

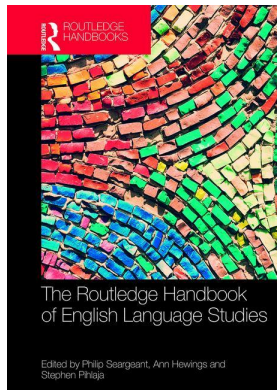
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### Media, power and representation

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# Media, power and representation

*Clara Neary and Helen Ringrow*

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## Introducing Media English

As the ubiquity and potential influence of the media increase, the language and imagery used to create meaning in this domain are of continued and enhanced interest to English Language researchers. While ‘the media’ or even ‘the English-speaking media’ is not one homogenous entity, the term is used throughout this chapter to refer broadly to a collection of media types such as newspapers, television, radio and so on. Media English can be understood as referring to the ways in which reality is linguistically constructed through these platforms. Additionally, media institutions play a significant role not only in terms of communication but also by way of ‘mediating society to itself’ (Matheson 2005: 1) in that the media helps to construct societal norms and values. Media language is distinctive because media discourses can be ‘fixed’ (i.e. recorded for posterity) as well as being interactive (people can react to subject matter, often using media forms to publically share their response(s), themselves becoming producers of media content). In investigating Media English, scholars analyse overall styles or genres in order to explore and challenge particular choices of language and/or imagery within a given media text.

This chapter commences with a consideration of some key contemporary media terminology. It then considers the dominance of *English* in Media English. Following this is a discussion of research into media representation(s) in terms of social class, race, ethnicity, gender and so on. The chapter then focuses on the range of text types the study of Media English currently encompasses, from ‘traditional’ media genres such as print and broadcast media, to ‘new’ media genres with an emphasis on online contexts. Recent developments in more ‘traditional’ media genres will also be considered, such as the increasing public participation and interactivity facilitated by digital communication and social media in particular. Throughout, key areas of dispute and debate in the field will be outlined. The chapter will close with a look towards future directions in the study of Media English, highlighting new and developing trends in the investigation of the communicative choices and shifting contexts of media output.

## Contemporary media research

Academic study of the media results from what Scannell (2007) identifies as two ‘key historical moments’ on both sides of the Atlantic: firstly, the development of a ‘sociology of mass

communication' in the United States between the mid-1930s and the mid-1950s, and secondly, from the mid-1960s to the end of the following decade, the splintering of a branch of Cultural Studies in Britain to form what we now term 'media studies' (1). The 1970s also witnessed a surge in academic interest in language analysis – exemplified by Levi-Strauss's work in structuralist anthropology, neo-Marxian explorations into the concept of ideology and Barthes and Eco's work in the field of semiotics – which was followed, in the 1980s, by an increasing awareness of the importance of contextual factors in the act of textual interpretation (see Corner 1998). In combination, these developments have generated a field of contemporary academic research into Media English which endeavours to analyse language within the context of both its production and reception.

Every communicative medium possesses its own grammar, that is, a set of rules and conventions by which it operates and according to which it is interpreted; in each case, the nature of these rules and conventions is determined by the specific characteristics of the medium in question. At this juncture, it is practicable to outline the characteristics of mass media, firstly because this facilitates identification of the differences and similarities between media types, and secondly because these characteristics determine how each medium, and the language it uses, is produced and consumed and, therefore, how its language should be analysed. Mass communication is defined as 'a form of communication that constitutes its audience and speaks to it as a mass' (Scannell 1991: 3) and its chief characteristics are as follows: *audience*; *time*; *distance*; *display and distribution*; *interactivity*; and *storage* (see Medoff and Kaye 2017: 8–9).

Firstly, *audience* refers to the manner in which a medium reaches its audience, with some media, such as print newspapers, communicating via a simple person-to-person or one-to-one mechanism, while others such as radio and television are considered monological, i.e. they follow what is called a 'one-to-many' broadcast model. The second characteristic of *time* essentially focuses on the speed with which media output is received; this is, of course, directly related to the *distance* which the media output has to travel for delivery. Print newspapers can be considered asynchronous as relative distance causes a delay between their production and receipt by a reader, while radio and television output is essentially synchronous due to the near-immediacy of its broadcast technology. Next to consider is *display and distribution*: display is akin to communicative mode in that it refers to the substance through which the text is transmitted, while distribution refers to how substance transmission takes place; for example, the audio-visual mode of television is largely distributed via cable or satellite transmission. The extent to which media are *interactive* also varies; television, for example, was traditionally known as a 'technical' medium in that viewers were unable to interact with it directly while radio has long availed of the 'phone-in' as a means of inviting audience interactivity. Finally, media differ in terms of how they are *stored*; traditionally, print newspapers were archived in hard copy while television programmes were stored on reels of film.

The mainstream popularisation of the internet from the 1990s onwards has had a clearly discernible impact upon these characteristics of mass media. In terms of how it reaches its audience, the internet is the first simultaneously mass and individual medium, capable of broadcasting on both a one-to-one and one-to-many basis. Its immediate distribution via wireless connection or mobile phone signal means it offers both synchronous and asynchronous transmission according to whether one wishes to view electronic output immediately or record it to access at a later date. However, its most dramatic effect upon media consumption is in terms of interactivity. In the pre-digital age, radio and television were predominantly non-interactive media genres, with the only opportunity for real-time interaction with their output coming in the form of occasional phone-ins. However, the increasing

levels of interactivity facilitated by digital transmission and internet use mean that a traditionally one-to-many broadcast mode is at times transformed into a one-to-one broadcast mode, for example when comments or questions asked by individual audience members are addressed in real time; solicited audience input can also shape large swathes of a programme's content (for example, audience voting on reality television talent shows). This heightened interactivity has caused a reconfiguration of pre-existing media audience models, one where the boundaries between media producer and media consumer are increasingly porous as audience members become (at least partial) producers. Though developed for application to online social media platforms, Bruns and Jacobs' (2006) term 'produser' – a conflation of producer and user – captures the changed nature of participant roles as a result of the increasing interactivity of much digital media output.

The rapidly increasing and ever-evolving influence of the internet has also generated a multitude of new text types which, while utilising some of the linguistic and discursive strategies associated with their 'traditional' or 'old media' predecessors, have also had to cultivate many more such strategies; in so doing, they are effectively redefining these media genres. The resultant output cumulatively comes under the umbrella term 'new media', a not unproblematic term which largely refers to all communication taking place via digital technologies (though see Manovich 2001 for a fuller discussion of the term). This term has become somewhat contentious largely because many 'new media' are not actually 'new': radio and television have been around for a considerable period of time but as they are now solely transmitted via digital technology in the UK (following the completion of the 'analogue switch-off' in 2012), both are technically defined as 'new media'. Similarly, the fact that a typical 'legacy media' genre such as the newspaper – extant since the latter decades of the seventeenth century – is increasingly read in digital form would suggest its not unproblematic recategorisation as 'new media'. This blurring of boundaries between print and electronic media, known as *convergence* (Jenkins 2006), has considerably complicated the nature of contemporary media genres.

### 'English' in Media English

The original language of the internet, English (especially as a North American first language or L1) remains largely dominant on a global stage, demonstrating a hegemonic presence in relation to other languages. With the increase of globalisation and related socioeconomic changes, the internet has, however, become increasingly multilingual. The growing prevalence of Chinese on the internet, reflecting to some extent 'off-line' social, political and economic developments, may point to future changes in terms of which language is likely to rival the online presence of English – or indeed which *variety* of English will dominate (see Crystal 2006, 2011). Within the framework of UNESCO's commitment to a multilingual internet, the potential consequences of the steady increase of internet penetration in Africa are noteworthy, considering the continent is home to approximately one-third of the world's languages (Crystal 2011: 80–84). However, future developments within these new settings may become increasingly connected to questions of internet censorship, which have not previously been a major issue in many English-as-L1 contexts.

If we consider how minority and/or endangered languages fare online, to some extent the internet has been beneficial for both preservation and promotion, particularly amongst a younger generation. Of particular relevance here are minority languages in contexts where English is the dominant language (for example, Irish, Welsh, Scottish Gaelic) and in which motivation and ease of online communication therefore needs to be considered. For minority

languages in the process of developing an online presence, there are often questions over how (and in what contexts) they can co-exist with English.

Within non-English advertising, English vocabulary is often used symbolically to ‘connote a social stereotype of modernity, global elitism and the free market’ (Piller 2011: 101), while a heightened demand for English media more broadly has resulted from an increase in people crossing borders for work and leisure. Machin and van Leeuwen (2007) show how Vietnamese journalists writing for an English-language newspaper have adapted to more Western styles, thereby raising questions regarding language hybridity in media contexts. Recent research into the language of the media has largely prioritised English-language media outputs and is generally published in English. As this chapter specifically focuses on Media English, it cannot, unfortunately, help in redressing this balance (see, however, Danet and Herring 2007). Future directions in this research area, however, may continue to explore non-English texts and contexts.

### Media representation(s)

For a range of complex reasons (spatial and time constraints; perceived newsworthiness; dominant societal norms; audience considerations; political views of media outlets and so on), the mainstream media can never offer us a full and unbiased picture, but instead uses language and imagery to provide us with representations of reality. Something which has been of key concern to many media discourse scholars is how media texts represent individuals and/or certain groups (sometimes called ‘social actors’, following van Leeuwen 2008). Through naming and visual strategies, certain aspects of identity can be foregrounded, often in quite subtle ways. Media communications often reinforce – or at least correspond to – various societal hierarchies or groupings, as Gill (2007: 7) argues: ‘We live in a world that is stratified along lines of gender, race, ethnicity, class, age, disability, sexuality and location, and in which the privileges, disadvantages and exclusions associated with such categories are unevenly distributed.’ These privileges, disadvantages and exclusions are, to a large extent, reflected in mainstream media discourse.

English Language researchers working in these areas of media representation tend to use methods typically (although not exclusively) associated with Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). As Media English research is concerned with exactly *how* and *why* particular language is used in authentic contexts, it draws upon Foucault’s (1972) concept of discourse. Foucault posits that society and societal practices shape language use; therefore, analysis of language use should reveal the users’ ideology, that is, the system ‘of ideas, beliefs and practices’ of that individual or social group (Mayr 2008: 10). Both within and beyond English Language study, there exist various definitions of what power is and what it might entail in different contexts. Power is often viewed at both individual and group levels. These levels are especially relevant when we consider how much power individual citizens have in relation to wider societal structures which can be, to a large extent, greatly outside of their control. In general terms, power can be conceptualised as privileged access to social resources such as education and wealth.

Within most broadly democratic societies, power tends to refer to the somewhat nuanced ways in which groups legitimise this privilege (see Simpson and Mayr 2010). Broadly, this conceptualisation of power connects to Gramsci’s (1971) concept of hegemony, as the ‘naturalisation’ of these ideas helps to reinforce the existing power structures. Within this context of power relations in Media English, the producer of the discourse should also be carefully considered. According to various metrics (e.g. the Reporters Without Borders World

Press Freedom Index), the press is relatively 'free' in many English-speaking contexts, in terms of the lack of overt censorship. However, the picture becomes complicated when we consider the political leanings of various media outlets which are often owned or funded by political parties or influential individuals. For certain newspapers, for example, there will therefore be reader expectations in terms of the content and style. Thus, consideration of language and power affects many levels of media texts.

This connection between language and power is significant for Media English research as it is often via mainstream media's communication systems that some groups' ideas are legitimised whilst others are delegitimised (Simpson and Mayr 2010: 2). However, dominant views may shift over time and according to socioeconomic developments. Media institutions therefore have power in that their positions, viewpoints and ideologies can be both privileged and disseminated widely. This power can be challenged and/or negotiated to a certain extent, both in terms of producing alternative media content – consider, for example, the rise of non-mainstream and social media sources, which will be explored later in this chapter – and by contesting disseminated ideas. Historically, studies of the media have considered two opposing power differentials – 'media power' versus 'people power' – although the reality tends to be more complex. Early constructions of the reader/addressee/viewer as somewhat passive and receptive (the so-called media 'effects' audience research model) have been superseded latterly by constructions of a more active, critical and inquiring media consumer (the 'uses and gratifications' model). This emphasis on reader autonomy is reflected, to some extent, in Reader Response research which considers the role and views of the text's audience(s). However, when discussing the reader in Media English, a careful balance must be struck: in according the reader agency, the ubiquity of media discourse and the often problematic assumptions found there – especially in terms of discursive representations of particular groups or individuals – must be acknowledged.

Particular groups or individuals may be portrayed in a range of ways in media texts. These portrayals do not necessarily reflect lived realities. In terms of gender, research into the area of media representation has examined how ideas about masculinity and femininity are reproduced, most often in gender-targeted media texts. Scholars have considered the construction of the female body in magazine and advertising discourse (e.g. Jeffries 2007; Talbot 2010) and explored how norms about masculinity are circulated in the mainstream media (e.g. Benwell 2004). The highly gendered domain of cosmetics advertising language in particular has also been examined from this perspective, with research exploring how dominant conceptualisations of the body are reproduced and reinforced (e.g. Harrison 2008; Ringrow 2016). Similarly, media representations of sexuality have also been explored within the expanding field of language and sexuality studies (see Baker 2008). In many cases, media representations of sexuality often intersect with discourses about gender norms.

In the current sociopolitical climate in which 'difference' is often (over)emphasised, the media's representation of race and ethnicity is subject to much scrutiny. Following Islamist attacks throughout the world, media scholars are increasingly interested in the portrayal of perpetrators, of Islam itself, and of Muslims more widely, generally in the context of increasing concern over Islamophobia in the Western media. Research into the (mis)representation of Muslims and Islam in contemporary British press – often using corpus linguistic approaches – reveals how language contributes to this notion of 'difference' or 'othering' (e.g. Baker et al. 2013). Similarly, investigations into media representations of immigration reveals discourses of fear and exclusion (e.g. Gabrielatos and Baker 2008; Hanson-Easey et al. 2014). Media depictions of (perceived) class can also be extremely revealing, with much contemporary research focused on representations of people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds which often give rise to claims of misrepresentation and tend

to obscure issues of social inequality, thereby ‘preserv[ing] the dominance of those in powerful political positions’ (Bennett 2013: 161; see also Jones 2011). Mainstream media representations of political movements and political figures tend to intersect with dominant ideas about class, social structure and economics (see for example the LSE’s Media and Communication research project on mainstream media representations of the Labour party leader Jeremy Corbyn, 2016; see also Wodak 2015).

The potential effects of media representation on both the various groups and individuals themselves (for example, whether they have been fairly represented) and on the reader/addressee of the text (in terms of how they engage with the ideas portrayed) must also be considered. If we consider the area of gender and advertising, the relationship between media, gender and identity is incredibly complex but certainly most scholars agree that it is highly unlikely that media ideals have no effect whatsoever on at least some of the target audience. Although many consumers are increasingly critical, the constructs represented in advertising and other media discourses are often pervasive. As such, alternative ways of thinking and being may involve substantial conceptual shifts (Jeffries 2007). Media representations of people who appear ‘different’ may reinforce what van Dijk (1991) calls ‘us/them’ discourses, in which similarities are ignored and binary opposites are often preferred (see Davies 2013).

### Traditional print media

Analyses of what we might term ‘traditional’ print media within English Language studies have focused predominantly on the discourse of newspapers. These analyses have often approached newspaper language from the perspective of CDA and/or SFL (Systemic Functional Linguistics), especially in terms of power and ideology (see Fowler 1991; Fairclough 1995a, 1995b; Richardson 2006). Newspapers are generally stratified in terms of (perceived) social class, education level, political leanings and so on. Media scholars have therefore historically been interested in exploring how, though text and imagery, print publications appeal to their demographics and how they represent certain social groups, especially groups with limited social power (e.g. Richardson and Machin 2008). Some studies of print newspaper discourse have considered evaluation (in SFL terms), exploring possible distinctions between tabloid and broadsheet newspapers (see Bednarek 2006). Within this context, much research has also investigated what makes certain stories more likely to appear in news media than others, i.e. the *news values* that help to explain both news content, salience and editorial stances in particular social, cultural and national contexts (e.g. Bell 1991; Bednarek and Caple 2017). These news values have recently been adapted to apply to online as well as traditional forms of news discourse, particularly in the context of the now 24-hour news cycle (e.g. Clarke 2017). Further contemporary research within Media English has considered the influence of ‘new’ media on these older forms, which often leads to hybrid, interactive texts (e.g. readers’ online comments on newspaper articles). This interactivity is having an increasing impact upon discourse and communication conventions, not least in terms of im/politeness and in/civility (e.g. Neurauter-Kessels 2011) and in terms of why and how readers engage with news articles (e.g. Blom and Reinecke Hansen 2015 on ‘clickbait’). It is worth considering whether traditional print media will see drastic overhauls in terms of style, content and format as a consequence of the increase of online news media, and thinking more about how these different media affect one another. For example, Fairclough’s comments on the ‘conversationalisation’ of public discourse (the creation of a ‘public colloquial’ language; see Fairclough 1995a) could be revisited, given the likelihood of further developments in print newspaper discourse as a result of its increasingly popular online counterpart.

Another area of traditional print media focus within Media English research has been advertising discourse, especially the examination of print advertising from critical linguistic and stylistic perspectives (see Cook 2001). This kind of research has broadly considered how advertisers identify strategies to tailor their content towards their target demographic, often (although not exclusively) in terms of gender and lifestyle (e.g. Williamson 1978; Goffman 1979). Multimodal approaches to printed advertising texts have also considered how visual grammar works with textual grammar in the often image-saturated domain of print advertising (see for example Forceville 1996). With regards to female-targeted advertisements in particular, women's bodies tend to be constructed in these kinds of texts as always needing 'work' in order to fix 'problems' and therefore conform to particular beauty standards (Lazar 2011; Ringrow 2016). In adherence to these standards, the fat female body symbolises a lack of discipline and control (Murray 2008) and ageing is seen as something which is unwanted and needs to be disguised (Coupland 2007). With male-targeted print advertisements for cosmetics, linguistic analyses have explored the general lack of emphasis on ageing in addition to an attempt on behalf of advertisers to appeal to homo- and heterosexual audiences (e.g. Coupland 2007; Harrison 2008, 2012). In a similar vein, print lifestyle magazines are often highly gendered in terms of both text and imagery (e.g. Jeffries 2007; Benwell 2004), and thus address a certain kind of reader/audience.

As a consequence of the effects of digitisation on print media, contemporary research in the area focuses as much – if not more – on its online counterparts. As such, insights into language use in digital communication, and in particular the consequences of its characteristic interactivity, are increasingly drawn upon when investigating what was once the most ubiquitous form of media text but is now a rapidly-mutating genre.

### **Broadcast media**

As mentioned above, the increasing digitisation of media output has resulted in a generic hybridity which increasingly confounds categorisation and renders a distinction drawn on the basis of 'new' versus 'traditional' increasingly problematic. As such, this distinction is not applied here; rather, the current section will focus on broadcast media – applying the term in its narrower sense to refer to radio and television – while the following section focuses on social media.

From the 1920s onwards, radio rapidly grew in popularity, with the first British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) radio broadcast taking place in 1922. In its coverage of a wide range of subject matter – from news and entertainment to factual programming – radio began to generate a vast array of varying text types, including talk shows, radio phone-ins, documentary programmes and advertisements, many of which were subsequently adapted for television. Television was first broadcast in the UK in 1936 and by the late 1970s it was integral to most people's daily lives, outstripping radio as the dominant source of news and entertainment (Branston and Stafford, 2010: 261). Unlike, perhaps, other media forms, the ideological underpinnings of these new media platforms were made fiercely explicit, at least in the UK. From the outset, the BBC monopolised both British radio and television broadcasting and while its core mission to 'inform, educate and entertain' audiences was deemed patronisingly middle-class and elitist by many, it was nonetheless an ideology to which all subsequent new UK television and radio stations had to adhere. While such ideological transparency is not unproblematic, its absence is undoubtedly more so; the objectivity of US television's Fox News Channel, for example, is consistently compromised by its deep-rooted yet largely unacknowledged political biases.



Consideration of contextual factors is crucial to all discourse analysis, and particularly in the case of broadcast media; Goffman (1967) referred to its output as ‘talk’ – meaning the casual and everyday exchange of conversation – rather than language, asserting that the former term situates language firmly in its context of use. The development of the internet has had a significant impact upon all aspects of radio and televisual communication, largely due to its alteration of their contexts of production and consumption, as noted above. All broadcast talk is intended for public consumption and marked by its ‘double articulation’, i.e. it is a ‘communicative interaction between those participating in discussion, interview, game show or whatever and, at the same time, is designed to be heard by absent audiences’ (Scannell 1991: 1). While broadcasters cannot control the context in which their output is received, successful broadcasting involves using language which shows understanding of these contexts. The preference, primarily dictated by the domestic sphere in which broadcast talk is received, is for language which mimics the intimacy and interaction of informal conversation; interestingly, in their mimicry of a one-to-one broadcast mode, radio and television are considered to constitute ‘the end, not the extension, of mass communication’ (see Scannell 1991: 3–4).

Latterly however, contexts of production and consumption are frequently conflated as a result of the unprecedented interactivity facilitated by the digital age, with many television programmes adopting internet-enabled technology to encourage participation from audiences seated in the comfort of their own living rooms. The traditionally ‘absent’ audience is becoming increasingly present as listeners and viewers are invited to engage further with and/or comment upon programme content by using their electronic devices to access, for example, a programme’s Facebook and/or Twitter accounts. The arrival of the digital age, while not changing the primacy of radio or television within the domestic sphere, has however dramatically altered the ways in which audiences access broadcast output. For example, cameras are increasingly installed in radio studios, thereby encouraging radio listeners to simultaneously become viewers of the radio presenters and their guests; similarly, the increase in online television viewing prompted the Broadcast Audience Research Board (BARB) – the official source for UK audience viewing figures since 1981 – to include online television viewing figures from September 2015.

Despite its longevity and popularity, radio has suffered a comparative degree of investigative neglect, being, as Tolson notes, a ‘relatively “forgotten” medium’ (Tolson 2006: 3). And while television broadcasting has been the subject of a considerable degree of academic enquiry, mainly within the fields of media and cultural studies, the focus has largely been on its subject matter rather than its discursive practices. In particular, and despite the centrality of language – and spoken discourse in particular – to their output, there is a paucity of research on the *form* of both radio and television discourse when compared to other media genres. As Lorenzo-Dus (2009: 2–3) notes, this is in part because researchers are acutely aware of the difficulties of paying sufficient attention to the all-important contexts of production and consumption when investigating broadcast media texts.

While both radio and television are generically ‘slippery’ media, television, with its increased multimodality, is characterised by ‘fluid formats and self-reflexive economy’ which enable it to fulfil its function as ‘the prime purveyor of a postmodern sensibility’ (Stempel-Mumford 1995: 20). However, this also makes television a difficult object of formal study as effective analysis of such a multimodal genre requires interdisciplinary expertise which many researchers, up to now, did not have. None of this is aided by the perception that, as Tolson notes, ‘[t]he products of TV and radio seem transitory and ephemeral and at best their consumption is a routine form of leisure’ (Tolson 2006: 5). What has been overlooked until

recently is that radio and television output simultaneously shapes and is shaped by our discursive practices, and, as is the case with all media, studying their communicative mechanisms affords scholars yet another means of interrogating the relationship between language and societal practice.

Early media theorists such as Fiske and Hartley (1978) constructed television as fulfilling the traditional social role of storyteller within a community – a role which can also be attributed to radio – assisting not in the generation but rather in the dissemination and, crucially, interpretation of news and information; in the role of storyteller, mediation is foregrounded. Within this model, broadcast media output takes on a distinctly narrative form operating on two levels: firstly, using terms taken from Young (1987), each programme can be considered a ‘taleworld’ in that it tells its own story which is driven by a plot and peopled by characters; secondly, these characters themselves tell stories, forming their own metanarratives or ‘storyrealms’ (see Lorenzo-Dus 2009). These narratives in turn act as purveyors of identity, encouraging audiences to either identify with or ‘against’ the ideals of the social groups represented.

Much research into broadcast media discourse draws upon a combination of these techniques. Scannell (1991) is one such early example, with most contributions to this edited collection analysing the narrative structure of radio or television discourse in terms of how identity is performed, from the identity of the broadcast personality to the politician’s self-representation through talk (for more contemporary but similar examples see Bednarek 2010; Piazza et al. 2011). Research into how talk acts as a marker of control and/or identity has, in the past, largely focused on non-fiction television, and talk shows in particular (e.g. Thornborrow 2007); however, such research has extended into the increasingly popular genres of realist crime fiction and new non-fiction genres such as ‘true crime’, which are loaded with discursively-constructed power play (see Gregoriou 2011; Statham 2015).

In terms of audience, earlier research on broadcast media audiences largely identified their role as that of ‘overhearing recipient of a discourse’ (Montgomery 1986: 428) or ‘eavesdroppers on a cosy chat’ (Moss and Higgins 1979: 291); however, this is problematic given that these audiences, though absent, are nonetheless authorised. Contemporary research increasingly constructs audiences as legitimised, though absent, participants in a conversation, and endeavours to develop communication models which go beyond the traditionally dyadic to accommodate the unique interactional strategies typical of broadcast media. As a result, much of this research adopts a structural, largely Conversation Analysis perspective, often focusing, as noted by O’Keeffe, on ‘the discourse of interactions in broadcast settings’ and how this differs from casual conversation (O’Keeffe 2006: 1).

While textual analyses of the genre of reality television – also known as ‘popular factual entertainment’, or ‘actuality-based’ television – tend to mimic that of fictional television, they must nonetheless take into account a more diverse set of complexities when doing so, including the genre’s hybridity and problematic engagement with the notion of ‘real’, both of which affect how the participants in these programmes are represented. Indeed, the genre’s concern with participant performativity and display has ensured that much of the academic focus – coming not from linguistic but media and cultural studies’ perspectives – is on assessing how ‘real’ reality television is. Lorenzo-Dus and Blitvich (2013)’s work constitutes one of a limited number of linguistic approaches to reality television discourse. Here, reality television output drawn from an impressively diverse range of countries, including Argentina, Israel and China, is analysed, not only in terms of how social, national and individual identities are linguistically represented, but also how aggression and conflict – crucial elements in successful reality television programming – are constructed in these texts through linguistic im/politeness.

## Social media

Many newer digital text types come under the genre of social media, a term referring to all online platforms which encourage social interaction (Mandiberg 2012). Social media tends to be differentiated from mass media on the basis of interactivity: while the latter communicates via an indiscriminate ‘one-to-many’ broadcast mode, social media’s targeting of specific individuals/networks of individuals results in its characteristic interactivity. As noted elsewhere, this interactivity has changed the nature of much traditional print and broadcast media output, as digital media platforms are increasingly appropriated into their broadcast mechanism. The heterogeneity of social media genres, which includes a range of forums and platforms, reflects a corresponding hybridity of form, comprised as it is of both written and spoken discourse features.

Research on language use in digital communication developed along three distinct strands (see Barton and Lee 2013). Firstly, emphasis was placed on investigating the structural features seen as unique to online language use. This was followed by a more context-orientated strand of research, in which the theoretical observations of the first wave were augmented by situating them within their contexts of use. The findings of much of this research indicate the continuity between offline and online language use, as well as a continued interest in the narrative dimensions of new media typical of the research on broadcast media (see Zappavigna 2012; Seargeant and Tagg 2014). It also foregrounds the existence of new digital communities which use particular linguistic and interactional strategies to create online identities, including gender, sexual and ethnic (see Page 2012; Tagg 2012, 2015). The darker side of this online linguistic identity performance is manifest in the increasingly rampant phenomenon of ‘trolling’ or cyberbullying (see Pihlaja 2014; Hardaker 2015). The final strand is two-fold. Firstly, it focuses on language ideologies, addressing common misconceptions of the effect of digital communication on language standards or what Barton and Lee refer to as ‘techno panics’ (Barton and Lee 2013: 7). Secondly, it investigates the way language is talked about online, i.e. metalanguage. Cumulatively, these strands represent the primary purposes of analysing online language use: to investigate the extent to which these perplexingly hybrid media outputs represent unique and innovative language use at the structural level; to analyse online strategies of linguistic representation and self-presentation; and finally, to investigate the effect of online language use on language ‘standards’ overall. The extent to which language shapes reality is, in an online context, particularly evident. As such, the study of Media English online not only analyses how we use language in digital communication – and indeed, given that we do so largely as a means of identity performance and forging interpersonal bonds, such use is largely contiguous with its use in offline contexts – but how digitally mediated communications ‘extend and transform what people are already doing with language’ (Tagg 2015: 9).

Finally, much has been made of the collaborative nature of new media construction, a phenomenon encapsulated in descriptive terms such as ‘participatory media’ (Mandiberg 2012), which emphasise the perceived democratisation of the internet. This is perhaps most obvious in the rise of ‘citizen journalism’ – which takes place largely though not exclusively via online media platforms – where the public actively participate in the various information gathering, analysis and dissemination processes previously carried out exclusively by journalists (for more on citizen journalism see Allan 2013). However, in analysing new media, it is important to note that this purported democratisation only holds true up to a point, given the presence of editorial ‘gatekeeping’ in citizen journalism websites. This is also the case with social media; the content of wikis, though created wholly through collaboration, is nevertheless decided upon by an elite team of administrators, while the creators of a blog decide

which comments are suitable to remain on their site and which are deleted. As such, though new media genres – and social media in particular – may smooth out the hierarchies found in mass media broadcasting, they often re-establish them in alternative ways.

## Future directions

In the past two decades, changing sociocultural norms coupled with numerous technological developments have triggered seismic shifts in how media institutions operate, as touched upon throughout this chapter. The wide range and increasing variety of text types has altered the nature of our relationship with the media, replacing a largely unidirectional broadcast mechanism with one characterised by a bidirectional interactivity which increasingly blurs the boundaries between producer and consumer. Simultaneously because of and despite this increased interactivity, the influence of the media in today's society has arguably never been stronger. As such, the study of Media English remains buoyant, with a number of key trends in future research likely to dominate, namely, interdisciplinary studies; the politics of media representation; and research into language abuse, especially in the digital domain.

Research into Media English is expanding in an increasingly interdisciplinary fashion and is likely to continue in this vein. This is evidenced in a number of areas within the study of Media English. For example, increasing awareness of the importance of non-linguistic semiotic modes – including colour, sound and movement – has stimulated much research into the visual and auditory grammar of media communication. Proponents of what has become known as Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis have analysed the various means by which non-linguistic semiotic modes communicate individually, in tandem with each other and alongside a text's linguistic modes to communicate meaning (see Machin and Mayr 2012; see also Kress and van Leeuwen 1996; Kress 2010; Dancygier and Sweetser 2012). This multimodal research also takes numerous forms; for example, one recent study analyses multimodality in the context of the effects of digitisation on traditional media (see Bednarek and Caple 2016 on print media). Finally, multimodal approaches themselves are, in turn, becoming increasingly interdisciplinary. Lukes and Hart (2007), for example, integrate insights from cognitive linguistics into multimodal and linguistic CDA approaches while Bednarek (2015) uses corpus-assisted techniques in her analysis of the multimodal construction of television and film narratives.

Research in the field also continues to interrogate the politics of media representation, as issues of personal, social, cultural, national and political identity are increasingly discursively constructed (see Stoegner and Wodak 2016). As suggested in the fourth section, political tensions and developments on a global stage have led to an increased interest in interrogating representations of Muslims and of Islam, especially in media discourses. In this vein, Törnberg and Törnberg (2016) examine the (largely homogenous and extremist) representation of Muslims and Islam in social media over time, while Pihlaja and Thompson (2017) use focus groups to investigate how young British Muslim students respond to and engage with negative media narratives about Muslims, especially in the aftermath of terrorist attacks. Another area of increased interest to Media English researchers is the representation of marriage, romantic relationships and parenting, especially in online media contexts. This interest can perhaps in part be attributed to societal changes, such as the increased popularity of online dating sites; the progression of legalising same-sex marriage in many parts of the world; the increased visibility of what we might broadly call 'non-traditional' relationships (cohabiting couples, civil partnerships, same-sex parents, polyamorous relationships, etc.); and the growth in online spaces for parenting discussions (via dedicated blogs and discussion forums). Recent linguistic research in these areas includes Mackenzie's (2017) work on the

discursive construction of parenting on the UK Mumsnet website and Jones et al.'s (2017) research on the identity politics of naming (including name-changing) practices for British couples.

As a phenomenon which raises issues of authenticity, authorship and audience reception, 'fake news' is also likely to generate new research from media linguistics. In essence, fake news involves the purposeful dissemination of false information via traditional broadcast media. As a form of political propaganda, its use dates back to ancient times but was greatly facilitated by the rise of mass media communication in the twentieth century. Its notoriety has, however, substantially increased in recent times, largely due to the purported impact of fake news upon events of national and international import, such as government elections and national referendums (though the disseminators of fake news in such cases have tended to be members of small-scale groups rather than state-sponsored propagandists). Social media is very much implicated in the contemporary rise of fake news. In their investigation into the effect of fake news on the 2016 US presidential elections, Allcott and Gentzkow (2017), for instance, note the pivotal role played by social media in its circulation and ultimate impact.

The anonymity typical of many channels of digital communication has generated a 'darker side' of language use in online contexts. As delineated above, the study of Media English is increasingly orientated towards investigation of the language and shifting contexts of digital and, in particular, social, media, with the latest research in the field replacing traditional linguistic concepts with bespoke terms more adept at capturing the nuances of internet language use, and placing these terms within various societal contexts. As a result, research into the origins, contextual use and, as appropriate, effects of bespoke internet language will no doubt abound. Of relevance here, for instance, is Thurlow's (2017) recent semiotic analysis of 'sexting', in which he explores how mainstream media discourses are used to both represent and discipline sex and sexuality. In addition, the internet's darker side is beginning to attract the attention of Media English scholars interested in the language used to construct these online communities. Lawson and McGlashan (2017), for example, investigate gender identity performance in online 'pick up artist' communities while Hardaker and McGlashan (2016) analyse the linguistic and identity politics of Twitter rape threats.

## Conclusion

Media English is a problematic category, comprised of disparate and at times indistinguishable bodies of texts whose hybridity has increased rapidly as a result of digitisation. It is a broad term referring to the ways in which the English language is used to construct reality through media platforms, such as the front cover of a print newspaper, the advertisements in a magazine, a radio programme, a text message or a tweet. Contemporary media research increasingly addresses the impact on the media landscape brought by digitisation, which has resulted both in the creation of new media platforms and the reformation of the old. One of the most significant changes has been in terms of media interactivity, resulting in the transformation of a previously unidirectional broadcast mechanism to one which is bidirectional and increasingly dialogic. Yet such interactivity is not unproblematic, resulting in an increasing abuse of the privileges of online communication. In the future, research in this field will no doubt continue to investigate the media's evolution and diversification into increasingly more interactive and multimodal forms, as well as investigating the challenges wrought by the increasing complexities of media forms and outputs. Language, however, continues to be a core communicative and discursive tool which mirrors the changing society in which contemporary media operates. The language of

the media, in particular, simultaneously creates and refracts our reality; as such, it will always constitute a worthy and indeed crucial area of English Language study.

### Further reading

- Fairclough, N. (1992) *Discourse and Social Change*. Cambridge: Polity Press. Explicitly laying out the central tenets and methods of CDA, this is an erudite introduction to the relationship between discourse and society.
- Fowler, R. (1991) *Language in the News: Discourse and Ideology in the Press*. London: Routledge. Fowler examines how language mediates reality, focusing on how newspaper representations reflect social constructions of power, ideology, gender and authority.
- Tagg, C. (2015) *Exploring Digital Communication*. London: Routledge. A key text representing current and future directions in the flourishing medium of digital communication.

### Related topics

- World Englishes: disciplinary debates and future directions
- Language, gender and sexuality
- Persuasive language
- The language of social media.

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