

News Discourse and Its Influence on Readers

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This paper investigates the ways in which readers interpret a news editorial on the basis of cultural assumptions formulated partly under the influence of the media they are associated with. For this investigation, questionnaires (English and Japanese versions) on the discourse of whaling were administered to 30 Japanese postgraduate students and 30 British, European and North American academics, researchers and teachers. In addition, seven EFL students also participated in filling in the questionnaire. The result shows that in the case of the English version, the majority of the non-Japanese respondents were anti-whaling, while most of the Japanese version respondents (Japanese) were either neutral or pro-whaling. This is clearly reflected in their interpretation of the text. The English respondents overwhelmingly supported the editor's anti-whaling stance despite pointing out the excessive use of emotive language. By contrast, most of the Japanese respondents showed strong disagreement with the editor's attitude, pointing out the lack of evidence and information. Although the result does not necessarily show that this single editorial had a direct influence on the respondents, there are nonetheless some indications of the ways in which naïve readers could be influenced by the media. Finally, the paper discusses implications of this study for language pedagogy.

This paper is an attempt to investigate the relationship between readers' cultural assumptions, beliefs and values and their interpretation and perception of news discourse, focusing specifically on the British press.

News discourse has been extensively studied in the past by commentators,

for example, from the perspective of media and sociolinguistics (Bell, 1991; Bell & Garrett, 1998), of critical linguistics (Fowler, 1991; Fowler, Hodge, Kress & Trew, 1979; Hodge & Kress, 1993; Simpson, 1993; Trew, 1979), of critical linguistics and social theory (Fairclough, 1989, 1992, 1995a, 1995b, 1998, 2000), and of social cognition (van Dijk, 1988, 1993, 1996, 1998).

Their approach, however, is not free from limitations, and it has been critically scrutinized mainly for the inadequacy of the linguistic analysis. In particular, there has been strong criticism of the analysis of limited lexical items and grammatical features, which are seemingly chosen arbitrarily to meet their specific interpretation, and of the lack of objective supports (Stubbs, 1994, 1996, 1997; Widdowson, 1995a, 1995b, 1996, 1998, 2000a,b, among others).

Apart from the limitations of the method and scope of analysis, the lack of attention to the production and reception stages of news making has also been pointed out (Fairclough, 2000; Garrett & Bell, 1998; van Dijk, 1998).

This paper therefore specifically explores the reader's interpretation and perception of a news article. Critics have also repeatedly pointed out that such a reader's perspective has often been neglected in an approach to news discourse based on critical discourse analysis, which, according to Widdowson (2000a), heavily relies on first person selective interpretation of a text. He points out the importance of introducing a second person, ethnographic perspective.

This view is confirmed by the ethnographer John Brewer (Brewer, 2000), who points out the importance of '[asking] people for their views, meanings and constructions' (p.35) in social research. Or, according to Hammersley (1992), 'one of the most valuable features of ethnography' is 'its commitment to seeking to *understand* the perspectives of others, rather than simply judging them as true or false' (p.45).

Accordingly, this paper investigates how readers from different cultural backgrounds interpret and react to the same newspaper commentary. It also attempts to explore how readers might be influenced by the cumulative effect of specific news discourse they are familiar with, by cross-referencing their attitudes and their interpretation of the text. This has been carried out by

administering a questionnaire which includes a news commentary on whaling published in *The Independent*, one of the four quality daily broadsheet newspapers in Britain. Whaling is a highly culture-specific, ecological, economic and political issue, and thus, it is a topic which will facilitate the observation of different cultural or what Widdowson (forthcoming) terms 'pretextual assumptions', i.e., those assumptions which readers bring in when reading and interpreting a text. The interpretation and perception of the same text could be greatly different among people from different sociocultural backgrounds.

METHOD AND INFORMANTS

The English and the Japanese questionnaires were administered to three different groups, 30 Japanese students (the Japanese version), 30 English professional respondents (the English version), and to seven secondary-level EFL students (the English version). The Japanese respondents consisted mainly of postgraduate students studying at four different colleges and universities in Britain¹ at the time of the administration of the questionnaire. The English questionnaire was completed by British (22), European (4), North and Central American (3) and Taiwanese (1) academics, researchers, teachers, and research students² (hereafter 'English professionals'). The seven sixth-form college EFL students were mostly from central European countries.

¹ These include Goldsmiths College, the Institute of Education and King's College of the University of London and the University of Warwick. They were all enrolled as MA or PhD students at these competitive colleges/ universities; therefore, their proficiency levels were regarded high. I would like to thank the colleagues and the students at these institutions for their cooperation.

² These are from four different colleges and universities in Britain, which include the Institute of Education, Leeds Metropolitan University, the University of Warwick and Croydon College.

The questionnaires consisted of three parts, of which the first part asked general background questions, including which newspapers they generally read. The second part asked the respondents' opinions about the issue of whaling, i.e., whether they were anti-, pro-whaling, or neutral regarding the issue, and the reasons for their stance. The third part, which consisted of three questions and was the main focus of this study, asked for interpretation and opinions about a news commentary on whaling. The first question of the third part of the questionnaire asked whether they agreed with the author's anti-whaling opinion and if 'yes/no', 'why'. The second question asked whether after reading the commentary, they had changed the opinion about whaling they had given in Question 1 in Part II, i.e., whether they were pro-, anti-whaling or neutral. The third question invited general comments on the commentary. The respondents were asked to complete the second part of the questionnaire before the third to see if any change of opinions on whaling could be seen after reading the commentary (see Appendix for the questionnaire).³

PROCEDURES FOR THE ANALYSIS

As the questionnaires were basically designed for qualitative analysis, the responses were studied carefully by the present author and researcher, cross-referencing particularly Question 1 in Part II, which asked the respondents' opinions about whaling and Questions 1 and 2 in Part III, which respectively asked the respondents' opinion about the commentary listed at the beginning of Part III and whether their opinions about whaling had changed or not after reading it. In this process, there emerged four main opinion types in their responses to Question 1 in Part III: 'agree', 'agree' but with certain reservation ('agree, but'), 'neutral', and 'disagree', instead of two clear-cut types of 'agree' or 'disagree'. This is because there were quite a few respondents who, while agreeing with the author, pointed out his/her excess

³ The questionnaires were administered in Britain between November 2000 and January 2001.

use of emotive language and the credibility of the information. These were classified as 'agree, but' or 'agreement with (+) certain awareness'. There were also some respondents who, while retaining their anti-whaling opinion in principle, showed strong disagreement with the use of language and one-sided information, and claimed to be neutral, withholding their judgment. They were classified as 'neutral', which in other words means that the respondents were critically aware (+critical awareness) of the use of language and information. Question 2 in Part III was analyzed in relation to Question 1 in Part III. This was because quite often the responses in Questions 1 and 2 contradicted each other since there was a tendency that the respondents would not admit that they had changed their opinions even though some indication of changes had been detected in the responses to Question 1 in Part III. Thus, the analysis of the responses to Question 1 was prioritized over their literal response to Question 2, Part III.

In contrast to 'agreement with (+) certain awareness', complete agreement was classified as 'agreement without (-) awareness' because the respondents here did not seem to be aware of the use of language at all in their comment, or rather, they used the same language positively as the author in stating their anti-whaling opinion. 'Disagreement', under close scrutiny, was also divided into two types despite the same categorization on the surface: 1. disagreement with both the author's opinion and the use of language and information, and 2. strong disagreement with the use of language and information, while retaining their anti-whaling opinion. On the basis of this classification, the data were reanalyzed.

ANALYSIS OF THE RESPONDENTS' OPINIONS ABOUT WHALING BEFORE READING THE COMMENTARY

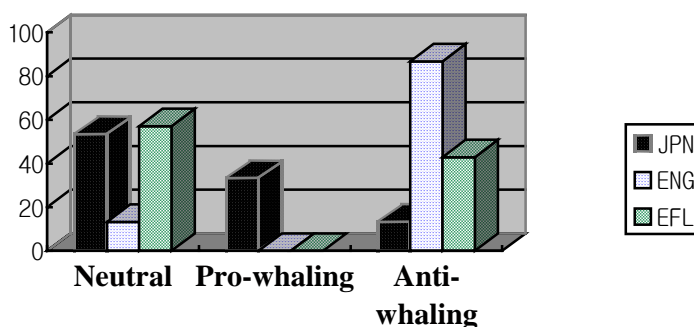
The result of Question 1 in Part II, which asked the respondents' opinion about whaling, revealed that more than half (16 – 53.4%) of the 30 Japanese respondents took a neutral stance towards whaling, while 33.3% (10)

regarded themselves as pro-whaling and only 13.3% (4) as anti-whaling (see Table 1 and Figure 1).

TABLE 1
Opinions about Whaling before Reading the Commentary

Opinions on whaling	Number of respondents (%)		
	JPN	ENG	EFL
Neutral	16 (53.4)	4 (13.3)	4 (57.1)
Pro – whaling	10 (33.3)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
Anti-whaling	4 (13.3)	26 (86.7)	3 (42.9)
TOTAL	30 (100.0)	30 (100.0)	7 (100.0)

FIGURE 1
Opinions about Whaling before Reading the Commentary



The majority of the English professional respondents (26 – 86.7%) were anti-whaling. No English-version respondents regarded themselves as pro-whaling although there were four (13.3%), who opted for neutral. More than half (4) of the seven EFL respondents (57.1%) opted for neutral on the grounds of lack of information and the rest (3 – 42.9%) were all anti-whaling (see Table 1). Although the percentage of neutral respondents was high both with the Japanese (53.4%) and EFL respondents (57.1%), the nature of neutrality differed between the two: the former chose neutral because most of them knew both the anti- and pro-whaling arguments well, whereas the latter decided to be neutral because they lacked information on whaling.

ANALYSIS OF THE RESPONDENTS' OPINIONS ABOUT THE COMMENTARY AND THE CHANGE OF OPINIONS ABOUT WHALING AFTER READING IT

The results of Part III of the questionnaires, which invited the respondents' comments on the editorial commentary (Question 1) and asked whether their opinion on whaling had changed after reading it (Question 2), are divided, on the basis of the informants' reactions to the commentary, into four main opinion types as stated earlier:

1. Agree (complete agreement/agreement without awareness (agreement – awareness))
2. Agree, but (agreement with certain awareness (agreement + awareness))
3. Neutral (critical awareness)
4. Disagreement (with the opinion)

The responses are also classified according to direct and indirect influences on the respondents. These were decided by comparing the respondents' opinions about the commentary in Question 1 and their responses to Questions 2, which asked the influence of the commentary on them. The responses to Question 2 were not taken at face value, since quite often their literal responses contradicted what they commented on in response to Question 1, there being a tendency to deny that they had been influenced by the commentary. The responses were, therefore, studied in detail cross-referencing the responses to the two questions. In the following section, we shall first examine the results from the perspectives of the influences, and then on the basis of the four opinion types presented above.

Direct and Indirect Influences

The influences were characterized by a drastic change of attitudes towards whaling after reading the commentary, which showed that the respondents

cooperated with the author's 'pretextual purposes' (Widdowson, forthcoming) and came to have the same view as him/her.⁴ I have divided these into two types: direct and indirect influences. The latter shows a much subtler form of influence, mainly through intertextuality (Fairclough, 2003).

Direct Influence (Complete Agreement/ Agreement – Awareness)

Direct influence was most clearly observed in the responses of four of the seven EFL and five of the 30 Japanese respondents. The four out of the seven EFL respondents⁵, who claimed to be neutral on this issue at the outset (see the result of Question 1, Part II in Table 1) mainly on the grounds of lack of information or interest, stated that they agreed with the commentary, one even clearly stating that his opinion had changed after reading it as can be seen in the following:

Ex 1.1 (Neutral Agree, i.e. Anti-whaling)

My answer was neutral, but now when I realize the situation I prefer to be anti-whaling, because pro-whaling means jeopardize(sic) its existence.

(Answer by EFL 1 to Q2, Part III)

The other three neutral EFL respondents clearly stated that they had agreed with the author in their responses to Question 1, thus, indicating the change of their opinions as can be seen in the following examples:

⁴ There can also be a type of influence which works against the author's 'pretextual purposes', i.e., some Japanese 'neutral' respondents strongly disagreed with the author's excess use of emotive language, which can be regarded as reverse effect. This type of 'negative' influence, however, is not included in the categories of influence here since the paper is looking at the 'positive' (from the author's side) influence of the author's 'pretextual' purposes, which is, in this case, to persuade the readers to understand 'anti-whaling' causes.

⁵ They were mostly from central European countries. There were, however, also one from Sierra Leone and another from Sri Lanka. Their English proficiency levels were approximately at Cambridge First Certificate Level or Pittman's Intermediate Level.

Ex. 1.2 (Neutral Agree, i.e. Anti-whaling)

I agree with the author because if they killing (sic) the whales will disappear. (Answer by EFL 2 to Q1, Part III)

Ex. 1.3 (Neutral Agree, i.e. Anti-whaling)

Yes I agree with the author because if they continue doing that the whales and Byeds(sic) disappear soon. (Answer by EFL 3 to Q1, Part III)

Ex. 1.4 (Neutral Agree, i.e. Anti-whaling)

Yes, I agree with the author, because of (sic) they keep killing whales with the passing of the time they will disappear.

(Answer by EFL 4 to Q1, Part III)

Thus, they changed their neutrality on the issue after reading the commentary and agreed with the author on the basis of his/her account. The responses of these EFL informants therefore appear to indicate that those who were not well informed about the issue tended to agree with the author, cooperating with his/her pretextual purposes directly and accepting the information at face value (see Table 2).

Similarly, four Japanese 'neutral' and one 'pro-whaling' respondents came to agree with the author after reading the commentary (see Table 2), although one of the 'neutral' respondents (JPN 5) only partially agreed with the author's opinion and another (JPN 17) cast doubt on the credibility of the information. The Japanese neutral-cum-anti-whaling respondents claimed to be neutral at the outset because they were concerned about the decrease of the whale population while agreeing with a regulated whale catch; thus, they classified themselves as neutral (JPNs 5, 6 & 7).⁶ However, after reading the commentary, they accepted the author's assertions and agreed with his/her anti-whaling opinion. The one 'pro-whaling' respondent who completely

⁶ These Japanese 'neutral' respondents were, strictly speaking, 'pro-whaling', judging from the standard of the British (or non-Japanese) respondents since the former agreed with regulated 'scientific' whaling, whereas most of the latter disagreed with any form of whaling whether scientific or commercial.

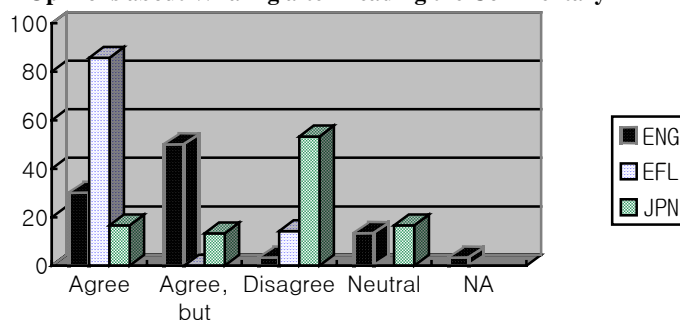
changed his opinion did so because he was persuaded by the author's assertion that the number of catches per annum was too large.

TABLE 2
Opinions about Whaling after Reading the Commentary

Opinions	JPN	(%)	English	(%)	EFL	(%)
Agree (Anti)	5(N4,P1)	(16.7)	9(A9)*	(30)	6(A2,N4)	(85.7)
Agree, but (Anti, but)	4(A4)	(13.3)	15(A14,N1)	(50)		
Disagree (Pro)	16(N8,P8)	(53.3)	1(A1)	(3.3)	1(A1)	(14.3)
Neutral	5(N4, P1)	(16.7)	4(A1, N3)	(13.4)		
NA			1(A1)	(3.3)		
TOTAL	30(A4,N16,P1)	(100.0)	30(A26,N4)	(100.0)	7(A3,N4)	(100.0)

• The letters in parentheses indicate the respondents' opinions about whaling shown in their response to Question 1 in Part II. Here, A stands for anti-whaling, N, neutral, and P, pro-whaling.

FIGURE 2
Opinions about Whaling after Reading the Commentary



Thus, these Japanese respondents also seemed to have taken the author's opinion at face value although not all of them agreed that they had been influenced by the commentary. Two of them, however, clearly admitted the change of opinions as follows:

Ex 1.5 (Neutral → Agree, i.e. Anti-whaling)

Henka shimashita. Kujira no niku ha oishii kedo nichijyoo no seikatsu de hitsuyoo fukaketsu na mono deha nai node. Jibunn tachi, Ningen to shite nakuteha naranai shizenn no sonzai wo kizutukerunoha yokunai desu.

(My opinion has changed. Although whale meat is delicious, it is not a necessity in everyday life. It is not good to destroy nature that is irreplaceable.) (Answer by JPN 6 to Q2 in Part III)

Ex 1.6 (Neutral Agree, i.e. Anti-whaling)

Kawaru. Jikken no tameni hoge wo suru no toha shiranakatta node, dato shitara 50-ttoo mo tukamaeru noha oosugiru kara.

(My opinion changed. I didn't know Japan caught whales for scientific research. If that is the case, we don't need to catch 50. The number is too large.) (Answer by JPN 7 to Q2 in Part III)

The pro-whaling respondent regarded himself as pro-whaling at the outset on condition that whaling was limited to scientific research. After reading the commentary, however, he changed his opinion and agreed completely with the anti-whaling commentary in that the size of the scientific whale catch per year was too large as can be seen in the following:

Ex 1.7 (Pro-whaling Agree, i.e., Anti-whaling)

Sansei. Nenkan no hoge-suu ga amari ni oosugiru. Mata kenkyuu kekka Oyobi nanno tame no kenkyuu ka ga meihakude nai.

(Agree. The size of the catch per year is too large. In addition, the result and the objectives of the scientific study are not clear.)

(Answer by JPN8 to Q1 in Part III)

Thus, the responses of the EFL and the Japanese respondents show that there is a tendency for those with limited information to interpret and accept the author's assertions at face value.

Indirect Influence (Agreement - Awareness & Agreement + Awareness)

Among the English professional respondents, there was also a strong tendency to deny that this single article had influenced their opinions. The

influence and its cumulative effects, however, appeared in a subtler manner and mostly at a subconscious level, or what Fairclough (2003) terms intertextuality. That is to say, their opinions in response to Question 1 echoed the author's in the use of vocabulary and other expressions although they denied that they had been influenced in response to Question 2 in Part III as can be seen in the following examples:

Ex 2.1 (Anti-whaling Agree, i.e. Anti-whaling) (Agreement – awareness)
--- There can be no justification for the *slaughter* of these creatures, and *certainly not scientific research*.--- (my emphasis, Answer to Q1 in Part III by a British male anti-whaling respondent, Br.3)

Ex 2.2 (Anti-whaling Agree, but, i.e. Anti-whaling) (Agreement + awareness)
Can't agree with someone using such emotive language. Want to know the truth of the matter, though I'm of the opinion that on the face of it, *killing whales* isn't a good idea when there are relatively few around & *there is the possibility of extinction*. (my emphasis, Answer to Q1 in Part III by a British female anti-whaling respondent, Br.14)

Ex 2.3 (Anti-whaling Agree, but, i.e., Anti-whaling) (Agreement + awareness)
I agree with the author that if the Japanese are *killing* whales for scientific research, then why should so many be *killed*. Although (sic) his last paragraph I find to be over the top. I don't think the Japanese simply want to *exterminate* whales! (my emphasis, Answer to Q1 in Part III by a British male anti-whaling respondent, Br. 11)

Here, the italicized expressions such as 'killing' and 'slaughter' are also used by the author, although it can not be proved that the respondents used them solely under the influence of this single commentary. However, the fact that these respondents tend to read the same newspaper(s) regularly according to the result of Question 1 in Part I of the questionnaire⁷ may partially support

⁷ The majority of the English respondents in the current study tend to read *The Guardian, The Observer, The Times, The Sunday Times, and The Independent*. As for the study on the discourse of whaling in the British press, see Murata 2001 and 2003.

the possibility of cumulative indirect influence since these newspapers tend to be characterized by anti-whaling discourse (see Murata, 2001, 2003) and since the main source of information is quite often the media they access. That is to say, there is likelihood of the respondents' reading similar types of anti-whaling reports and commentaries in the same newspaper(s) and this could have influenced the respondents cumulatively.⁸ We shall now move on to the examination of the four different opinion types.

Agreement: Complete Match of Pretextual Assumptions

This type is divided into two: 1) complete agreement with the author's opinion, i.e. anti-whaling, without (-) awareness of the use of emotive language and 2) agreement with (+) certain awareness.

Complete Agreement: Agreement without (-) Awareness (Agree!)

Nine out of 26 (34.6%) anti-whaling English professional respondents showed strong agreement with the author's opinion (see Table 2). Here, it seems the pretextual assumptions of the author and the informants matched completely. This is also demonstrated, for example, in their use of anti-whaling discourse in a similar manner to the author's in expressing their strong opposition to whaling as can be seen in the following examples:

Ex 2.1 (Anti-whaling Agree, i.e. Anti-whaling)

--- There can be no justification for the *slaughter* of these creatures, and *certainly not scientific research*.--- (my emphasis, Answer to Q1 in Part III by a British male anti-whaling respondent, Br.3)

Ex 2.4 (Anti-whaling Agree, i.e. Anti-whaling)

Yes I agree, I feel *scientific research is an excuse to cover the slaughter of whales to meet public consumption demands*. All the more so given the

⁸ The term 'exterminate' in Ex.2.3, however, could have been used intentionally to emphasize the author's use of emotive language, not just echoing his/her word.

large numbers *killed* and *any lack of findings* that this research is supposed to provide. (my emphasis, Answer to Q1 in Part III by a British male anti-whaling respondent, Br.4)

In these excerpts, the anti-whaling respondents use emotive expressions (italicized in the above extracts) such as ‘slaughter’ and ‘kill’, which are also used by the author. They also cast doubt on the use of ‘scientific research’ in the same manner as the author in stating their anti-whaling opinions. Two of the seven EFL respondents showed the same tendency (see Table 2). Thus, they showed complete agreement with the author by freely using the same emotive expressions. There were, however, some who showed certain awareness towards the use of emotive language.

Agreement with (+) Certain Awareness (Agree, but ---)

Fifteen out of 30 (50%) of the English professional respondents, including 14 anti-whaling and one neutral respondents, while agreeing with the commentary in principle, pointed out the excess use of emotive language by the author as represented in the following example:

Ex 2.2 (Anti-whaling Agree, but, i.e., Anti-whaling)

Can't agree with someone using such emotive language. Want to know the truth of the matter, though I'm of the opinion that on the face of it, killing whales isn't a good idea when there are relatively few around & there is the possibility of extinction. (my emphasis, Answer to Q1 in Part III by a British female anti-whaling respondent, Br.14)

The above respondent clearly states that she cannot agree with the author. However, here she is disagreeing with the author's use of language but not the opinion itself as she also makes clear. Interestingly though, she uses the same reasons and logic as the author when she states her opposition to whaling, even using some of the same emotive language as the author. This could be said to reveal the indirect influence of the author's opinion as stated earlier (or the cumulative influence of the exposure to the discourses of anti-

whaling). Thus, her response was classified under the ‘agreement with (+) awareness’ category (*Agree, but*).

Another respondent also points out the exaggerated use of emotive language by the author, while he himself uses the term ‘killing’ just as the author does, as follows:

Ex 2.3 (Anti-whaling Agree, but, i.e., Anti-whaling)

I agree with the author that if the Japanese are *killing* whales for scientific research, then why should so many be *killed*. Although (sic) *his last paragraph I find to be over the top*. I don’t think the Japanese simply want to *exterminate* whales! (my emphasis, Answer to Q1 in Part III by a British male anti-whaling respondent, Br. 11)

Thus, the above response clearly demonstrates a certain degree of intertextuality.

Four anti-whaling Japanese respondents were also placed in this category: while retaining their anti-whaling stance, they all pointed out the excess use of emotive language and the lack of well-balanced, sufficient information in the commentary (Answers by JPN 1, 2, 3 & 4). Thus, those placed in this category agreed with the author’s anti-whaling opinion, while criticizing the excessive use of emotive language. Moreover, some of these respondents, in stating their opinions, showed signs of the influence of the author’s anti-whaling discourse (or at least, intertextuality).

There were also some respondents whose awareness was even greater than those categorized under ‘agreement with awareness’ and who insisted that they remained neutral on the issue. They were classified as the ‘critical awareness’ group, i.e., neutral. We shall now turn to these respondents.

Neutral: Critical Awareness

This type of the respondent tended to be very well informed of the use of language in the news media or/and of the topic. Three of the English professionals who opted for ‘neutral’ at the outset (out of the total of four English professional ‘neutral’ respondents) were classified in this way. In

principle they agreed with the author's opinion, while strongly disagreeing with the use of emotive language and casting doubt on the credibility of the information. Although it is difficult to demarcate between the preceding category 'agreement with (+) certain awareness' ('Agree, but') and this category, the respondents in this category completely withheld their judgment on the author's assertion, and thus, were classified as neutral, an example of which can be seen in the following:

Ex 3.1 (Neutral Neutral)

It is hard to judge whether the facts are true as stated in the article. It seems to me to be written in a very one-sided and inflammatory way, so I would tend to withhold judgment based on it.

(Answer to Q1 in Part III by a British female neutral respondent, Br.21)

Despite claiming to be neutral, most of these respondents basically agreed with the author's anti-whaling opinion while casting doubt on the credibility of the information and/or the use of language.

There was also one British male respondent, who, despite claiming to be anti-whaling at the outset, decided not to agree or disagree with the commentary, pointing out the use of 'negative connotation words' by the author as follows:

Ex 3.2 (Anti-whaling Neutral)

I'm not sure – the article quotes certain facts but the author continually uses negative connotation words to describe the Japanese decision –it's quite opinionated.

(Answer to Q1 in Part III by a British male anti-whaling respondent, Br.15)

This respondent was also placed in the category of 'neutral' (critical awareness). The view was also shared by two of the four 'neutral' Japanese respondents who clearly disagreed with the use of the emotive language, while retaining their neutrality (Answers by JPNs 20 & 22, see Table 2). (But see the following section as well.)

These examples show the reverse effect of the author's strong pretextual

purposes; that is, although the informants understood the author's pretextual purposes in principle, the way in which these purposes were realized seems to have had a reverse effect on them.

Disagreement: Complete Mismatch of Pretextual Assumptions

This category includes 16 out of 30 Japanese respondents (53.3%) who disagreed with the author, including eight respondents who at the outset claimed to be neutral, as well as eight pro-whaling respondents. This shows that the commentary had a completely reverse effect on some Japanese 'neutral' respondents compared to the English ones, most of whom came to agree with the author's opinion while disagreeing with the use of language, and thus claiming to remain 'neutral' on the surface (see Table 2). That is, the author's pretextual purposes were rejected mainly because of the strategies s/he used to realize the purposes. The difference seems to result mostly from the differences in the perception of the use of language and of over-exaggeration based on 'unsatisfactory' or 'one-sided' information, as clearly pointed out by some Japanese respondents in the following:

Ex 4.1 (Neutral Disagreement)

Hantai desu. Fukuzatsu na Nihon-bunka no shoosai na kenkyuu mo okonawazu ippoo teki na mikata de noberarete iru kara desu. Kotoba no sentaku no shikata ni sore ga yoku dete imasu.

(I disagree with the author's opinion. It is one-sided and lacks detailed research into sophisticated Japanese culture. The choice of the vocabulary shows it clearly) (Answer to Q1 in Part III by a 'neutral' male Japanese respondent, JPN23)

Ex 4.2 (Neutral Disagreement)

Hantai desu. Kanjoo teki na iken ni suginai. Deeta wa yori koohei ni, shoosai ni dasu beki. Kore wa tugoo no yoi suuji wo narabete iru dake (ron wo tateru ue de).

(I disagree with the author's opinion. It's too emotive. Fairer and more detailed data should be used. It is selectively used to promote the anti-whaling lobby (to make it look more logical).

(Answer to Q1 in Part III by a 'neutral' male Japanese respondent, JPN24)

Thus, despite reading the same commentary, more Japanese 'neutral' respondents came to disagree with the author's opinion, pointing out the inadequacy and one-sidedness of the information, whereas no English professional 'neutral' respondents clearly disagreed with the author, particularly in their opinions about whaling. The disagreement of the Japanese respondents, however, appears to originate more in the disagreement with the author's excess use of emotive language and imbalanced information rather than the anti-whaling opinion itself. Their judgement, thus, seems to have based simultaneously on their opinions about whaling and perception towards the author's use of language and information, not differentiating between the two. There was also one anti-whaling English professional respondent who showed strong disagreement with the author, pointing out cultural bias despite classifying herself as anti-whaling at the outset and insisting that she retained the same position in principle after reading the commentary. Thus, she was also placed in the category 'disagreement'.

The above examples and discussion clearly show that more Japanese respondents disagreed with the commentary, reacting strongly to the author's opinion, the amount and nature of the information and the use of language. This can be said to have resulted mainly from the difference in pretextual assumptions between the Japanese and the English respondents, most of the Japanese respondents being either 'neutral' or 'pro-whaling', while most of the latter being 'anti-whaling' (see Table 1).

Summary

To summarise, those who were less informed on the topic, with little critical awareness in the language, seemed to have been influenced most by the commentary according to the current study. There was also an indication that readers' pretextual assumptions influenced the interpretation and perception

of the text since more Japanese neutral respondents disagreed with the author's 'one-sided' opinion and excessive use of emotive language than the English neutral respondents, who agreed with the author's opinion in principle. By contrast, those who shared the same discourse (of anti-whaling) with the author tended to agree with the author's opinion without even noticing the excess use of emotive language. Or rather, they used the same emotive language positively in stating their agreement with the author, confirming their anti-whaling stance as observed in the answers by the English anti-whaling respondents (Agreement without (-) Awareness), while the Japanese pro-whaling respondents mostly disagreed with the author (Disagreement) (see Table 2).

CONCLUSION

To conclude, it can be said that readers' cultural backgrounds, values and beliefs *seem* to influence the interpretation and perception of a text although further research is needed to support any claim that readers' cultural pre-textual assumptions have a *direct* influence on text interpretation.

This study also has implications for language pedagogy since some indications of the relationship between the amount of information that the respondents had and their interpretation and perception of texts were observed. This, however, also requires further research specifically designed to take the informants' learning backgrounds and experiences into consideration. Despite the need for further research, this paper makes it clear that different pre-textual assumptions may bring about disparate interpretations and perceptions, and it shows the importance both of raising readers' critical awareness from an earlier stage and of being aware of different pre-textual assumptions that readers bring to interpreting texts.

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APPENDIX

November 2000

This questionnaire is part of my research on the news discourse on whaling in the British and the Japanese Press. It consists of three parts and Part III includes a short newspaper article on whaling. I should be most grateful if you could answer general questions in Parts I & II first, and then move on to answer the questions in Part III after reading the text. Naturally, there is no right answer and you are free to give your own opinions. Your answer will be dealt with confidentially.

Part I

Age: 1) 20s 2) 30s 3) 40s 4) 50s 5) 60s and over

Sex (M/F): 1) Male 2) Female

Occupation: 1) businessman/woman 2) journalist 3) student

4) teacher 5) academic/ researcher

6) other professionals() 7) others()

Your mother tongue:() Nationality:()

Newspaper(s) you usually read: ()

Part II: On whaling in general

- 1 Are you pro- or anti-whaling?
1) pro-whaling 2) neutral 3) anti-whaling
- 2 Why? Please state reasons for your answer to 1.
- 3 Do you know anything about controversies between pro- and anti-whaling nations? If yes, what do you think about the controversies?

Part III: Now please read the following article on whaling and give your comment on it.

Harpooned

THE JAPANESE decision to start killing sperm whales and Bryde's whales, which we reported exclusively yesterday, is a provocative one. It comes just weeks after the attempt by Japan and Norway to reopen the trade in whalemeat was rejected by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species.

Japan pretends that its extended programme of slaughter is for the purposes of scientific research. It is a strange kind of science that requires so many specimens to be killed. It is a strange kind of research that requires – in addition to the 500 minke already killed each year – 50 Bryde's whales a year and 10 sperm whales. Why does scientific research into one species need five or 50 times as many corpses as another? What are they doing in those sinister laboratories in the suburbs of Tokyo? Manipulating whale DNA in order to produce Pokemon?

Sadly, the only plausible explanation, apart from the unthinkable possibility that the Japanese authorities may be lying, is that they are engaged in a very simple experiment. They want to see what the effect of exterminating the world's population of several species of whale would be. They must not be allowed to succeed.

(The Independent, 5 May 2000)

Questions:

- 1 Do you agree or disagree with the author? Why? Please give your comment on this.
- 2 After reading this article, do you think you might change the opinions on whaling you gave in Part II, i.e. either you are pro- or anti-whaling, or neutral? If yes, please state the nature of the change and give reasons for it. If not, please give reasons as well.

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- 3 Do you have any further comments on this article or on whaling in general?
(Please continue overleaf if necessary)

Thank you very much for your cooperation.