"WAVES OF DESTRUCTION": A PORTRAYAL OF A NATURAL DISASTER BY THE MASS MEDIA

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Abstract

In the wake of the recent disaster suffered by several Asian countries, this study examines the "journey" undertaken by the victims and the world through the representation of the disaster by the mass media. The disaster being analysed and referred to is the December 26 Tsunami. The examination is undertaken using the paradigm of Critical Discourse Analysis as proposed by Norman Fairclough (1992, 1995, 2003). Fairclough states that the mass media's power to present a certain event or group of people is evident in the selection of texts/voices. This article investigates how discourse representation (i.e. which and how other voices are included or significantly excluded, are the voices attributed, and how other voices are textured in relation to the authorial voice and in relation to each other) may be varied or manipulated in the construction of reality to evoke certain feelings and images within the audiences. A corpus of Malaysia's leading English local daily (1197 articles in total), *The Star*, within a month's frame (i.e. 27 December 2004 to 31 January 2005), is analysed to provide an insight to this portrayal of the tsunami. The results from the analysis reveal that the mass media play an instrumental tool in presenting news of a natural disaster to the audience with a certain agenda.

Abstrak

Kajian ini menggambarkan malapetaka yang dialami oleh mangsa Tsunami dari sudut media massa. Malapetaka yang dianalisakan ialah Tsunami yang telah melanda pada 26hb Disember 2005. Analisa ini menggunakan Wacana Analisa Kritikal oleh Norman Fairclough (1992,1995,2003). Mengikut Fairclough media massa mempunyai kuasa untuk memilih suara/ teks untuk menggambarkan sesuatu peristiwa atau seseorang. Artikel ini menganalisa bagaimana suara/teks yang berlainan digunakan atau dimanipulasikan untuk merangsangkan perasaan atau imej di kalangan pembaca. Korpus yang dikaji terdiri daripada 1197 artikel yang dipetik dari suratkhabar harian *The Star* dalam tempoh sebulan, iaitu dari 27 Disember 2004 ke 31 Januari 2005. Keputusan dari kajian tersebut menunjukkan bagaimana media massa menggambarkan malapetaka ini untuk tujuan tertentu.

Keywords: Tsunami, critical, discource analysis, mass media, construction of reality, news

Introduction

The media coverage of the recent Asian disaster has been extensive, ranging from news releases from government, aid agencies and businesses offering help to victims (AsiaNet, 2005), to news about mysteries or ghost stories in the affected areas (Thai Press Reports, 2005). The varied representations of the tsunami have undoubtedly created certain impressions in the minds of the mass media audience. This paper analyses the various voices that are given space in Malaysia's leading English local daily, *The Star*, and how they are woven together textually. This entails analysing how the voices are recontextualised (i.e. as direct quotes, indirect discourse) in the new context and how they are framed in relation to each other and in relation to the writer's voice. The corpus consists of 1197 articles published within a month's frame (i.e. 27 December 2004 to 31 January 2005) in the local daily, *The Star*.

Mass Media Coverage on Disaster

The mass media have been recognized as an important source of the creation and reproduction of meaning for a long time (Lupton, 1999: 259). According to the Annenberg Washington Program Report (Hernandez, 1994), the media have an obvious role when it comes to reporting news of natural and man-made disasters, and they also are an important part of effective preventive and rescue operations as well. The report states that accurate and timely information is essential during a disaster. Many reporters and editors are incredibly resourceful when it comes to dealing with breaking news, but any journalist who has been steeped in the chaos of a blockbuster knows that it takes more than resourcefulness to cover a story (Shepard, 2005). Similarly, Haymarket Media (2005) opines that although most relief organizations have media plans ready should a natural disaster strike, the press has less of a structure in place to cover these catastrophic events. However, background preparation is a critical element in preparedness and can give journalists a cutting edge in their coverage of unexpected events (Shepard, 2005). The media is a vital part of this process where audience receives precise information (Hernandez, 1994). Therefore, the Annenberg Washington Program report urges better relations should be established between the media and scientific and disaster organization (Hernandez, 1994). The report also states that organizations have a duty to communicate reliable data to the media, and subsequently, the media have an obligation to report information accurately.

Stories dealing with celebrities, crime, sex, disasters, accidents, and public fears have consistently been labeled as sensational (Davie

& Lee, 1995; Ehrlich, 1996; Hofstetter & Dozier, 1986; Juergens, 1966; Knight, 1989; Shaw & Slater, 1985; Stevens, 1985). Numbers on the move in the media are always addictive and a weeklong succession of news flashes about deaths in a disaster makes them even more addictive (Thieren, 2005). Powers (2003) argues that mass media coverage of tragedy has become the main reference point in modern culture, rather than each occurrence being treated as isolated incidents. Sensational news is apparently designed to attract attention in the name of high viewership ratings (Berkowitz, 1993; Scott & Gobetz, 1992). On the other hand, respected journalists readily admit that they intentionally arouse emotion in readers with the hope that they will channel audience excitement into efforts to right social wrongs (Grabe, Zhou & Barnett, 2001). However, sometimes it does not bring about the intended outcome as this study by Saylor et. al. (2003) shows. This study was conducted on elementary school students a month after a disaster. It reveals that children exposed to September 11 via television, the Internet, and print media develop Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and that there is no measurable benefit to seeing heroic or "positive" images.

Media coverage of the devastating tsunami in South Asia and the outpouring of aid spurred by images of the catastrophe is testament to the power of journalism (Robins, 2005). The disaster created huge global news story and tested newsgathering skills on all fronts (Sambandan, 2005). The American television is also said to have done an outstanding job of bringing the nightmarish situation to faraway viewers, who without the aid and immediacy of pictures electronically transmitted from the scene of the disaster, might have found it almost impossible to realize the extent of the destruction (Crain Communications, 2005). Diane Sherman, associate VP of public affairs and communications for Save the Children affirms that there is less reporting about problems and more reporting about the great needs and heroic efforts of everyone to try to meet the needs of children and families (Haymarket Media, 2005). However, the media coverage on the Asian tsunami is not without its controversies. The World Health Organisation believes that when a number-hungry press shifts its audience's attention from survivors to the deaths and from the deaths to the toll, there are negative implications to it: from myths about the hazards of decomposing bodies to the numbing effects of disasters on audience (Thieren, 2005).

There are many ways on how the news of a disaster can be covered by the mass media. The Asian tsunami is no exception and the findings from the analyses below reveal how a Malaysian daily has chosen to portray this catastrophe.

Methodology

Theoretical Framework

The investigation of the present study is undertaken using the analytic paradigm of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) employed by Fairclough (2003).

According to Fairclough (1992), texts (including media texts) are essentially intertextual whereby they are composed by elements of other texts. Intertextuality denotes "the property texts have of being full of snatches of other texts, which may be explicitly demarcated or merged in, and which the text may assimilate, contradict, ironically echo, and so forth" (Fairclough, 1995: 84).

Discourse representation is a "form of intertextuality in which parts of other texts are incorporated into a text, and usually explicitly marked as such, with devices such as quotation marks and reporting clauses (Fairclough, 1995: 107). It is a major part of the news: representations of what newsworthy people have said (Fairclough, 1995). Fairclough states that the mass media's power to present a certain event or group of people is evident in the selection of texts/voices.

This article investigates how discourse representation (i.e. which and how other voices are included or significantly excluded, are the voices attributed, and how other voices are textured in relation to the authorial voice and in relation to each other) may be varied or manipulated in the construction of reality to evoke certain feelings and images within the audiences.

Accounts usually draw a basic distinction between 'direct' and 'indirect' discourse representation. In the case of direct discourse (DD), the words represented are in quotation marks, and there is an explicit boundary between the 'voice' of the person being reported and the 'voice' of the reporter. As for 'indirect' discourse (ID), the quotation marks disappear and the represented discourse takes the form of a clause grammatically subordinated to the reporting clause. In this case, the voices of the reporter and the reported are less clearly demarcated, and the words used to represent the latter's discourse may have been paraphrased by the reporter (Fairclough, 1995).

Data

The sample data is derived from one of Malaysia's local daily: *The Star*. The chosen articles are published between 27th December 2004 and 31 January 2005. The total number of issues containing articles on the tsunami disaster is 1197. The newspaper articles cover various aspects of the disaster, ranging from the number of casualties to personal accounts of the tsunami victims.

Analysis

The analysis will be presented according to headings on how the tsunami disaster is represented in the newspaper articles.

Global Obligation to Help

It has become a sort of unwritten rule that whenever a country faces some sort of disaster, the rest of the world has to step in to help. Thus, helping another country in times of need is considered a sort of obligation. However, it can sometimes turn into a form of contest among nations to see who is extending more help as compared to the others. Also, the extent of help rendered to the disaster-affected nations must be reflective of the donating nation's wealth and power. Otherwise, the donating nation's help might just be criticized. This is evident in the data analysed in **Extract 1** below.

Extract 1

US TO LEAD RELIEF EFFORT

Crawford (Texas): President Bush said on Wednesday that the United States would spearhead a worldwide effort to provide financial, military and humanitarian assistance to the Asian nations devastated by one of the world's deadliest natural disasters.

Speaking publicly for the first time since Sunday's tsunami, Bush said the United States, India, Japan and Australia were forming an international coalition to provide immediate relief and rescue assistance, and longer-term help with rebuilding.

He said the initial US pledge of US$35mil (RM133mil) in direct financial aid was "only the beginning of our help."

"These past few days have brought loss and grief to the world that is beyond comprehension," Bush said.

"And together the world will cope with their loss. We will prevail over the destruction."

Bush's remarks followed several days of criticism that the United States had not been as swift or as generous as other countries in its response.

Although officials said they had to assess the destruction before making specific commitments, there has been an outpouring of contributions from Americans to private and international groups.

Bush was criticized for not taking a break from his vacation until Wednesday to address the issue in person and for offering only US$15mil (RM57mil) in assistance initially.

The administration was also pressed to explain the timing and amount of its relief pledge.

But critics noted that the aid so far is about the equivalent of what the US spends in seven hours for its military operations in Iraq.

Spain has pledged US$68mil (RM258mil), almost twice what the United States has contributed so far, Japan has pledged US$30mil (RM114mil), Britain US$29mil (RM110mil), Australia US$27.6mil (RM$104mil), Germany US$27mil (RM102mil), France US$20.5mil (RM77.9mil) and Denmark US$15.5mil (RM58.9mil).

The current US aid is also significantly lower than other recent natural disasters.

After Hurricane Mitch in 1998, when about 9,000 people were killed and three million left homeless in Central America, the United States provided US$988mil (RM3.75bil) in relief assistance.

Another potential form of aid may be debt relief for the stricken countries, an idea pit forward by German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder.

Bush said the United States would consider the German proposal for a debt-payment moratorium for Indonesia and Somalia.

He also pledged to work with other nations to create an early warning system that experts say could have potentially averted thousands of deaths had one been in place in the Indian Ocean.

(*The Star*, 31 December 2004, p. 32)

Extract 1 above shows a high level of dialogicality where many of the statements made are attributed to both specific and non-specific agents: President Bush (US President), officials (US officials), critics, Gerhard Schroeder (German Chancellor). The direct attribution to these 'voices' serves to highlight the difference between the voice of the reported and the voice of those reported. Fairclough (1995: 81) mentions that an important variable in the representation of discourse is the degree to which boundaries are maintained between the representing discourse and the represented discourse – between the voices of the reporter and the person reported. In the extract above, the boundaries between reporting and reported voices are not strongly maintained. The represented discourse is integrated into the representing discourse, summarized rather than quoted, using indirect speech (ID) in many cases. For example, *Although officials said they had to assess the destruction before making specific commitments, there has been an outpouring of contributions from Americans to private and international groups.* Many of those voices attributed to (i.e. President Bush,

officials, critics, Gerhard Schroeder) are in ID, except for President Bush. He is the only agent whose voice is represented in both ID and DD (e.g. *"These past few days have brought loss and grief to the world that is beyond comprehension," Bush said*). There is also an instance where President Bush's speech is framed within the reporter's writing: *He said the initial US pledge of US$35mil (RM133mil) in direct financial aid was "only the beginning of our help."* This is considered noteworthy because the reporter is trying to distance himself from the President's claim, as the reporter does not want to be implicated in any way lest the claim does not become a reality in the future.

The inclusion of 'voices' or accessed voices would be similar to the 'voices' listed above. It is often noted that a very high proportion of media output in news consists of the speech of mainly prominent people in the various domain of public life, such as politicians, police, lawyers, many categories of experts and so forth (Fairclough, 1995: 79). However, the 'voices' of the leaders from the other donating nations are excluded from the text. The inclusion and exclusion of certain 'voices' is deemed significant, as this is an article about providing relief to the affected countries. With the exclusion of 'voices' from the leaders of the other donating nations, this seems to accentuate the lack of effort by the US; the US President has to come forth to explain the paltry financial assistance offered to the tsunami-affected nations. The other leaders do not need to have their voices heard, as the sum of their relief pledge in comparison to the US is considered generous.

There is a high degree of commitment to act by President Bush as he utilizes the modal 'will' several times in his speech (*President Bush said on Wednesday that the United States* _would_ *spearhead a worldwide effort to provide financial, military and humanitarian assistance to the Asian nations devastated by one of the world's deadliest natural disasters, "And together the world* _will_ *cope with their loss. We* _will_ *prevail over the destruction."*). This is interesting as it serves to emphasize the President's desire to realize his claims. At the same time, there are also instances of categorical assertions (i.e. statements of fact) by President Bush. The use of categorical assertions is to illustrate that the statements are a reality and that it is not contentious. In the example, *Bush said the United States, India, Japan and Australia were forming an international coalition to provide immediate relief and rescue assistance, and longer-term help with rebuilding*, the coalition formed among the four countries to administer assistance is considered a reality or fact.

The use of pronouns is also a means of distancing or bridging the distance between the speaker and the audience. For instance in the statements by President Bush, *"And together the world will cope with their loss. We will prevail over the destruction."* Bush is trying to highlight there exists two types of nations: one which is not struck by the tsunami (no loss), and the other which is tsunami-stricken (loss

experienced). Although there is this polarity, the whole world will unite and overcome this loss together as a form of global effort.

A Catastrophe that is Controllable

The magnitude of the tsunami disaster is seen as something that could have been averted if proper measures had been taken by the relevant authorities concerned. Consequently, many suggestions have been put forth that a sort of early warning system be set up to prevent a repetition of the 26 December tsunami. **Extract 2** below is an article on how experts are urging for an early warning system to be in place for the Indian Ocean.

Extract 2

ALERT SYSTEM NEEDED FOR INDIAN OCEAN

Tokyo: The massive waves that devastated southern Asia were doomed to happen as two plates carrying the weight of the world adjoin near Sumatra, but the region lacked a warning system that could have saved thousands of lives, experts said yesterday.

The India-Australia and Eurasia plates that hold the Earth's surface are lodged on top of each other deep under the ocean near the Indonesian island.

"As the India-Australia plate was digging under deeper and deeper and causing too much strain, the plates slipped – on a large scale," said Yoshinoby Tsuji, assistant professor at the Earthquake Research Institute of Tokyo University.

The result on Sunday was an earthquake of 9.0 on the Richter scale – one of the most powerful in history.

Yoshimitsu Okada of the state-run National Research Institute for Earth Science and Disaster Prevention said the raw power of Sunday's quake must have been 500 times as great as the Kobe quake 10 years ago that measured 7.3 on the Richter scale and killed more than 6,000 people in Japan.

Japan has improved its disaster response time since the Kobe quake. It has long had in place a rapid alert system for tsunami waves whenever a temblor strikes.

But the infrastructure in place for the Pacific does not exist for the Indian Ocean, a less prosperous region which experiences fewer tsunamis.

Tsuji noted that the waves that hit India and Sri Lanka had taken two hours to reach their shores, but no warnings were issued.

"People were hit by tsunamis all of sudden without having warnings," Tsuji told a private television network.

Another expert from Tokyo University, Keiji Doi, said the awareness of people in the Indian Ocean about tsunamis "was not high".

"Indonesia has experienced tsunamis many times," Doi said. "If the nation had known about the danger of tsunamis, however, it did not have any system to convey the fears to other countries along the Indian Ocean."

Japan's national Tohuku University has transferred the country's advanced tsunami prediction technology to 15 other countries but they are all in the Pacific region, the *Yomiuri Shimbun* said.

"Without any tsunami warning centre, people in places who did not feel the tremor were probably unable to know tsunamis were coming over," the daily quoted Tohuku University professor Fumihiko Imamura as saying.

But even with its technology, Japan could also learn from the disaster, newspapers said.

"Wariness for tsunamis cannot be said to be high enough even in Japan," the *Tokyo Shimbun* said.

(*The Star*, 28 December 2004, p. 38)

The level of dialogicality in **Extract 2** above is rather high with many of the statements being attributed to specific agents, both animate (i.e. Yoshinoby Tsuji - assistant professor at the Earthquake Research Institute of Tokyo University, Yoshimitsu Okada - National Research Institute for Earth Science and Disaster Prevention, Keiji Doi - Tokyo University, Fumihiko Imamura - Tohuku University professor) and inanimate (i.e. newspapers - Yomiuri Shimbun, Tokyo Shimbun). The boundaries between the representing discourse and the represented discourse can be considered high as there are many instances of DD (i.e. *"As the India-Australia plate was digging under deeper and deeper and causing too much strain, the plates slipped – on a large scale," said Yoshinoby Tsuji, assistant professor at the Earthquake Research Institute of Tokyo University, "People were hit by tsunamis all of sudden without having warnings," Tsuji told a private television network, "Indonesia has experienced tsunamis many times," Doi said. "If the nation had known about the danger of tsunamis, however, it did not have any system to convey the fears to other countries along the Indian Ocean.", "Without any tsunami warning centre, people in places who did not feel the tremor were probably unable to know tsunamis were coming over," the daily quoted Tohuku University professor Fumihiko Imamura as saying, "Wariness for tsunamis cannot be said to be high enough even in Japan," the Tokyo Shimbun said*) as compared to ID (i.e. *The massive waves that devastated southern Asia were doomed to happen as two*

plates carrying the weight of the world adjoin near Sumatra, but the region lacked a warning system that could have saved thousands of lives, experts said yesterday, Yoshimitsu Okada of the state-run National Research Institute for Earth Science and Disaster Prevention said the raw power of Sunday's quake must have been 500 times as great as the Kobe quake 10 years ago that measured 7.3 on the Richter scale and killed more than 6,000 in Japan, Tsuji noted that the waves that India and Sri Lanka had taken two hours to reach their shores, but no warnings were issued. Another expert from Tokyo University, Keiji Doi, said the awareness of people in the Indian Ocean about tsunamis "was not high", Japan's national Tohoku University has transferred the country's advanced tsunami prediction technology to 15 other countries but they are all in the Pacific region, the Yomiuri Shimbun said. But even with its technology, Japan could also learn from the disaster, newspapers said). The high-boundary maintenance is a strategy used by the journalist to distance himself from the statements to illustrate that these claims and opinions are that of the experts and not he himself. Therefore, the audience will have more faith in the journalist's reporting as expert opinion and exact words are used within the article. Furthermore, the journalist uses DD when reporting what two experts said to a television network (i.e. *"People were hit by tsunamis all of sudden without having warnings," Tsuji told a private television network*) and another newspaper (i.e. *Without any tsunami warning centre, people in places who did not feel the tremor were probably unable to know tsunamis were coming over," the daily quoted Tohoku University professor Fumihiko Imamura as saying*). This further accentuates the importance the media place on using the exact words of experts to increase the credibility of their reporting.

The accessed 'voices' consists of seismologists (i.e. Yoshinoby Tsuji, Yoshimitsu Okada, Keiji Doi, Fumihiko Imamura) and Japanese newspapers (i.e. Yomiuri Shimbun, Tokyo Shimbun). It is not by chance that Japanese seismologists are chosen to air their views because Japan is known for being an earthquake and tsunami prone area. After all, the word 'tsunami' originated from the Japanese language. Thus, inserting the voices of various Japanese seismologists makes sense and subsequently, increases the credibility of the reporting. And the opinion that the disaster could have been forecast and averted is to be taken seriously by the tsunami-hit nations. The inclusion of the Japanese newspapers could probably be due to several reasons – the seismologists were interviewed only by the Japanese media or the seismologists themselves are more fluent in Japanese rather than other languages. Ironically, the 'voice' of seismologists from the tsunami-affected nations is excluded from the extract. This is considered salient as they are not given a chance to explain their side of the story and what they feel could be the real reason behind the extent of the tragedy. It would be interesting to

find out if the seismologists from the Indian Ocean hold similar views to their counterparts in the Pacific Ocean.

Many of the statements made by the accessed voices are categorical assertions, where they are to be taken as facts. This makes the assertions such as how the earthquake and the tsunami were bound to happen as reality. The seismologists did not use any modals to hedge their assertions, making their assertions as statements of fact without any room for argument. There is only one instance of modal used by the seismologist (i.e. *the raw power of Sunday's quake must have been 500 times as great as the Kobe quake 10 years ago*). Even then, it shows a high degree of commitment to truth by the seismologist. The other instance of modal being used is by the Japanese newspapers (i.e. *But even with its technology, Japan could also learn from the disaster, newspapers said*). However, this modal depicts a low level of commitment to act, probably because the newspapers themselves know that they are not the experts and by asking Japan to heed their warning is what Brown and Levinson (1978) term as a face-threatening act by the newspapers. Thus, the newspapers have to utilize a low degree of commitment to act to mitigate their face-threatening act.

A Disaster of Historical Magnitude
Many claim that they have seen the worst of disasters but many will agree unanimously that the devastating trail left behind by the tsunami is the worst they have ever witnessed. **Extract 3** below is an article exemplifying the horror faced by a veteran journalist as he journeyed through Bandar Aceh.

Extract 3

FOUL TIME AHEAD FOR ACEH

The stench of death, I was warned, would stay with you forever. I arrived in Bandar Aceh on Thursday morning fully prepared – a mask, a thick handkerchief and a bottle of *minyak angin*.

After 20 years as a hard-nosed journalist and having covered a wide spectrum of news, including gruesome killings, I thought I would be able to stomach what I would see.

My Indonesian driver, Maran Gunawan, had warned me before we drove out of the airport that even after more than 10 days after the tsunami catastrophe, the stench was unbearable because the mass burials had yet to be completed.

Maran looked at me in the eyes and asked whether I was sure I wanted to look at the bodies. I nodded and told him, in Bahasa Malaysia, to move immediately.

Barely 10 minutes after we drove out of the airport, where we were greeted by a huge archway with the sign *Selamat Datang ke Serambi Mekah* (Welcome to the Veranda of Mecca), the stench began.

Just a short distance away, a huge hole had been dug to bury the dead. A huge pile of bodies, all in black body bags, was still left unattended at the mass grave. No one knows for sure when these unidentified victims would be buried.

The locals just passed by without taking a second glance. Only a few journalists like me, who have just arrived, took the trouble to stop and look at the gruesome scene.

The central part of Bandar Aceh, which used to be the commercial area of the city, is now in shambles.

This part of Bandar Aceh resembles a war zone; I saw more rotting corpses being pulled out from the flattened area by soldiers and rescuers who were trying to look for survivors.

Jalan Cutmutia, where lovers used to congregate in the evenings to enjoy the cool sea breeze along the promenade, is now a sorrowful wasteland. Wails and cries filled the air as frightened families wandered around looking for their missing loved ones.

In nearby Penayong, where the thriving Chinatown was once located, the rows and rows of double-storey shops are all gone. It looked like it had been hit by a series of bombings.

The 3m high killer waves which had swallowed and swept away this commercial hub had transformed it, in 10 minutes, into a wasteland of muddied wooden planks and piles of stones.

It will take at least five to 10 years to rebuild Aceh, which was once a gateway to Indonesia.

Even as I write this, more than 24 hours after my visit to Aceh, the nauseating stench of death still remain vividly – they were right.

(*The Star*, 8 January 2005, p.4)

Extract 3 above illustrates a low level of dialogicality, with only two of the statements being attributed to only one person, Maran Gunawan, the journalist's Indonesian driver. The rest of the

statements are in the authorial account. Even the statements attributed to Gunawan are in ID, making it ambivalent as to the actual words being said by Gunawan. The journalist has incorporated Gunawan's discourse within his own discourse. Overall, it can be said that there is a low maintenance of boundary between the reported and the reporting.

The article above can be categorized as a narrative authorial account. It is not by chance that the journalist chooses to write this way because of several reasons. First of all, the journalist is a well-known senior editor of the leading English daily in Malaysia. He is a renowned editor/journalist (i.e. *20 years as a hard-nosed journalist*) and thus, this increases the credibility of the writer and subsequently, his writing. Secondly, the journalist is a veteran in his area of expertise. Thus, he is supposed to have been exposed to many similar disasters (e.g. *having covered a wide spectrum of news, including gruesome killings*) and when he says that this is by far worse than what he has imagined or has been exposed to (e.g. *Even as I write this, more than 24 hours after my visit to Aceh, the nauseating stench of death still remain vividly – they were right*), the reader must take his word for it due to the journalist's vast experience. Thirdly, writing a narrative account makes the article more interesting as compared to writing it in the third person perspective. Readers love to read a story and by writing it in the narrative account, the journalist has managed to capture the attention of the audience to read the article and at the same time, gather information on the magnitude of the devastation experienced by Indonesia after the tsunami.

The use of the personal pronoun, 'I', helps to bridge the distance between the journalist and the reader. This is what Fairclough (1992) term as 'synthetic personalisation', where the writer is trying to be 'friendlier' with the audience by referring to himself in the first person instead of the third person. The journalist in this article probably wants to achieve this aim and thus, incorporates the use of the first person personal pronoun.

Trauma Experienced by High-risk Groups

The people most likely to be traumatized by the tsunami are the victims themselves. However, it has also been noted that volunteers and people who have loved ones in the tsunami-affected areas are also likely to be traumatized as well. The forms of trauma that these people experience can range from physical trauma to mental trauma. Below (**Extract 4**) is an example of a group of people undergoing trauma from the aftermath of the disaster.

Extract 4

CHILD SURVIVORS PAY HEAVY PRICE

KALMUNAI: Baby Farahan Mohd sucks his thumb constantly.

He's probably wondering when his mother, who used to breastfeed him, is going to pick him up.

But she will never return. Farahan, just a year old, is now an orphan as both his parents were killed in the tsunami disaster recently.

He is now in the care of his grandmother, Farina Akbar, 38, and they are at the Islamic Welfare Association centre at Sammanturai, in the eastern district of Kalmunai.

Farahan is not the only child at the centre who has lost his parents in the tragedy.

Farahana, 10, and Parvina, five, both lost their mothers. Tasira, 14, lost her father and saw her mother slowly becoming mentally unstable.

The home has 25 children and handles cases involving young and traumatized people who come in daily.

The UK-Sri Lanka Trauma Group, aware of the extent and severity of the problem, has given suggestions in a local newspaper on how to deal with traumatized survivors.

Group member Dr Athula Sumathipala suggested that officials contact NGOs involved in counseling and trauma work to treat suffering children and others, including voluntary workers.

Dr Sumathipala said that as far as possible children must be left with families or adults familiar to them.

"High-risk groups likely to be traumatized include workers involved in the disposals of bodies and those dealing with bereaved families," he said.

The doctor also suggested that manuals in the Sinhala, Tamil and English languages on working with traumatized people be made available.

He said the centre had been taking photos of children without parents or relatives, to be circulated in the disaster relief camps, with the hope of reuniting these children with either parents or relatives who are still alive but had been separated by the disaster.

"So far, this has been the most effective method in helping to find a home with familiar faces for the children."

"If we cannot locate the children's parents or relatives, we will get a good family to look after them," he said.

(*The Sunday Star*, 10 January 2005, p.12)

The level of dialogicality in **Extract 4** above is quite high. The statements are attributed to specific agents: Farahan Mohd (baby orphan at Islamic Welfare Association centre at Sammanturai), Farina Akbar (Farahan's grandmother), Farahana (orphan at Islamic Welfare Association centre at Sammanturai), Parvina (orphan at Islamic Welfare Association centre at Sammanturai), Tasira (orphan at Islamic Welfare Association centre at Sammanturai), UK-Sri Lanka Trauma Group, Dr Athula Sumathipala (group member of UK-Sri Lanka Trauma Group). However, it can be noted that the orphans do not speak but the details about them indicate that the journalist has spoken to them and that he has written based on the information he had gathered from his interview with the children, and inserted the information in authorial account. As for the other two specific agents, there is some level of boundary maintenance between the authorial account and the reported account because the agents' statements are both in ID and DD. The views of the specific agent, UK-Sri Lanka Trauma Group, is in ID (i.e. *The UK-Sri Lanka Trauma Group, aware of the extent and severity of the problem, has given suggestions in a local newspaper on how to deal with traumatized survivors*). It has been recontextualised by the journalist and thus, there is a sense of ambivalence as to what the Group actually said. Furthermore, the journalist did not elaborate further on the suggestions given by the Group. Probably, the journalist feels that since it is the 'voice' of a group, it will be better to actually pay more attention to one of its members by quoting both indirectly and directly: Dr Athula Sumathipala (e.g. *"High-risk groups likely to be traumatized include workers involved in the disposals of bodies and those dealing with bereaved families,"* he said, *"So far, this has been the most effective method in helping to find a home with familiar faces for the children"*, *"If we cannot locate the children's parents or relatives, we will get a good family to look after them,"* he said).

In terms of accessed voices, the agents whose voices are heard are the UK-Sri Lanka Trauma Group and Dr Athula Sumathipala. By using these two agents, the journalist has been able to lend more credence to his article on the trauma faced by the victims of tsunami and also the volunteers who are engaged in disposing the bodies and those involved with grieving families. However, what is excluded is also considered significant. For example, the 'voice' of the traumatized victims or those involved directly or indirectly with the tsunami victims are not heard. This is considered salient because they are the ones who are suffering from the physical or mental trauma caused by the tsunami. This group of people should be given space to air their grievances or views on the trauma that they are facing; are they handling it well or is there adequate counseling given to them.

The journalist has been very careful with the types of reporting tags that he uses because they all indicate either an option

(e.g. *suggested*) or is neutral in nature (e.g. *said*). This gives the parties concerned or the reader, a choice whether to take up the suggestions offered by the UK-Sri Lanka Trauma Group and Dr Athula Sumathipala or to interpret the assertions made by Dr Athula Sumathipala as non-threatening, without any underlying intentions. There are two modalised assertions made by Dr Athula Sumathipala. Both are highly modalised assertions to act: Dr Sumathipala said that as far as possible children <u>must</u> be left with families or adults familiar to them, "If we cannot locate the children's parents or relatives, we <u>will</u> get a good family to look after them".

Religious Beliefs Surrounding the Disaster

In countries where religion plays an important role in the citizens' life, religious beliefs regarding death are issues that will be brought up. A case in example would be the cleansing rituals carried out by the Hindu-dominated community in Bali after the 2002 bombings. Similarly, **Extract 5** below is an example of how the Thais are conducting cleansing rituals after the tsunami tragedy.

Extract 5

THOUSANDS SET TO CONDUCT CLEANSING RITUALS
KHAO LAK: Thousands of Thais will take part in a week of formal Buddhist and Chinese rituals beginning today to lay to rest the "wandering spirits" of the tsunami victims.

In a deeply spiritual country, many survivors have become increasingly concerned about the presence of angry spirits. The survivors cite traditional Buddhist teaching, which said the spirits of those who suffer a sudden, violent death often roam the land until they are calmed and blessed.

Ceremonies will take place in Phuket and Phang Nga and small groups of Buddhist monks are also touring beaches, particularly the razed resorts here, where they turn to the ocean and lay to rest the spirits that are still out at sea.

In nearby Krabi City, monks have sought to ward off stray spirits by encircling the entire settlement with a holy thread. By day, the shores of southern Thailand are a hive of industry; churned up mud is leveled, splintered steel is hauled away, fallen trees are burned and mangles motorcycles are carefully collected on the roadside.

By night people sit, reflecting on the disaster that befall them and telling tales of the tsunami and what they have seen since.

Many are straightforward ghost stories, often derived from the Buddhist belief in the wandering spirits.

One night last week, a taxi driver in Patong Beach was said to have been hailed by four western tourists, who asked him to take them to the airport. He chatted as he drove, grateful to have a rare tourist fare. When he pulled up and turned round to let them out, there was no one in his cab. His story was taken seriously and reported in a local newspaper.

It is no accident that the main morgue at Wat Yanyao is based inside a Buddhist temple. Many Thais are deeply troubled by the presence of so many unidentified bodies.

They believe it is not just survivors and pathologists who want to identify the corpses but that the wandering spirits, too, are seeking their bodies from the 4,000 stacked in refrigerated containers inside the temple grounds.

(*The Star*, 18 January 2005, p.41)

The level of dialogicality in **Extract 5** above is rather low, as many of the assertions are in authorial account interspersed with indirect discourse from several agents: survivors, a taxi driver in Patong Beach, four western tourists, local newspaper, many Thais. One feature of indirect speech is that although it is expected to be accurate about the propositional content of what was said, it is ambivalent about the actual words that were used – it may simply reproduce them, or it may transform and translate them into discourses that fit more easily with the reporter's voice (Fairclough, 1995: 81). This is the case with **Extract 5** where the reporter has incorporated the words of the several agents within his discourse, thus creating a sense of ambivalence within the reported speech. Therefore, there is a low maintenance of boundary between the reported speech and the reporting speech.

Many of the assertions made are categorical assertions, with only one instance of modalised assertion. The use of categorical assertions implies that these are statements of reality or fact: there are wandering spirits, these spirits are angry at the way they died, the monks need to pray and perform blessing rites to appease these spirits, many have encountered these spirits, spirits are also identifying their own bodies at the morgue. With these statements of reality, the reader may believe this reporting to be true and might be afraid to visit the aforementioned places in Thailand. This might not augur well for the tourism industry in Thailand as the tourism industry is one of the biggest money-making earner for the country.

Reports like these might scare away potential tourists from the country. According to Thai Press Reports (2005), journalists who have been covering these ghostly sightings have been urged to stop this form of reporting as many readers have been reported to be frightened off from visiting Thailand. The one instance of modalised assertion illustrates a high level of commitment to act by the Thais: *Thousands of Thais <u>will</u> take part in a week of formal Buddhist and Chinese rituals beginning today to lay to rest the "wandering spirits" of the tsunami victims*. This means that the thousands of Thais are committed to participate in the cleansing rituals. Again, because this assertion is written in indirect discourse, there is a sense of ambivalence to the actual words being used by the Thais. The reader will not know for sure whether the Thais actually said that they are committed to taking part in the cleansing rituals. It is after all in the reported speech within the authorial account.

Conclusion

The discussion above clearly illustrates how the media are inevitably selective with respect to what is included and what is excluded from the events and texts represented. This in turn shapes the way the audience perceives and reacts to the message in the media. However, it is undeniable that the media are and will remain an influential means of gathering and disseminating information to the masses, especially in this era of globalization and also with the advent of the Internet in our lives. Arguably, the media has a tremendous task to uphold between reporting and serving the community by balancing the need to increase the sale of their newspaper and reporting accurate information.

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