

**Littlewood, R. and Lipsedge, M. (1997, 3rd edition) *Aliens and Alienists: ethnic minorities and psychiatry*, London: Routledge pp. 27–28 (extracts)**

However we conceive of our group, whether a class, nation, or a race, we define it by those we exclude from it. These outsiders are perceived as different from ourselves. They may have different languages, different customs or beliefs. They may look different. We may even regard them as sick or sub-human. However we define them, we perceive them as an undifferentiated mass with no individual variations.

Outsiders always pose a threat to the status quo. Even if they are not physically dangerous, they are threatening simply because they are different. Their apartness is dangerous. It questions our tendency to see our society as the natural society and ourselves as the measure of normality. To admit a valid alternative is already to question the inevitability of our type of world. We forget that outsiders are part of our definition of ourselves. To confirm our own identity, we push the outsiders even further away. By reducing their humanity, we emphasize our own...

...Successful belief systems pre-empt the possibility of change by apparently describing all possible alternatives in the restricted form of the outsider. He is always necessary: he is part of our beliefs, and his presence legitimates our institutions. He is the model for all challenges to the accepted order.

Outsiders' characteristics must be contrasted unfavourably with our own. They are nature: we are culture. Excessive cruelty and sexuality is attributed to groups which are technologically less developed than ourselves (too little discipline), while the technologically more advanced are seen as mindless automatons (too much discipline). Some groups are paradoxically both. We delineate the features of the outsider and avoid seeing ourselves in this mirror of our own deficiencies; his evident peculiarities become the scale by which we measure our own conformity. To many communities, including Europeans, the outsider appears dirty and bestial, aggressive but matriarchal, treacherous but stupid, and frequently with an enormous sexual appetite. Some societies perceive their neighbours as cannibals or witches or lunatics – the standardized nightmares of the community.

Outsiders in our midst also have to be identified and isolated. Because they are so close and yet are difficult to distinguish, they may be even more dangerous than the outsider from abroad: heresy and witchcraft are contagious... Both internal and external aliens have a role in our society: they demonstrate to the average individual what he should avoid being or even avoid being mistaken for – they define for him the limits of his normality by producing a boundary only inside which he can be secure.

**DECONSTRUCTION: why do we need otherisation? To reinforce our identity - belonging to a community.**

**B**

## Theme

# 3Representation

**UNIT B3.1**

### **REPRESENTATION IN THE MASS MEDIA: THE CASE OF 'ASYLUM SEEKERS'**

Noam Chomsky's view (1992:6) that the news media provide us with 'a very narrow, very tightly constrained and grotesquely inaccurate account of the world'



### Task B3.1.1

"In a passage near the beginning of Abdul Razak Gurnah's novel *By the Sea*, an individual who is fleeing his own country, has no visa or permission to enter the United Kingdom, and is hoping to be given permission to stay in the UK, arrives by air at Gatwick Airport, near London. The story is narrated by the new arrival:"

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- Consider in what ways 'refugee' and 'asylum seeker' are *not* 'simple words'.
- What does the narrator mean when he says that the 'habit of hearing' the words 'refugee' and 'asylum seeker' make them seem simple?

**Do you know the difference between a refugee and an asylum seeker? The most common refugee terminology explained.**

#### Asylum seeker

An asylum seeker is an individual who is seeking **international protection**. In countries with individualised procedures, an asylum seeker is someone whose claim has not yet been finally decided on by the country in which he or she has submitted it.

#### Refugee

A **refugee** is a person who has fled their country of origin and is unable or unwilling to return because of a well-founded fear of being persecuted because of their race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion.

#### Economic migrant

An economic migrant is someone who leaves his or her country of origin purely for financial and/or economic reasons.

**Moss, S. 'Mind your language: the semantics of asylum', Guardian 22 May 2001**

"'Asylum seeker' is a term that gained currency in the 90s. In 1990, references in the Guardian to 'refugees' outnumbered references to 'asylum seekers' by 10 to one. Last year it was less than two to one. This year the ratio is even closer. In 1999, across all papers, the ratio was six to one in favour of refugees. In 2000, references to refugees halved, while references to asylum seekers doubled.

It is not easy to identify when the change occurred, though two stories in the Guardian on women displaced by the war in ex-Yugoslavia suggested a change in usage in the first half of the 90s. The unquestioned 'refugee' of 1993 had become the 'asylum seeker' of 1994. . . bureaucratic unease about growing numbers claiming to be refugees had produced the new category of asylum seeker, and the media quickly latched on to the change of nomenclature. Significantly, it will enter the online version of the Oxford English Dictionary later in the year.

Mid-90s from refugee to asylum seeker

The term 'asylum seeker' was first used in the American Political Science Review in 1959 and was a Cold War creation: most asylum seekers were political dissidents from the Soviet Union. Refugees were quite different: people displaced in large numbers by war or famine. 'Refugee' is a word that evokes immediate sympathy; 'asylum seeker' is a colder, more bureaucratic term, and it is convenient for the Home Office that the latter is now increasingly favoured.

Refugee (emotionally connoted) - asylum seeker (bureaucratic)"

**Task B3.1.2**

Consider the pairs of words and phrases below, all of which might be used in everyday talk or in the mass media to describe or discuss those seeking to be given, or who have been given, permission to stay in a particular country after they have fled their own (and, indeed, to describe or discuss other categories of people and individuals).

aggressive	assertive
overwrought	hysterical
unforthcoming	quiet
determined	stubborn
to claim financial assistance	to scrounge
to receive help and out	to receive financial assistance
to open the door to	to grant asylum to
to mislead	to lie to
to fail to adapt to the culture	to reject the culture

Would you say that both words or phrases in each pair have a similar connotation?

If not, which of the pair would you say has the more positive, and which the more negative connotation?

Can you think of other pairs of words or phrases which might be used in everyday talk or in the mass media to describe or discuss those seeking to be given, or who have been given, permission to stay in a particular country after they have fled their own?



Van Dijk, T.A. 'New(s) Racism: A discourse analytical approach' second short draft (July 1998) accessed online at [www.hum.ura.nl/2teun/racpress.htm](http://www.hum.ura.nl/2teun/racpress.htm) of chapter to be published in Cottle, S. (ed.) (2000) *Ethnic Minorities and the Media* Buckingham: Open University Press (extracts)

### The New Racism

In many respects, contemporary forms of racism are different from the 'old' racism of slavery, segregation, apartheid, lynchings, and systematic discrimination, of white superiority feelings, and of explicit derogation in public discourse and everyday conversation. The New Racism (Barker 1981) wants to be democratic and respectable, and hence first denies that it is racism. Real Racism, in this framework of thought, only exists among the Extreme Right. In the New Racism, minorities are not biologically inferior, but different. They have a different culture, although in many respects there are 'deficiencies', such as single-parent families, drug abuse, lacking achievement values, and dependence on welfare and affirmative action – 'pathologies' that need to be corrected of course...

DECONSTRUCTION: no longer 'right wing racism'

### The role of discourse

Especially because of their often subtle and symbolic nature, many forms of the 'new' racism are *discursive*: they are expressed, enacted and confirmed by text and talk, such as everyday conversations, board meetings, job interviews, policies, laws, parliamentary debates, political propaganda, textbooks, scholarly articles, movies, TV programs and news reports in the press, among hundreds of other genres. They appear 'mere' talk, and far removed from the open violence and forceful segregation of the 'old' racism. Yet, they may be just as effective to marginalize and exclude minorities. They may hurt even more, especially when they seem to be so 'normal', so 'natural', and so 'commonsensical' to those who engage in such discourse and interaction....

New racism is conveyed through discourse: language is used to reinforce and perpetuate racism through all forms of communication

### Discourse analytical approaches

Discourse analytical approaches systematically describe the various structures and strategies of text or talk, and relate these to the social or political context. For instance, they may focus on overall topics, or more local meanings (such as coherence or implications) in a semantic analysis. But also the syntactic form of sentences, or the overall organization of a news report may be examined in detail. The same is true for variations of style, rhetorical devices such as metaphors or euphemisms, speech acts such as promises and threats, and in spoken discourse also the many forms of interaction. These structures of text and talk are systematically related to elements of the social context, such as the spatio-temporal setting, participants and their various social and communicative roles, as well as their goals, knowledge, and opinions.

Discourse analysts study how people use text and talk in context.

### The role of the media

There is no need to argue here the overall power of the media in modern 'information' societies... the power of the media is primarily discursive and symbolic. Media discourse is the main source of people's knowledge, attitudes and ideologies, both of other elites as well as of ordinary citizens. Of course, the media do this in joint production with the other elites, primarily politicians, professionals and academics. Yet, given the freedom of the press, the media elites are ultimately responsible for the prevailing discourses of the media they control. This is specifically also true for the role of the media in ethnic affairs, for the following reasons:

- (a) Most white readers have few daily experiences with minorities
- (b) Most white readers have few alternative sources of information about minorities
- (c) Negative attitudes about minorities are in the interest of most white readers
- (d) More than most other topics, ethnic issues provide positive but polarized identification for most white readers, in terms of Us and Them
- (e) The media emphasizes such group polarization by focusing on various Problems and Threats for Us, thus actively involving most white readers
- (f) Minority groups do not have enough power to publicly oppose biased reporting
- (g) The dominant (media) discourse on ethnic issues is virtually consensual
- (h) In particular, there is little debate on the 'new' racism
- (i) 'Anti-racist' dissidents have little access to the media.

In sum, when power over the most influential form of public discourse, that is, media discourse, is combined with a lack of alternative sources, when there is a near consensus, and opponents and dissident groups are weak, then the media are able to abuse such power and establish the discursive and cognitive hegemony that is necessary for the reproduction of the 'new' racism. Let us now examine in some more detail how exactly such power is exercised in news and newsmaking.

The media reinforce new racism: 1. Many white people do not look for alternative sources; 2. Many people agree with new racism; 3. Opponent groups are weak; 4 media is power

### News structures

... on ethnic issues, for which alternative sources of information are scarce, news on TV or in the press often provides the first 'facts', but at the same time the first 'definitions of the situation' and the first opinions – usually those of the authorities or other white elites. Topics Interestingly, whereas there are a large number of types of topic in the press, news about immigrants and ethnic minorities is often restricted to the following kind of events:

(1) New (illegal) immigrants are arriving (2) Political response to policies about (new) immigration (3) Reception problems (housing etc.) (4) Social problems (employment, welfare etc.) (5) Response of the population (resentment etc.) (6) Cultural characterization: How are they different? (7) Complications: Negative characterization: How are they deviant? (8) Focus on Threats: Violence, crime, drugs, prostitution (9) Political response: Policies to stop immigration, expulsion, etc. (10) Integration conflicts.

In each of these cases, even potentially 'neutral' topics, such as immigration, housing, employment or cultural immigration, soon tend to have a negative dimension: Immigration may be topicalized as a threat, and most ethnic relations represented in terms of problems and deviance if not as a threat as well, most typically so in news about crime, drugs and violence minorities are associated with. On the other hand, many topics that are also part of ethnic affairs occur much less in the news, such as migrants leaving the country, the contributions of immigrant workers to the economy, everyday life of minority communities, and especially also discrimination and racism against minorities. Since topics express the most important information of a text, and in news are further signalled by prominent headlines and leads, they are also best understood and memorized by the readers. In other words, negative topics have negative consequences on the 'minds' of the recipients.

In general what we find is a preference for those topics that emphasize Their bad actions and Our good ones. On the other hand, Their good actions and Our bad ones are not normally emphasized by topicalization (and will therefore also appear less in headlines or on the front page, if reported at all). This general strategy of positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation is prevalent in most dominant discourse about immigrants and minorities...

Immigrations is connotated negatively by the media (problems and not how honest immigrants contribute to the country's economy.) Titles and leads

**Local meanings Derogatory words in racist discourse are well known, and need not be spelled out here. The new racism, as described above, however, avoids explicitly racist labels, and uses negative words to describe the properties or actions of immigrants or minorities (for instance, 'illegal'). Special code-words (such as 'welfare mothers') may be used, and the readers are able to interpret these words in terms of minorities and the problems attributed to them. And it needs no further argument that attitudes about groups and opinions about specific events may influence the lexical choice of such words as 'riot' on the one hand, or 'urban unrest', 'disturbance' or 'uprising' on the other hand, as is also the case for the classical example of 'terrorist' vs. 'rebel' vs. 'freedom fighter'. Thus, most mentions of 'terrorists' (especially also in the US press) will stereotypically refer to Arabs. Violent men who are our friends or allies will seldom get that label. For the same reason, 'drug barons' are always Latin men in South America, never the white men who are in the drugs business within the USA itself. In other words, when there are options of lexicalization, choosing one word rather than another often has contextual reasons, such as the opinions of the speaker about a person, a group or their actions.**

Lexicalization of otherization (Drug dealers are Latinos, Terrorists are Arabs)

Modern linguistics and discourse analysis, however, goes beyond the study of isolated words, and also studies the meaning of sentences or sequences of sentences and their role in the text as a whole. Thus, sentence meanings also show what specific roles participants have, for instance as responsible agents, targets or victims of action. What we find in such an analysis is in line with the general strategy mentioned above: minorities are often represented in a passive role (things are being decided, done, etc. for or against them), unless they are agents of negative actions, such as illegal entry, crime, violence, or drug abuse. In the latter case, their responsible agency will be emphasized.

Much of the information in discourse, and hence also in news reports, is implicit, and supplied by the recipients on the basis of their knowledge of the context and of the world. Also in news and editorials about ethnic affairs, thus, many meanings are merely implied or presupposed, and not explicitly stated. Because of social norms, and for reasons of impression management, for instance, many negative things about minorities may not be stated explicitly, and thus are conveyed 'between the lines'. For instance, in a sentence like 'The rising crime in the inner city worried the politicians', it is presupposed, and not

explicitly stated, that there is rising crime in the inner city, as if this were a known 'fact'.

Analysis of Grammar and syntax:agency—new racism (active sentences for negative actions done by immigrants)

Many meanings are implicit in the news. If it is implicit, it is well known.

DECONSTRUCTION: no longer 'right wing racism'

New racism is conveyed through discourse: language is used to reinforce and perpetuate racism through all forms of communication

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Lexicalization of otherization (Drug dealers are Latinos, Terrorists are Arabs)

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**TaskB3.1.4**



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