Chapter 5
Framing in News Discourse: The Case of the Charlie Hebdo Attack

Miriam Tribastone
University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Sara Greco
Università della Svizzera Italiana, Switzerland

ABSTRACT

By presenting the case study of the Charlie Hebdo attack in news discourse, this chapter combines a semantic analysis of the most frequent frame-activating words through text linguistics tools with frame analysis, developed according to the model proposed by Entman in the news making context. The linguistic perspective adopted in this chapter combines the works by Fillmore and Congruity Theory. As shown in the present work, both linguistics and news framing benefit from such integration.

INTRODUCTION

“The social world is … a chameleon, or, to suggest a better metaphor, a kaleidoscope of potential realities, any of which can be readily evoked by altering the ways in which observations are framed and categorized” (Edelman, 1993, p.232). These significant words illuminate the importance of framing in research and the fundamental connection between the social world and the phenomenon at the center of this research: Van Eemeren (2010, p.126) argues that “framing always involves an interpretation of reality that puts the facts or events referred to in a certain perspective.” According to Entman (2004), no one can escape from framing: even journalists in news reporting, thought as objective, frame events, issues, and political actors. Indeed, as argued by Fowler (1996, p. 4), “news is a representation of the world in language” that reflects a fact and all the values and meanings attached to it. Not coincidentally, there is a lot of research on framing in different (and sometimes not compatible) disciplines and approaches (see for example the review in Dewulf et al., 2009).

More often than not, the different approaches to framing are not in dialogue one with another. This work has the methodological ambition to integrate different but complementary traditions on frames and framing in order to shed light on how frames are created in news discourse.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-5622-0.ch005
In this paper, the news framing tradition will be combined with the attention to words from a text linguistic perspective, with the purpose to combine framing in news discourse and highlight the role of frame-activating words. The Charlie Hebdo attack, which took place in the Parisian newsroom on the 7th January 2015, will be examined as a case study. Because this event has been interpreted in different ways on the media, it is particularly suitable for the studying of framing. The several frames will be investigated as different ways through which this event has been understood and interpreted; the analysis will be based on a combination of two complementary dimensions: a semantic analysis of the most frequent frame-activating words, as based on linguistic tools, and a news discourse analysis of frames. These two dimensions will be illustrated in the following section. In section 3, the method used for data collection and analysis will be explained. Then, the findings and discussion section will follow (section 4); finally, some conclusions will be drawn in section 5.

FRAMES AND FRAMING: A COMPLEX CONCEPTUAL PANORAMA

The concepts of frame and framing have interested researchers coming from different areas of research: from psychology, sociology and communication, to conflict resolution, artificial intelligence, and management (Dewulf et al., 2009; Goffman, 1974; Minsky, 1975). However, the dialogue between traditions is still not sufficiently developed: the varied of subjects, methodologies, and definitions scattered findings and increased the scepticism among disciplines (Entman, 1993).

Across the years, two different approaches have been forming in the frame tradition: the interactional or communicative perspective and the cognitive paradigm (Dewulf et al., 2009; Shmueli, 2008). The bipartite nature of framing is reflected in the use of the word “frame” as a noun (frame) or a verb (to frame or framing) (Shmueli, 2008). In a cognitive perspective, frame refers to the mental structure that helps individuals to reduce the complexity of reality through information selection, simplification, and categorization (Shmueli, 2008). In contrast, in a communicative perspective, framing is the act of frame’s creation during social communicative interactions and the consequences that this phenomenon brings (Shmueli, 2008). Despite the ontological, epistemological and methodological differences between the two traditions (Dewulf et al., 2009), it is important to underline the complementarity and compatibility of the cognitive and communicative aspects (Shmueli, 2008). Linguistics and Discourse Analysis offer a set of theoretical tools that communication researchers can use to comprehensively analyse frames. In specific, the linguistic perspective enables the study of the lexicon level and the framing-activating power of words. This has the potential to integrate the news framing analysis by showing how frames are activated at the linguistic level.

FRAMING IN JOURNALISM

The importance of framing in journalism is hard to question. Journalists choose carefully words and mental images because by describing facts and issues, they can influence public opinion (Tewksbury & Scheufele, 2009). In fact, the power of communicative discourse is embodied by the concept of framing, which Entman (1993, p. 52) defines as: