

# REFLECTION OF THATCHER'S POLICY IN THE CZECHOSLOVAK DAILY NEWSPAPER *PRAVDA*

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Today we are living in the world of fast communication where events become public through various sources such as media and other technological means. The media are important social institutions. They are key presenters of culture, politics and social life. They shape as well as reflect how these are formed and expressed (Bell, 1991). In other words, they play a key role in transforming social events in the form of news and most of the time it manipulates information according to its own interest. Central to news is the text or language through which social events are described, which is considered not as a way of interpreting reality but as a way of constructing reality.

According to Widdowson (2007), some texts “have an obvious utility function” whereas others “are meant to serve a range of different social purposes” and it is not uncommon that the functions a text is to fulfil “are ... combined in complex ways” (Ibid., 6). Similarly, Diller (2002) describes newspaper discourse as having three main purposes, i.e. information, comment (opinion formation) and entertainment, and stresses that “there is a clear tendency in modern journalism to blur the three purposes” (Ibid., 5).

News content is not independent of its expression, one can hope to have a clear understanding of the nature of news content by close analysing the news text. A close analysis of the text needs to be done in order to unpack the ideologies underlying the news. Such analysis can show that even simple- looking news are rather complex and the described events are rather less distinct. It illustrates how the news are made. The idea is that the news is a ‘product’. Thus, what we are *told* happened (Bell, 1991).

The following study represents an analysis of an industrial dispute, The Miners’ Strike (1984-1985) in the UK as it is reproduced in one selected Czechoslovak newspaper *Pravda* from the perspective of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), applying Van Dijk’s theory and methods in order to examine Thatcher’s policy to demonstrate or point out to certain ideological aspects of the newspaper.

The Miners’ Strike was an industrial action trying to prevent colliery closures in the UK in 1984- 85. It was led by Arthur Scargill of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) against the National Coal Board (NCB), a government agency.

The data (all articles dealing with the strike, specifically 116 articles) for the present study are gathered, grouped and analysed in terms of the discursive strategies resorting to the discursive micro and macro-strategies suggested by Van Dijk (2000) from one selected Czechoslovak daily newspaper *PRAVDA* in order to examine the ideological representation of the industrial dispute through Critical Discourse Analysis.

The Critical Discourse Analysis adopting Van Dijk’s approach of the analysed data tries to elucidate how a single news item was presented in the newspaper based on its ideological perspective. The dominant definition of the policy was primarily formulated

by the authorities of the communist regime and thus, the press uncritically adopted and communicated that policy. I presuppose that the dominant definition at the same time contributed to a manipulated depiction of the Thatcher's policy through Miners' strike event.

The concept of ideology is often used in the media and the social sciences, yet, it is vague. Its everyday usage is rather negative, its usage in politics or in the social sciences carries more or less negative connotation (Dijk, 2006).

The following study tries to find how political ideologies are expressed and reproduced by the structures of the text. The analysis of the articles discusses specific patterns in the presentation of news to show how they underpin the ideological meanings of text. The used qualitative analysis was established for thematic structures alongside with schematic structures and selected categories of ideological discourse analysis.

By thematic structures we understand the hierarchical organization of themes or topics of a text. The thematic structures define what is the most important information of a text (Dijk, 1988, p. 72).

The overall content of the Miners 'Strike coverage is partly reflected in different *themes* or *topics* of the articles. The following topics appear in the articles most often:

- 1, There is a strike of miners in the UK
- 2, The government led by M. Thatcher responds to the strike
- 3, Sympathies with the miners

To sum up, it is topic 1, which stands out. It is the major topic in terms of frequency. Its coverage makes 72 % while topic 2, represented less frequently, has coverage of 61% and topic 3 has the lowest coverage; that is, 44%. Undoubtedly, the most frequently appearing topic is topic number 1, the topic focusing on the event itself.

Examining another aspect within the thematic structures, *actors*, the main actors in the dispute are:

- 1, miners and/or National Union of Mineworkers (NUM)
- 2, the government led by Margaret Thatcher, and the institutions headed by the government; for instance, the police unit and/or NCB
- 3, other political institutions, for instance, Labour Party or Communist Party

To sum up, it is miners and/or NUM and the Conservative Government led by Margaret Thatcher who are central actors in the event. In spite of the fact, they are central actors they are quoted very little or they are not quoted at all. Even more surprising is the fact that when comparing a speaking space for the miners and a speaking space for the government, in spite of the fact it is miners who are the major actor – they get less speaking space than actor number 2 – the government. The newspaper writes about their activities, harsh conditions they are exposed to, but does not provide the reader with (the only exception is one article) their point of view. Unlike the miners, the government and mainly Margaret Thatcher are quoted from time to time, though, always presented in a way how Margaret Thatcher was unwilling to make any compromise towards the miners.

Newspaper *headlines* are another category of the thematic structures. Newspaper headlines act as forerunners to news reports. They reveal the social, cultural and national representations circulating in a society at any given time. This is particularly true of front-

page headlines, which are more carefully chosen to evoke some emotions in the reader. The headlines make the most prominent feature of news discourse (Dijk, 1988). They subjectively express the most important information of the text, for instance, the main topic. They define the situation, in other words, they define certain way the reader with a reading and interpretation is going to do. However, headlines can express secondary topics, too. The headlines alongside with the lead form the summary of the article, which serves as the expression of its macrostructure. It has been proved that such macrostructure or thematic structure is best recalled by readers (Dijk, 1988).

Proceeding to the analysis, the main topic, expressed in 49 (42 %) of the 116 article headlines, deals with various forms of governmental response to the strike. These articles are about the actions of the government and/or Margaret Thatcher and her response to the strike. Most frequent examples of the main topic in the headlines dealing with the actions of the government and/or Margaret Thatcher against the strike include (translated as literally as possible):

- 1, Reprisals against the British miners
- 2, Demonstration of the police power
- 3, Terror used against the strike
- 4, 50 wounded, 100 arrested
- 5, Iron Lady threatens
- 6, Intimidation on the miners

The implications of these headlines are complex. They point out to toughness of the authorities, more precisely, the actions performed by the authorities can be interpreted only in negative way. No headline expresses efforts of the government to make compromise or find a satisfying solution. Hence, this may be interpreted in a way that the government uses and misuses its power in an absolute way, not respecting the rights of the miners.

From this thematic analysis of the headlines it can be concluded that the vast majority of the headlines deal with the responses of the government to the striking miners, focusing on refusal to change the decision to close uneconomic pits. The use of brutal methods such as police raids, intimidation, fines, arresting are mentioned and emphasized several times. No single headline mentions any neutral means used by the authorities.

To conclude, based on thematic structures, the overall content of the Miners 'strike coverage was partly reflected in two topics which stand out. They were first, *There is a strike of miners* (with its coverage of 72 %) and second, *The government led by M. Thatcher responds to the strike* (with its coverage of 61 %).

Similarly, the main topic in the headlines deals with *The government led by M. Thatcher responds to the strike* and is expressed in 49 articles (42 %). The topic *There is a strike of miners* is expressed in 26 articles (22%). Since the governmental response to the strike was always interpreted in a negative way, in all news reports, the reader perceives the response of the government only in a negative way. In spite of the fact, the government approached the strike cautiously and used stricter means only when all other means turned out to be useless. Based on the main topic in all headlines one

might easily deduce that the response was always violent and unjust, anytime it was used. Hence, the reader gets this information in a manipulated way.

Regarding actors it is miners and/or NUM and the Conservative Government led by Margaret Thatcher who are central actors in the event. In spite of the fact, they are central actors they are quoted very little or they are not quoted at all. Even more surprising is the fact that when comparing a speaking space for the miners and a speaking space for the government, in spite of the fact it is miners who are the major actor – they get less speaking space than the government. The newspaper writes about their activities, harsh conditions they are exposed to, but does not provide the reader with (the only exception is one article) their point of view. Unlike the miners, the government and mainly Margaret Thatcher are partially quoted but the content and form of their statements contribute to a negative depiction of Margaret Thatcher's policy.

To conclude, the analysis of the depiction of Thatcher's policy through the Miners' Strike (1984 - 1985) in the UK using the Critical Discourse Analysis based on Van Dijk elucidated how a single news item was presented in the newspaper based on its ideological perspective. The analysis proved that the political ideology was expressed and reproduced by the thematic structures of the text.

### Literature

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### Summary

The paper examines depiction of Thatcher's policy through the industrial dispute of The Miners' Strike in the UK (1984 – 1985) as it is reproduced in selected Czechoslovak daily newspaper *Pravda*. The Critical Discourse Analysis of the analysed data tries to elucidate how a single news item was presented in the newspaper based on its ideological perspective. The dominant definition of the policy was primarily formulated by the authorities of the communist regime and thus, the press uncritically adopted and communicated that policy. I presuppose that the dominant definition at the same time contributed to a manipulated depiction of the Thatcher's policy through Miners' strike event.

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