

‘Woman Robbed and Punched on London Street’: Linguistic and Discursive Representation of Offender and Victim Social Actors in Crime News Headlines

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Abstract

As the media is the primary public source of information on a large variety of topics, so the patterns of media discourse play an outstanding role in shaping public opinion and strengthening society. Drawing from combined approaches to Critical Discourse Analysis and, in particular, the socio-semantic analytical model proposed in van Leeuwen’s (2008) framework, I utilise a randomised corpus of English-language crime news headlines to investigate the linguistic features relevant for the media representation of offenders and victims as social actors within the discursive construction of the social reality of crime alongside the impact the media has in the construction of public belief and attitude to crime and criminality. It is argued that social actors, their identities and relations are (re)shaped by the ideology the media supports in the specific discourse situation and legitimised social practices, with the media coverage of crime news sensitising and influencing the general public’s thought on the social and cultural phenomenon of criminality.

Keywords

media discourse, critical discourse analysis, social actors, social actions, gender, identity