Language and Media – November 5th, 2017 Texas Church Shooting

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When an event is reported in news media, while the main facts may be the same; different journalists can supply evidence that supports their beliefs and tries to influence the reader and block their unobstructed vision by employing implicit or explicit semantics. Importantly, how information or facts are presented will shape the reader's perceptions about an event and even their views of current issues. This paper analyzes how a mass shooting in Texas that took place on November 5th, 2017 was reported differently by The New York Times and The Guardian newspapers. I focus on the effects of their syntax use on the reader, while connecting them with social and language ideologies. A very nice introduction.

I will begin by discussing the effects of syntax in the headings of the two newspapers. In New York Times (US), the headline reads "**Gunman Kills at Least 26 in Attack on Rural Texas Church." As for t**he Guardian (US online UK edition), the headline says "**Texas shooting: at least 26 killed at Baptist church in Sutherland Springs.**" The Guardian sub heading (US online UK edition) is ***Gunman dead after worst mass shooting in modern Texas history devastates tiny, close knit-community of a few hundred residents.*** The New York times used an active construction with the gunman as the agent and the process was described as an gruesome, violent act. It goes on to show the affected as "at least" 26 people were killed. The phrase "at least" implies that there could be more dead people because there were others who were seriously injured. The circumstances mentioned based on the headline is that, those people were in a rural Texas Church. Drawing the reader to the "Rural Texas church" makes the act

committed that much more deviant as it emphasizes where the violence act was inflicted. This is aimed to cause a marked identity to become oriented in the mind of the reader, due to the fact no one would expect such an act of violence to be taking place in a little country town church. Another thing that can be noted is that the mention of a rural

The Guardian article, on the other hand, used a passive constructed headline which is the opposite to that of the New York times. Like the New York Times, The Guardian's article stated the affected as "at least 26 people" implying there could be more deaths due to the severity of the injured. The Guardian like the New York Times refer to these people as being killed, suggesting an intent of brutality. However, because they did not use the word "attack" to describe the killing but instead uses the word "shooting," which directly attributes the cause of deaths to gun violence. The one issue the two newspapers seem to be unanimous on is regarding the political aspect of the gun issue. Both newspaper articles quote President Trump: "We have a lot of mental health problems in our country, as do other countries, but this isn't a gun's situation," The Two newspapers used this to create different effects though. The New York Times used the statement to show that it is a singular incident rather than a systemic, widespread, national problem.

In their article The New York Times use words like "scene of carnage", "deadliest mass shooting" to explicitly describe the negative act committed. They painted a negative account of the gunman, they continued to describe the scene before the gunman's attack and the scene when after. The article stated many after the attack many in the church were either dead or wounded. Actively giving evidence to attest to the violence of it all. They made a point of using specific parts of a speech President Trump made about the shooting using it in this manner:

" " *mental health problem at the highest level" and not "a guns situation" adding the gunman was a "very deranged individual*." " by they stating it that way it implies the president is making excuses for the gunman in an attempt to avoid being part of a gun control discussion. After that they discuss they detailed other mass killing. Then went into the effect the killing had on the community, followed by an articulation of how easy it is to get a legal gun. It as if New York Times was implying. The President can do something to stop these killings. They then quoted different grieving people in the community of the rural Texas Church. They seemed to be saying if this incidence could occur in a Rural Town where such a mass shooting should be a marked occurrence, then it was definitely time for the President to make it *"a guns situation"*. so in one way NYT is also making the report a political criticism.

In my view, The Guardian newspaper due to catering to a global audience of readers seem to have the more impartial narration of the incident. yes, it is likely. Its article appears to be geared at making the reader more aware about the crime itself with the focus being on how it affected the community. They describe the shooter and give a basic background on the gunman to know who he was but not with the intent to depict him in a negative or positive light. By not mentioning the gunman in the main heading they made him an insignificant part of the article. The gunman was a threat but as mentioned in their subtitle being dead he was no longer important. yes, or 'gun man' is actually implied or suggested, the reader can bridge that logic gap him or herself easily. The Guardian is bringing the reader's attention to the effect the "mass shooting" (sub heading) had on the community. The statement "*The shooting led to dramatic scenes in the tiny community of Sutherland Springs*." shows their way of making it known that the killings in the "*tiny community"* was a marked act. Their sub heading was an active statement of the effect of the shooting however by making the dead gunman the subject of their sub

headline it's almost as if they're saying the focus should be on the suffering not on the act committed.

By including President Donald Trump statement "*I think their additional reference of "This is a mental health problem at the highest level. It's a very sad event … these are great people at a very, very sad event, but that's the way I view it."* The Guardian is using implicit semantics to show that in spite of the President using the "us" and "them" dichotomy by referring the people in the Sutherland Spring community as these people that the occurrence of the mass shooting is a big deal to the close-knit community and they're not one of them but as Americans who have endured a mass shooting and in need of empathy especially due to being a small place. Not sure about this point.

To conclude, news writers have become very effective at using their media power to communicate to the masses to focus your attention on whatever aspect of an incidence that the writer perceives as most relevant. The New York Times made their article backing up their active heading that the shooter committed a brutal act in a town where the situation was a marked incident and implied that had the "gun situation" been handled the attack would not have occurred because the gunman would not have had legal access to the Weapons he used. The Guardian on the other hand was very passive (would't be fair to call it "passive", but you can say the report focuses more on the aftermath) in their approach and instead discussed the effect of the shooting on the community. They mentioned trump showed a reluctance to get involved in the gun debate but stayed away from laying blame. It was almost as if The Guardian was stating the event was an unfortunate incidence in a "close-Knit community" which is the reason it was devastating.

You really closely analyzed the subtle differences between the two newspapers. It's also interesting that the two newspapers quoted different parts of Trump's speech, and you can also point out what was selected by the two papers.

Grade:

B+ (8/10)

References

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