

‘We Care’, and ‘They Need Help’: The Disabled in the Print Media

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, we examine the way a leading Malaysian newspaper represents the act of charitable giving on the part of big corporate organisations that take on the role of benefactor in order to fulfil their corporate social responsibilities. Drawing on the methodology of critical discourse analysis, we examine extracts from four newspaper reports selected from a corpus of 179 texts. The aim of the analysis is to find out how the news reports represent the charitable act (i.e. the donation), the organisation performing the act (i.e. the benefactor), and the object of the act (i.e. the recipient) in its report of the charitable event. This question is critical because the answer reveals the unequal distribution of power in the relationship constructed between benefactor and recipient. We also set out to discover how the different voices are incorporated into the writer’s voice. The analysis reveals in addition the manner in which the discourse of charitable giving becomes inextricably entwined with the discourse of advertising and promotion.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis, disabled, news, objectification

INTRODUCTION

Charity is seen as a social investment to enhance a company’s image and attract investors through their good deeds (Gomez, 2009). As a social practice, giving to charity

has a set of participants in certain roles, principally the agent doing the act of charity who is in a position of power (the have) and the recipient or beneficiary of this act who is in the power of the agent (the have-not). To be eligible to play their specific roles, the participants must fulfil certain “eligibility conditions” (van Leeuwen, 2008). For the giver, being seen as charitable will indirectly promote brand names, strengthen business positions in the market and draw approval

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from consumers and investors (Banerjee, 2006). In this sense, 'caring' for the disabled persons becomes an entrenched influence and a form of paternalism (Corbett, 1996).

This paper aims to examine the way the news reports represent the charitable acts of big organisations involving the disabled, which inevitably constructs unequal power relations between them. Drawing on a critical discourse analytical approach, we analyse the way the charitable act (i.e., donation), the organisation performing the act (i.e., the benefactor) and the object of the act (i.e. the recipient) are represented in the four extracts of the newspaper reports selected for analysis.

SUPPORTING THE DISABLED THROUGH CHARITY

Charity is a form of cultural representation which reinforces a subordinate position for people with disability in society and implies "[...] that impairment is the cause of unequal treatment, and [...] it is only charities that can give help and support" (Barnett & Hammond, 1999, p.310). This perspective disregards their individuality, agency and abilities (Furnham, 1995). Being identified as different from the non-disabled, the disabled become the other, not belonging to the 'norm' at large (Shakespeare, 1997).

Many business establishments have taken on the role of benefactor under the pretext of giving support to the disabled and in the name of fulfilling their corporate social responsibilities (Bourk & Worthington, 2000), i.e. giving back to the community. They appear to tackle social issues on the

basis of enlightened self-interest (Carroll, 1979). However, Banerjee (2006) points out that corporations will not engage in any social initiative unless it is profitable to do so.

Gold and Auslander (1999) argue "[...] the modern day media plays an important role not only in reflecting public attitudes and values regarding disability, but also in shaping them" (p.209). This concurs with Fowler's (1991, p.3) definition of news, that news is "a practice: a discourse which far from neutrally reflecting social reality and empirical facts, intervenes ... 'in the social construction of reality'. Reality represented by media texts is filtered and manipulated to tailor a particular viewpoint of a particular group with perhaps vested interest and can "affect the representation of people and events" (Thomas & Wareing, 1999, p.50).

The content of the media reporting of charitable acts involving persons with disability will inevitably contain discourses which represent them from a particular perspective, for example, as objects of pity and needing special care. Shakespeare (1997, p.221) uses the term 'objectification' to refer to the representation of the disabled as vulnerable and lacking agency. Presenting negative images of the disabled as a means of raising funds will unfortunately have negative implications for them (Fulcher, 1989). It appears that the more tragic their life, the more support they will get from the 'caring others'. In the context of charity in the modern world, disability is thus "the marker of both stigma and privilege" (Grue, 2011, p.33).

METHODOLOGY

Taking Fairclough's (2003) critical discourse analytical approach, we examine the way benefactor-recipient relations are established and the journalists texture advertising and promotion into the reporting of the charitable act. In this regard, we will determine what the acts of charity are, whether they are distinguished from the acts of promoting, and to what extent the disabled actually benefit from the donations. We analyse four excerpts selected from a corpus of 179 news reports published in *The Mirror* from 1 July 2004 to 30 June 2005. The real name of the newspaper is not revealed here. *The Mirror* was chosen because it has the widest newspaper circulation in Malaysia amounting to approximately 300,000 copies and a readership of about 1 million daily (2011). In order to maintain the anonymity of the subject we use a letter in place of the actual name such as (M), (T), (S), etc.

Critical Discourse Analysis is essentially concerned with how language relates to and is implicated in the (re)production of unequal power relations in society (Fairclough, 2010). As a tool that represents society, language can be used to group people and assign different roles to each group. This can lead to discrimination and asymmetrical power relations among the various groups (Fowler, 1985). The textual analysis involves language analysis and intertextual analysis.

In analysing language we examine the way elements of language (e.g., words and meaning, grammar and sentence construction) are chosen and put together

to represent the social actions and the social actors present in the text. To give meaning to the form, our analysis involves examining the linguistic form and content of texts including their overall themes. We concur with Richardson (2007, p.38) that elements of language should not be considered of profound significance in themselves; what is more important is how they function and the meaning they convey in their specific context of use.

Kristeva (1986) highlights the intertextual nature of text, i.e. that a text is not a self-contained entity, but exists in the presence of other texts and it has meaning in relation to other texts. News reporting by its very nature consists of fragments of other texts which are incorporated into the present text in a variety of ways. The intertextual analysis of the news reports essentially involves looking at the way elements of previous texts concerned with charitable acts are incorporated into the news reports and the meanings they create within the dialogical space of texts. We also examine how representations draw on various discourses and genres to produce interdiscursively complex texts.

DATA ANALYSIS

Cursory examinations of the corpus of 175 reports, from which the four extracts are drawn, shows the foregrounding of the charitable act suggesting "the organisations care", and the act of receiving suggesting that "the disabled need help". A preliminary analysis of the four case studies revealed a common structure made up of roles and

relationships. In any charitable act, there has of course to be a Benefactor, a Recipient, and a Donation. The newspaper reports also include a Spokesperson who conveys a message concerning the charitable act. In examining each case, we have to distinguish the voices that promote the charitable act itself from the newspaper report.

Any commercial company has an obligation to maximise the return to shareholders, and to this end is involved in advertising and promotion (a&p). The nature of a&p is that it involves costs and therefore losses to shareholders in the short term, but it is also intended to increase income in the longer term. Charitable acts are like a&p in that they involve costs and losses to shareholders, but in this case the costs and losses are permanent and are not recovered. A second question is to what extent the Benefactors genuinely separate charitable acts from a&p.

It is also important to notice what information is missing. Information may be omitted because it is irrelevant or in accordance with Grice's Maxim of Quantity (1975) or on account of limited space. When relevant information is omitted, readers have to reconstruct or invent it for themselves. For the purpose of analysis, our task is to identify the gaps and possible interpretations.

Fulfilling Social Responsibility

The extract is taken from an article by a disabled columnist quoting P, the PR liaison officer for (M), a leading education group in Malaysia which owns a private

higher education institution (T). The overall theme is fulfilling social responsibility by providing the disabled students with vocational training and skills-based courses and facilities for their convenient. Consider the following example:

Extract 1

(1) *"Since 2003, (T) has been providing vocational training and skills-based courses to one sector usually overlooked by many private institutions – disabled students."...*

(2) *"One of the management missions is to play a definitive role in fulfilling its social responsibility towards local communities," P explains.*

(3) *"(J) joined the (B) Spastic Children's Association at age seven.*

(4) *After completing Form Three, (J) received vocational training and learnt living skills such as domestic chores, cooking and cleaning.*

(5) *She had almost completely given up the idea of continuing with her education until she read about (T's) MLVK courses ... "*

(6) *"She was absolutely delighted when she heard that (T) gave opportunities to disabled students to train for careers in Information Systems, Computer Technician and Multimedia Artist."*

(7) *"(T) also looks into the physical needs of disabled students. ... "*

(8) *"These include the provisions*

for wheel-chair ramps, disabled friendly restrooms and a multimedia laboratory and a resource centre that are situated on the ground floor for easy access to wheelchairs. (9) In addition (P) stresses that disabled students at (T) can fall back on their fairly good study experience without fear of being patronised by others or getting sympathy just because they are in wheelchair ... a true joy to notice the caring and sharing spirit in our college! ...” (10) (T’s) five-block campus was recognised by the ... Municipal Council for having the “The Most Disabled Friendly Building in the (S) residential community...’

Analysis

The voices represented are: P (a PR liaison officer for M, the company that owned College T) and J, a disabled student portrayed as having benefited from the vocational training that T provides. Notice how the voices are represented in relation to each other. While P’s voice is prominently represented as actual words, J’s voice is included as part of P’s narrative (3-6), a representation that presents evidence for the positive outcome of the vocational training and courses provided by T.

The text articulates together a variety of genres and discourses including elements of advertising and promotion. Notice how P includes the promotional material about T in her direct report: the provision of vocational

training for disabled students is “usually overlooked by many private institutions” implying that T is more enlightened than its competitors.

In paragraph 2, P draws on a narrative genre to represent T as the agent that provides disabled students including J with “opportunities” to be trained “for careers in Information Systems ...” (6). The simple story exemplifies the way J views the courses that T offers. It begins by suggesting that the vocational training that J received only prepares her for “domestic chores, cooking and cleaning” leading at best to menial work. A contrast is then set up between J’s state of mind before she was aware of T’s courses (“completely given up the idea of continuing with her education”) and when she knew about them (“absolutely delighted”). Note the use of “completely” and “absolutely” to intensify maximally the associated verbs.

Through P’s voice, T’s enlightened treatment of disabled students is presented as something which began in the past (“Since 2003”) and is still continuing [“has been providing” (1)] indicated by the progressive form and as an irrefutable fact [“T also looks into the physical needs of disabled students” (7)] with the use of the simple present tense. The nominalization of ‘provide’ in “the provisions for wheel-chair ramps, disabled friendly restrooms ...” (8) conveys that the entities denoted by “provisions” have a real existence and are difficult to contest. In (9), T is represented as an institution with a “caring and sharing spirit” enabling the disabled students to

study “without fear of being patronised by others”. These claims may well be true, but they are not justified by the provisions we are told about.

Another obvious promotional element is the claim that the building is recognised by the Municipal Council as “the most disabled friendly building” (10). Notice how the activation of the Municipal Council gives force to the claim being made. The claim is of course ambiguous, and could mean either that the building is indeed advanced, or that other buildings in the locality are backward. The claims ‘disabled-friendly building’ and ‘disabled-friendly organisation’ alternate in such a way that they reinforce each other, and indeed it is reasonable to infer that a disabled-friendly building must be run by a disabled-friendly organisation. The use of the plural *ramps* and *restrooms* indicates that there are at least two of each. The listing of the ramps, the toilets, the laboratory and the resource centre as “provisions” for the disabled suggests that they are provided for their exclusive benefit, but our knowledge of academic institutions leads us to guess that the laboratory and resource centre must also be for the use of non-disabled students. Similarly, the ground floor location may provide “easy access [for] wheelchairs”, but it is also convenient for other students. So, disabled students can use student facilities and go to the toilet.

The newspaper puts together what appears to be an objective report with verbatim quotations. It appears to have created a free a&p event for the institution, advertising the institution as a suitable place of study for disabled students.

Bringing Excitement and Joy

Some children from SF Spastic Centre meet two characters from the local production of *Sesame Street*. The overall theme is that this event brings them excitement and joy.

Extract 2

(1) *Special children at the SF Spastic Centre ... recently met Elmo and the Cookie Monster, two of the characters from the upcoming Sesame Street Live musical production to be staged from Dec 7 to 12 at Putra Stadium in Bukit Jalil.*

(2) *The visit was made possible by (H), which is the presenter of the musical show.... (3) (H) customer service division vice-president (VP) said the company was concerned with the underprivileged who might be left out in the festivities... (4) “In conjunction with festivals like Deepavali and Hari Raya Aidilfitri, we want to bring some joy to them,” she said.*

(5) *“Sesame Street is such as well known show and the characters are loved by children from all around the world. (6) It is our hope that this visit will **liven up their spirits and bring excitement and joy to them,**” she added.*

(7) *“The 90-minute Sesame Street Live production will feature **lavish***

sets, colourful costumes and riverting [sic] song and dance performances by the muppets including Big Bird, Bert, Ernice, Elmo, Cookie Monster, Count von Count and Oscar the Grouch... (8) The show is based on the television series, which has garnered the largest worldwide audience of any children's shows and won a record 85 Emmy Awards," she explained.

(9) Tickets are priced at RM40, [...]. For bookings, call Ticket charge hotline at 03-77262002 or visit www.ticketcharge.com.my

Analysis

Paragraph 1 seems to be a mix of giving information and advertising. There is ambivalence between giving information about charity and advertising and promoting. The information about when and where the live musical is going to be held has elements of advertising discourse. Paragraphs 2 and 3 contain self promotional material with claims made about the company (e.g., "... the company was concerned with the underprivileged") and the Sesame Street live musical production (e.g., "Sesame Street is such a well known show"). Paragraph 5 contains elements of product advertisements (e.g., Tickets are priced at RM40..., For bookings call...). This extract is a good illustration of the colonisation of the news reporting of charity by promotion.

Different roles are assigned to the social actors represented in the text. They

include the presenter of a local production of *Sesame Street Live* ((H), the agent that makes the visit possible), the company's Customer Service Division Vice-President (the spokesman) for the company (the benefactor) and the special children from the SF Spastic Centre (the beneficialised social actor). H's role is realised by the transitivity structure, in which H is coded as actor in relation to "making" the visit possible (2) actively involved in the actual act of doing. The disabled children are assigned an active role of behavior in the behavior process of "meeting" "Elmo and the Cookie Monster" (1). The children's act of "meeting" is nontransactive, represented as mere behaviour without effect. The company's role as a "concerned" benefactor is foregrounded as actor in relation to the feeling of "being concerned" (3).

The main voice brought into the text is that of (VP), which appears as indirect reporting (3) and direct reporting (4; 5-9). Note the use of the title "vice-president" to foreground that (VP) as someone holding a high post giving force to her words. (VP) is assigned the active role as sayer in the verbal process of "saying" (3 and 4), "adding" (5 and 6) and "explaining" (8). Through VP's reporting, two kinds social of action are attributed to the company: "was concerned" and "want to bring". In "the company was concerned with the underprivileged ...", being "concerned" about the children's state of affairs is a positive affective reaction attributed to the company. Its relation to the children here is represented as non-transactive which takes place at the level

of emotion. This representation in direct report casts the company in a good light. Secondly, the company is represented in (6) as wanting “to bring some joy to them”. Notice the use of “we” to humanise the company representing it as people rather than an entity. The phrase “want to bring joy” attributes the feeling of wanting to cause something positive to happen, i.e. bringing “joy to them” highlights the company’s benevolent self. Here the affective mental process of “wanting” is combined with a to-infinitive non-finite clause; “joy” is the direct object of bring and “them” the indirect object. The expected outcome of the visit, i.e. “will liven up” their spirits and “bring” joy, is presented grammatically as a probability, with high-affinity epistemic. From the information given in (5) that “the characters are loved by children from all around the world” we can infer that the probability is high. The it-construction at the beginning of (6) represents it as a “hope”.

Paragraph 4 draws on the discourse of advertising and promotion, focusing on the “lavish sets, colourful costumes and riveting [sic] song and dance performances by the muppets”, seven of whom are then listed. Emphasis is placed on the fact that the show has “the largest worldwide audience [...] and won a record 85 Emmy Awards”, suggesting this is not an ordinary children’s show. Using ‘will’ in “will feature”, which marks futurity plus high-affinity epistemic modality, (VP) predicts that the show will be lavish, colourful and riveting. Her central purpose here is clearly to express her positive opinion of the show. The final paragraph is

a genre of consumer advertising containing elements of advertising discourse, giving details of ticket sales, including how to obtain tickets.

Now, a quick superficial reading of the article might leave the reader with the impression that the children were taken to see the show, and in that case the spokesperson’s remarks would be appropriate. However, the children just get to meet two of the characters. The company may well have been generous to the children in some other way, but we are not told about it. The generosity remains an unsubstantiated claim made by the company and reported uncritically by the newspaper.

Commitment and Kindness

The pharmaceutical company (G) has donated 200 copies of a book entitled ‘*BenO Comes Home!*’ to the Special Children Society, an organisation whose mission is to provide education for people with learning difficulties. The overall theme is commitment and kindness to special children through book donation. The extract represents (G) and the author and publisher of the book, (VD), as Benefactors, the society as Recipient and the 200 books as Donation. The author and publisher of the book were reported to be present to present the books jointly with the company.

Extract 3

*(1) The youngsters at the Special Children Society ... received **some cheer** when a team from pharmaceutical company (G) paid*

a visit to the society's headquarters recently.

(2) The visitors donated 200 copies of the children's story book, 'Ben O Comes Home!' to the society.

(3) Also present was the book's author and publisher; (VD). (4) "I looked for corporate organisations which were interested in buying the book for charity purposes and contacted (G), and we joined up to deliver the books to the special children here," said (VD)...

(5) "I'm deeply touched by (G)'s commitment and (VD)'s kindness," said SCA president (C).

Analysis

The pattern of intertextuality is an alternation between authorial account and reporting. In paragraph 1, the writer represents how happy the youngsters were with the visit from company (G). While the benefactors (G) and (VD) are the agents of actions, having the power to affect people, the representation of the youngsters is restricted to their reactions with no effect on the world.

Paragraph 2 reports that "The visitors donated 200 copies of the children's story books" which leads us to make the link between the youngsters' positive reactions to the visit and the donation that comes along with it, i.e. 200 copies of books. The two together cast (G) in a positive light. The choice of a transitive form foregrounds the benefactor, the donation and the recipient.

The activation of the benefactor as the agent of donating accentuates its capacity for positive action. Three kinds of social action are represented here: the actions of donating and receiving and the reactions of the youngsters to the visit. Giving the exact title of the book is part of the a&p discourse.

In paragraph 3, VD shifts from "I" to "we" in representing her actions (4). "We" foregrounds that the action of delivering is a joined activity between G and VD. Before they teamed up, VD was looking for "corporate organisations interested in buying books for charity purposes". Notice the link set up between the act of buying books and charity. And VD's 'looking out' leads to G being contacted which results in them joining up to donate VD's book "for charity purposes". On the surface, the donation of 200 books looks like a generous gesture. However, (VD) does not claim to have been particularly generous because she "looked for corporate organisations which were interested in buying the book for charity purposes and contacted (G)."

No statement at all is made on behalf of (G). And yet, the charity spokeswoman allegedly praises (G) for its "commitment" and the publisher-author (VD) for her "kindness", even though no evidence is given of either commitment or kindness. The foregrounding of G's and VD's good deeds is expressed through the voice of the SCA president. The SCA president is not just "touched", but "deeply touched". The adverb strengthens the feelings. The fact that it is the president who says it gives force to the emotion expressed.

Where essential information is not given, readers have to work things out for themselves. A surplus of 200 books also suggests a miscalculated print run, and many books to be pulped or in this case disposed of cheaply. Giving the books to the children is surely better than destroying them, and (VD) has found a commercially viable way of doing this. (G) gets the credit for paying for the books, while (VD) minimises the cost of disposal. However, a less favourable interpretation is also possible. Since the children have learning difficulties, the question needs to be asked how many of them can read at all, let alone read books which appear to be written in English.

In this case, the newspaper does not provide some of the information which is essential for the reader to reconstruct a coherent interpretation of the event. A superficial reading may lead to the understanding that the benefactors have indeed been generous. However, there is no evidence of much generosity in support of the spokeswoman's statement, and the generosity could be taken to be exaggerated.

Serving the Community

The overall theme for this report is that hosting parties for the underprivileged is part of (S)'s effort to serve the community. (S) and (C) (Benefactors) organise gifts to be presented at a party (Donation) for underprivileged children (Recipients). Preparations are being made for Christmas in (S), which is a massive shopping mall in Kuala Lumpur and (B) is one of the retail outlets in (S).

Extract

(1) Several decorated Christmas trees are now glittering at the atrium of (S). (2) However, one of them is 'special.' ...it carries the wishes of 50 underprivileged children...(3) They asked for only small gifts priced below RM50, like a shirt, watch, toy or cap. (4) They also want to be happy this Christmas... (5) Those who are interested can just buy the gifts at (B) from now until Dec 19.

'(6) (S) is also throwing a party for these children... (7) The gifts will be presented to them individually... (8) We name this programme 'Wish Upon A Shooting Star' because our (S) carries the meaning of star and we are inviting two superstars to bring joy to the children...' C explained.

(9) C said the shopping mall tried its best to serve the community, adding that it was a norm for the mall to host parties for underprivileged children during festive season.'

(10) Specially-designed postcards of the two superstars... will be on sale at B on Dec 20, from 11am at RM10 each. (11) ... proceeds will be donated to charity concert [at the said party]. (12) For details, call 03-2148 7411.'

Analysis

The writer intertextually incorporates other voices into the text and they are attributed, i.e. the voice of the 50 underprivileged children and (B) the spokesperson for (S). The intertextuality of the children's voice takes the form of indirect reporting (3 and 4). It is not possible for us to know what the children actually say because the actual words are not reported. B's voice appears as direct reporting in quotation marks (6-8) with a reporting clause and indirect reporting (9).

In paragraph 1, the authorial account and the children's voice are textured together to present the main idea, i.e. "Those interested can ... buy the gifts at B", a retail outlet located in (S). Note the ordering of the voices in relation to each other. There is a "writer-underprivileged children-writer" structuring, which effectively sets what the children ask for against where "those interested" can get them what they want. There is an interesting mix of discourses of charity and selling. Sentences (1) and (2) are in a contrastive relationship. 'However' sets the "Several decorated Christmas trees" against the "special" Christmas tree that "carries the wishes of the 50 underprivileged children". Sentences 3 and 4 report what the children want: "They asked for only small gifts priced below RM50..." The low price minimises the imposition; "only" to emphasise that they do not ask for much. The list of ideas for presents is followed by "They also want to be happy this Christmas", which carries two implications: the children are not already happy, and a cheap present

can make a child happy. Closer examination reveals that the gifts are actually to be paid for not by the Benefactor but by members of the public: "Those who are interested can just buy the gifts at (B) from now until Dec 19"; and *just* minimises the imposition on those who buy the gifts.

In her direct report, (B) gives prominence to the company's charitable activity which suggests that it is a company that cares: "The shopping mall tried its best to serve the community" and "it was a norm for the mall to host parties for underprivileged children during [the] festive season." The phrase "it was a norm" suggests that hosting parties of this nature is part of the company's practice to serve the community. Accordingly, "(S) is also throwing a party for these children... The gifts will be presented to them individually." While the first and third paragraphs of the extract are primarily concerned with charitable giving, the second paragraph brings in a&p, for it tells us "We name this programme 'Wish Upon A Shooting Star'", which puns on the name of the location *Bukit Bintang* 'star hill', and that "we are inviting two superstars to bring joy to the children". Some readers might accept the implied claim that the stars are brought in for the benefit of the children, but less trusting readers are more likely to conclude that they were brought in to support the Christmas promotion.

Paragraph 4 deals with a&p, and with the sale of postcards of the superstars. The charity theme returns, for "proceeds will be donated to... charity concert" at the party organised for the children. No details are, however, given of how the proceeds of the

sales (or indeed the charity concert) are to be divided among the superstars, the children and other unnamed parties.

The charitable act is clearly inserted into an a&p event advertising (S) and (B) in the run-up to Christmas and intended to bring extra business for (B) and further income from the sale of postcards. We are not told exactly what is being done for the children, but there would seem to be insufficient evidence to support the claims made by the spokeswoman. The event, together with the claims, is reported uncritically by the newspaper.

DISCUSSION

It is essential to preface this discussion with a caveat. The evidence we have available is limited to what the newspaper chose to publish. We do not know exactly what the Benefactors provided for the Recipients because we do not know how much has been revealed and what has been concealed. Nor do we know what the spokespersons actually said, and to what extent their words were reported verbatim, paraphrased or replaced. This is particularly true in the case of the charity spokeswoman expressing gratitude for the books. We do not even know what the reporter sent to the newspaper, and how much has been contributed by editors.

With this caveat in mind, we now consider the Donation, the ideological beliefs implicit in the reports, and the role of the newspaper.

The Donation

The Donation would appear to be small, and made at minimal cost to the Benefactor. In 4.4, the Benefactor (C) even stands to gain. In every case, the generosity of at least one party is exaggerated, usually through the words attributed to a spokesperson. In the case of (VD) in 4.3, the Benefactor appears to make no claim to generosity, but other means are employed to exaggerate the generosity on the Benefactor's behalf.

Ideological Beliefs

There is a significant relationship between what is considered an appropriate Donation and the esteem in which the Recipient is held. For example, the parent who gives a few cents to a beggar is unlikely to spend the same amount on a present for a head teacher. The size of the Donations does not merely reflect but actually entails a view of society in which the disabled belong to the margins and are expected to be grateful for anything they are given.

The disabled are constructed as sad, unhappy people who but for the generosity of the Benefactor would have no joy at all in their lives. The role of Benefactor as the source of joy is expressed most clearly in the two cases of Company (H) in 4.2 and (S) in 4.4, and the provision of joy is sometimes extended to an unsubstantiated 'giving back to society'. A spokesperson speaks on behalf of the disabled, who are kept silent in the background. The spokesperson can be relied on to say things favourable to the Benefactor, even if what is said has nothing to do with the Donation and may

not even be true. Children have the habit of saying the wrong things which might cause embarrassment to the Benefactor, and they may not be unhappy at all, or they might not think the Benefactor has been generous. The exception that proves the rule is the disabled student J, but she talks not about facilities for the disabled but academic progression. The fact that it is regarded as amazing and exceptional that a disabled student is allowed to take a course linked to employability gives an unintended insight into the treatment normally expected for disabled students. Academics who have worked closely with designated officers in their own institutions to teach students with all manner of disabilities will surely find such attitudes deeply disturbing.

The Role of the Newspaper

The newspaper is not a disinterested and objective transmitter of information, but has its own commercial objectives. It is a mass circulation newspaper, and many of its readers will have limited reading skills. It is also published in English, which for the majority of readers is a foreign or second language. Its articles must therefore present a simple story for readers with limited English. In the case of charitable giving, a commercial organisation is presented as Benefactor performing an act of generosity towards the disabled. The charities themselves, and the people who work for them, are not treated as Benefactors but along with the disabled themselves as Recipients. It can be more or less guaranteed that the majority of readers

will read the articles superficially as true records of charitable events. The newspaper will only survive if it prints what its readers want to read, and so this kind of presentation presumably finds favour with the readers.

In order to construct simple stories, the discourse of charitable giving is confused with the discourse of a&p. This mixing of charitable giving and a&p is only possible because a journalist is present to send a report to the newspaper. Otherwise, a Donation however small would represent a real and irrecoverable cost. The journalist casts the Benefactor in the most favourable light, and so produces a simple story. Creating these reports also does not cost very much, especially if the journalist has access to a press handout. This is presumably why the journalist does not seem to ask awkward questions such as *What did the children have for lunch?* or *What proportion of the proceeds will benefit disabled children?* The answers to such questions would surely show the issues to be rather more complicated, and perhaps not what the newspaper wishes to publish. For the same reason, questions are not asked about the alleged contributions being made to society.

At this point we have to reconsider the observation made above that the newspaper involved, namely *The Mirror*, published 179 articles relating to the disabled. This presents *The Mirror* as a newspaper with a social conscience and a special concern for the disabled. However, at least some of these articles would seem to be reporting thinly disguised a&p events which could never be

regarded as charitable events but for the way the newspaper generates its news stories. The companies and the newspaper have a strong motivation to collaborate because the newspaper helps the companies minimise their a&p costs, while the companies provide the newspaper with stories. At one level, commercial companies seem to be exploiting the disabled to increase the effectiveness of their a&p events and reduce costs, while at another level the newspaper seems to be exploiting these same events to enhance its own reputation.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of the selected extracts illustrates the colonisation of the discourse of news reporting by promotion. The news reports articulate together a variety of genres (including narrative and the genre of consumer advertising) and discourses (including advertising and promotional discourses and discourses of charity). It is also interesting to note here that besides selling copies, newspapers also sell advertising space. This is evident from the space allocated for advertisements placed in the last paragraph of Extracts 2, 3 and 4. In this regard, discourse of news reporting on charity acts can be seen as a vehicle for selling products, services, etc.

A quick and superficial reading might give the impression that our four case studies are heart-warming exemplars of commercial generosity to the disabled. A closer study reveals just how little we know for certain. The events are constructed and presented in most cases as acts of generosity,

and then the newspaper reconstructs the event in the form of an article that its readers want to read.

Since we do not know and cannot reconstruct the reality behind the newspaper reports, we are not in any position to suggest that any of the individual parties involved has failed to act in good faith, and we would not wish to do so. What we can and do claim is that on close examination, none of our case studies comes across as a convincing example of genuine generosity to the disabled. Some disabled persons may in each case enjoy some benefits but the commercial companies and the newspaper have far more to gain. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that what these case studies actually show is that current social practices place the disabled in a position of powerlessness which makes it possible for them to be exploited to minimise a&p costs and maximise the return for other interested parties.

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