-laden as authority imposes linguistically its perspective in a 'power behind discourse' approach (Fairclough, 1996, 59-62). Billing (2008) doubts the fact that passivization and nominalization are ideologically-laden and that their choice is not random, but intentional and purposeful. The notion of nominalization was defined by Fowler (quoted in Billing, 2008, 785) who stated that 'nominalization is a transformation which reduces a whole clause to its nucleus, the verb, and turns that into a noun'. Fairclough (quoted in Billing, 2008, 789) defines nominalization as 'the conversion of a clause into a nominal or noun'.

Slightly touched upon at the beginning of the argumentation, the relationship between Critical Discourse Analysis and Functionalism will be further investigated, highlighting their implementation in the media field. As suggested above, CDA is a linguistic approach which searches into the manner media messages are composed for releasing to audiences and not into the message itself, in other words it is interested in the 'how', not in the 'what'. CDA theorists claim that media message writers select the lexis and the grammatical structures according to the 'power relations' they are in control of or aware about. Repetition seems to ensure a safe means by which biased messages become permanently rooted and dissimulated under the mask of normality. In this amalgamation of elements, CDA relies on Functionalism as it focuses on the role that different elements play in discourse. Variability is the key element as Functionalism recognizes the different meanings that identical structures can have in different contexts and for different individuals. Tannen (quoted in Toolan, 1998, 625) illustrates a similar idea by stating that past experiences create a horizon of expectations which is most likely to influence the 'particular ways one constructs stories and interprets those of others'. If Tannen analyzes the situation from the point of view of the reader/ viewer, Schroder (1998, 548) interprets it from the point of view of media analysts and he focuses on the same concept of choice and variability. He thus argues that 'in analyzing a text, analysts are dealing not with a fixed structure of meaning, but with a volatile phenomenon resulting from the codes at the disposal of both the producers and the recipients of the text'. The relationship between CDA and Functionalism is stated by Fairclough (1995, 25) who states that 'critical linguistics is based upon systemic linguistic theory'. In addition, Fairclough quotes Trew (1979) who defines discourse as 'a field of both ideological and linguistic processes and there is a determinate relation between these two kinds of processes; specifically, the linguistic choices that are made in texts can carry ideological meaning'. The linguistic/ grammar/ semantic choice seems to be central to both Functionalism and CDA. The abundance of choices that a language offers is noticed by Toolan (1998, 629) who argues that choices are not arbitrary (randomly chosen), but 'functionally motivated'.

If Functionalism characterizes by 'choice', CDA focuses on the concept of

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'ideology' to whose contouring the concept of 'functional choice' greatly contributes. Ideology has been extensively researched upon by a large range of scientists. Linguistics, sociologists have defined ideology by emphasizing its different aspects. Luke (1998, 366) claims that ideology refers to 'systems of ideas, beliefs, practices and representations which operate in the interests of an identifiable social class or cultural group'. Marx and Engels (1970 quoted in Luke, 1998, 366) define ideology as a 'systematic distortion in perception of social and economic relations'. Interestingly, Luke (1998, 366) argues that ideology is not detained in the mind, but in the language which makes ideology first and foremost a social fact. He claims that 'ideology is not a possession of mind, a corpus of illusions and abstract ideas residing in consciousness; it has a material social existence in language, text and discourse'. Schroder (1998, 549) concludes that language and ideology are inseparable and that currently newspapers are likely to promote and sustain 'the existing socioeconomic and its power and privilege relations'.

By way of conclusion, ideology seems to be a pervasive, all-influencing, well-hidden, but highly effective means by which the interests of certain privileged social and economic classes are seen to. The means by which ideology is settled down and perpetuated is the language which has the intrinsic capacity of varying the meaning depending on the structures which are used. Although still unsolved, the Whorf-Sapir hypothesis (Cameron, 1992, 112) proves to be functional as language seems to model and influence human mind and behavior.

Yet, studies have continued to demonstrate that linguistically women are demeaned either in direct address or in media representation. Media representation is an indirect, filtered presentation which carries the imprint of the writer, of the newspaper's orientation, of the ownership's political and economical interests and of the context where women are placed.

Speaking of contexts, criminality is one context women frequently seem to be the subject of. Criminals in general represent a social category that is negatively reflected in media due to their wrongdoings. Nevertheless, studies have pointed out that there is a double dealing with male criminals and women criminals. The difference consists in men's being fully responsible for their fault whereas women in most cases are denied responsibility, being presented as 'mad', 'irresponsible', 'lost'. Oxman-Martinez & Marinescu & Bohard (2009, 298) claim that research examining gender and crime has consistently indicated that most crimes involve male offenders and female victims. The cases when the women are offenders are rare, but when they occur, they are more likely to be more newsworthy and definitely they will receive more media coverage. What this is actually hinting at is that, although less involved in crimes, when they do commit one, women are to be largely presented in the media, which has been defined as 'women demonisation'. And this is so because according to Graddol and Swann (1995, 141) women should take up 'gentle, nurturing roles while men should be dominant'. When they do not take up such roles they are likely to be judged as 'demonic'. Dale Spender (2001) identifies in criminology a phenomenon which the author calls 'double-standard' which stands for a double measurement unit in the case of men and women. Thus, male offenders are usually referred to as criminals, whereas female offenders are seen as sick or mentally disturbed. By considering female offenders as sick and mentally-disturbed the intention is that of

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demeaning them, of reducing them to nothingness.

Another study which came to similar conclusions is that of Cavaglion (2008) who claims that public perception of criminal mothers as reflected in the media and transmitted to the public as the only real is that they are more influenced by mental disorders and that they are worthy of cure and care rather than punishment. Cavaglion senses the danger in that media usually functions with stereotypes or simplified images reducing and compressing a wide variety of human individuals to an easily recognizable criminal pattern. Cavaglion (272) thus states that: "the desire of narrators to ensure coherence can lead to the use of stock stories and anecdotal details, some of which are familiar to their intended audience. One of the results of this cultural construction is the formation of scripts and their protagonists, where good and bad actors and specific plots are created and judged". Just as in Spender's case, Cavaglion argues that women are mostly identified with the unconscious, the irrational, irresponsible and disturbed are a common stereotype in both scientific and popular literature. Similarly, Cavaglion maintains that by claiming madness or sadness on criminals' side, women are actually losing their 'agency' not being thus given the chance of defending their actions.

4. Whom does aggressivity belong to?

Archer and Lloyd (1992, 130) in 'Sex and Gender' present the traditional roles of males and females and argue that usually it is men and not women the ones who display more aggressiveness. They claim that, in the traditional societies, women 'experience greater anxiety about aggressive feelings' in comparison to men. Yet, they maintain that changes have been recorded in women's attitude towards violence. The exacerbation by the media of the incidents with female wrongdoers owes mostly to the infrequency of such events, which, when actually taking place, receive increased media, therefore, public attention. These are the infelicitous situations when an isolated case is extended to whole categories and when the wrongdoer is exposed to increased public blame. Moreover, Archer and Lloyd (1992, 132) identify in the media that female deviants undergo a social phenomena consisting of the transformation of the passive woman into an active one: 'one point to bear in mind in assessing media reports is that female violence is particularly noteworthy, because of its departure from the stereotype of the passive woman'. Another element that they focus on is that western societies consider violence in women as 'inappropriate and undesirable' (145) which suggests that when such incidents do occur, society as a whole and media in particular are more likely to express disagreement than in the case of men as their violence has already been standardized. In a similar line, Newburn and Stanko (1994, 1) maintain that masculine violence, being the norm, is ignored, whereas feminine violence is always taken into discussion. Moreover, when men commit violent attacks, their guilt tends to be avoided and, surprisingly, blame is laid on mothers. Such an example is provided by Clark (1992) who provides the headline of some British newspapers after the murdering of a girl by a man.

(1) Girl 7 murdered while mum drank at the pub
Little Nicola Spencer was strangled in her bedsit home -- while her Mum was out drinking and playing pool in local pubs.

(December 12, 1986, The Sun)

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The murderer is invisible and moreover his deed does not even seem important, while mother's vicious life (drinking and playing pools) are the important elements that put an end to the little girl's life.

Ehrlich (2001: 224) analyzes the way roles are set up in some sexual assault trials by emphasizing the cancellation of all responsibility '*the grammar of non-agency*' that men seem to retort to, given their traditional power position in relation to women that the society willingly acknowledges.

(1) 'our pants were undone'
(2) 'our pants were pushed off
(3) 'it was agreed that'
(4) 'it was decided that . . . '
(5) 'it was established that . . .'
(6) 'it started to heat up'
(7) 'it became increasingly sexual'
(8) 'it started to escalate'

Ehrlich proposes to compare the victim's (woman) and the aggressor's (man) vision on the event by evidencing the '*language of love*' that man uses as opposed to the '*language of violence'* that the victim rememorizes.

(1) 'He grabbed my hair' - the victim
(2) 'Yeah, I was caressing her hair' - the aggressor

Although research proves that aggressiveness is mostly a male attribute, the question of female aggressiveness is definitely given attention to. The question in the title of this subchapter is nevertheless hard to answer since aggressiveness is incidental with rare manifestations of a permanent state of facts. In spite of this, female aggressiveness attracts more attention on the part of media, due exactly to its infrequent character and to the spectacular treatment that mass-media confer to such 'unique occasions'.

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