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European Journal of Communication 2005; 20; 155

DOI: 10.1177/0267323105052295

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Hybrid Public Relations News Discourse

■ *Karmen Erjavec*

A B S T R A C T

■ The aim of this article is twofold: to integrate an analysis of discourse processes into Fairclough's textually orientated critical discourse analysis, and to show the usefulness of this approach in demonstrating the encroachment of public relations on news production in Slovenia. Interpractice analysis – which identifies cases where text production and interpretation processes overtly use practices outside the convention – was used to identify so-called 'public relations news reports' and uncover the elements of public relations practice used in journalism. The analysis of interdiscursivity revealed how hybrid practice, through textual devices (i.e. topics, perspective, choice of sources, genre and lexis), incorporates discursive elements of public relations into news report discourse. These include using the representatives of an organization as the main source, partiality and a one-sided (favourable) evaluation of the characteristics/activities of the subject discussed; none of which are in the interest of the audience, but in the interest of the powerful elite that the news covers. ■

Key Words critical discourse analysis, interpractice, journalism, public relations, public relations news

Introduction

Slovenia, similar to other post-socialist Central and Eastern European countries, is catching up with Western Europe with regard to the growth and spread of professional public relations (PR) practitioners. The

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European Journal of Communication Copyright © 2005 SAGE Publications (London, Thousand Oaks, CA and New Delhi) www.sagepublications.com, Vol 20(2): 155–179. [10.1177/0267323105052295]

findings of several documented studies in Western Europe (Davis, 2000; Esser et al., 2000) and Central and Eastern Europe (Verčič, 2003) have found that, in addition to the fact that institutional and corporate sources are increasingly using PR¹ in order to consolidate their superior media access, alternative sources are also managing to make frequent interventions by adopting PR strategies. Numerous studies dealing with the influence of PR on journalistic discourse (e.g. Baerns, 1979; Sachzman, 1976; Baskin and Aronoff, 1988; Fröhlich, 1992; Russ-Mohl, 1992; Wilcox et al., 1995; Curtin, 1999) have found that over a half of daily newspaper content originates from press releases and other forms of PR information. For example, in 2003, Slovene newspapers published news on the largest Slovene telecommunications company that in five out of six cases was based on PR information. Why do news producers use PR sources and information? What do these sources mean to them? How do they process these sources? Do news producers publish PR information without citing the source, as certain studies have indicated (Russ-Mohl, 1994; Bentle, 1998; Michie, 1998)?

The question regarding the characteristics of 'public relations news' (PRN) also remains unanswered in the existing research dealing with the influence of PR on news discourse. In my definition, PRN pertains to all published news that contains basically unchanged PR information, that appears without citing the source and attempts to promote or protect certain people or organizations. In order to obtain answers to these questions, the present study combines an analysis of news production processes and textual analysis in an attempt to identify PRN, uncover the elements of PR practice within journalism, and to reveal PR discursive elements that are overtly used in news discourse. Furthermore, this study seeks to arm newspaper readers with the means to recognize this hybrid type of discourse, namely PR news discourse.

Integration of discourse processes analysis with textually orientated critical discourse analysis

This study is based on Fairclough's (1989, 1992, 1995a, 1995b, 2003) critical discourse analysis (CDA), which focuses on three different dimensions of a communicative event: text, discourse practice and social practice. Textual analysis is linguistic, while discourse practice analysis is intertextual and interdiscursal. In the latter, the analyst searches through the text to find 'traces' of production process and attempts to find indications of how the text could be interpreted. Discourse analysis, as a social practice, involves social conditions relating to three different levels

of social organization: the level of social situation, the level of social institution and the level of society as a whole.

Since Fairclough's concept of discursive practice analysis focuses only on the features of the text, while 'discourse refers to the entire process of social interaction of which a text is just a part' (Fairclough, 1989: 13), I expand the dimension of discourse practice to discourse processes, i.e. the process of production, of which the text is a product, and the process of interpretation, for which the text is a resource. Thus, textual analysis is only a part of discourse analysis, which also incorporates an analysis of production and interpretation processes. With the help of findings of news production studies, van Dijk (1988) has shown that the production process interlocks with a news text. For example, production processes are a function of the structure of source texts; however, they also depend on the journalistic motives that underlie the construction of the news text. On the other hand, approaches that highlight the role of the reader – reception studies – mostly connect reception with production and text. For example, according to Barthes (1964: 23), interpretation is shaped by an individual's set of decoding practices, which act as 'shifters', favouring one path of interpretation over other possible paths. The producer has a hand in the choice of these paths of possible interpretation, and an interest (as well as a set of strategies) in 'overcoding' a particular path of interpretation and 'undercoding' others. Thus, the interpretation of a text is closely linked to its production. Since (production and interpretation) processes and text structure are integrated and mutually dependent properties of discourse, textual analysis should be combined with an analysis of discourse processes. Chain relationships between the participants of discourse processes could also be analysed in the framework of the analysis of discourse processes: what types of relationships exist between the participants in text production and interpretation processes?

Ethnography is the best way to understand text production and interpretation processes (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983; Hansen et al., 1998). This is also recognized by Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999: 61–2), since ethnography requires the systematic presence of researchers in the context of the practice studied and can therefore establish precisely the sort of knowledge that CDA often extrapolates from the text, namely the knowledge regarding different moments of social practice: its material aspect (for example, location arrangements in space), its social relationships and processes, as well as the beliefs, values and desires of its participants. Ethnography can illuminate, both synchronically (at the time of the fieldwork) and historically, multiple aspects of a certain

practice; furthermore, it also provides an invaluable context for assessing the articulatory process in practice and the specific function of discourse. Eriksson (2002) also proved the usefulness of ethnographic methods for CDA with an analysis of television's text production and reception, which showed that television plays a crucial role in the reproduction of political discourse.

For the purpose of PRN analysis, it is necessary to define some concepts that enable identification and analysis of elements of other types of discourse (non-conventional) that are overtly used in (conventional) discourse. Fairclough (1992: 64) adopts the approach of French discourse analysts and defines *intertextuality* as the instance where specific other texts are used in a text (i.e. specific sections of other texts are incorporated into news reports with the use of quotation marks and reporting clauses), whereas *interdiscursivity* deals with the question of how discourse type is constituted through a combination of elements of discourse orders. The concept of interdiscursivity focuses on discourse conventions rather than on other texts as constitutive. An example of interdiscursivity would be 'mixed genres', combining elements of two or more genres, such as 'chat' in television chat shows, which is partly entertainment and partly performance (Fairclough, 1992).

In addition to interdiscursivity, the concept of *interpretation* is presented in the dimension of discourse practice, which identifies the instances where specific alternative modes of text production and interpretation processes are used in practice. For example, in the news discourse production process, the news producer (journalist, editor) selects and produces the news. Where the journalist is passive in the processing of information, such as reactions to the initiatives of PR sources, routine coverage of events and rewriting of press releases, the interpretation that occurs is a hybrid practice consisting of journalistic/editorial practice and PR practice, whereas, in the process of interpretation, interpretation occurs when the reader believes he/she is reading the news, while he/she is actually reading PR information. An earlier study of mine (Erjavec, 2004) also proved the usefulness of interpretation for CDA through an analysis of hybrid discourse between advertising and journalism.

Different news production studies or the so-called 'sociology of news' have clearly demonstrated the usefulness of ethnographic methods, such as participant observation and interviews (Tuchman, 1978; Gans, 1979; Golding and Elliot, 1979; Fishman, 1980; Schlesinger, 1987; Helland, 1993). These studies have also found that the journalistic process of text production is, to a large extent, a routine practice. The

meaning of a text – its ideational and interpersonal functions – is a result of the text production process. In this process, journalists use an established form and habitual methods in order to manage production. The work can be performed in more or less routine and institutionalized ways, which, of course, influences what can be expressed in the text, and how it can be expressed; it has a consequence for how PR information is formed as news.

My aim is to combine these insights into a multidimensional approach for PRN studies: an approach that considers the structure, as well as the processes, production, interpretation, textual interdependence and overlap of the communication process. In order to be able to identify and analyse PRN items, the research is presented stepwise. In the first step, I analyse PRN production practices and collect a corpus of PRN. In the second stage, I identify discursive elements of PR using textual analysis. While I do not treat reception in the traditional sense of studying audience reception, I do hope to employ the sensitivity of the reception paradigm in order to uncover the responses of PRN producers to PRN practice.

Analysis of PRN discourse

Interpractice: analysis of the PRN production process

Data were collected using two methods of field research: participant-observation and in-depth interviews. In 2003, I spent 120 hours in the offices all four quality daily newspapers in Slovenia over a period of 12 weeks. I participated in and observed the news production activities in all editorial departments, apart from the foreign policy and sports departments.² My goal was to immerse myself in the world of PRN production and to provide an adequately ‘thick’ description of the ‘informal logic of the actual life’ of PRN producers (Geertz, 1973: 17). Participant-observation was necessary due to the problematic nature of the subject of analysis, since the producers of PRN were aware of the fact that, according to the journalistic code,³ this practice is prohibited in Slovenia, and they were very reluctant to discuss the issue. The use of in-depth interviews was also intended to obtain the participants’ responses regarding PRN practice. I conducted in-depth interviews with three journalists and three editors⁴ from each newspaper. The interviewees were between 22 and 45 years old and all but five were women. Since they would only be interviewed under the condition of complete anonymity, I refer to them by letters of the alphabet. In the first step of the research,

my aim was to uncover the elements of PR practice that are used in journalistic practice, and identify PRN items for textual analysis. The results are presented in three, often interrelated, stages of news production – information gathering, selection and writing.

Information gathering

Most participants felt that finding news was not their responsibility, since they don't even have the time to process the information offered: 'How can I find the time to search for news, when I am not even able to process the existing information?' (Journalist C). In compliance with studies dealing with changing patterns of news sources (McManus, 1994; Davis, 2000; Manning, 2001), participant-observation showed that PR sources are a main source of information. Journalists obtained PR information from press conferences and press releases, or via mail, email, fax and Internet, and also via telephone calls or face-to-face conversations with PR practitioners.

Due to an oversaturation of PR information (up to 18 different pieces of PR information per journalist per day) from official, as well as alternative, resource-poor sources such as worker unions, peace movements, ecology organizations and anti-globalist groups,⁵ the journalists created the illusion that PR sources cover newsworthy events in society. So, what did these PR sources represent to the journalists and editors? They represented a primary source of information, with the help of which they could reflect events in society. The principal work of the news producers interviewed was based on a construction of reality motivated by narrow interests, since they predominantly used the information provided by PR practitioners, whose goal is not to expose information or report impartially on social organizations, but rather to present a particular image of a paying client, or, in other words, to form and maintain a positive public face to readers (Grunig and Hunt, 1984; Wernick, 1991; Wilcox et al., 1995; Wragg, 1993). The pursuit of such journalistic practice was at the expense of the unorganized sources.

Why did journalists and editors use PR sources? The analysis revealed at least five reasons.

Accessibility of information News producers used PR sources because they were physically accessible; furthermore, PR practitioners sent the information regularly and in large quantities. Or as Fishman (1980) puts it, a 'bureaucratic affinity' exists between journalists and institutions. In addition, PR practitioners are a good source of information that would

not be available elsewhere: 'I know where to obtain the information I would not receive from the managers' (Journalist F). Journalists and editors also used PR sources because PR practitioners might otherwise threaten to limit their access in future to information, which is 'of vital importance in the competitive struggle among the newspapers' (Editor I). In one case, such a threat was actually followed through: 'Due to the fact that only the idea of the piece was based on the news release – namely, I also published the information of competitive companies – I did not receive an invitation to their following press conference. The editor had to intervene' (Journalist P).

Journalistic routine practice and news values The 'primary definer' (Hall et al., 1978) status of official sources is structurally determined by the routine practice and values of journalists, which has been confirmed by many various studies (e.g. Golding and Middleton, 1982; Philo, 1995). News values dictate that the public must be informed regarding the policies/activities of individuals and institutions, which, in theory, draw their legitimacy from the support of the public. They also dictate that institutional representatives command an authority and respect that per se justifies their source status.

In addition to already established news values, the news producers on the quality dailies take into account the relevance of information to the audience's lifestyle, which particularly corresponds to PR information because of its consumer orientation. Due to the 'span of interests of today's readers' (Editor M), the journalists write 'not only about politics, but also about lifestyle' (Journalist A) – issues such as fashion, health, leisure time, personal finances – and choose PR sources that offer lifestyle information: 'PR information about a new mobile telephone will be published, because I am certain that our readers need this information due to their lifestyle' (Editor J). According to a conscious conception of the lifestyle of their readers – whom they perceive as consumers – journalists and editors 'presented key information on quality products' (Journalist G) or services.

Economic, political, cultural and ideological pressures of PR sources Official sources have the power to exercise pressure on news producers. The state and its institutions have the political power and corporate sources have the economic power to restrict or enable access to information. The pressures from corporate sources were predominant: 'In the last few years, political pressure has been replaced by economic pressure. This is

illustrated in the fact that PR people blackmail us to publish or keep back certain information by threatening to discontinue their advertising', stated Editor E. PR practitioners were using this kind of coercion not only regarding the publication of promotional information, but also to protect their client; furthermore they would use such coercion to also ensure 'unsuitable' information about their client was not released into the public domain.

Even though this research confirms the findings of earlier studies (e.g. Miller, 1994; Manning, 2001), that the selection of PR sources is correlated with the economic resources of PR, it also shows that in crisis situations, where there is clear disagreement between official and non-official actors, the journalists will choose PR sources from groups who have, as Bourdieu would say, 'cultural capital'. Non-official, PR resource-poor alternative sources (ecological movements, peace movements, anti-globalist movements and other groups, who are fighting against the politics of state/corporations) exercised pressure on the journalists through an appeal to public interest. Or in other words, those PR sources have succeeded in gaining positive newspaper coverage through strategies focused on the 'needs of the public' (Journalist S) rather than on 'personal or partial interest' (Journalist S).

Certain topics and sources were continuously selected due to ideological pressures, which would also be connected to the interests of the powerful and maintaining the status quo. Journalists continuously covered the topic of the conflict between 'them' (Roma, 'erased citizens', Muslims or other groups of foreigners) on the one hand, and 'us' (Slovenes) on the other hand, in order for the political sources to legitimize their dominant position. The research also reiterates the earlier argument that non-organized marginal groups are also marginalized in the media due to a journalism that mainly relies on PR sources.

The employment status of journalists, lack of human resources in editorial offices and time pressure Since there is a lack of human resources in editorial offices it means that news producers rely heavily on PR sources: 'Since we don't have enough journalists, they are often forced to publish the information in the format they have received it, because they don't have the time for a detailed study of the story' (Editor A). Furthermore, journalists who do not have a full-time employment contract (the majority of young journalists are temporary employees) were particularly vulnerable to the pressures of PR practitioners: 'A temporary employee does not have the support of the editorial board, while at the same time

he/she succumbs to PR pressures due to his/her knife-edge existence' (Journalist J).

Journalists' and editors' personal motives Personal relationships, through relatives, friends or work colleagues (i.e. during their spare time, some journalists work as PR practitioners or PR consultants), also contributed to the use of PR sources. Additionally, in consonance with the literature (Aronoff, 1975; Curtin, 1999), many participants mentioned that personal relations with PR practitioners led to more favourable attitudes towards the information provided by those practitioners. Some participants also confessed that they chose PR sources simply because they were 'lazy' (Journalist A): 'such work is the easiest' (Journalist V); 'work results are at least doubled with the use of PR information' (Journalist D); and 'it is easiest to bend under PR pressures' (Editor C). Journalists and editors were also tempted to use PR sources because of the gifts and 'perks' they received at press conferences (i.e. notebooks with logos, folders, luxury food and drink) or personally (i.e. paid travelling costs, products such as mobile telephones).

What was the attitude of the journalists and editors interviewed towards PR practitioners? In contrast to most studies, which have tended to find a negative, often antagonistic relationship between them (e.g. Aronoff, 1975; Pincus et al., 1993; Curtin, 1999), the participants interviewed in this study had quite varying relationships with PR practitioners; however, positive relations prevailed. The majority of the interviewees confirmed that they regularly used PR sources and their information, and believed that their work and the work of PR practitioners was interdependent: 'PR people make my work easier and shorten the time needed to search for information. However, it is obvious that they also profit due to the publication of the information' (Journalist N). Some individual journalists confessed that they use PR sources almost exclusively and that they are dependent on these sources: 'I am dependent on PR sources due to the lack of time' (Journalist O). A handful of participants claimed that they never use PR sources and had an extremely negative attitude towards PR practitioners: 'I don't use PR sources, because PR people manipulate journalists by giving them gifts in exchange for free promotion in the form of a journalistic article' (Editor D). In the interviews following participant-observation, which had established the use of PR sources, the majority of those participants who strongly denied ever using PR sources and their information were defined as using them occasionally.

Selection of sources, events and information

Despite the fact that the majority of participants interviewed admitted using PR sources and information, they also expressed a belief in the autonomy of their news selection process: 'I am the one who chooses what I will be reporting on, regardless of the pleas of the PR people' (Journalist F). The journalists and the editors believe they exercise an autonomous choice, even though this choice is mainly limited to different PR sources and their information. However, the choice of PR sources is only exceptionally based on a criterion of public interest, or as stated by Editor M: 'When I select the sources, I always ask myself: Who benefits from the event or information? Does the information serve the larger public welfare or particular interests?'

The majority of events covered were organized with the purpose of promoting or protecting persons and institutions by covering the event in the media. Boorstin (1962) defined such events as 'pseudo-events': unreal events, events without rational meaning and no point outside the circle of the media for which they were designed. The most frequently used pseudo-events were press conferences. The journalists see the advantage of press conferences over individual research in that 'you can find out everything you want and more in one place' (Journalist R); 'you don't have to put in a lot of work with them' (Journalist C); and 'they are cheap' (Editor N). Participant-observation showed that journalists ask few or no questions at press conferences. If they do it tends to be when high-status individuals such as politicians, high-level officials and the like are involved and/or if something very unexpected has happened, e.g. a press conference regarding an environmental accident. In other instances, journalistic questioning is disappearing and the events remain under the absolute control of the PR people. Interviewees also confirmed that the information acquired through the Internet (home pages of state institutions, corporations, movements, individuals) is replacing press conferences for event coverage, as it is 'cheaper and simpler' (Journalist E) to obtain and select information in this way; furthermore, it 'allows for an optimal use of my time, since I don't have to organize my timetable round an event, because I can get it on the Internet whenever I want' (Journalist H).

Writing

Participant-observation shows that journalists use PR information, reproduced in different ways, in over half of all published news. There are at least four variations of such news reproduction. The prevailing

method⁶ consisted of choosing key PR information and neutralizing words of overt praise such as 'wonderful', 'unique', 'a great step forward' by erasing those words and/or inserting less positive words, such as 'quality' instead of 'wonderful'. The information is presented in an appropriate genre, mostly news items, news reports or features. The majority of information is identical to the PR information, while the source is concealed. Even though this practice prevailed in the coverage of economic topics, it confirmed what many other studies have shown (Russ-Mohl, 1994; Bentle, 1998; Michie, 1998), that journalists tend to use PR information without stating the source.

The second method (also in a quantitative sense) of reproducing PR information that was prevalent in the coverage of political topics is similar to the first method. The only difference is that in this case the journalists state the source of primary information. The third method involves journalists summarizing the topic or idea presented in the PR information; however, the piece is written in their own words, and the source of the information is stated. Despite the greater activity, the journalists still predominantly use the PR sources in their writing. The fourth method involves journalists who cover economic topics rewriting or just copying a press release without stating the source. While the second and the third methods of PR information reproduction are problematic because the news production practice is predominantly relying on PR sources, according to the journalistic code, the first and the fourth methods are prohibited, because a journalistic text is being published without the processing of information and without stating the source of information. It follows that the term PRN relates to the products that are created using the first or last method.

Although most participants admitted using PR sources, they denied the prevalence of not citing sources. None of the participants felt compelled to explain the reasons behind the use of PR information, although we can conclude from responses made earlier in the study that the journalists would defend themselves by claiming autonomy since they choose their own sources.

The analysis of the PRN production process found that over a quarter⁷ of all published news is created by reproducing PR information without citing the source. In this interpractice – a hybrid practice consisting of the journalistic/editorial practice and PR practice – journalists' reports are, more or less, based on the report of the PR source in terms of the staging and control, and such journalistic products thus achieve the PR goals.

Interdiscursivity: textual analysis

If interpractice analysis points to the fact that PRN items are produced by the domination of PR practice within journalistic practice, then the analytical task is to identify those linguistic choices within the PRN discourse that point to the choices at the level of interdiscursivity.

The sample subjected to a detailed discourse analysis consists of 32 news reports⁸ identified in the first step of the research as PRN items published in the news genre. The sample consists only of those news reports whose production I observed at all levels, from the search for information to the writing of the news report. These news reports were mostly written in the local and economic editorial departments of the newspapers analysed and were predominately based on economic PR. Although I use the term PRN in a general sense, I also use the term 'public relations news reports' (PRNR) for selected texts that were published in the form of news reports.

News reports were chosen for the analysis because they were perceived as the most factual, disinterested, impersonal and objective genre in the mass media by the journalists themselves and also by the general public (White, 2000). The main aim of interdiscursivity analysis is to uncover discursive elements of PR used in news report discourse. The findings of this analysis are additionally confirmed with a comparative analysis of a typical PRNR and its press release,⁹ presented in Figure 1.

Intertextuality

Even merely scanning the two texts, we find intertextuality between them, while the analysis of propositions – propositions are defined as the smallest independent meaningful constructs of language and thought typically expressed by a single sentence or clause (van Dijk, 1988) – confirms this notion, since public relations news reports' propositions are identical to the majority of press releases' propositions. Since it would be senseless, due to duplication, to state the propositions of both texts, I decided rather to present the results of the macro-semantic¹⁰ analysis, which deals with global meanings and enables the description of the meaning of the entire text (Pan, 2002). It was found that the macro-proposition of both texts is the same, i.e. the business success of Loxus. Previous interpractice analysis also confirms the fact that press releases are used as a basis for PRNRs, therefore creating a 're-contextualization' (Bernstein, 1990; Chouliarakis and Fairclough, 1999) of PR discourse to news report discourse, i.e. the journalist altered the explicit charac-

<p><i>Loxus – good business results</i></p> <p>Last year Loxus increased their profits by a third, they rationalized their business activities, and increased the number of employees.</p> <p>In 2002, Loxus in Ljubljana achieved an income of 71,9 milliard tolars, which amounts to a 12 percent increase from the previous year. Profits were increased by a third, to four milliard tolars. Two thirds of income was created with export to foreign markets, while sales were successfully increased in Western Europe. According to the words of the president of administration board, Matej Dolenc, such good business results were achieved by decreasing the costs of business operation, timely increase of the stock of primary material, and high quality façade plates. Last year Loxus successfully increased the number of employees by 3.3 percent, while added value per employee was increased by a tenth. In the current half-year, they achieved an income of 40 milliard tolars and profits of 3,1 milliard tolars.</p>	<p><i>Loxus – very successful</i></p> <p>At a press conference held today, the representatives of Loxus company presented their excellent business results of the past year.</p> <p>In 2002, Loxus increased their incomes to 71,9 milliard tolars, out of which 50 milliard were in exports. Loxus increased added value per employee by 10,5 percent, while profits were increased by a third, namely 4 milliard tolars. They increased business outcome of operations prior to depreciation (EBITDA) by 7,3 percent and it amounted to 23 milliard tolars, representing a third of all income. "In Loxus we thus exceeded our plans by almost a third. Our excellent results are the consequence of a decrease in business operation costs, increased quality, and timely increase of the stock of strategic primary material, such as steel" commented the president of administration board of Loxus, Matej Dolenc.</p> <p>Loxus improved the sales in Western Europe, where they achieved 33 percent income coming from sales. This successful result was achieved having 830 employees, namely 3.3 percent more than two years ago.</p> <p>Loxus is successful also in the current year. In the first half of 2003, they achieved an income of 40 milliard tolars, EBITDA 13,9 milliard tolars, and profits of 3,1 milliard tolars. In the fall, they will begin with the sales of new types of façade plates due to which they expect further growth in the future.</p>
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Public relations news report

Press release

Figure 1

teristics of the press release in order for the text to be appropriate for publication in a newspaper (changes are presented later).

However, since my intention is not merely to show the similarities between the two texts, but mainly to uncover the PR discursive elements incorporated in the PRNR, I focus on the comparative analysis of both texts – thus giving newspaper readers the tools to recognize PRNRs, since they don't have the option of comparing both texts. However, I use this analysis only to confirm the incorporation of PR discursive elements into a PRNR. The main focus is on an interdiscursual analysis of a PRNR, which is performed from a macro-structural (topic, perspective, choice of sources, generic structure) to micro-structural textual analysis (lexis).

Topics

Topics or themes are an important aspect of news reports (van Dijk, 1991), and as the analysis shows, they are crucial in interdiscursivity analysis. Within news discourse, topics represent what news producers construe to be the most important items of information. The PRNR

might contain the following topics: success reports, award achievements, new or improved products or services, major contracts, competitions, sponsorships, VIP visitors, new equipment orders, purchase of new premises, milestones and other measures of success, which are all typical topics of press releases (Grunig and Hunt, 1984; Wilcoy et al., 1995; Wragg, 1993). A comparative analysis of the example PRNR and press release also demonstrates that the topics of both texts are identical and focus on business success. Furthermore, PRNRs tend not to cover social events, as is typical of news reports (van Dijk, 1988; Bell, 1991), but rather deal with promotional activities/characteristics of the subjects discussed. The themes analysed reveal another feature: they have little news value, i.e. they are not important for the general public, but rather for a limited number of individuals and organizations, and above all for the subjects in question.

Perspective

Perspective is an important feature of discourse meaning: namely, the point of view from which events and actions are described (van Dijk, 1991). Perspective is both a local and global feature of semantics and is expressed by various textual signals, which are analysed in more detail later. Now, I focus on the global semantics of PRNRs. Both textual examples in Figure 1 are written from the same perspective, or, in other words, the PRNR covers the topic from the same point of view as the press release, i.e. from the organizational point of view, and neglects those perspectives that would present the organization in a less positive light. Partiality is also the main characteristic of the PRNR. All the texts analysed in the study cover one organization, or more than one organization within the same interest group, presenting only the positive characteristics/activities of the subjects in question. They never present controversial or negative characteristics, which is a typical feature of promotional texts such as press releases (Grunig and Hunt, 1984; Wilcoy et al., 1995; Wragg, 1993).

Choice of sources

One of the characteristics of a news report is the reliance on various sources of information, on which basis the news report is constructed (van Dijk, 1988; Bell, 1991). Hence, quotes – both direct and indirect – are frequently woven into the fabric of the news discourse to give it a semblance of ‘facticity’ and it is argued that a quote from the news

maker's own words renders it incontrovertible fact (Tuchman, 1978). In the news reports analysed, the primary sources come only from the organization or its clientele. There is no multiplicity of sources, which might offer some variation of perspective, or, in other words, create a balanced, two-sided argument. The PRNR chosen in Figure 1 also confirms this fact, since it cites the same source of information as the press release, namely the president of the administration board. The most frequent sources in PRNRs are the general manager and/or president of the board followed by the PR people, while in longer news reports other representatives of the company might also appear. 'Independent' sources – sources not directly linked to the organization – are rare, but they always confirm or build upon the main point. Politicians tend to be most frequently used as 'independent' sources, demonstrating the link between political and economic elites. Thus, sources construct an illusion of truthfulness in the texts and legitimize the partiality of PRNRs.

An interesting finding relates to where journalists do not attribute the source to a press release or conference. Journalists explain this as the desire to present themselves as proactive 'information gatherers' rather than as passive receivers of 'news'.

Generic structure

Van Dijk's (1983, 1988) and Bell's (1991) schematic conception of genre is familiar within the literature. According to this concept, a schematic structure – headline, lead and satellites – is made up of stages, which are either all obligatory or some obligatory and some optional. Van Dijk's concept is oriented towards modelling the cognitive process associated with reading news stories. Bell (1991) adopts van Dijk's framework of relationships between the structure of the news report and that of the Labovian narrative of personal experience (Labov, 1972).

At first glance, the generic structure of a PRNR is the same as that of typical news reports. The form – headlines and leads printed in bold, followed by satellites – is no different from neighbouring news reports. Only a detailed discourse analysis reveals that such news reports include elements of PR discourse. The first specific characteristic of a PRNR is immediately revealed in the headline. The key characteristic of the titles of both texts is a positive evaluation of the organization. Headlines of other PRNRs in our study also demonstrate this, e.g. 'Revoz Novo mesto: Even though less Crios were produced, the results are good'; 'Modernized cable car on Kanin'; 'Factory Kovina Slovenj Gradec obtains ISO 9001 certificate: "Quality is our motto"'; 'Digitel achieves good business results

in the first trimester'; 'Prestigious GSM apparatus also in Slovenia'; 'Today, Mobitel begins with the introduction of a new generation of mobile telecommunications: Among the first in the world and the only one in the country'; 'Društvo prijateljev mladine Ljubljana is offering a rich holiday programme for the children'; 'A rich artistic programme in Cankarjev dom from 5 to 30 December 2003: The kingdom of pre-New Year Fairytales'. The headlines are short statements, generally one or two sentences, with one categorical claim, tending to offer more or less explicit praise of the organization, its product or service. The title of the press release as well as the guidelines in the PR literature regarding the writing of titles (e.g. Grunig and Hunt, 1984; Wilcox et al., 1995; Wragg, 1993) confirm that this is a typical characteristic of contemporary press release headlines. Since one of the main characteristics of a headline is that it orients the reader to process the text in a pre-determined direction (van Dijk, 1991), the headlines analysed offer a preferred positive meaning on the subject discussed.

The scholars of news report discourse agree that the lead paragraph, which follows the headline, summarizes the central action by answering the questions 'who', 'when', 'where', 'what' and sometimes 'why' and establishes the point of the story (van Dijk, 1988; Bell, 1991). As already mentioned, a key feature of these texts is that they do not report on a social event, which is typical of news reports (van Dijk, 1988; Bell, 1991), but rather report on promotional activities and the characteristics of the subject discussed. The leads of both texts in the example presented here summarize positive business results, the only difference is that the press release states them in a more explicitly positive way and also indicates that a pseudo-event (press conference) had been organized.

Furthermore, the structures of both texts analysed are very similar, since they both list the good business results of the organization in question. The list of promotional characteristics/activities of the organization, its services or product are also a key feature of all PRNRs. With the use of Bell's (1991) and van Dijk's (1988) framework of the news report, it is possible to conclude that the body of the news report consists of a comments category, containing the source's observations on the organization, its product or service and is represented by a more or less positive evaluation. In longer news reports, the expectations about the future development of the organization and its product or services are included in the last paragraphs. The category of expectation is included in the last sentence of the press release. Although the comments category is always implicitly present, it only encompasses a smaller part of generic categories in most news reports (van Dijk, 1988; Bell, 1991). According

to van Dijk (1988), generic categories include the episode category with two subgroups: main events with consequences and background category with history and context, which is further divided into circumstances and previous events. The comments category with a positive evaluation is dominant in the body of the PRNR, which clearly shows the incorporation of press release characteristics (Grunig and Hunt, 1984; Wilcox et al., 1995; Wragg, 1993).

Lexis

The final comparison between the texts also confirms intertextuality, since there is a clear lexical link between these two texts. All the figures and keywords used to describe the business results in the PRNR are also a part of the press release's vocabulary. In addition, the PRNR contains indirect reporting of the source stated in the press release, which is a typical characteristic of intertextuality (Fairclough, 1992). Key differences are displayed in the fact that the PRNR contains less explicit positive adjectives: the adjective 'good' is used instead of the adjectives '(very) successful' and 'excellent'¹¹ used in the press release; furthermore, the details of the business results are not stated.

When comparing the two texts, it is evident that the name of the organization is referred to repeatedly in both texts (see Table 1). The repetition of a lexical item is the most direct form of lexical cohesion (Halliday, 1985: 310), which is best defined as an 'overt linguistically-signalled relationship between propositions' (Widdowson, 1978: 31). Coherence, on the other hand, is defined as the property of 'unity', 'hanging together' (Hasan, 1984: 171), which concerns the ways in which the configuration of concepts and relations that underlie the surface text are mutually accessible and relevant. Therefore, the surface cohesion of a text predisposes a reader to search for an underlying structure of relations that makes a text coherent. Lexical cohesion, as the single, most important cohesive tie used in a text (Hoey, 1991: 9), therefore provides the discourse analyst with a key to unravel the potential ideological construction that underlies a text. The name of the organization is repeated in the headline, lead and body paragraphs in both texts. Moreover, the repetition of the organization's name throughout the text is one of the main rules of copywriting in promotional texts (Grunig and Hunt, 1984; Wilcox et al., 1995; Wragg, 1993).

In addition to the repetition of the organization's name and/or brand name, the PRNR also repeats positive words, showing the subject in question from a favourable perspective, which, again, is a basic

Table 1 The repetition of the organization's name

<i>Sentence number</i>	<i>Public relations news report</i>	<i>Press release</i>
1	<i>Loxus</i> – good business results	<i>Loxus</i> – very successful
2	Last year <i>Loxus</i> increased their profits	Representative of <i>Loxus</i> company
3	<i>Loxus</i> in Ljubljana	In 2002, <i>Loxus</i>
4	They [referring to <i>Loxus</i>] increased profits	<i>Loxus</i> increased added value
5	Two-thirds of income [referring to <i>Loxus</i>] was created	<i>They</i> [referring to <i>Loxus</i>] increased business outcome
6	According to the president of the administration board of <i>Loxus</i> , Matej Dolenc, good business result	'In <i>Loxus</i> ...', commented the president of administration board of <i>Loxus</i> , Matej Dolenc
7	Last year <i>Loxus</i>	<i>Loxus</i> improved
8	In the current half-year, <i>they</i> [referring to <i>Loxus</i>]	This successful result [referring to <i>Loxus</i>] was achieved
9		<i>Loxus</i> is successful
10		In the first half of 2003, they [referring to <i>Loxus</i>] achieved
11		In the fall, <i>they</i> [referring to <i>Loxus</i>]

characteristic of promotional texts such as press releases (Grunig and Hunt, 1984; Wernick, 1991; Wilcox et al., 1995; Wragg, 1993). This is also confirmed in the press release, where the adjective '(very) successful' is repeated three times, and the adjective 'excellent' is repeated twice, thus showing the organization in a very positive light. The PRNR also repeats the positive adjectives 'successful' and 'good' twice.

Promotional vocabulary is especially visible in the lexical device known as 'overlexicalization'. PRNRs provide 'a large number of synonymous or near-synonymous terms for communication of some specialised area of expertise' (Fowler and Kress, 1979: 211), thus giving rise to a sense of 'over-completeness' (van Dijk, 1991). As Fowler (1985: 65) argues, vocabulary might be seen as a map 'of the preoccupations of a culture.... Detailed systems of terms are developed for areas of expertise, the features of habitat, institutions and relationship, and beliefs and values of a community.' PRNRs contain synonymous adjectives, such as leading, top quality, effective, richer, best known, strong(est), good, better, best, (most) favourable, (most) interesting, big(gest), new,

improved, attractive, (most) pleasant, which contribute to the co-referentiality of the success of an organization, its products or services. For example, the PRNR we have focused on has the headline 'Loxus – *good* business results', and the report itself employs the following positive adjectives: '*sales were successfully increased*', '*good* business results'; '*high quality* housing façades', '*successfully increased* the number of employees', which all contribute to the referentiality of the organization's business success.

A PRNR also contains other lexical items that connote success when they are piled together. By listing and repeating only the positive characteristics of an organization, a cumulative effect of success is achieved. For example, in the Loxus PRNR, verbs that refer to positive business activities are repeated, e.g. 'increased' is repeated six times in this short text, and the verb 'achieved' is used three times. The news report also contains nouns connoting business achievement, such as 'income', 'profit', 'quality', 'added value per employee'.

What are the effects of the repetition of the organization's name and the use of lexical items that connote the business success of a company? PRNRs attempt to form or maintain positive publicity among readers, which is the basic function of PR (Grunig and Hunt, 1984; Wernick, 1991; Wilcox et al., 1995; Wragg, 1993).

Social practice: the commercialization of journalism

The colonization of news discourse by PR is part of a wider social practice within which we can find these discourse samples. Social practice is the third dimension of discourse (Fairclough, 1989, 1992) and its main function is the explanation of the context of discourse samples. Since broader social practice is not the main focus of this study, I only attempt to explain broader developments in journalism that have stimulated the development of PR news discourse.

PR journalism falls within the successful frame of 'market journalism' (McManus, 1994), 'MBA journalism' (Underwood, 1993), or 'journalism of a new type' (Hardt, 2000), which has been gaining ground in the last few decades. Its typical feature is the fact that commercialization dictates its nature and prescribes the limits of public interest (Underwood, 1993; McManus, 1994; Hardt, 2000). A key characteristic of the commercialization of journalism is its primary subordination to the business sphere and its logic of profit maximization. According to Hardt (2000: 218), this new journalism is derived from the practice of advertising and PR, and promotes the construction of corporate realities

at the expense of a commonsense desire for a fair and truthful representation of everyday life. In Slovenia, due to the lack of a traditional democratic culture, the lack of suitable legislative regulations of the media and other related subjects, a small media and advertising market and the desire for quick profits, the commercialization of journalistic discourse has reached extreme proportions with the majority of journalists giving in to the demands of the advertisers and PR practitioners; journalists address their readers as consumers rather than participants and a source of democratic power in the society, and they understand journalistic labour in terms of routine technical tasks responding to specific promotional interests (Erjavec, 1997; Hardt, 2000; Splichal, 2001). This subordination of journalism as a cultural practice to the economic rationale of marketing has enabled the development of the PR news discourse.

Conclusion

Despite its link to social theory, Fairclough's discourse analysis is limited due to the fact that it is still textual analysis, while discourse refers to the entire process of social interaction of which the text is just a part. Therefore, textual analysis should be combined with an analysis of discourse processes by using ethnographic methods, which can help an analyst to attain better understanding of text production and interpretation processes. In addition to the analysis of interdiscursivity, I introduced interpractice analysis in the dimension of discourse practice. This analysis identifies instances where text production and interpretation processes use practices outside the convention.

This expanded approach has been checked in the analysis of PR news discourse. It proved to be very effective, because it enabled the identification of PR discursive elements within news discourse. A more precise overview shows at least three main reasons for successful supplementation of interdiscursivity analysis with interpractice analysis. First of all, since, according to the journalistic code, PRN items are prohibited and difficult to identify, text analysis alone could not identify the subject of the analysis. The second reason lies in the fact that interpractice analysis has enabled us to uncover the elements of PR within news discourse, which textual analysis alone cannot reveal. The third reason is that interpractice analysis has enabled us to become acquainted with the production processes, in which the news producer, due to his/her passiveness, is subordinated to the PR practitioner along all stages of production. The identification of the news producer's motives

behind the use of PR sources and information helps to explain why this prohibited practice is in use and what the relationship is between journalists and PR practitioners.

Interdiscursivity analysis of a PRNR has demonstrated how PR journalism, through textual devices, incorporates discursive elements of PR used in news report discourse. In the identification of PRNRs, newspaper readers can ask questions like whether the content of the story is a partial and positive-only evaluation of the characteristics/activities of an organization and its product or services, whether the representatives of the organization are the only sources cited and whether the information is in their, the public's, interest, or whether it is only in the interest of those who feature in the text.

The combination of textual analysis and analysis of the discourse process through the use of ethnographic methods has proved to be invaluable, since we could not possibly find the subject of textual analysis without production process analysis, to discover why and how the PRNR was created. Textual analysis has uncovered the PR discursive elements that are used in news report discourse; thus giving newspaper readers the means to recognize this hybrid type of discourse: PR news discourse.

Notes

1. The focus of this article is only one part of PR: media relations.
2. The production processes in foreign and sports departments are not analysed, because they differ from other departments. The foreign news department is mainly based on the work of foreign correspondents, which we were not able to analyse, while the sports department is based on sports events, which are specific events.
3. According to the code of the journalists in Slovenia, by publishing PRN, the journalists and the editors are violating the articles dealing with the conflict of interests: mainly Articles 13, 14 and 15, which prohibit mixing promotional and journalistic texts and demand that promotional texts, such as press releases and advertising, have to be separately marked, especially when they are not journalistically processed.
4. In the process of information gathering through interviews, I encountered instances of refusal to cooperate, since editors, above all, did not wish to discuss the subject, because it is problematic. The condition for participating in interviews was complete anonymity.
5. PR is only used by organized alternative sources, but not by non-organized sources such as Roma and illegal immigrants.
6. Pieces which were published in such a way amounted to 68 percent of all texts analysed.

7. Due to capital pressures, PRN is increasingly more prevalent in the local and economic news departments.
8. Only two news reports contained pictures of the organization and the product.
9. I changed all names in the texts, since participants demanded absolute anonymity.
10. Semantic macro-structure is derived from local meanings of words by macro-rules, such as deletion, generalization and construction. Such rules have left out irrelevant details and they connect the essence on a higher level into abstract meanings or construct different meaning constituents in higher-level events or social concepts (van Dijk, 1980).
11. This points to a process called the neutralization of explicit positiveness in interpractice analysis.

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