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Sylvia Velikova **The pragmatics of news actor labelling in media discourse: A case study**

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Abstract. Media discourse is a pervasive phenomenon that entails diverse social interactions mediated through linguistic and paralinguistic means in spoken and written medium. This paper aims to focus on media discourse, in particular on online news sites, and to explore the linguistic means of news actor labelling in news stories. The pragmatic value of some referring expressions used to name news actors in news media is further examined. The first part of the article provides a review of research on the “act of naming” in news discourse and the various linguistic resources utilized by writers for referring to news actors. The second part of the paper presents a case study that looks closely at the representations of news actors in news articles from online news sites of four British newspapers – *The Guardian*, *The Independent*, *The Mirror*, and *The Sun*. The results of the case study revealed various patterns of news actor labelling that are consistent with Jucker’s (1996) classification. The study concludes that the journalist’s preference for one referring expression over another in the news story has a powerful role in construing newsworthiness, in amplifying audience engagement, in influencing their perceptions of the news content, and in channeling their meaning construction process.

Keywords: Media discourse; Newspaper language; Referring expressions; Appositional construction

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Introduction

Media discourse is a pervasive phenomenon that takes the form of multifarious social interactions mediated through linguistic and paralinguistic means in spoken and written medium. In order to understand its characteristics one should bear in mind that it is by no means a form of spontaneous, “private” interaction, rather it is a “public, manufactured and on-record” communication platform oriented towards the “mass” reader, listener or viewing audience (cf. O’Keeffe, 2012). In recent years, technological advances, digital media and social networking lend themselves to a high

degree of audience engagement and participation. This has changed the traditional paradigm of “participation frameworks” of both written and spoken media discourse (O’Keeffe, 2012). In other words, media discourse has become multimodal, and although a great deal of the way communication is navigated remains in the control of the media, discourse is co-constructed by the producers and the consumers of messages in versatile communicative environments. The demarcation between spoken and written media communication has been blurred. For example, television and radio channels have

their websites or pages on social networks. Newspapers, in turn, also make use of the Internet space. The “online dailies”, for instance, provide “readers” with easy access to back issues, online forums and live chats, video material, and opportunities to post their comments on articles and news topics. In addition, readers of online newspapers can personalize their user experiences by customizing the time and the type of news alerts they receive and the content of the news stream they see to match their individual interests. This opens up a much stronger “feedback channel” to the audience, with new, more fluid patterns of interaction. What is more, communication in digital media discourse unfolds in unlimited temporal and special domains, “far and wide”, and with much more instantaneous and spontaneous interactions.

In addition, news media do not only inform the public about current events, but they also have an agenda-setting impact on their audiences (Lippmann, 1922). It has long been established that the media have a powerful effect on public opinion by channeling audience attention on particular issues, events, public figures and “manufacturing” their importance or salience (see also Ivanova, 2020a; 2020b). Therefore, they do not mirror but actually frame reality, influence and shape public opinion. There is then an intrinsic bias in the selection, organization and structuring of the messages in media discourse. News, for instance, does not “naturally emerge from reality”, but is a product of the media industry and consists of embedded values of a society in a particular historical context (Fowler, 1991: 222).

Also, from a more critical standpoint, the media employs various strategies for obfuscating reality which serve as a solid ground for audience persuasion and even reaching to the extreme form of “discursive power abuse” – manipulation (Van Dijk, 2006: 359). More specifically, the authors of news media texts have specific purposes and intentions, and their texts perform functions that do not only focus on reader

comprehension and information reception. With news reports, for instance, these could be persuading and entertaining, although their explicit aim is to convey information. As Fowler (1991: 4) observes in his study on the newspaper language: “news is a representation of the world in language; ... it is not a value free reflection of facts... [E]ach particular form of linguistic expression in a text – wording, syntactic option, etc. – has its reason. There are always different ways of saying the same thing and they are not random, accidental alternatives”.

The interdisciplinary study of language as a social practice from the perspective of power and ideology is associated with *Critical Linguistics* (e.g., Fowler, 1991) and *Critical Discourse Analysis* (CDA) (van Dijk 1988a, 1988b; Fowler, 1991; Fairclough, 1995a, 1995b, among others). The **purpose of the present paper** is to focus on news media discourse, in particular on online news sites, and to examine the linguistic means of news actor labelling in news reports and their pragmatic value. In Cotter’s (2010: 16) study on “news talk” and “the language of journalism”, *language* is conceptualized as the linguistic units within the structure of news language (e.g., syntax, lexicon, phonology, sociolinguistics, and pragmatics); while *discourse* is understood as “longer stretches of text and talk” relating to “coherence, narrative, participant structure, stance, and communicative function”. The present investigation adopts Cotter’s (2010) research perspective in the study of the language of the news, integrating ideas from critical news analysis. Furthermore, the *communicative context* of news discourse that should also be accounted for in the study can be referred to as the relation between the news discourse, the producer(s), and the audience(s) of the news discourse, where the producer(s) and the audience(s) enter into various forms of interactions and these interactions are shaped by the assumptions they may hold about each other (cf. Bednarek and Caple, 2012: 20). The examination will concentrate on the hard news story which

reports on recent events or incidents that are considered newsworthy (cf. Bednarek and Caple, 2012).

Methods of research

The “act of naming” is generally seen as both a linguistic and social practice and as one of the main functions of news discourse through which the media engages with the audience and influences their perceptions not only of the news reported but also on reality (Calabrese, 2012). In the framework of *French Critical Discourse Analysis*, Calabrese (2012) observes that assigning a name is an act of representation and categorization of an object, person, or a phenomenon but this act is also indicative of our perception of the named entity. At same time, the act of naming reveals the position of the “namer” in relation to the named object or entity (Siblot, 1997). Not only people are identified and described by the act of naming in news discourse. Events are also framed and represented in news media – e.g., “Europe’s 9/11,” “a financial tsunami,” “post-Kyoto,” “from Hiroshima to the Twin Towers” (Calabrese, 2012). The labels, therefore, used to name events trigger and preserve the memories of the event through condensation of related information, images and representations (Calabrese, 2012). The media event, hence, also seems to be a “non-referential entity” in that it does not actually exist in reality but is a social construction. Once it is sifted and named by the news media, it becomes available in the social space and comes to the fore of public attention (Calabrese, 2012).

Similarly, news media craft their stories around news actors or individuals, and they constantly name them. As Jucker (1996: 373) notes: “News is about people. Most, if not all, news stories on radio, television or in newspapers focus on people, on what they say, what they do, or what has happened to them. People can be important as news sources or they can be important as news actors”.

As with events, news actors are not intrinsically newsworthy, however high-ranking, public figures tend to be selected and

represented as news actors based on what they say, and “ordinary” people become represented mainly through their actions or when they are involved in accidents, crime, or natural catastrophe (Jucker, 1996). Bell (1991: 194) classifies news actors as follows: political figure; official; celebrity (e.g., film or music star); sportsperson; professional or other public figure (e.g., lawyer); criminal or accused; human interest figure; participant (e.g., victim or witness). Generally, news actors fall into two broad categories: “the knowns” and “the unknowns”; however, in the news they should equally be recognized and identified by the audience and the journalist has to name, identify, and describe them in a way that ensures their prominence in the news story (Jucker, 1996).

In order to refer to news actors, the writers of media texts utilize various linguistic resources, e.g., first names, surnames, titles, pronouns, and descriptive labels. All these means can also be used in different combinations. The naming expressions, on the other hand, have specific pragmatic functions and the choice of a specific name reference for labelling the news actors can construct particular aspects of newsworthiness, trigger reader response in the construction of (implied) meanings, channel and structure the writer – addressee communication (Ivanova, 2020b), and even manipulate the reader (Getsov, 2009).

Jucker (1996: 377) identifies three syntactic options for referring to news actors: (1) the use of his/her name (*John Major* or *Mr. Major*); (2) through a personal pronoun (*he* or *she*); or (3) through a descriptive label (*the prime minister*). An appositional construction combining a proper noun (name) and a descriptive label can also be commonly used (e.g., *Prime Minister John Major*, or *Sir Richard Scott, an Appeals Court judge*). The three categories of different news actor labels are further summarized as follows: “**name** – nickname (*Johnny*), given name (*John*), surname (*Major*), full name (*John Major*), title + surname (*Mr Major*), title + full name (*Mr John Major*); **descriptive label** (*the*

prime minister); **pronoun** (*he, she*); **apposition** (*a) the prime minister, John Major, b) Prime Minister John Major c) John Major, the prime minister c) John Major, prime minister*)” (Jucker, 1996: 378).

Appositional constructions have been found to be extremely common in the context of news actor labelling in the news and news reporting in general, presumably because through their use writers can convey maximum information in a concise and economical way (see also Jansen, 2008). A distinctive feature of the *appositional construction* is its binary grammatical structure, consisting of two coreferential nominal elements. The two elements are considered to be in apposition and one of them is commonly called the *independent unit* (*the head, the anchor*), while the other component is referred to as the *dependent unit* (*the appositive*) (see also Getsov and Velikova, 2020). As Heringa (2012: 25) correctly points out, “there is no clear consensus in the literature on which constructions exactly belong to the class of appositions, let alone which subclasses of appositional constructions there are”. Most linguists, however, distinguish between “loose appositions” (*John Major, the prime minister*) and “close appositions” (*Prime Minister John Major*). As illustrated by the examples, the two components in the first type of appositional constructions “are set off by so-called comma intonation” (Heringa, 2012: 2), whereas the units in the latter are not. It is important to note that since there are no formal grammatical means of linking the two components of the appositional constructions referred to as close appositions, the main criterion for determining the distribution of the syntactic functions between these elements should be the logical one. However, in the case of analytical languages, such as English, word order should not be neglected as the main means of expressing the grammatical links between the units of the appositional construction (Getsov, 2019; Getsov, 2020). Furthermore, in the appositional constructions of the type *Colonel*

Miller, Father Sergius, the role of the “(re-)naming” element is to supplement, to specify further, to make informational adjustments to the meaning already expressed by the other element/entity that has been named; to situate it in a different perspective; to characterize it; to classify it; to categorize it, etc. (Getsov, 2020). Also, it is the proper noun in this class of appositional constructions that narrows the scope of the concept, previously expressed by the common noun with a zero article (e.g., of the many people who are opera singers by profession, there is only one person – *opera singer Johnson*) (cf., Getsov, 2020). As Getsov (2020) further comments, in this type of construction, the proper noun functions as modifier that limits the reference of the common noun to exactly one: e.g., *Dr. Mathews*.

From a Functional Discourse Grammar perspective, Hannay and Keizer (2005: 176–177) explain that when introducing a proper name or a description which is familiar to the audience, the appositive has the function of labelling. In other words, the proper noun assigns a new label to the referent of the other unit and if the appositive “takes the form of a proper name, the proper name will be assumed to be new to” the hearer/reader. Therefore, it will become familiar and available for identification by the audience later in the discourse. Identification and labelling then can be distinguished in that labelling provides information that is new to the hearer/reader, while when performing the function of identification, the appositive is associated with the hearer’s/reader’s prior knowledge.

Titles and pseudo-titles are elements of one type of appositional construction (sometimes called *close apposition*), which consists of a proper noun as one unit of the construction and a noun phrase with a common noun in the second component (cf., Meyer, 2014). Titles are further classified into seven sub-categories (Bell, 1988: 329):

“Professional (Doctor, Professor); Political (President, Chancellor, Senator); Religious (Bishop, Cardinal, Mother); Honors

(Dame, Earl, Countess); Military (General, Corporal); Police (Commissioner, Constable, Detective-Sergeant); Foreign (Monsieur, Senorita)”).

They cannot be added to M-terms, but can substitute them (Bell, 1988). In the context of news media, titles are markers of newsworthiness, they convey some form of respect and esteem, and they are always capitalized. Pseudo-titles, on the contrary, are not capitalized. Bell (1988: 330), for example, comments that pseudo-titles perform a specific pragmatic function by implicating that the person they label belongs to an exclusive class of human beings. However, Meyer (2002) argues that in a construction such as *opera singer Johnson*, “opera singer” functions as a description of the person and her/his occupation, rather than as a marker of honour or respect. Also, in contrast to Meyer (2014), who does not consider pseudo-titles elements of an appositional construction, Bell (1988: 326) refers to them as „appositional naming expressions” with deleted determiner: *(the) race relations conciliator Hiwi Tauroa*; (a) *local resident Beth Anderson*; *(his) Chips’ series co-star Erik Estrada*.

It is also worth noting that pseudo-titles have been found to predominate in the American newspapers, whereas in British newspapers they are more commonly used in tabloids. What is more, in his analysis of news actor labelling in British newspapers, Jucker (1996) discusses the “stratifying” functions of all noun phrases used to describe individuals in the news reports. For instance, one specific type of appositional construction, such as *Labour Leader Neu Kinnock* functions as marker of the stylistic differences between the three types of newspapers: the up-market (e.g., *The Times*, *The Independent*, and *The Guardian*), mid-market (e.g., *The Daily Mail* and *The Daily Express*), and down-marked (*The Daily Mirror* and *The Sun*) newspapers. Thus, a predominant feature of tabloids, and to a lesser extent of the mid-market papers, is the appositional construction of the type ‘common noun +

proper noun’ with a zero article (for instance, *leftwing firebrand Derek Hatton*). The quality papers (but not typically *The Guardian*) deploy the descriptive element of the same type of construction, but in post-position (for example, *Mr Neu Kinnock [the] Labour Leader*), while the use of preposed descriptive elements are used with lower frequency. In addition, a distinguishing feature of the style of the quality papers is that they avoid using a zero article (and this has also been established as characteristic of *The Guardian*). Jucker (1998) also identified differences in the use of titles and pseudo-titles between the British up-market newspapers, and mid- and down-market newspapers. Titles, if used at all, were used in the up-market press when identifying news actors. While pseudo-titles, such as *snooker star Dennis Taylor*, were more common in mid-market and down-market newspapers.

The naming of news actors within the structural components of the news story has also been described as following a specific pattern that differs from what has been observed as typical for personal narratives. Time and space constraints determine the choice of the writers of news stories to present the orientation (introducing the characters and the setting, according to Labov’s framework) “in passing, while they are telling the action”; i.e., while they are telling the actual story about who, what, when, and where (Bell, 1995: 310). Structurally, Jucker (1996) found out, that unlike “normal” story progression (where the main character is introduced in detail with the first mention, and later references are less explicit), news stories most explicitly mention news actors in the lead. Also, this is where the newsworthiness of the main actor is established. Interestingly, the first mention which appears in the headline is usually less explicit. Overall, the main actor is always identified at the beginning of a news report, in the overline, headline, strapline, and lead. In the headline, typically surnames are used, while full names are mentioned in the overlines and straplines. In the lead paragraph,

one would expect an anaphoric reference to the first mention of the news actor in the headline, however, according to Jucker (1996), a more explicit identification is provided there through a full name or with a descriptive label and a proper name.

Jucker's (1996) findings also indicate that, statistically, 80% of the appositional constructions in titles are names, while the combination 'a descriptive label + proper name' has a lower frequency. In the lead paragraph, the opposite tendency is observed: the construction consisting of a descriptive label and a proper name is more common. In the body of the article, there is a small percentage (10%) of the 'descriptive label - proper name' combination in comparison to all labelling expressions.

Case study: the pragmatics of news actor labelling in news reports on *Rust* film set shooting

Results and discussion

This section reports on a case-study that aims to examine the representations of news actors in news articles on Alec Baldwin prop-gun shooting on a film set, which killed the cinematographer Halyna Hutchins and injured the film director Joel Souza. The reports covering the incident were extracted from online news sites of four British newspapers – two up-market (*The Guardian* and *The Independent*) and two down-market (*The Sun* and *The Mirror*) newspapers. All news items were published on the same day, 22 October 2021 – the day of the incident. The story received a great deal of attention from all news media included in this study. All newspapers gave it a substantial degree of prominence by publishing the news story on their front pages. The overall aim of the case study is to look at the representations of the news actors in the examined news reports – Alec Baldwin, the main news actor, who fired a prop gun while rehearsing; Halyna Hutchins who was killed in the incident, and Joel Souza who was injured.

The main **research questions** addressed in the study are as follows:

1. How is news actor labelling realized in online news reports?

2. What are the pragmatic functions of the grammatical constructions used to name and describe people in the news?

3. Is there a difference in the choice of expressions referring to news actors in the structural components of the news reportage; i.e., in the headline, the lead, and the body/lead development?

Firstly, the headlines of all news stories were analyzed comparatively. One more headline from *The Times* was also included in the analysis.

- **Alec Baldwin fired prop gun that killed woman on film set of *Rust*** (*The Guardian*, Fri 22 Oct 2021)

- **Sheriff: Baldwin fired prop gun on movie set, killing woman** (*The Independent*, Fri 22 Oct 2021)

- **Alec Baldwin accidentally killed cinematographer Halyna Hutchins on a film set** (*The Times/The Sunday Times*, Fri 22 Oct 2021)

- **Alec Baldwin accidentally shoots woman dead as prop gun misfires on film set** (*The Mirror*, 22 Oct 2021)

- **MOVIE SET TRAGEDY Alec Baldwin accidentally shoots & kills cinematographer & leaves director in 'critical condition' on set of movie *Rust*** (*The Sun*, Fri 22 Oct 2021)

Except for *The Sun* and *The Independent*, all headlines have the first mention of the main news actor by his full name (Alec Baldwin) in initial position. The initial position of the reference to the news actor is indicative of the fact that not only the accident itself is considered newsworthy, but it is the famous actor Alec Baldwin who is the center of the news coverage of the event. This construes newsworthiness in terms of *prominence/eliteness* since the story about a celebrity who belongs to the "knowns" or high-status individuals (e.g., celebrities, politicians) is more newsworthy and likely to attract readers' interest than a story about the victims who are less known and can be

referred to as „ordinary people” (Bednarek and Caple, 2017). In fact, the initial mention of the main actor by his full name is not consistent with Jucker’s (1996) finding that usually the first reference to the news actor in the headline is less explicit and tends to take the form of a surname only. This might be explained with the fact that Alec Baldwin is the eldest and the best-known of the four Baldwin actor brothers. It is also worth noting that the actor’s birth name is Alexander Rae Baldwin III but he is famous as Alec Baldwin. Therefore, the use of his first name (i.e., the full name reference) in the headline has a disambiguating and informative function, clearly identifying the celebrity who is the thematic focus of the story. This draws on prior cultural discourse and public background knowledge, which also can have an impact on generating readership.

What is more, through the identification of the main news actor by his name, all headlines represent the event personally, as opposed to an impersonal way of reporting (cf. **North’s rail ‘betrayal’: HS2 set to run on existing track in shoestring plan for Yorkshire leg of route** /*The Independent*, 24 Oct 2021/). In this respect, personalization, according to Bednarek and Caple (2017), is another news value, and personalized news stories are found to attract audience attention more than generalized descriptions.

Looking at the headlines in *The Mirror* and *The Sun*, one can recognize the typical of the down-marked newspapers evaluative slant through the use of the word “accidentally” presupposing the shifting of the blame for the accident from the main news actor to the tragic circumstances. In other words, the “negative event referred to is not the news actors’ fault, since they arrive in this situation ‘by accident’ rather than by volition” (Bednarek, 2006: 175-176).

The different linguistic resources for naming the main news actor and the victims in the accident are also noticeable. Namely, Alec Baldwin is identified by his name, while Halyna Hutchins and Joel Souza, who are less known than the actor, are designated through

an appositional construction (pseudo-title + full name) (*cinematographer Halyna Hutchins*) or through common nouns which function as descriptive labels (*a woman, a director*). More specifically, the descriptive identification for the representation of a referent, which describes a property or an occupation, is associated with the following semantic rule: “individuate when the person is already presumed to be famous; otherwise categorise by membership of the most salient or significant group” (Montgomery, 2007: 79).

The relations between the headlines and the sub-headings clearly indicate that headlines are not mere “self-contained instances of discourse at work” (Montgomery, 2007: 82). There are paratextual links between the two structural units of the news stories as the sub-heading further extends the framing of the event and the introduction of the news actors in a more explicit and informative way. It can be concluded that this fact is consistent with Jucker’s (2006) findings on the use of naming expressions in the structure of the news article. One can also observe the thematic shift in the sub-headings which provide more details on the other news actors, with much prominence given to Halyna Hutchins who was killed in the accident. Again, in the naming of Alec Baldwin by his full name, the news value of *prominence/eliteness* is foregrounded here. On the other hand, both Halyna Hutchins and Joel Souza are not named through the use of their names only, but they are introduced through the appositional constructions of the ‘pseudo-title + full name’ type (*Cinematographer Halyna Hutchins; Director of Photography Halyna Hutchins; director Joel Souza; movie director Joel Souza*) and descriptive labels of functional categorization (*the cinematographer; a cinematographer; director; a director*) referring to their professional roles in the film industry. Thus, “WHAT they did or what happened to them is more newsworthy than WHO they are” (Cotter, 2010: 165):

- Cinematographer Halyna Hutchins airlifted to hospital, where she died, while di-

rector Joel Souza also injured (*The Guardian*, Fri 22 Oct 2021)

- Authorities say actor Alec Baldwin fired a prop gun on a movie set and killed the cinematographer (*The Independent*, Fri 22 Oct 2021)

- A cinematographer was killed and a director wounded when the actor Alec Baldwin fired a prop gun on a movie set in New Mexico, authorities have said. (*The Times/The Sunday Times*, Fri 22 Oct 2021)

- Director of Photography Halyna Hutchins died after Alec Baldwin fired the ‘prop’ gun on the set of *Rust*, Sante Fe authorities have said (*The Mirror*, Fri 22 Oct 2021)

- ALEC Baldwin accidentally shot and killed a cinematographer while leaving its director in critical condition on set of his new movie, *Rust*, cops exclusively revealed to *The Sun* (*The Sun*, Fri 22 Oct 2021)

Table. News actor labelling expressions in the news articles in the four British newspapers

Alec Baldwin	Halyna Hutchins	Joel Souza	Source
Alec Baldwin; Baldwin (x9); he (x4)	Hutchins (x4); she (x4); a 2015 graduate of the American Film Institute in Los Angeles; Ms Hutchins	Souza (x2); Mr Souza	<i>The Guardian</i> , Fri 22 Oct 2021
Actor Alec Baldwin; Baldwin (x3)	the cinematographer; Halyna Hutchins; cinematographer on the movie “Rust”; Hutchins (x3); Hutchins; a 2015 graduate of the American Film Institute; the woman fatally shot; a cinematographer; she; an incredible talent; a great person; a person being shot on set	The director of the Western being filmed; director Joel Souza; Souza (x2); he	<i>The Independent</i> , Fri 22 Oct 2021
Alec Baldwin; lead actor Alec; Baldwin; the star	a woman; Director of Photography Halyna Hutchins; The Ukrainian-born, Los Angeles-based director of photography; she (2); mother of a young son; Ms Hutchins	a man; the man injured; the director of the film; Joel Souza; he; Mr Souza	<i>The Mirror</i> , Fri 22 Oct 2021
Alec (x4); Alec Baldwin; Baldwin (x3); the actor	Director of photography Halyna Hutchins; Halyna Hutchins; Halyna	<i>Rust</i> director and writer Joel Souza; Souza; director Joel	<i>The Sun</i> , Fri 22 Oct 2021

As the referring expressions in Table indicate, the differences in the way the same

news actors are represented in the news stories across different newspapers are mainly

relative to the respective market orientation of the newspapers.

The representational choices of the news actors in all newspapers are nomination and categorization (van Leeuwen, 1996: 52–59). Nomination focuses on the personal identity of the individuals and the use of proper nouns with or without the use of honorifics (e.g., *Joel Souza*, *Ms Souza*). It can be **formal** (*Baldwin*, *Hutchins*, *Souza*), **semi-formal** (*Alec Baldwin*), and **informal** (*Alec*, *Halyna*). It is not surprising that the informal means of news actor nomination have been employed by the down-market newspapers, *The Sun* and *The Mirror*. Categorization refers to the collective identities of news actors and their social roles (e.g., *mother of a young son*, *the cinematographer*, *director of the film*). Except for *The Guardian*, all newspapers employ categorizing expressions to name Halyna Hutchins and Joel Souza.

As can also be seen from the table above, in all newspapers, irrespective of their market orientation, there are only proper name references to Alec Baldwin. There are only two instances of descriptive labels of categorization (*the actor*, *the star*) and two instances of appositional constructions of the type ‘pseudo-title + full name’ and ‘pseudo-title + first name’ (*Actor Alec Baldwin*, *lead actor Alec*). The use of pseudo-titles and descriptive labels is much more frequent in the down-market newspapers than in the up-market ones, with the exception of *The Independent*, where the main actor is named by an appositional construction containing a pseudo-title (*Actor Alec Baldwin*). Thus, the references to Alec Baldwin by his name only, also have the effect of foregrounding his private identity rather than his public status and occupation as an actor. In this line of thought, the analysis of the news report under the headline **Alec Baldwin pulls out of Emmys sketch after Fox cuts phone-hacking joke** (*The Guardian*, Mon 19 Sep 2011) reveals that, in the news story, Alec Baldwin is identified by the descriptive label *actor* 4 times out of 8 references of which 4 identify him by name (*Baldwin*). This

functional categorization (cf. van Leeuwen, 1996) closely associates Alec Baldwin with his occupational role, and evokes readers’ perceptions of him as much with his social collective identity as an actor (and a public figure) as with the individual Alec Baldwin.

An episode covered by *The Guardian*, *The Independent*, and *The Mirror* is an emotionally charged representation of the main actor in tears outside the sheriff’s office. The two up-market newspapers use the surname *Baldwin* to refer to the actor, while *The Mirror* refers to him with the descriptive label *the star*; thus creating a more dramatic effect:

- The Santa Fe New Mexican newspaper reported Baldwin was seen on Thursday outside the sheriff’s office in tears. (*The Guardian*, Fri 22 Oct 2021)

- The Santa Fe New Mexican reported the 63-year-old Baldwin was seen Thursday outside the sheriff’s office in tears, but attempts to get comment from him were unsuccessful. (*The Independent*, Fri 22 Oct 2021)

- The star was seen in tears outside the local sheriff’s office on Thursday. (*The Mirror*, Fri 22 Oct 2021)

Generally, using a surname as a naming expression in the news creates the impression of a more detached and objective stance. In this specific instance, however, it seems that the journalists also construe newsworthiness through personalization (by showing the individuals’ emotional responses) (Bednarek and Caple, 2017) to invoke audience engagement, curiosity, and compassion.

Interestingly, of the other two news actors, it is Halyna Hutchins, who – within all news articles – has been promoted as the central news actor with the storyline development. As mentioned above, in the headlines, Alec Baldwin has the “first position agent role” (cf. van Dijk, 1988b) and Halyna Hutchins is assigned a less prominent role. However, in the body of the articles, the naming expressions used to label her do not outnumber those employed for the naming of Alec Baldwin, but they exhibit a wider range of structures representing Halyna Hutchins in

both official and private ways. Some of the expressions referring to Halyna Hutchins include: an appositional construction of the ‘pseudo-title + full name’ type (*Director of photography Halyna Hutchins*), full name (*Halyna Hutchins*), given name (*Halyna*), surname (*Hutchins*), pronouns (*she*), an appositional construction of the type ‘title + surname’ (*Ms Hutchins*), appositional constructions of the type ‘proper NP + NP’ (*Halyna Hutchins, cinematographer on the movie “Rust”*; *Hutchins, a 2015 graduate of the American Film Institute*), descriptive labels (*a woman, the mother of a young son*). Practically, all options for referring to news actors, described by Jucker (1996) have been employed across the different newspapers. Also, the majority of the descriptive labels with which Halyna Hutchins is identified in the press categorize her functionally; namely, in her professional role of a cinematographer. In comparison to the expressions referring to Alec Baldwin, Hutchins’s functional nominations make her visible to the audience not that much as a private actor but as an official actor, with the collective identity she represents – of all those working in the film industry, affected directly or indirectly by the incident. This also construes news value in terms of *impact* or “the effects or consequences of an event”, “especially, if they involve serious repercussions or have a more global impact, rather than only minor consequences” (Bednarek and Caple, 2012: 43). In addition, Halyna Hutchins is referred to via identification and classification; i.e., “in terms of the major categories by means of which a given society or institution differentiates between classes of people” (cf. van Leeuwen, 1996: 54): e.g., *the woman fatally shot (The Independent)*; *a woman; the Ukrainian-born, Los Angeles-based director of photography (The Mirror)*. All these structures do not only provide background information about the victim but also give her prominence and increase her visibility to the general readers since for many of them she is likely to be unknown. Thus, through her prominent appearance in the news stories, she

enters the category of the “knowns” and eventually becomes intrinsically newsworthy (cf. Jucker, 1996). It is not surprising then that Halyna Hutchins becomes the main actor and is given a first position agent role in the headlines of news reports following the day of the accident; e.g.:

Halyna Hutchins mourned amid anger at Hollywood ‘cutting corners’ on sets

Somber vigil charged with subdued rage over conditions that many lower-paid crew believe were linked to cinematographer’s death
(*The Guardian*, Mon 25 Oct 2021)

Another nominating pattern occurring in some news reports is the reference to Halyna Hutchins in interpersonal, rather than experiential terms (cf. van Leeuwen, 1996: 58); i.e., through a set of evaluative NP that denote and project appraisal: e.g., *an incredible talent, a great person*. It is also important to note that the descriptive label *mother of a young son* (for kinship relations), with which Halyna Hutchin is identified in the *The Mirror*, represents her as a private actor to whom the readers are more likely to relate, thus triggering their emotional response and engagement. At the same time, in *The Guardian* and *The Mirror*, she is named *Ms Hutchins* in a direct speech quote. This appositional construction realized as ‘title + surname’ conveys honorification, and aims to indicate respect.

The referring expressions to the other news actor, Joel Souza, are also more varied in format than those used to name Alec Baldwin across all newspapers. Although they are much fewer and less varied than the constructions employed to refer to both Halyna Hutchins and Alec Baldwin. These naming expressions include: an appositional construction of the ‘pseudo-title + full name’ type (*director Joel Souza*), full name (*Joel Souza*), surname (*Souza*) pronouns (*he*), an appositional construction of the type ‘title + surname’ (*Mr Souza*), descriptive labels (*The*

director of the Western being filmed, the man injured, a man, the director of the film). In *The Sun*, the appositional construction of the ‘pseudo-title + first name’ type (*director Joel*) is in keeping with the informal style of the down-market newspapers and the extensive use of pseudo-titles and first names in this category of the press. The main functions of all referring expressions to Joel Souza are similar to those used for the naming of Halyna Hutchins, though with a lower degree of focus and emphasis.

In terms of format of the referring expressions across the different sections of the news story, the findings in this study are partly consistent with Jucker’s (1996) data that in the lead, the identification of the main news actor is the most explicit. For instance, Alec Baldwin is referred to by his full name in most headlines. In the lead in *The Independent*, he is nominated by an appositive construction of the ‘pseudo-title + full name’ type (*Actor Alec Baldwin*). However, in the lead in all other newspapers he is referred to either by his full name only (as in the headline) or even by his first name (*The Sun*). This might be explained by the fact that as a celebrity, he is considered familiar to the audience of all newspapers, irrespective of their market orientation.

On the contrary, the references to Halyna Hutchins are in the form of short expressions in the headline (if at all included) and the sub-headings, and they are significantly expanded and diversified in the lead and throughout body of the articles. Clearly, their function in the story development is not that much to identify but to describe her, and to bring her closer to the attention of the audience. A similar pattern of labelling is observed in the case of Joel Souza, though with less focus and prominence.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, the aim of this study was to explore some pragmatic functions of news actor labelling in media discourse. For this reason, a case study was conducted, which focused on the use of referring expressions employed in news stories published in the

digital versions of four British newspapers, representing the two market orientations: the up-market and the down-market papers. In regard to our first research question, the findings are consistent with Jucker’s (1996) classification of the different options of linguistic means for labelling news actors in media discourse. The second and the third research questions address the pragmatic functions of the grammatical constructions used to name and describe people in the news (Q2) and the distribution of naming formats across the different structural units of the news article (Q3). In this respect, it was found that naming/identifying expressions were employed as a means of foregrounding and giving a voice to a “new” news actor in the story and thus construing newsworthiness. For instance, Halyna Hutchins was not mentioned in the headlines, where the thematic focus was on Alec Baldwin. She was explicitly introduced in the sub-heading, whereas in the lead and throughout the news story, Halyna Hutchins was given exclusive prominence through the use of multiple and varied labelling expressions. Finally, it can be concluded that the choices of the syntactic variants of news actor labelling in the news story do not only identify individuals that are or eventually become “protagonists” in the news, but they also describe them and allow “a dominant perspective to be created, inscribing a position for the reader/audience within the text of the news” (Conboy 2007: 111).

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