

Modality, distance, and the television news genre

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KEYWORDS:
distance;
discourse;
television news;
modality;
proximization.

ABSTRACT: The present article focuses on the triad of modality, distance and the television news genre. It assumes the centrality of the notion of “distance” to functioning and impact of the news media in general. Distance, in its different dimensions, which will be discussed in the paper, is something that needs to be overcome and/or skillfully manipulated by journalists. In order to make the reality they (re)construct and (re)present more relevant and emotionally-engaging for the audience, news makers will “proximize” selected aspects of this reality, bringing them cognitively and affectively “closer” to those who watch or read the news. It is claimed here that this work on distance, shaping the form and function of news discourse understood as both a product and a process, may be used to account for mass and social impact of the news media, including the “CNN effect”, or recently the “Al-Jazeera effect”, and is the underlying mechanism of the “mediatization” process. As will be demonstrated, modality plays an important role here, with “modality cues” acting as proximization triggers both verbally and visually. On the theoretical level, the article proposes a new integrated approach towards news discourse, combining critical discourse analytic and Discourse Space Theory perspectives with the insights from semiotics and mass communication studies. The data used to illustrate distance-related operation comes from the NBC coverage of the famine in Somalia.

1. TELEVISION, NEWS GENRE AND DISTANCE

The news media, a major source of definitions and “pictures in our heads” have long influenced the audiences’ reception of the external world that is “out of reach, out of sight, out of mind” (Lippmann 1922: 29). Many a time, such mental images of the events happening beyond the viewers’ and readers’ immediate experience have considerably determined public judgement and emotional attitude concerning these events, inciting both outcry and collective compassion.

Already in the previous century, Mirzoeff (1999: 1) observed that “life is mediated through television”, while Fiske and Hartley (1978: 86) argued that television, in particular television news, can be placed at the center of culture, rather than at its periphery. More recently, the concept of “mediatization” has surfaced in communication, media and cultural studies to capture the dynamics of the functioning and effects of contemporary media (Agha 2011; Bennet and Entman 2001; Ekström 2001; Hjarvard 2008; Schulz 2004; Hepp 2013). Researchers see it as a dynamic process, enabled by technological development, through which media transform both social and cultural processes (Hjarvard 2004; Krotz 2007, 2009). For Schulz (2004: 94), mediatization is a product “of the television era”, which is not surprising if we consider the public appeal and impact of this medium. People turn to television not only for entertainment but also for information about the local and global affairs (Bilandzic 2006; Gunter 2005; Schaap 2009). Its credibility as a source of information derives predominantly from immediacy it offers and the prevailing assumption that “pictures do not lie” (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996/2006).

The genre of television news encapsulates two key components: the language of the news story and the images that accompany the narrative. Most research so far, in particular within linguistics, has concentrated on the first element, based on the assumption that it is the text of the news that encodes the values which both reflect and affect the world outside. This article focuses on the interaction between the text and the image in the generation of meaning. The term “discourse” will be understood here in its broad sense, as referring to the totality

of the ways of representing reality in broadcast news, and viewed within a representational and critical, rather than interactional framework (O’Keeffe 2006: 1).

According to Cotter (2001: 416), the news discourse encompasses the news story in its spoken or written form, and the process involved in the production of this story, including the norms and routines of the community of news practitioners. This claim seems compatible with the observation that media discourse is shaped both by linguistic rules, and by what becomes a norm of practice in a particular social context, or that it is a way of talking about and acting upon the world which both constructs and is constructed by a set of social practices (Candlin and Maley 1997: 202). The news genre is thus understood not as a static artifact, but as an ideology-bearing representation dynamically developing over time, as part of culture and context. Consequently, it is regarded as both “process” and “product”. Such a view is not new; it was already postulated, among others, by Jacobs (1999) and Richardson (2007, 2009).

It has been generally accepted that any analysis of media discourse should start with the idea that news is not out there, waiting to be talked about by journalists, but it is the journalists who have to make the news by writing about it. Hence, Thompson (1995) treats the break between sender and receiver as one of the central defining features of today’s news, and argues that the evolution of the technical and institutional apparatuses of the media has crucially extended the availability of news events beyond contexts of co-presence to a wide range of absent recipients. Indeed, the fact that many events are only available thanks to the media lies at the basis of the journalists’ newsmaking ability, their symbolic power to actively create events. In the words of Thompson (1995: 216), “our experience of events which take place in contexts that are spatially and temporally remote, from strikes and demonstrations to massacres and wars, is an experience largely mediated by the institutions of mass communication; indeed, our experience of these events as ‘political’, as constitutive of the domain of experience which is regarded as politics, is partly the outcome of a series of institutionalized practices which endow them with the status of news.” Hence, one of the definitions of news formulated within the Uses and

Gratifications theory postulates that news is a combination of what audiences need to know and want to know, while Bennet (1983: 85) emphasizes the fact that news is “information that is timely, relevant to the concerns of its audience, and presented in a form that is easy to grasp”.

The dominance of television as a news medium comes partly from the perceived impartiality of news broadcasting, and partly from its immediacy, since television news can present events just as they are happening (Kopytowska, forthcoming.). And modality, in both its verbal and visual dimension, plays a major role here. News both shapes and reflects the dominant notion of what is significant, because what is significant is in the news, and contributes to the ongoing process of a dominant ideology (Bignell 2002: 112). The news anchor mediates reality for the audience, by symbolically connecting the newscast, correspondents, sources, and viewers. Rather than simply reading the news, he or she brings closer, or “proximizes” selected parts and aspects of the reality which the audience cannot experience directly. On the one hand, in the presentation of news, the anchorperson connotes authority, balance and objectivity through a formal dress-code and a neutral vocal delivery. Also, the attribution of information to multiple sources or weak hedges like “allegedly” are intended to reinforce the news media’s position as a cautious, reliable, and unbiased authority and reporter of what is happening in the world. On the other hand, with less emphasis on reading a script and more emphasis on personal presentation via eye contact through a teleprompter as if the viewer was the third party in conversation, he or she creates “a studied informality” (Bignell 2002), “simulacrum of conversational give and take”, whereby an illusion of a face to face relationship is created between the viewer and the person appearing on the screen (Meyrowitz 1985: 119), or “broadcast sociability” (Scannell 1996).

As argued by Hartley (1982: 118-119), news stories make use of four main narrative functions: framing, focusing, realizing and closing. Framing means establishing the topic by a “mediator”, news presenter, in the discursive code which will be dominant in the story. The topic is “focused” by reporters and correspondents with “institutional” voices (ibid. 110-111)

explaining the significance of the news event in detail. “Realizing” is the process of lending authority to the story and confirming it as real by using actuality footage, interviews and “accessed voices” shots from the exterior of a building where the event is taking place, footage from a demonstration, and interviews with eye-witnesses (ibid. 111). “Closing” refers to the movement throughout the story towards a preferred meaning, which means insisting on the point of view connoted by the frame or focus and thus discounting any alternative points of view.

Unlike in the case of photography, television gives a possibility of instant transmission, providing the medium with one of its defining characteristics, namely “liveness”. Due to this temporal alignment, “the basic attraction is not so much the subject matter it [television] presents but the realization that whatever is happening is happening at the time” (Caughie 1991: 32). Another consequence of “liveness” is “putting home and studio or home and world into temporary co-presence” (Corner 1999: 40), thereby enabling the viewer to be in two places simultaneously, giving him access to various fictional or factual spaces. Television “realism”, consists in providing visible evidence instantaneously, and in the capacity to show movement and action, and to indicate physical causality and chronology. News image sequences can be used in an evidential way, in a supportive and illustrative way, as well as highly indirect and indicative way. Archive footage may include material from feature fiction interwoven with actuality sequences. Importantly, the images are framed and composed (focus, spatial positioning, figure/background relations, indicators of size and distance, etc.), with the potential (referred to as “figuration”) to generate associative resonance beyond literal depiction (Corner 1999: 45). There are conventional coded ways of representing press conferences, children in developing countries. The news presenter is showed in medium close-up, full face and naturally lit. Accessed voices in television news may be either empowered or disempowered by connotations produced by the signs of situation present in the shots.

The dominance of iconic visual signs has a significant effect on the news value of television news stories, as the news stories lacking pictures will be less likely to be included. In the words of Caldwell (1995: 152) the success of television is not built on the “reality effect” but the “picture effect”. Still, it is extremely rare to show pictures without accompanying voice-over by an institutional voice. The connotations which support the framing and closing narratives of a news story are provided by iconic signs and linguistic signs supporting each other.

The intertextual context of television news also has to be taken into account. Television proclaims its ability to bring what is different, strange and interesting into the viewer’s familiar and domestic world. It has a mythic identity as something that bridges the gap between private and public. Hall et al. (1978: 61) claim that this process of reinflecting a news topic into a variant of public service similarly serves “to translate into the public idiom the statements and viewpoints of primary definers. The translation of official viewpoint into a public idiom not only makes the former more ‘available’ to the uninitiated; it invests them with popular force and resonance, naturalising them within the horizon of understandings of the various publics.” In this way the definitions, interpretations and inferences of the powerful are embedded, to varying degrees, into the everyday language of the public.

The parameters characterizing news discourse are textual, technical and ideological, and include: newsworthiness, the structural organization of the story, target audience, technical constraints, and attribution practice. Since news reporting and presentation are socially, economically and politically situated news is invariably reported from some particular angle (Fowler 1991: 10). Hence, apart from being a primary source of information, the media play an important role in the transmission of attitudes, perceptions and beliefs, as in the words of Tuchman (1978: 2) “[b]y seeking to disseminate information that people want to know, need to know and should know, news organisations both circulate and shape knowledge.” In Blumler’s (1977: 24) words they provide “the informational building blocks to structure views of the world... from which may stem a range of actions.” Although these informational building blocks

combine with a multiplicity of political and social functions to direct an individual's action, they do determine the limits of his or her knowledge as well as perceptions of events and their causes.

The analyses of news values suggest that the information chosen is not a random selection of events. There is a clear pattern indicating a hierarchy of seemingly important events and individuals (Galtung and Ruge 1965; Bell 1991; Fuller 1996; Brighton and Foy 2007). Elite groups, nations, and individuals as well as large-scale dramatic events dominate the news, and the prominence accorded to them is not simply an outcome of judgements of what is or is not intrinsically important. Thus, "the news values and news judgements which determine the content of the media not only direct our thinking to specific areas which the media define as important, but, conversely, direct our thinking away from other unimportant areas. In this way they contribute to our mental maps of the world" (Negrine 1994: 4).

Since the media do not simply and transparently report events which are naturally newsworthy in themselves, news is not a self-defining phenomenon but rather the end-product of a complex set of journalistic processes "which begin with a systematic sorting and selecting of events and topics according to a socially constructed set of categories" (Hall 1973 cit. in Fowler 1991: 12). The news media select events for reporting according to a set of criteria of newsworthiness, which are referred to as news values (Galtung and Ruge 1965; Bell 1991; Fuller 1996; Brighton and Foy 2007; Harcup and O'Neill 2001). It is with reference to these values that one fact is judged more newsworthy than another. Accordingly, Philo (1983: 135) puts forward a claim that "news is not found or even gathered so much as made."

Hartmann and Husband (1976: 276) distinguish two kinds of characteristics that make events newsworthy. Firstly, conflict, threat and deviance make the news, not only because information about these factors has a real importance to society, but also due to the fact that for various reasons people enjoy hearing about them. Secondly, what makes events more newsworthy is their ability to be interpreted within a familiar framework or in terms of existing

images, stereotypes and expectations (see also Shoemaker et al. 1991). The framework and the expectations may originate in the general culture, or they may originate in the news itself and pass from there into the culture. There appears to be a continuous interplay between events, cultural meanings and news frameworks. The way events are reported helps structure expectations. Subsequent events that conform to the expectation stand a better chance of making the news than those that do not. Such processes of selection and inclusion, and by implication, of exclusion, are in fact one of the most effective way of implementing bias, the public would be never aware of. News reports offer only a selection of those events, which has major implications for the news and its claims to truth. As argued by Lippmann (1922: 216), news and truth are not the same: “the function of news is to signalize an event, the function of truth is to bring to light the hidden facts, to set them in relation with each other and make a picture of reality on which man can act.”

An important factor in the construction of the news is the role played by a journalist, ranging from a fairly neutral observer to an active participant. While the former is linked to the view of the media as a mirror reflecting the reality, and their function of informer and interpreter, the latter is connected with the notion of the “fourth estate”, and the function of a representative of the public, a critic of the government and a policy-maker). Another division of roles, formulated in the 1970s, includes: the “interpreter” responsible for analyzing and interpreting complex questions, investigating claims made by the government, and discussing the national policy, the “disseminator” in charge of “getting information to the public quickly” and appealing to “the largest possible audience”, and the “adversarial” role consisting in scrutinizing government’s statements and determining their truth.

2. REALITY, PROXIMIZATION AND MODALITY

In his seminal work on the construction of social reality John Searle (1995: 1) makes the following claim: "...there are portions of the real world, objective facts in the world, that are only facts by human agreement. In a sense there are things that exist because we believe them to exist." Hence, social reality, as he argues is co-constructed by language, or as he puts it, "X counts as Y in (context) C" (Searle 1995, 2010). In other words, individuals, groups, events, issues, phenomena and relations have the form and status they have as a result of language constitutive potential coupled with public collective agreement. Such a claim is compatible with Critical Discourse Analysis perspective on discourse as "a form of social practice" (Fairclough and Wodak 1997) and the assumption is that it is socially constituted and socially constitutive (ibid.). In the words of Fairclough and Wodak (1997: 258): "Describing discourse as social practice implies a dialectical relationship between a particular discursive event and the situation(s), institution(s) and social structure(s) which frame it: the discursive event is shaped by them but it also shapes them." Hence interest in the notions of power and ideology visible already in the early publications *Language and Control* (1979) and *Language as Ideology* (1979) within critical linguistics. One of the most important assumptions of CDA is that all discourses are historical and, being a form of "social practice", can only be understood with reference to their context, namely such extralinguistic factors as culture, society, and ideology (Fairclough and Wodak 1997). Equally important seems to be the claim that the power of language resides not in language itself, but in its being used by powerful people, in particular in new public spaces and new genres provided by the globalized media (Fairclough 2000, see also Kalyango and Kopytowska 2014). The assumption on which the present article is based is that, to a considerable extent, "journalists/media create context C by *proximizing* selected aspects of reality", and in this way shape, perpetuate or challenge existing ideologies and power relations. The "proximization" proces consists in reducing the "distance" between the audience and the reality presented in the form of news events. Regarded by its original proponents as the main

tool of legitimization, it is linked to the symbolic construal of relations between entities within the Discourse Space (DS) and convergence of the “deictic centres” of the speaker/author and the audience through the process of symbolic discursive shifts (Chilton 2004, 2005, 2010; Cap 2006, 2008, 2010, 2013). A claim is made here that the mechanism, rather than performing only a legitimizing function in public/political discourse, is inherent in the very nature of mass-mediated communication and enabled by the semiotic properties of various media. Television is characterized with a considerable potential to reduce “distance” between the audience and selected aspects of reality transformed into news events. The dimensions of distance that the journalists have to overcome to bring the reality presented “closer” to the viewers, include spatial, temporal, axiological, epistemic and emotional distance. The temporal and spatial dimensions are related to the fact that the events presented happened or happen out there in the world, beyond the audience’s immediate experience. The epistemic distance results from the fact that the audience is not necessarily familiar with the events and phenomena presented in the news, while the axiological distance means that such events have to do with different cultural values, beliefs and practices. Finally, emotional distance has to do with various degrees of emotional involvement on the part of the audience. If one looks at the news discourse as a “process”, that is journalistic strategies of news selection and production, most of the “news values” are correlated with the five types of distance (Fig. 1). Events “out there in the world” are chosen to be included in the news bulletin because they are temporally, spatially, axiologically, epistemically or emotionally “close” to the audience. At the same time, however, journalists’ work consists in enhancing newsworthiness of these events, which means making them even “closer” (Kopytowska, forthcoming). Importantly, throughout the whole process, they have to make assumptions as to what will be relevant to the audience, and these are both culturally embedded and ideologically based.

In news discourse as product proximization takes place at the verbal and visual level. In both cases, as argued in this article, modality is one of the main “proximization cues”. Its proximizing potential lies in the fact that in addition to encoding speakers’ claims about the necessity,

probability or possibility of beliefs and actions, it is a means of establishing a three dimensional relationship between the news being reported, the journalists and potential readers (Fairclough 1989).

Traditional accounts of modality distinguish between “epistemic modality” which has to do with knowledge, and “deontic modality” which has to do with right and wrong according to some system of rules (Portner 2009: 2). Portner (2009) further distinguishes sentential modality, sub-sentential modality and discourse modality, which makes modality a multi-dimensional phenomenon. Importantly, as argued by Nuyts (2000), it is a cognitive rather than only linguistic category. In other words, it both reflects and shapes individuals’ conceptualisations of truth and relations between both objects and persons, and this observation is of particular significance to proximization mechanism.

Modality is also linked to power differences in communication (Fowler et al. 1979; Kress and Hodge 1979) and thus central to ideology critique (Fowler 1991). It not only influences relations and interdependencies, but also, in its affinity dimension, expresses the status of knowledge or the facticity of its mimetic system (news, with its unquestioning claims about the world – high affinity). Hence, as argued by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006: 24), “modality refers to the status, authority, and reliability of a message, its ontological status, or its value as truth or fact”. Fairclough (1989: 26) distinguishes here between relational modality, which concerns participant’s relation to others) and expressive modality, which refers to writer’s authority with respect to the truth or probability of a representation of reality. What also deserves attention is the fact that modality is both genre-dependent and genre-constitutive. In the words of Kress and van Leeuwen (2006: 142): “different genres, whether classified by medium (e.g. comic, film, cartoon, TV, painting) or by content (e.g. western, science fiction, romance, news) establish sets of modality markers, and an overall value which acts as a baseline for the genre”.

The theory of social semiotics also adopts a broader view of modality, as conveyed not only by the “fairly clear-cut linguistic systems” (Kress and Hodge 1979; Kress and van Leeuwen

2006: 155). Kress and Van Leeuwen (*ibid.*) further claim that “It does not express absolute truths or falsehoods; it produces shared truths aligning readers or listeners with some statements and distancing them from others. It serves to create an imaginary ‘we’. It says, as it were, these are the things ‘we’ consider true, and these are the things ‘we’ distance ourselves from”. And the visuals, referred to as “the grammar of visual design” play a significant role here too, as they can “represent people, places and things as though they are real, as though they actually exist in this way, or as though they do not – as though they are imaginings, fantasies, caricatures, etc” (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006: 156).

For this reason, modality becomes an important tool in the process of proximization, within all dimensions of distance. Spatiotemporally, events can be presented as happening here, right now in front of viewers’ eyes and as relevant because of their physical closeness. Epistemically, they can be constructed as familiar and predictable. Axiologically, they can be imbued with values with which the audience identifies or from which it distances itself. And emotional distance will be the result of all the above processes.

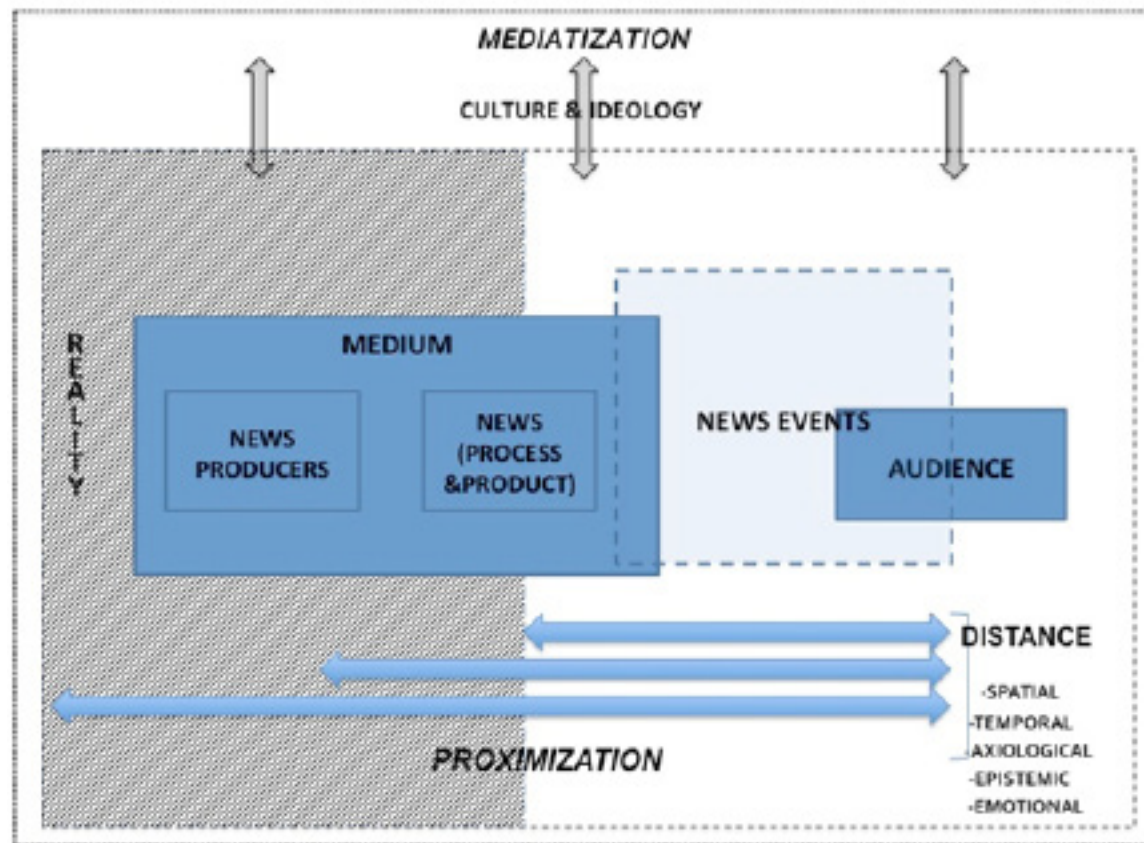


Fig. 1 - News discourse and proximization

3. REPRESENTING AFRICA IN THE NEWS

In the words of Hawk (1992: 4): “Africa is special because there is little common understanding between Africans and Americans to provide context for interpretation.”

Indeed, since it is the continent Western audiences are relatively unfamiliar with, the reporting on it, along with both relational and expressive modality, gains particular importance. It

is often pointed out in the literature discussing the representation of Africa that, instead of providing their viewers and readers with full, explanatory coverage, news organizations offer their stereotypical, superficial and decontextualised (mis)representations and racial imagining of the continent (Alozie 2005; Hagos 2000; Livingston and Eachus 2000; Kalyango 2011; Kalyango and Onyebadi 2012). Scholars analyzing the portrayal of Africa in the Western media have concluded that what the audience members are regularly presented with is Africa plagued with political and socio-economic upheavals, prone to violent conflicts and suffering from natural disasters, as well as disasters caused by humans (Fair 1992, 1993, 1996; Hawk 1992; Kopytowska 2008, 2009, 2014). The “African” events considered newsworthy usually fall within three categories: (a) stereotypical stories associated with pre-conceived images of the region, e.g. famine, (b) actual or threatened inter-state violence, and (c) stories concerning Westerners (e.g. kidnapping of white people) (Styan 1999: 289). As a result, events are frequently conceptualized in terms of irrational tribalism without an explanation of the real causes of the conflicts, the African people are as either irrational and primitive or brutal and inhumane (Hawk 1992; Maloba 1992), and a distorted picture of famine in Africa is construed with an excessive emphasis on the benevolence of the West (Benthall 1993; Fair 1992; Sorenson 1991; Kothari 2010).

The objective behind the present article is to demonstrate that the legacy from colonial times only one of the factors at play. What plays a more significant role is the distance between the Western audiences and African reality that needs to be overcome. In their attempt to reduce various dimensions of this distance with the use of available verbal and visual strategies, whether intentionally or not, news media perpetuate the existing power division between “us” and “them”, thereby enhancing the existing stereotypes based on the pre-attributed roles of heroes and victims.

4. ANALYSIS

The data used here comes from an NBC report (aired on July 21, 2011). Rather than being a quantitative study (for quantitative accounts see Kopytowska 2009, 2014, Kopytowska, forthcoming), this short analysis of one news report is meant to illustrate proximization strategies and the role of modality cues.

As far as the spatiotemporal distance is concerned, the audience is encouraged to believe that events presented on the screen are unfolding right now in front of their eyes making them witnesses of this distant suffering. Visually, distance and angle create a symbolic relation between the people on the screen and the viewer. The anchor person is shown frontally, from slightly below eye level, which enhances his authority (Fig. 2). This authority is also manifested verbally in statements confirming his knowledge of the events (and of how they will evolve), which will only now be revealed to the audience, and his right to attribute value judgements:

- 1) *Tonight we'll tell you about the next global crisis **you will be hearing about**. It's **bad** and fair warning, **it's hard** to watch, and **it's going to get worse**.*
- 2) *Here's our report tonight from the Kenya - Somalia border, and again, a reminder, **these are some tough images**.*



Fig. 2 - The (re)presentation of the news anchor person (NBC news)

His claims to knowledge are supported with both statistics and images “straight from the sight”, introduced by the phrase “here's our report tonight from the Kenya - Somalia border”. Progressive aspect is one of the key grammatical triggers here. In most cases the effect is intensified lexically, either by means of time adverbials like “just” and “now”, or lexical verbs themselves.

3) ***It's happening** in the Horn of Africa, triggered by years of drought and poverty and civil war in some cases and **setting off** a human tide of refugees.*

4) *All the while across parts of East Africa, **the conditions are worsening**, and the **famine is spreading**.*

The feeling of closeness is also constructed by proximal spatial deixis, including “here” and demonstrative “this”. There is thus “the effect of simultaneous (verbal and visual) reference” (Montgomery 2005: 246). The news correspondent in his video footage by using proximal demonstratives brings people, objects and phenomena within the scope of the audience's deictic centre:

5) *400,000 have come to **this** refugee camp in eastern Kenya.*

6) ***This** woman left home with her 12-year-old boy, mother and son together, but he collapsed from hunger and died on the way.*

Proximization along the time axis aims to bring past events (recency), present events (currency), and future events (imminence) to the Self in the DS, which is the audience's attention. Recency is constructed by means of perfective aspect, sometimes in combination with the progressive.

7) *Millions of people **have been forced** to flee their homes. 400,000 **have come** to this refugee camp in eastern Kenya, most from Somalia, and every day 1,500 more arrive, escaping war as well as famine.*

8) *To get here **Abby has walked** for almost a month with her five children.*

Temporal imminence (expressed both verbally and visually) often enables epistemic imminence and axiological urgency. The former is related to knowledge about the future, how the situation will develop, the latter has a deontic dimension and concerns actions that have to be taken:

9) *11 million people **are in urgent need of food assistance**, including millions of children.*

10) *In this village it hasn't rained heavily for two years, so children are starving, **desperately in need of help**.*

11) *They **really need it immediately**. It's a matter of urgency and some of them life or death.*

12) *It's hard to watch, and **it's going to get worse**.*

At the same time, visually the viewer is placed in an “empowered” position. As the camera presents African people from high angle the audience is vested with the feeling of control. The impression is created that the powerless are waiting for help from those who have the power to grant it. Their anticipation, which is full of hope, is also connoted by their frontal position and gaze directed straight at the camera (Fig. 3, 4).



Fig. 3 - Representation of a suffering African child (NBC news)



Fig. 4 - Representation of Africans in need (NBC news)

The audience is thus empowered to help, and the knowledge of this fact is also attributed to the news anchor, confirming his authority and omnipotence:

13) And we know a lot of our generous viewers will want to help the people in the Horn of Africa. There is a list of charities who are doing just that on our website.



Fig. 5 - Empowering/instructing the audience to help (NBC news)

Having being presented with the suffering of others in places featured in the reports, the viewers are encouraged to take action. Their mediated experience of contact with distant places, people and events may bring forward tangible behavioural results.

CONCLUSIONS

In contemporary mediatized world, the institutions of mass communication give their audiences an opportunity to experience distant reality in an indirect way. To make it possible, however, and – more than that – to make their audiences interested and emotionally involved, journalists need to overcome various dimensions of distance as the events reported happened or happen (or will happen) in places that are spatially remote. Epistemic distance exists as the audience may not have enough knowledge of the causes and possible implications of the events. And here again, the newsmakers make use of modality cues (in their both verbal and visual form) to assert their authority and knowledge which they possess about the past, present and the future. They have the power to make audiences emotionally involved by highlighting the axiological urgency and, at the same time, audience's potential to act after being a witness to an instance of "distant suffering".

Modality cues, and the proximization mechanisms they enable are embedded in the very genre of television news and enhanced by the semiotic properties of the medium. Journalists make judgements as to which aspects of reality presented will be brought closer to the audience based on their ideological motivations, previous knowledge and existing journalistic routines. They "mediate" reality for their viewers, inescapably creating pictures of this reality in their minds.

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