How Media Messaging Affects the Real Story

Presented by:
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Class Introductions

• What is your organization?
• Why are you here?
• What is your favorite mode of transportation?
Today’s Class Outline

- Introductions
- Pre-Assessment
- Overview of Research
- Overview of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)
- Group and Individual Activity
- Lesson
- Group Discussion
- Post-Assessment
- Questions, Group Photo, Evaluation
Please take the short assessment. When you’re done, put your pen down.
Learning Objectives

Once the workshop is completed, participants will be able to:

• Analyze language in news stories and other print media.
• Define Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA).
• Evaluate language use and recognize biases in grammar and vocabulary.
• Design sentences that are as factual and objective as possible.
• Demonstrate insight into the impact of language on the material world.
LANGUAGE MATTERS

How We Talk About Crashes Involving Bicyclists and Pedestrians

“Accident” versus “Crash”

An “accident” is, by definition, unintentional, writes Emily Badger in a 2015 Washington Post article. The word “accident” presupposes a conclusion that no one bears responsibility. Most language experts and transportation activists agree that “crash” is a more accurate and neutral term to use when talking about crashes between motorists, bicyclists and pedestrians.

Agency

In a sentence, the “agent” is the subject who is clearly performing the action. In other words, agency is a concrete action by a clear actor. If a motorist’s name is included, or if the action is narrated, then agency is emphasized as a part of the motorist is responsible.

Sentience Construction

Agency is communicated through grammatical structures, such as sentence construction. A sentence is written in passive construction when the subject is omitted or included as the by, to the, in the case of bicyclist and pedestrian construction, the subject is not included in the sentence. In the case of the motorist, the sentence is written in active construction. The following text is a possible sentence:

Active sentence: The motorist struck the bicyclist.
Passive sentence: The bicyclist was struck by a motorist.

Fact Choices

It is possible for a story to be factual but biased. The facts we choose to include and how we organize them influence the focus and perception of an event. The following texts are written in terms about pedestrian and bicycle crashes. The following texts should be balanced for readability.

Episodic versus Thematic Framing

While episodic framing is used to present specific events and is usually limited to the facts of a police report, thematic framing brings social and political issues into context. Episodic framing suggests events are isolated and involves individuals rather than societal responsibility. Studies show that thematic framing draws attention to the collective role in a particular issue. In the case of crashes, involving bicyclists and pedestrians, thematic framing brings attention to policy and infrastructure measures that may be taken to prevent crashes in the future.

Research Article

Framing the Bicycle: A Qualitative Study of Media Discourse about Fatal Bicycle Crashes

Erin Scheffels1, Julie Bond2, and Lorraine E. Monteagut1

Abstract

This research examines the linguistic choices that frame relationships between bicyclists and other parties involved in fatal crash events. Textual data were collected from media reports of all bicyclist traffic fatalities that occurred in Florida from 2005 through June 2015. The data was then coded with a qualitative data analysis software and analyzed using a thematic analysis approach. The following text is an excerpt from the research article:

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How it all started . . . .

- Research Project funded by NCTR
- Research conducted – names of all bicyclists and news reports were gathered
- TRB paper accepted for publication and presentation
- Street Blogs publishes article
- Road to Zero Grant submitted
- Road to Zero Grant awarded
- Workshops to be held in Florida
- Outside Magazine publishes article
Research Objective

To examine the linguistic choices that frame relationships between bicyclists and other parties involved in fatal crash events

Data Collection

Textual data were collected from 189 media reports of the 94 bicyclist traffic fatalities that occurred from January 2009 – to June 2018 in Hillsborough County, Florida

Methods

Critical discourse analysis (CDA), qualitative method used to analyze oral and written communication
Site of Study – Hillsborough County, FL

Hillsborough County, Florida

2017 Population Estimates
1,408,566
Source: Vintage 2017 Population Estimates

Median Household Income
$51,681
Source: 2012-2016 American Community Survey 5-year Estimates

Persons in poverty, percent
15%
Source: 2016 Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates (SAIPE)
Tampa bicyclist, 52, dies after being rear-ended by vehicle; no charges

Times staff
Published: December 15, 2017
Updated: December 15, 2017 at 07:17 PM

Media language influences public understanding of bicyclist fatalities (Hojman et al., 2005).
What is Critical Discourse Analysis?

- CDA is a method by which we analyze language use under the assumption that language has power and functions as a subtle means of social control.

- With CDA we examine and analyze:
  - Sentence structure
  - Grammar
  - Vocabulary

- With CDA we do NOT attempt to determine any of the following:
  - Intent (what anyone is thinking)
  - Cause/effect

- The Nature of Language:
  - It predates us
  - Is both objective and subjective
Critical Discourse Analysis

- Language is both objective and subjective, meaning we have agreed upon definitions of language (objective) and definitions that are specific to individuals (subjective). For instance, the word *dog* might conjure fear-based memories in one person, and love-based memories in another.

- Effectiveness of CDA
  - Is objective
  - Removes blames from individuals
Activity

Write a description of the crash from the details of the police report provided. You have ten minutes.

Instructions:

1. Write a title.
2. Write a subtitle.
3. Write five sentences.
Bicyclist killed after hitting Mercedes driven by teen in Belleair Bluffs

BELLEAIR, Fla. (WFLA) - A bicyclist was killed when he drove into a Mercedes driven by a 17-year-old girl in Belleair Bluffs on Sunday, according to authorities.

Deputies with the Pinellas County Sheriff’s Office say the girl was driving a 2016 Mercedes AMG G63 northbound on Harbor View Lane, approaching the stop sign at West Bay Drive.

Deputies say 56-year-old Anthony Violante was riding his bicycle eastbound on West Bay Drive, approaching Harbor View Lane on the south sidewalk. Violante did not have front or rear lights on his bicycle.

After making a complete stop, the teen proceeded to turn westbound onto West Bay Drive when Violante struck the front driver's corner of the Mercedes, ejecting him from his bicycle. Violante was not wearing a helmet.

Violante was transported to Bayfront Hospital with life-threatening injuries and was later pronounced deceased.

Investigators say impairment and speed do not appear to be a factor in the crash.
Bicyclist killed after hitting **Mercedes** driven by teen in Belleair Bluffs

BELLEAIR, Fla. (WFLA) - **A bicyclist** was killed when he drove into a **Mercedes** driven by a **17-year-old girl** in **Belleair Bluffs** on Sunday, according to authorities.

Deputies with the Pinellas County Sheriff’s Office say the girl was driving a **2016 Mercedes AMG G63** northbound on Harbor View Lane, approaching the stop sign at West Bay Drive.

Deputies say **56-year-old Anthony Violante** was riding his bicycle eastbound on West Bay Drive, approaching Harbor View Lane on the south sidewalk. **Violante did not have front or rear lights on his bicycle.**

**After making a complete stop,** the teen proceeded to turn westbound onto West Bay Drive **when Violante struck the front driver's corner of the Mercedes,** ejecting him from his bicycle. **Violante was not wearing a helmet.**

Violante was transported to Bayfront Hospital with life-threatening injuries and was later pronounced deceased.

Investigators say impairment and speed do not appear to be a factor in the crash.
A Largo bicyclist was killed Sunday night when he was struck by a vehicle in Belleair Bluffs, according to the Pinellas County Sheriff's Office.

According to deputies, 56-year-old Anthony Violante was riding eastbound on the south sidewalk of West Bay Drive, approaching Harbor View Lane, just before 8:45 p.m. At the same time, a 17-year-old driver approached a stop sign at West Bay Drive while driving a 2016 Mercedes AMG G63.

The driver came to a complete stop, deputies say. After turning westbound onto West Bay Drive, Violante struck the front of the vehicle, ejecting him from the bicycle.

Violante, who deputies say did not have lights on his bicycle and was not wearing a helmet, was taken to Bayfront Health St. Petersburg, where he later died from his injuries. The driver was not injured.

Alcohol and speed do not appear to be factors in the crash, deputies say.
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Violante, who deputies say did not have lights on his bicycle and was not wearing a helmet, was taken to Bayfront Health St. Petersburg, where he later died from his injuries. The driver was not injured.

Alcohol and speed do not appear to be factors in the crash, deputies say.
Belleair Bluffs crash kills Largo man

Pinellas deputies said he did not have front or rear lights on his bicycle.

BELLEAIR BLUFFS – A Largo man died Sunday (Feb. 17) of injuries he received when his bicycle collided with a car on West Bay Drive in Belleair Bluffs, the Pinellas County Sheriff’s Office said.

Anthony Violante, 56, of Largo, died at Bayfront Health St. Petersburg where he was taken after the crash. He was not wearing a helmet.

The crash happened about 8:42 p.m. at the intersection of West Bay Drive and Harbor View Lane in Belleair Bluffs.

Deputies said a 17-year-old was driving a 2016 Mercedes AMG G63 north on Harbor View Lane, approaching the stop sign at West Bay Drive. Mr. Violante was riding his bicycle east on West Bay Drive, approaching Harbor View Lane, on the south sidewalk. Mr. Violante did not have front or rear lights on his bicycle.

After making a complete stop, the Mercedes proceeded to turn west onto West Bay Drive when Mr. Violante struck the front driver’s corner of the car. The impact threw him from the bike. Impairment and speed do not appear to be a factor in the crash, deputies said.
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After making a complete stop, the Mercedes proceeded to turn west onto West Bay Drive when Mr. Violante struck the front driver’s corner of the car. The impact threw him from the bike.

Impairment and speed do not appear to be a factor in the crash, deputies said.
Agency

- Agent: subject who is clearly performing the action
- Agency: conscious action by a clear actor
- Omissions and references to inanimate objects obscure responsibility.
  - Omitted agent: The pedestrian was hit.
  - Inanimate agent: The car struck the bicyclist.
  - Clear agent: The driver hit and killed a man crossing the street.
Sentence Construction

- Agency is communicated through grammar.
- Passive construction: The subject is absent or included after the verb or the actor is unclear.
- Passive sentences direct focus to the bicyclist/pedestrian instead of the motorist.
  - Passive: The bicyclist was struck by a motorist.
  - Active: The motorist struck a bicyclist.
Fact Choices

- A story can be factual and biased at the same time.
- Fact choices and organization affect perception.
- Details typically found in crash stories that should be balanced for neutrality:
  - Demographic and socioeconomic descriptors
  - Behaviors leading up to the crash
  - Outcomes for the motorists and victims
Episodic versus Thematic Framing

- Episodic framing used to present specific events and “facts”.
  - Suggests events are isolated
  - Evokes individual responsibility

- Thematic framing used to contextualize events within larger social and political issues.
  - Suggests events are connected
  - Evokes societal responsibility
  - Invites discussion about policy and infrastructure measures
Discussion: From Police Report to Story

What:
Deputies assigned to the Major Accident Investigation Team are investigating a fatal vehicle vs bicycle crash in Belleair Bluffs.

When:
The crash occurred at about 8:42 p.m. on Sunday, February 17, 2019.

Where:
The crash occurred at West Bay Drive and Harbor View Lane.

Why/How:
Deputies assigned to the Major Accident Investigation Team are investigating a fatal vehicle vs bicycle crash in Belleair Bluffs.

According to investigators, 17-year-old Kendra Sharp was driving her 2016 Mercedes AMG G63 northbound on Harbor View Lane, approaching the stop sign at West Bay Drive.

Deputies say 56-year-old Anthony Violante was riding his bicycle eastbound on West Bay Drive, approaching Harbor View Lane, on the south sidewalk. Violante did not have front or rear lights on his bicycle.

After making a complete stop, Sharp proceeded to turn westbound onto West Bay Drive when Violante struck the front driver’s corner of Sharp’s vehicle, ejecting him from his bicycle. Violante was not wearing a helmet.

Violante was transported to Bayfront Hospital with life-threatening injuries and was later pronounced deceased.

Sharp did not sustain any injuries.

Impairment and speed do not appear to be a factor in the crash.

Next of kin has been notified.

The investigation continues.
Post Assessment

You have 10 minutes to take the post assessment and provide comments.
When you’re done, please turn in your quiz.
Thank you!

1. Questions
2. Workshop Photo
3. Evaluation