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Summary

In: Trčková, Dita. *Representations of natural catastrophes in newspaper discourse*. Vydání 1. Brno: Masarykova univerzita, 2014, pp. 95-96

ISBN 978-80-210-7414-9

Stable URL (handle): <https://hdl.handle.net/11222.digilib/133028>

Access Date: 01. 12. 2024

Version: 20220831

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Summary

The book is a research study on the representations of natural catastrophes in newspaper discourse from a critical discourse analysis point of view. It aims to determine on whom the discourse puts the blame for the damage and destruction (whether the catastrophe is portrayed as a joint outcome of the natural phenomenon and social factors), what kind of relationship between nature and people the discourse constructs (whether Western nature-culture dualism is reproduced or deconstructed), and what are common discursive strategies dramatizing the events.

Being a multi-disciplinary study, the research draws, apart from critical discourse analysis, upon the cognitive theory of metaphor, sociological and anthropological research, and media studies. The body of data consists of articles on the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, 2005 Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, the 2010 Haiti earthquake and the 2011 Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami, compiled from newspapers published in Western English-speaking countries: *The New York Times*, *The Guardian* and *The Globe and Mail*.

The analysis, which is mainly qualitative and arrives at conclusions empirically from the data themselves, focuses on an exploration of global meanings (main topics) of the articles, and an investigation of vocabulary, mainly in terms of the cognitive theory of metaphor and van Leeuwen's (2008) set of categories for analyzing a representation of social actors in discourse, grammar, drawing upon Halliday's system of transitivity (1985), and the narrative elements and structures of victim stories.

It is revealed that the newspapers tend to resolve the tension between natural disasters and the ideology of superiority of humankind over nature by drawing upon mythology and demonizing the natural phenomenon, depicting it as an aggressive, cruel creature that acts with volition. This is realized by the employment of a metaphorical representation of the natural phenomenon as an ANIMATE BEING, a MONSTER and a WARRIOR. The blame for the catastrophe is in such a portrayal ascribed solely to nature, and nature-culture dualism is reinforced.

A deconstruction of the dichotomy between nature and people occurs in some of the articles. They foreground human-made factors and allocate the blame for the catastrophe on both the natural phenomenon and social, politico-economic and historical factors. In the articles on the Haiti earthquake, the responsibility for the damage is to a large extent ascribed to the nation itself, with a patronizing

colonial ideology representing the West as a savior of a powerless Haiti embedded in the discourse.

Rather than providing a rational and analytical account of the natural catastrophes, the newspaper discourse generally appeals to readers' emotions, employing a number of discursive strategies that lead to dramatization and sensationalization of the events, including a demonization of the natural phenomenon, emotive victim stories and the use of contrast, hyperbole, numbers, repetition, a telegraphic style and superlatives. Although the emotional appeal is necessary for the evocation of solidarity and the encouragement of humanitarian action among readers, its overuse is likely to prevent readers from the contemplation of the events and the acquisition of a distanced perspective, necessary for a construal of a reflexive identification with the sufferers.