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Publication Details

Tran, VTH & Thomson, E, The nature of 'Reporter voice' in a Vietnamese hard news story, in Thomson, E & White, PRR (eds) Communicating Conflict: Multilingual Case Studies of the News Media, Continuum International, 2008, 51-64.

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Chapter 3

The nature of 'Reporter' voice in a Vietnamese hard news story

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(Level A heading) Abstract

Hard news in English is characterized as being 'factual', 'neutral' and 'objective'. However, research shows that, despite the characterization of 'neutrality', reporters take a subjective stance towards the event or issue being reported (White 1997). This stance is a veiled stance, in the sense, that the journalist avoids explicit opinion, preferring to use indirect invocation and the 'voices' of other authoritative sources to present and or support the writer's position. While the register of hard news is well understood in English, this is not the case in Vietnamese. Further, journalism in Vietnam occurs within the context of a Communist state, which undoubtedly influences the news stories.

This chapter sets out to investigate the nature of a hard news story in Vietnamese published in the *Nhan Dan Daily* (The People's Daily). The article reports on the Iraqi war, particularly the Abu Ghraib prisoner scandal. Appraisal theory, particularly, attitude and engagement, is used as the tool of analysis to explore the reporter's opinions and

ideological positioning expressed in the article. The analysis reveals the reporter's negative attitude towards the US government as well as the strategies used to engage other parties in support of the reporter's point of view.

(Level A heading) Background

Before looking at the news article in detail, it is useful to consider the nature of the context of news reporting in Vietnam under the control of a Communist state. The first newspaper, the French-sponsored *Gia dinh Bao* (The Family's Paper) dated back to 1869 in the South. This paper was used as a tool for propaganda for both the nationalistic and colonial sides. In the North, Ho Chi Minh's revolutionists first had their newspaper published in 1925. The paper, called *Thanh Nien* (The Youth), was actually the predecessor of the present most popular newspaper, *Nhan Dan* (The People's Daily).

Nowadays, there are more than 350 newspapers, magazines and journals printed in Vietnam. The papers cover almost every field of life such as science, law, security, education, sports, army, just to name a few. The Vietnam News Agency releases and receives news to and from media in Vietnam and the rest of the world. Known as the official government wire service, this organization releases information that the government considers as most significant for distribution. Along with the Vietnam News Agency is the *Nhan Dan* (the People's Daily), which is the Communist Party's primary national newspaper. All government and party workers are supposed to read the *Nhan Dan* every day, which brings to readers news and information in line with the Party's

policies and regulations. *Thanh Nien* (the Youth), another popular weekly mainly has young people as its readers while *Phu Nu* (Women) covers most aspects of women's life.

Under Vietnam's Press Law (1989), common people have the right to express their opinions either via reporters' words or by writing articles themselves. However, freedom of expression is limited to the extent that people are encouraged to say what they think as long as it does not harm the prestige of the Party, or the State to any extent. Similarly, reporters' freedom of expression is also protected by the State. No organization or individual can restrain or obstruct reporters' activities. At the same time, however, no one can use the right to freedom of expression and freedom of the press to violate or undermine the interests of the State and the people of Vietnam.

Interestingly, despite what appears to be a limited right of expression, regulations in Vietnam's Press Law (1989) reads that the press is not censored before distribution. Journalists are allowed to criticize or condemn in print any misconduct by the Party's and or the State's organizations and their staff as well as disseminate the general public's work and opinions. If an article is censored prior to publication, then the newspaper has to justify the censorship with appropriate reasons, either by mail or printed in the paper (Vietnam's Press Law, 1989).

However, the reality is that the freedom of speech, as emphasized in Press Law, has to be used in a 'proper' (*đúng đắn*) way. To make sure every journalist uses this right of freedom of speech properly, there is always a copy editorial process before an article is

published in any Vietnamese newspaper. The copy editor of a newspaper, especially those run by the State like the *Nhan Dan,* must have a good command of the State's and the Party's guidelines, and of policies in specialized aspects as well as be well-informed of important social, and political events (Criteria for recruiting state employed editors – State Employee Administration Document, 1993). This is to ensure that the content of the article does not include information that 1) provokes people to protest against the State; 2) provokes violation, crime and sex; 3) reveals State's secrets, military, economic, security secrets as well as other types of secrets regulated by law; and 4) provides misinformation that offends organizations and individuals (Vietnam's Press Law 1989). In short, while freedom of expression is enshrined in law, the everyday working reality includes a form of editing or self-censorship designed to protect the authority of the State.

The *Nhan Dan* newspaper's first issue was published in 1951 in the War Zone of *Viet Bac* during the resistance war against French colonialism. Today the daily *Nhan Dan* has a circulation of 180,000 copies, the weekend one has 110,000 copies and the monthly paper has 130,000 copies (www.nhandan.com.vn). *Nhan Dan*'s readers are not restricted to any social group but as mentioned, the Party's members and State's employees and officials are expected to read the paper for up-to-date news as well as to stay abreast of policies and guidelines by the Party and the State.

Nhan Dan is believed to be one of the most reliable sources of information among newspapers circulated in the country. The paper distributes news and information related to politics, life, business, culture and sports, albeit from the point of view of the State.

(Level A heading) The *Nhan Dan* article

Before discussing the linguistic analyses of the article, it is useful to have a look at the context of situation of the story. It is common knowledge in Vietnam that America invaded Iraq in March 2003. The reasons it presented to the rest of the world included Iraqi production and use of weapons of mass destruction, relations with terrorist organizations and human rights violations.

Whether or not the stated justifications were convincing to other nations is beyond the scope of this chapter, however, Vietnam did not support the American action. Yet, Vietnam never officially stated its opposition to America's war on terror in an international forum.

The reason for this can be explained by the fact that Vietnam currently enjoys good relates with the US after efforts by both governments to put the past behind them. The two-way trade between Vietnam and the US increased from US$220,000 in 1994 – the year the embargo was lifted – to oer US$6.4 billion in 2004 (www.vietnam-ustrade.org/Eng/vietnam-US_relations.htm). Even though Vietnam has a productive relationship with the US in terms of trade, Vietnam is not listed in the group of governments that supported the Iraq war (among those being Australia, Azerbaijan, Colombia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Ethiopia, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Japan, Korea, Poland, Demark, Portugal, and Spain (http://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/war_against_iraq.htm)). Vietnam remains

opposed to America's war on terrorism and this is directly expressed in the article selected from the *Nhan Dan* newspaper.

The article, titled "US mask stripped off in Iraq", is about how the US "human rights" mask has been stripped off after a series of mistakes since the US invaded Iraq, especially the scandal of Iraqi prisoners being abused by US soldiers. According to the article, despite efforts to hide and censor information about US troops in Iraq, President Bush's government has now lost control of the situation. Photos of US soldiers abusing Iraqi prisoners firstly outraged many Americans, which was followed by embarrassment and consternation. According to the article, American citizens asked that soldiers be punished for their inhumane acts as well as asked for an apology from the US President and British Prime Minsiter.

The article also quoted international organizations and world leaders who criticized the Bush's government, namely the International Red Cross, Amnesty International, the Italian and Australian Prime Ministers, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the United Arab Emirates.

In concluding the article, the reporter emphasizes that even though the US often boasts about their "human rights" protection, what they are doing in Iraq proves the opposite. He also points out that the war has brought President Bush's and P.M Blair's credibility to the lowest level so far and that the two leaders are facing an increasingly serious wave of anger against them and protests from the public.

(Level B heading) Appraisal Analysis

By investigating attitude and engagement, the analysis will demonstrate how the negative portrayal of the US by the article reporter is achieved. This is followed by a discussion on the nature of the appraisal choices. The article is reproduced in translation with the appraisal analysis highlighted within the body of the text. The analysis relates to the evaluation as it appears in the original Vietnamese and may not directly match with the English translation. The analytical key is provided. Also, the full Vietnamese text is supplied in the Appendix.

Key
bold underlining = inscribed (explicit) negative attitude
bold = invoked (implied) negative attitude
italics underlined = inscribed positive attitude
italics = invoked positive attitude
heteroglossic voices (i.e. voices other than the reporters) = Arial font

The sub-type of the attitude is indicated in square brackets immediately following the relevant span of text.
[j] = judgement (positive/negative assessments of human behaviour in terms of social norms)
[ap] = appreciation (positive/negative assessments of objects, artifacts, happenings and states of affairs in terms of systems of aesthetics and other systems of social valuation)
[af] = affect (positive/negative emotional responses); 1st-af = first-person or authorial affect; 3rd-af = observed affect, i.e. the reporter describing the emotional responses of third parties.

The sub-types of heteroglossia are indicated immediately following the process in the clause.
[dis] = disclaim (a voice at odds with or rejecting a contrary position).
[end] = endorse (propositions by external voices considered valid and warrantable by authorial voice).
[ent] = entertain (the proposition is represented as but one of a set of possible positions).

America's **"human rights" mask** [j] *stripped off* [j] in Iraq

The **scandalous bomb** [ap] of the **invaders' crime** [j] in **abusing Iraqi prisoners** [j], which has **shaken** [j] the American as well as the international public after having been **ignited** [j] by US and UK media, is now becoming a **hot** [ap] political issue of the States. This is a **scandal** [ap] which entails potential negative consequences to the US authority who are (at the same time) **puzzled** [af] by the problem of getting out of the Iraqi **swamp** [ap] after one year of **costly illegal occupation** [j]. The American troop's **mask** [j] has been *stripped off* [j].

Despite efforts **to hide and censor** [j] information about US troops in Iraq, President Bush's government has now **no control** [j] of the situation. Photos of US soldiers abusing Iraqi prisoners have been continuously publicized while at the same time US troops have faced **non-stop attacks** [ap] in many places and **heavy losses** [ap]. Many Americans, after seeing photos and hearing stories from prisoners and guards about US soldiers **killing civilians** [j] and **abusing Iraqi prisoners** [j] showed [end] their **discontent** [3rdaf], **consternation** [3rdaf] and **felt ashamed** [3rdaf] of those **"fight-for-freedom"** [j] troops. They **condemned** [end] [j] the American authorities for having **cheated** [j], **hidden** [j] and **distorted** [j] the truth. The Upper House Committee of Military Force has demanded [end] that the Defense Secretary Rumsfeld and the related commanders *inspect* [j] *and punish* [j] those alleged soldiers. US President and UK Prime Minister *have to give* [end] *apologies* [j] for US and allied troops' acts of Iraqi prisoner abuse and *promise to carry out inspections to clarify their conduct* [j]. The commanding division of American troops in Iraq has decided [end] to bring a guard at Abu Ghraib prison before a US military court.

However, according to the public, the US authority's solutions are [end] still **unsatisfactory** [ap], **insufficient** [ap]and **too late** [ap]. More and more Iraqi people are demanding [end] US troops *withdraw* [j] from Iraq. The US government is trying hard to **reduce their influence** [j] and wants to get out of the **scandal** [ap] as soon as possible. They asked [end] the press not to provide anymore evidence of the abuse of Iraqi prisoners. However, it seems [ent] *difficult* [j] for the US

government **to hide this scandal** [j]. The American image, which has been **smudged** [j] by the intervention war (in Iraq), has now got more **dirty** [ap] parts. The *resistance* [j] against America in Iraq is becoming *stronger* [j] and, in fact, allied troops have had to make [ent] some concessions which are seen by analysts as **failure** [j]. Recently, a world court on Iraqi matters consisting of a *"conscience jury"* [j] made of 14 members who are *peace activists* [j], academics and consortium leaders has made a statement [end] in New York that America has **committed war crimes** [j] in Iraq. The International Red Cross has filed documents of allied troop's crimes in Iraq. The organization stated [end] that the fact that abused prisoners are found in all prisons managed by US and British troops shows that this is **systematic** [j] and **directed** [j], not just a personal act. The Minister of Foreign Affairs of UEA strongly condemned [end] the US soldiers' **"inhumane" acts** [j] in Iraq's prisons. Amnesty International has alleged [ent] that British soldiers are **killing Iraqi civilians** [j], who definitely **cannot create any threats** [j]. Even close allies of the **warlike** [ap] group like Italian Prime Minister S. Berlusconi or Australian Prime Minister J. Howard also criticized [end] the US-British soldiers' **inhumane** [j] acts.

The **scandal** [ap] of US-British soldiers **abusing Iraqi prisoners** [j] is still going on and drawing attention from the international public as well as related organizations. This **scandal** [ap] has once more *unveiled a truth* [j] that the US government has always **tried to hide** [j]– the nature of the **so-called "human rights policy"**[j], which they have used to **cheat** [j] the public, **threaten** [j], **intervene** [j] and **harm** [j] other independent and sovereign nations. The US State Department's reports of the **so-called "human rights situation"** [j] in other countries is just a **dirty** [ap] card, which cannot be used to **cheat** [j] the public. For the last several days, a number of researchers of US policy and history have continuously criticized [end] the **arrogance** [j] and **defiance** [j] of US authorities in dealing with international matters and have asked [end] them to first **get rid of** the domestic human rights **pile of rubbish** [j].

The US **one-way** [ap] war in Iraq is going on with **complication** [j], **tension** [j] and **against the expectations** [j] of the US government. US President Bush's and UK P.M

Blair's **credibility has fallen** [j] to the lowest level since the beginning of their terms. The **wave of anger** [3rdaf] and **criticism** [j] of US war **crimes** [j] in Iraq continues to rise and results in bad effects for those who **sow misery** [j] and cause **misfortune** [j] for others.

(Level C Heading) Engagement

The proposition which is under attack in this story is that the Bush government is in control of the situation in Iraq. The authorial voice of the story takes the position that the US is **not** in control at all (*Mặc dù ra sức bưng bít, kiểm duyệt thông tin về hoạt động của quân Mỹ tại Iraq, nhưng đến lúc này, chính quyền của Tổng thống Bush đã không còn kiểm soát được tình hình*). This position is backgrounded in the first paragraph of the story with details about the discovery of the US abuse of Iraqi prisoners in Abu Graib gaol. This discovery is the catalyst for the 'unmasking' of American foreign policy which uses the rhetoric of human rights as a guise for interfering in the affairs of sovereign states.

In the subsequent two paragraphs, this position is endorsed by a number of compelling voices, such as the American public at large, the American Upper House Committee on Military Force, the commanding division of the American troops in Iraq, the Iraqi people, a world court, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the United Arab Emirates and Allied Prime Ministers such as Italy's Berlusconi and Australia's Howard. Further, the authorial voice introduces the possibility that the US government themselves are finding it difficult to hide the true situation thereby strengthening the authorial proposition with concessions by the US (*Mới đây, Tòa án thế giới về Iraq với "Đoàn bồi thẩm lương tâm" gồm 14*

người là những chiến sỹ hòa bình, học giả, lãnh đạo nghiệp đoàn ra tuyên bố tại New York rằng Mỹ đã phạm tôi ác chiến tranh ở Iraq….). Another similar strategy by the reporter is using Amnesty International to entertain the possibility that British soldiers are implicated in the killing of Iraqi civilians (*Tổ chức ân xá quốc tế đã tố cáo binh sỹ Anh sát hại thường dân Iraq, những người hoàn toàn không có khả năng tạo ra các mối đe dọa).*

In the fourth paragraph, the author takes the specific example of the US in Iraq and generalises to suggest that US foreign policy dishonestly operates under the guise of 'human rights':

> *Vụ bê bối này đã một lần nữa vén lên bức màn mà lâu nay nhà cầm quyền Mỹ cố che đậy bản chất thực của cái gọi là "chính sách nhân quyền" do họ lạm dụng để đánh lừa dư luận, đe dọa, can thiệp và vu cáo làm hại các quốc gia độc lập và có chủ quyền khác trên thế giới.*
>
> This **scandal** [ap] has once more *unveiled the truth* [j] that the US government has always **tried to hide** [j]– the nature of the **so-called "human rights policy"**[j], which they have used to **cheat** [j] the public, **threaten** [j], **intervene** [j] and **harm** [j] other independent and sovereign nations.

This generalisation suggests an underlying and ongoing resentment towards the US in relation to their role in the war in Vietnam in the 1960s. This is not just a report about what is happening in Iraq. It is a report which demonstrates *again* another imperialist action of the US against sovereign nations, actions which have profoundly affected the

sovereign nation of Vietnam. And not surprisingly, the Vietnamese nation still resonants with anti-American sentiment, which comes through in this report.

The story finishes with the authorial voice negatively evaluating the US government, but also suggesting that the 'wave of anger' and criticism of US war crimes will eventually impact negatively on the US, which is here represented as a country which sows misery and mishap:

Làn sóng phẫn nộ và lên án tội ác chiến tranh của Mỹ tại Iraq tiếp tục lên cao, lan rộng va fgaay ra những hậu quả cho chính những kẻ đi reo giắc đau khổ và tai nạn cho người khác.

The **wave of anger** [3rd af] and **criticism** [j] of US war **crimes** [j] in Iraq continues to rise and results in bad effects for those who **sow misery** [j] and cause **misfortune** [j] for others.

(Level C heading) Attitude

Even without quantifying the instances of attitude in the translation of the news story, it is evident from a cursory glance that the story overwhelmingly uses explicit, negative attitude. The reporter does not attempt to appear 'objective' or 'neutral' through the use of invoked evaluation. The reporter clearly takes an anti-American stance using inscriptions as the evaluative strategy of choice. The story negatively evaluates the US and its military actions in Iraq, using inscriptions of appreciation, judgement and affect, as evidenced in the example below:

… một vụ bê bối tiềm ẩn những hậu quả khó lường đối với nhà cầm quyền Mỹ trong khi họ đang rất lúng túng chưa tìm được giải pháp thoát khỏi vũng lầy Iraq sau một năm chiếm đóng bất hợp pháp, hao người và tốn của.

> … a **scandal** [ap] which entails potential negative consequences to the US authority who are (at the same time) **puzzled** [af] by the problem of getting out of the Iraqi **swamp** [ap] after one year of **costly illegal occupation** [j].

Significantly, when positive evaluation occurs, it is in relation to the authorial position that America is not in control in Iraq. The positive evaluation relates to the exposure of the American strategy of using the rhetoric of human rights as a guise for interfering in the affairs of sovereign states. Exposing the guise is evaluated positively using instances like *bóc trần* (stripped off) and *làn sóng phẫn nộ và lên án tội ác chiến tranh của mỸ tại Iraq tiếp tục lên cao, lan rộng* (the resistance … is becoming stronger) and the nature of America as being hypocritical come through in the negative appreciation *bản chất thực của cái gọi là "chính sách nhân quyền"* (the true nature of the so-called "human rights policy").

This pattern of negative evaluation is not isolated to the authorial voice, but is also evident in the words of other voices in the text. For example,

> *Nhiều người Mỹ khi được xem những bức ảnh, nghe những mẩu chuyện của người tù, cai tù … nói về cảnh lính Mỹ giết hại dân thường, ngược đãi tù nhân Iraq, đã bày tỏ sự bất bình, kinh hoàng và cảm thấy xấu hổ, nhục nhã cho đội quân tự xưng là "những người giải phóng" cho nhân dân Iraq. Ho lên án giới cầm quyền đã lừa dối, bưng bít và làm sai lệch thông tin.*
>
> Many Americans, after seeing photos and hearing stories from prisoners and guards about US soldiers **killing civilians** [j] and **abusing Iraqi prisoners** [j] showed [end] their **discontent** [3rdaf], **consternation** [3rdaf] and **felt ashamed** [3rdaf] of those **"fight-for-freedom"** [j] troops. They

condemned [end] [j] the American authorities for having **cheated** [j], **hidden** [j] and **distorted** [j] the truth.

In this example, the authorial voice inserts negative judgements of the actions of the US, such as killing civilians and abusing prisoners and then uses the voice of the American public to insert negative observed 3rd party affect and negative judgements. Words like *bất bình* (discontent), *xấu hổ, nhục nhã* (consternation), *lừa dối*(cheated) and *làm sai lệch* (distorted) etc. endorse the authorial voice, adding weight to his/her proposition that American is not in control and hiding this reality from the world.

To sum up, this article is explicitly anti-American. The reporter's opinion is clearly evident and is supported by other voices who also disapprove of America's actions. The other voices serve to endorse the reporter's position that the US is not in control in Iraq, and is thus another example of the interfering foreign policy that America propagates.

(Level A heading) Discussion

Conclusion

According to Martin and White (2005), the evaluative key of 'reporter' voice in hard news in English is characterized by an attitudinal configuration which includes a low probability of authorial inscribed judgment and inscribed appreciation with no authorial affect and some 'observed' affect (ibid p.178). Authorial inscribed judgement is explicit positive/negative assessments by the author of human behaviour in terms of social norms.

Inscribed appreciation is explicit positive/negative assessments by the author of objects, artifacts, happenings and states-of-affair by reference to aesthetics and other systems of social valuation. Authorial affect refers to the announcing by the author of his/her own positive/negative emotional reactions. And finally observed' affect relates to the emotional reactions of others as 'observed' by the author.

Taking this characterization and applying it to the patterns of evaluation in the *Nhan Dan* article, it is immediately obvious that the *Nhan Dan* article does not display the configurations of 'reporter voice' in English as defined by Martin and White (2005). For example, rather than having a low probability of explicit authorial judgement and appreciation, the article is saturated with overt instances. Further, rather than having no examples of affect, there are examples of both 1st and 3rd party (observed) affect, (insert example in Vietnamese). It would thus be a mistake to suggest that this article uses the evaluative key of 'reporter' voice. Whether or not this is representative of the hard news style of reporting in Vietnamese is unclear. Analysis of just one article is inadequate and further research is required.

What is interesting about the overt evaluation by the reporter in this article, however, is the fact that it occurs within the context of the Communist state. Rather than tempering the evaluations in order to avoid possibly violating or undermining the interests of the State and the people of Vietnam as described in Vietnam's Press Law, the journalist's opinion is direct and strongly negative. It seems that this article, despite its overt

evaluations and supporting authoritative voices, has passed through the 'censorship' filters of the *Nhan Dan* Daily.

> Even though there seems to be a kind of censorship process which is applied to most articles, especially those involving political points of view, anti-US opinions don't seem to undergo that process (Nguyen *pers. comm* 2007). It looks like Vietnam's experience with the US during the war 30 years ago has brought this country enough confidence to judge what the US is doing in Iraq despite the fact that Vietnam is enjoying improved economic relations with America.

In conclusion, this suggests that, despite the good relations between the US and Vietnam, there is definitely room in Vietnamese society for negative assessments of the US and its foreign policy. Taking into account that *Nhan Dan* is the most read state-run newspaper in Vietnam, its publication has considerable influence on the population, their thinking and their opinions. Consequently, the opinion of the reporter as well as the newspaper has a guiding influence. While all news has to pass through a censorship filter to ensure that it is not against Party's guidelines, it appears, in this case, that the reporter's opposition to America's war in Iraq is not contrary to the State's point of view.

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Appendix

Original Vietnamese article: