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# WHEN WE ARE THEM

## AN ANALYSIS OF THE PORTRAYAL OF UNEMPLOYED AND MIGRATING BRITONS IN *THE TIMES*

*By Soňa Pazderová*

### I. Introduction

The purpose of this article is to examine what strategies are used and what attitudes are expressed when reporting on British citizens in the role of migrant workers. Articles dealing with this topic were published successively by *timesonline.co.uk*: “Britons take ‘migrant’ jobs in farms and factories” by Parminder Bahra, Poverty and Development Correspondent (from 14 March 2009); “Britons vie with immigrants for low-paid jobs” by Richard Ford, Home Correspondent (from 16 March 2009); and “Strewth! Briton Julie Dutton must take an English test to work in Australia” by Sophie Tedmanson (from 17 March 2009). The first and third article incline to soft news and the second represents a more traditional style of hard news. These texts are part of a corpus of 403 articles focusing on immigration and unemployment in British national quality online newspapers, and are the only ones which offer this view.

First of all, the present article will explore the structure of the selected news texts with regard to the participants and voices entering the news quoted directly or indirectly in the text. It will also focus on the employment of narrative tech-

niques, e.g., the use of a prototypical story to illustrate and personalize the reported issue. The aim of this examination is to mark the areas both in the authorial text and in the quotations which offer space for evaluation.

The following part of the analysis will deal with concrete examples of evaluation conveyed in the materials which concern the description of British citizens and migrant workers. Both sections will draw on the resources of the Appraisal Theory developed by J. R. Martin and P. R. R. White (2005). The examples of lexical evaluation occurring in the articles are divided into the following topics: attribution to sources, labels for the participants (e.g., proper names, references to nationality or social status), their presentation, and reactions to the situation. This analysis will map the ways in which bias can operate in the selected reports on the British and non-British.

## II. The Story and Its Structure

This section examines the structure of the news articles and the techniques used for reporting their messages. It also describes the sources of information and their attribution. Further, the focus moves to the interplay of voices in the text and the points of view which they present.

Each of the three articles is structured in a different way, and uses a variety of strategies for presenting the message and attitude to the audience. To make the decoding of the message less ambiguous and difficult, and to narrow the possible readings, the authors use several techniques. A *narrative* often links actions and events to a logical sequence and gives a story a realistic character by providing elements of people and places (McQuail 1994: 240), and this logical sequence of events is used to show what, according to the author, led to the incident in question (Craig 2005: 126). Thus, it can offer “a clear way to get through the story,” since the reader is likely to leave it if there are too many choices to make (De Wolk 2001: 104). Themes of *personal-*

*ized account* help the reader identify with the characters of a story, though it is superficial and temporary (Macdonald 2003: 69). Personalization, nevertheless, represents a type of journalistic bias because it downplays the social context of events, as well as the institutional and political considerations the reader could make (Bennett 1996: 48). Another method for making the perception of a story easier (and, consequently, saving time and space) is to employ various *forms of representation*, such as types, archetypes, and stereotypes (Trampota 2006: 92-93).

With regard to the voices entering the text, they, besides giving information, may provide different viewpoints and perspectives on the reported event. The authorial position to these viewpoints can be reflected both in the choice of the sources and their sequencing, as well as in the way they are introduced in the text (cf. Martin & White 2005: 97-98).

The article “Britons take ‘migrant’ jobs in farms and factories” (2009) by Parminder Bahra can be divided into two parts: the first three paragraphs describe the story of Christopher Cogan, a creative director, who had been made redundant but later found a job in a food factory; the fourth paragraph provides a link; and the following six deal with information and comments concerning Britons working in factories. Those paragraphs which concentrate on Christopher Cogan make use of a narrative by describing and comparing his old and new lifestyles. The ones following contain additional information, statistics, reactions, and comments in the form of quotations from a variety of sources. In this non-narrative text, four sources are quoted directly, and their names and positions are stated to show their authority in this field (Mr. Cogan; Paul Whitehouse, chairman of the GLA; Mark Rye, UK operations manager of DKM Labour Solutions; and Sam Scott, author of the GLA’s 2008 annual review). Three sources are quoted indirectly, and their identity is generalized, since they are presented impersonally with reference to institutions (The Gangmasters Licensing Authority, other agencies, and the most recent Home Office

immigration statistics). What these voices state does not contradict but rather helps to complete the story—e.g., by proving the number of workers who are from outside Britain (paragraph 4), by providing the former attitude of the British to this kind of work (paragraph 6), and by providing reports of an increasing number of Britons working in factories (paragraph 8). Consequently, they are introduced by neutral reporting verbs—e.g., *say*, *tell*, *report*, *predict*—and aim to promote the credibility and authenticity of the information.

The second article, “Britons vie with immigrants for low-paid jobs” (2009) by Richard Ford, focuses on the current situation and unemployment; and, in paragraphs one to seven, is based on a report carried out by a non-governmental organization, the Centre for Cities. This part of the text uses the “inverted pyramid” structure. Later in the text, the outcomes of the report are compared with an analysis from the Trade Union Congress and with Government-related sources: the Government’s policy and the Home Office statistics appear in paragraphs 3, 9 and 14. Like the previous article, direct quotations are attributed to specified relevant sources (Dermot Finch, the director of the research institute Centre for Cities; Brendan Barber, General Secretary of Trade Union Congress; and the Centre for Cities report). Both the report and the analysis are also quoted indirectly. Although the quoted sources are introduced by a neutral verb *say* and do not contradict, the report itself is described in the article as problematic or controversial: *The report will fuel the row over Gordon Brown’s promise.*

The last article “Strewth! Briton Julie Dutton must take an English test to work in Australia” (2009) by Sophie Tedmanson concentrates on the story of a British-born nurse who will have to take an English language test to get a job in Australia. The first three paragraphs supply the reader with background information about the participant (her life, career), and this is completed, in paragraphs 4 and 10, with general information about the language test and the employment policy. The narrative structure of the text generally corresponds with the problem-solution concept. How-

ever, the solution to the situation suggested by the authorities is vague (paragraphs 8 and 9). In this report, all quotations are attributed to specified sources (Ms. Dutton; Nathan Rees, the Premier of New South Wales; and John Della Roca, the state Health Minister). Ms. Dutton's direct and indirect statements form the majority of the second part of the article. As in the above articles, the introduction of the sources into the text is neutral, and they do not hold contradictory points of view. In this way, the text does not state an alternative position.

On the whole, two of the articles contain personal stories which are connected to the topic of unemployment. Their characters are aimed to represent typical citizens hit by the economic crisis. These stories show information about the background of the participants (both are respectable, well-educated, and used to have occupations of high social esteem) and details about their situation (which aims to personalize the topic and make an appeal to the reader). "Britons vie with immigrants for low-paid jobs" gives general information on the topic of unemployment. What connects these texts is the fact that what is presented in the authorial parts is endorsed by the quoted sources. The voices in these texts generally show a high level of similarity in their positions, so the articles do not offer different viewpoints of view. Thus, the identification or solidarity with the participants is made easier in the case of the personal stories, since there is no controversy about them. As a result of this identification with concrete human beings, the reader may easily adopt a similar attitude to those issues, one that resembles those expressed in the text, a point that will be analyzed in the next portion of the present article.

### III. Evaluation in the Texts

The broad term *evaluation* covers the expression of the speaker's or writer's attitude towards, or feelings about, entities or propositions that he or she is talking about. Evalua-

tion fulfils several functions: in expressing the speaker’s or writer’s opinion, it reflects the value system of that person and their community; it constructs and maintains relations between the participants in the discourse and helps to organize them (Hunston & Thompson 1999: 5-6; White 2006: Stage 1).

With regard to *evaluative language*, its source is either in direct or indirect quotation of various voices or in the authorial text. Evaluation can be present explicitly—which means, in words conveying either a positive or a negative assessment of people, things, or events; or, implicitly, in statements which are aimed to evoke or provoke a response in the reader. Furthermore, in the *Appraisal System* Martin and White divide the areas in which evaluation operates into *Attitude* and *Engagement*. Their means can be intensified or mitigated by *Graduation*. Graduation concerns *Focus* (assessment with respect to unscalable categories) and *Force* (assessment with regard to intensity and amount). The analysis mainly uses the resources of *Attitude*—that is, on evaluation of feelings. They describe emotional reactions, judgments of behaviour, and evaluation of things, and respectively split into *Affect*, *Judgment*, and *Appreciation* (Martin & White 2005: 35; White 2006; Martin & Rose 2007: 28).

**Table 1**  
**The Appraisal System**

<b>Attitude</b>	Affect	<b>Graduation</b>
	Judgment	
	Appreciation	
<b>Engagement</b>		

In “Britons take ‘migrant’ jobs in farms and factories” (2009) instances of Judgmental assessment are numerous. The most prominent case of implicit authorial Judgment is represented in the story of an unemployed Briton depicted as a prototypical victim of the economic crisis. The assessment is intended to gain solidarity on the part of the reader. In the first paragraph, his former social position is described: *Christopher Cogan used to start his working day by logging onto his computer. It was when he was a creative director*. It implies a respectful, i.e., non-manual, occupation requiring qualifications and experience. This is sharply contrasted with information in the following sentence: *These days he is more likely to pick up a knife to cut vegetables on the factory floor*. There are parallels between sophisticated and basic tools (*a computer* versus *a knife*) and intellectual and physical activities (*to log on a computer* versus *to cut vegetables*). In addition, the work place—the *factory floor*—implies very rough and primitive conditions. These contrasts suggest a sharp decline in social status, which is emphasised in the third paragraph: *He was earning £40,000 a year for a 38-hour week in advertising, where he had worked for 27 years before being made redundant. Last week he worked 82 hours at the minimum wage of £5.73 per hour to earn £469*. Here the difference in numbers is used to upgrade the position. Later, these statements are combined with more Affectual and Judgmental evaluation to evoke a sympathetic reaction in the reader, by mentioning the age (52) and by providing a direct quotation from Mr. Cogan on his situation: *“You have to pay the bills,” he said*. His age may suggest a disadvantage in the job market, and the quotation may present him as an honest and responsible person who has undeservingly lost his social status.

The second case of Attitudinal evaluation recognisable in this news article—the reference to migrants—is represented by a label given to a type of work (“migrant jobs”). This label first occurs in the headline—that is, in a prominent place in the text. This is specified by reference to places of work—i.e., farms and factories—which may connote low-skilled professions. Later, further information



about these jobs is mentioned (*The work is seasonal and temporary and the average net income for agency workers was just under 200 per week based on an average 33-48 hours per week, representing a net annual income of 10,800*). By depicting them as unstable and low paid, these jobs are marked with negative Appreciation. This is followed by the mediated reaction of the British: “*The reality is that native British people have not wished to do these jobs in the past,” says Paul Whitehouse, chairman of GLA*. The quotation is direct (to give the information authenticity and truthfulness); and, at the same time, this type of quoting is an opportunity for the author to distance himself from the message. The quotation contains a specification of the participants with regard to their place of birth (*native British people*), as a contrast to migrants and their attitude to this kind of work (*they have not wished to do these jobs in the past*). The source uses a low intensity verb *not wish* as opposed to *not want* or *refuse* which signal more negative values. As a result, it may contribute, similarly to Mr. Cogan’s story, to a more favourable view of the British. A further feature is the combination of the present reference of the action (“*have not wished*”) and the adverbial location (“*in the past*”), which might or might not be intentional.

Moreover, paragraphs eight and nine report on the high demand for these jobs, and this changing situation is also reflected in the lexis:

Sam Scott, author of the GLA’s 2008 annual review, predicted further changes: “As the agricultural season starts in spring, there’s a good likelihood that we’ll hear English spoken on some of the fields that have been providing work exclusively to migrants. We might also see students, which we haven’t seen for a while.”

First, the phrase *good likelihood* (unlike “very likely”) may evoke the positive connotations of something which is welcome. In this case it is the language that makes the difference, since migrants are perceived here as non-English speakers: *there’s a good likelihood that we’ll hear English spoken*

on some of the fields that have been providing work exclusively to migrants. Further, there is one more reference to the place of work—the *fields*. The adverb *exclusively* is used to denote limitedness or restriction, and “exclusive” may also mean “available only to particular people, so that only they can have, do, or use something” (LDCE 1997: 470). Later in this quotation, another group of people is mentioned which is now willing to take “migrant” jobs—students.

The second article, “Britons vie with immigrants for low-paid jobs,” describes the two groups of participants as rivals. The conflict is revealed in the headline: *Britons vie with immigrants for low-paid jobs*, where *to vie* marks a high negative Affectual value meaning “to compete very hard with someone in order to get something” (LDCE 1997: 1594). This is reworded and specified in the lead: *British-born workers are having to seek low-paid and low-status jobs that have become the preserve of immigrant workers, a report says today* and in the paragraph following it (*competition for jobs is expected to become fiercer*). Here the modal construction implies a much less voluntary action—rather, an outer necessity—and that action changes into searching. In both cases, the object of *vying* and *seeking* is described as unattractive and undesirable, but vital given the circumstances. The specification *to become fiercer* represents a graduated expression by means of a copula verb and an adjective in the comparative which shows negative value of Appreciation. The lead also depicts the jobs as *a preserve* of immigrants, i.e., “an activity that is only suitable or allowed for a particular group of people” (LDCE 1997: 1115), which may be an implicit signal of a negative Attitude.

In addition, the reason for this competition appears three times in the lead and the first paragraph: *because of rising unemployment, with unemployment expected to top two million this week* and *there is little evidence that East Europeans are returning home because of the economic downturn*. Further in paragraph six, this message is repeated, and paraphrased in a direct quotation: *Mr. Finch said: “[...] Migrants and the recently*

*unemployed* are now *competing* for fewer jobs and previously 'hard to fill jobs' are now in demand." These repetitions, mentioning both the conflict and its cause, may be considered an instance of Graduation, with the aim of pointing out how serious the situation is and leading the reader to the preferred meaning of the message.

The first group of participants, the British, are referred to with regard to their place of birth—*British-born workers* or *local people*. In several instances they are implicitly described as discriminated against; for example: *it [the report] found evidence of recruitment agencies in one city operating an immigrants-only policy—effectively freezing local people out of the chance to work in factories*. Here a restriction is mentioned in the statement (*immigrants-only policy*), and later an interpretation of the restriction is provided: *effectively freezing local people out of the chance to work in factories*. In this phrase, an evaluative verb of high negative intensity occurs, which also has a metaphoric meaning. This value is supported by the prepositional object (*out of the chance to work*) and an adverb of manner (*effectively*). On the whole, the formulation is intended to evoke injustice—and, thus, negative Judgment—because it states a “denial of a fair chance,” in contrast to the shared opinion that, in a democratic society, everybody should be given the same opportunities.

In paragraph thirteen, another example of disadvantaging is mentioned, in a direct quotation from a report by the Centre for Cities: “*Many [recruitment agencies] were unofficially Polish only. Unless you were Easter European, recruitment agencies were unlikely to put you on their books.*” The direct form contributes to authenticity, and the statement represents a further example of a restriction based on people’s origins. Besides, the adverb *unofficially* may suggest an activity on the margin of the law. The negation on the adjective *unlikely* stresses the improbability of a change taking place. Both expressions are negated by a prefix which marks a higher degree than verbal negation.

Contrastively, the other group—migrant workers—is characterized as more active. They are also labelled by their

places of origin, e.g., *immigrant workers*, *East Europeans*, or *migrants*; however, they are described in different ways. Firstly, there are instances of positive Judgment, of favourable assessments of their behaviour or character, as in, e.g., *It (the report) says that employers prefer East Europeans because they are better motivated, more reliable, punctual and have low levels of absenteeism* and Dermot Finch [...] said: “*Workers from Eastern Europe have filled skills shortages and helped businesses grow.*” The former case is an explicitly positive, non-authorial Judgmental evaluation of their character; the latter is an implicit one. From these descriptions it may be assumed that these qualities cannot be attributed to the British.

Paragraphs eleven and twelve offer a reason for migration (*It suggests that Britain will remain attractive to migrants because of the differential in wage rates, standard of living and opportunities between Britain and the East European states*), so they emphasise the economic aspect of migration. Moreover, there is another reason why migrants have an advantage in the job market, which is because of their personal qualities: “*Migrants perceived their flexibility to work in any job meant they were less likely to be unemployed relative to the local work force,*” *the report says*. As a result, on the whole the assessment of migrants and their actions is more favourable than the assessment of British citizens.

The last article, “*Strewth! Briton Julie Dutton must take an English test to work in Australia*” (2009), concentrates on a British citizen who has to go through a standard procedure which any migrant has to undergo to be able to work in the Australian health system. Like the first article, the story operates with a prototypical case. What is analysed in this text is the author’s position towards this situation, the content of the text, and the participant.

The author’s viewpoint is revealed as early as the headline: *Strewth! Briton Julie Dutton must take an English test to work in Australia.* It contains an interjection (*strewth!*) marking surprise or annoyance caused by the message that follows it (LDCE 1997: 1425). As the interjection is not attributed to a source and occurs in the authorial text in a prominent posi-

tion, it may be assumed that the author, thus, anticipates it as the potential reaction of the majority of readers. This interjection is followed by a reference to three geographical items which imply a contradiction, because they do not correspond with the traditional, common-sense objection that the British speak English as well as Australians do. The triad also represents an instance of Graduation. This clash is then worded explicitly in paragraph six:

“I think it’s just ridiculous,” Ms. Dutton told *The Times*. “I am English, I was born in England, I speak English, I have a British passport, I was educated in Britain and I got my nursing degree in Britain, so I just couldn’t believe when they told me. I think it’s a joke—this is just a mad, stupid policy.”

In this direct quotation, the source expresses her attitude towards the situation as highly negative, e.g., *it’s just ridiculous, it’s a joke, this is just a mad, stupid policy*. These evaluative expressions belong to negative Appreciation, since they refer to a state of event. The contradiction is expressed by a repetition of the same structure (*I am, was, have ...*) which could be taken for an instance of Graduation.

As far as the authorial text is concerned, there is a mention of the cost of the language test and difficulties in taking it (*The written and oral test will cost £131 (\$280), and Ms. Dutton was told that she will have to wait until June to sit them because there are no available places before then.*). Nevertheless, its necessity is stressed: *She was told that despite her obvious proficiency in the English language there were no exceptions*. The source of this information is not revealed, as the reporting verb is in the passive. In the reported speech, a further contrast appears. From the formulation it may be inferred that the unnamed source acknowledges the participant’s high command of the language, but is unable to act against the given rule.

The severity of Ms. Dutton’s situation is emphasized in paragraph seven when the reasons for her actions are re-

ported: *Ms. Dutton is desperate to go back to work to support her husband and four-month-old son, because Mr. Mervin (her husband) works in finance and has been unable to get a job due to the economic downturn.* First, the adjective *desperate*, which describes Ms. Dutton's feelings, has a highly negative Affective value. Additional implicit evaluation is expressed in the information about the reasons for Ms. Dutton's feelings: the strongest impact, due to their connotations, might be made by the mention of supporting her young child (protection of her family) and the current economic situation, which has been an ongoing topic and which is generally presented as a cause of hardship. These instances may be aimed at evoking sympathy for the participant and a corresponding position on the part of the reader.

On the other hand, paragraphs eight and nine report on possible changes to the situation and a potential solution to the problem:

The plight of the British nurse caught the attention of Nathan Rees, the Premier of New South Wales, who said today that her situation was absurd. John Della Bosca, the State Health Minister, said that he would review the Nurses and Midwives Board policy and help to streamline Ms. Dutton's case so that she could undergo the test and start work sooner.

"I have no doubt that in this case there are issues where the test appears to be a frustration and I can acknowledge the public and Julie would feel frustrated," Mr. Della Bosca said.

Here the situation of Mr. Dutton is again referred to as *a plight*, denoting "a bad, serious or sad condition or situation" (LDCE 1997: 1081), and *absurd*, denoting something "completely stupid or unreasonable" (LDCE 1997: 8). Both expressions convey a negative Attitudinal value of Appreciation. Further instances of evaluation concentrate on the position towards the language test, which is assessed as *a frustration*: this marks a similar value. The first case concerns implicit authorial Attitude; the following two, non-authorial.

Finally, the text is concluded by a direct quotation of Ms. Dutton's opinion, an implicit Judgmental evaluation:

“In principle it’s a good idea for people who don’t speak English as a first language, because I’ve worked with people in London and the UK who didn’t speak English to the level that you would expect (as a nurse) and it can create problems,” she said. “But I’m English, so I think it’s just silly.”

This evaluation aims to establish Ms. Dutton as a person who is sensible, respects the rules, and applies her life experience. It could be taken as an instance of aligning her with the moral values of the majority of the news story's readers. After this, her personal opinion appears (*“But I’m English, so I think it’s just silly”*). As the readers have had an opportunity to identify with this voice, it is likely they will identify with this final viewpoint as well.

The most frequent way to evaluate the participants in the analyzed news stories is to describe their behaviour and actions and, thus, imply their social status and character. This evaluation aims to build an alliance with the reader and to gain their solidarity. In the case of the articles reporting Mr. Cogan's and Ms. Dutton's stories, these implications are favourable to the participants, because they highlight their social esteem, responsibility, and difficult situation.

Explicit negative assessment of the participants is not present in any of the three texts. However, if the outcomes of surveys and studies require a negative or at least a problematic description of the British, it is achieved by positive evaluation of their “rivals.” This strategy appears in the second article, where the sources stress those positive qualities which migrant workers have and the British are believed to lack. Generally, the authors avoid the connection of strong negative values and people in the texts. Upscaling and intensifying Graduation tends to concern assessments of abstract entities instead—for instance, competition in the job market or a company's policy. This can be found in the repetition of words or structures, and in intensified words.

## IV. Conclusion

To summarize, the present article analysed how evaluation operates in the structure and language of three articles reporting on unemployed and migrating Britons. With regard to the structure of the news texts, the authors employed several techniques to narrow the possible readings: a narrative, a personalized account, and the choice of voices. The two articles which incline to soft news—“Britons take ‘migrant’ jobs in farms and factories” and “Strewth! Briton Julie Dutton must take an English test to work in Australia”—employed narrative strategies for presenting a personalized case. They gave the reader an opportunity to identify with the participants and also attempted to evoke solidarity. The voices entering the texts were represented by authorities in the particular field and endorsed (or at least did not contradict) the positions held in the texts. In this way, the articles offered a limited, but strong perspective for the reader.

As for the areas where evaluation operated, they concerned both the authorial text (especially the narrative part) and the direct and indirect quotation of sources. Evaluation which focused on the behaviour and character of the participants frequently fell into the category of implicit Judgment. Further instances of evaluation involved references to jobs, situations, and policies. These were marked with negative values, because they described the circumstances and reasons why the British were unemployed.

In all three texts, the presentation of Britons and migrants shared certain common features: the British were described as middle-class victims of the economic situation who have been discriminated against for various reasons, such as bureaucracy, lack of competitiveness, or age. They are contrasted with migrants who are generally referred to as “non-English speakers.” On the one hand, according to the articles migrants typically perform low paid and low status jobs; on the other, they were described as active, competitive, and contributing to the economy. The general effect of these articles is to present the British as a disadvantaged



group, which is illustrated by personalizing the participants (Mr. Cogan, Ms. Dutton), showing reasons why they are disadvantaged (policy of recruitment agencies), and reducing the variety of voices in the texts.

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## Abstract

This article examines what strategies are used and what attitudes are expressed in British national quality press when reporting on Britons in the role of migrant workers or the unemployed. The analysis is based on newspaper articles published by *The Times* (*timesonline.co.uk*) in March 2009, and aims to explore the areas of lexis which offer space for evaluation both in the authorial text and in the quotations. The article also concentrates on evaluative language employed in these newspaper articles to show an explicit or implicit position to what is reported. The main focus here is on the positions which are present in descriptions of the participants in the texts as their positive and negative assessment, and the effect of such positioning on the reader.

## About the Author

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