



TET OFFENSIVE: WINNING HEARTS AND MINDS FOR PREVENTION

Discourse and ideology in Vietnam's "Health" Newspaper

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Abstract—A quantitative content (CA) and qualitative discourse analysis (DA) was made of all 67 articles in the February 1995 ("Tet") issue of *Suc Khoe* ("Health"), a bi-weekly newspaper issued by Ministry of Health, Hanoi, Vietnam. The aim was to uncover discursive strategies used in the construction of health-related meaning during a period of rapid economic transition and latent ideological struggle in Vietnam. The DA was based on the work of i.a. Foucault, Fairclough, Thompson, and Fowler. The CA showed a strong domination of Western sources. There were four themes: prevention, cure, the Tet festival, and crime and punishment. In the two first, health-related groups, prevention ($n = 31$) dominated over cure ($n = 22$), modern ($n = 19$) over traditional ($n = 13$) medicine, and overall, the theme of continuity (prevention and crime/punishment) over change (cure and Tet), reflecting Vietnam's programmatic pluralism in the health field and its ideological struggle against outside influences. The DA revealed three mixed but unintegrated discourses in the material; "popular" (simplistic, authoritarian, and sentimentalizing), "expert" (technical, egalitarian, and uncritical), and "nationalist" (administrative, impersonal and propagandistic). Prevention was mainly expressed via the popular discourse, whereas cure was represented, prospectively, by the expert discourse, and retrospectively, by the nationalist discourse. This combined order of discourse functions, we suggest, as a disciplinary "Discourses of Order". A proposed integrative CA/DA model relates content themes and discursive foci to the classical rhetorical dichotomy hope/fear. We see "Health" as struggling to uphold traditional besieged values under the new economic policies by using preventive propaganda in both medical and political terms. These findings are compared with expressed editorial policy statements. © 1998 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved

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INTRODUCTION

Historically, in Vietnam, the mass media have been seen as important "tools" in mobilizing the citizens for political and social goals, e.g. via health education. The Vietnam National Drug Policy, adopted in 1996, e.g. promotes public drug education via the media. The impact of such information crucially depends on the perceived credibility of the media and the government, and more specifically on public attitudes towards prevention and cure, respectively. With the advent of the market economy after "doi moi" ("renovation") 1986, these attitudes are in a rapid state of flux in Vietnam with strong forces pushing both for change and continuity. This struggle should arguably be discernible by studying media content and make studies of the depiction of health, illness, and medicines in the media of more than theoretical interest.

The mass media scene in Vietnam is flourishing and heterogeneous with some 650 dailies and periodicals, an increase from 64 in 1965, 241 in 1986, and 300 in 1991 (Fredriksson *et al.*, 1997) with a combined weekly circulation in 1991 of 3.5 million (Petersson, 1993) for a population of approx. 72 million. The new economic policies in Vietnam might arguably be expected to also involve a liberalisation of the media. Indeed, journalists seem to experience a greater autonomy in practice in what to report (Chaipipat, 1994; Herzfelder, 1995). However, the relationship between State and media is complex. After an initial thawing in the wake of "doi moi" 1986–1988, the perceived trend towards increased media commercialisation caused a backlash of tighter government (Do Muoi, 1995). Historically, writers and journalists in the Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam) were among the most persecuted group after national reunification 1975 (Jamieson, 1993). We interpret these attitudes towards perceived western media influences, and also towards western medicine, in terms of an

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ambivalence on the part of the authorities towards modernity, a struggle between continuity and change. While encouraging the investment of foreign capital, the government explicitly seeks to protect its citizens from an increase in undesirable media items such as violence, explicit sexuality, and a preoccupation with trivia, all seen as being influenced by the West. Government policies in the health field — n.b. the Vietnam National Drug Policy of 1996 — reflect the same need for control in the national interest, but are for many reasons less easy to enforce than in the media field. In fact, the drug market is commonly acknowledged to be out of control (Chalker, 1995; Lalvani *et al.*, 1996). These processes of ideological resistance to change and modernity should, we argue, affect (and reciprocally be affected by) media health content and discourse, a particularly interesting area of inquiry, given that medicine and science often are seen — both in East and West — as issues above or beyond ideology.

Thus, the aim of this study was to identify ideologically-significant content and discourse elements in the texts, which might throw light on the wider issue of the role of the media in the construction of meaning (DeFleur and Ball-Rokeach, 1989) in the health arena, and in turn facilitate understanding and interpretation of the rapid economic and political changes in Vietnam, particularly in the field of health.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

A content analysis was made of all 67 articles in the February 1995 (“Year of the Pig”) Tet issue of the — then — weekly newspaper *Suc Khoe* (“Health”) in Vietnam, published by The Ministry of Health. One and the same individual, a qualified Vietnamese medical translator, translated all the articles into English. One of the authors (DF) also interviewed three members of the editorial staff, the Vice-Director, the Deputy Editor-in-Chief, both physicians, and a pharmacist, about their view of the function of the paper. The interview was carried out before our analysis was done, and the paper has subsequently undergone an overhaul and fragmented into three publications with the same title — “Health and Life” (*Suc Khoe va Doi Song*) — a 16-page weekly, a 40 page bi-weekly, and a 20-page monthly version. Analysing Vietnamese texts in English translation of course increases the risk of misunderstandings, particularly in the analysis of discourse. However, this method has been used in other studies (Hatim and Mason, 1990).

The newspaper “Health” was selected because we hypothesised that it would be more prone to “the slippage between education and indoctrination”, characteristic of much health communication, at least in the West (Lupton, 1995). Thus, value-laden content would — by virtue of the close association

with a government organ — presumably be more easily detectable. *Suc Khoe* was started in 1961 and calls itself “A publication for health protection guidance”, i.e. focuses on prevention. Despite a small circulation of 15,000–20,000 copies, it enjoys a privileged role, both in terms of influence and access to qualified writers. It is distributed to all 53 provinces, and targets both the general public and health care professionals at all levels (Cu *et al.*, 1994). An issue of *Suc Khoe* typically consists of a page with doctors’ answers to readers’ questions, some basic science reports, a regional health news section with reports from various clinics, communes, districts, and provinces, and regular features on new (modern) drugs, and on plant drugs, respectively. *Suc Khoe* was at the time produced by a staff of eight people; one pharmacist, five doctors, one artist and one secretary. The layout is attractive with many illustrations, primarily small drawings accompanying the articles, and some photographs. Most of the articles are written by the staff and by leading professors and doctors, often managers of specialised Institutes or Heads of National Programs in various medical fields, all under the Ministry of Health. Normally, each issue has eight pages. In addition, a special, thicker, issue is published four times per year, e.g. at Tet.

The Tet 1995 issue of *Suc Khoe* comprised 20 pages, of which 6 pages had four-color print, 6 pages two-color print, and the rest one color. Tet is the most important annual national holiday in Vietnam, falling between January 19 and February 20 of the Western calendar and involving the population in traditional celebrations for several weeks. It means the coming of spring and a visit by the ancestors, a time of family reunion, spiritual and material renewal (transition), leisure, rejoicing and hope. Our rationale for selecting a Tet issue for our study was that it would represent a maximum concentration of creativity and resources devoted to a single issue, and thus contain sufficient material to be analytically rewarding. In this thinking we have also been influenced by Kinnvall’s observation that rituals, myths, and symbols may be used in political discourse to sanctify the prevailing norms and rules in authoritarian societies, e.g. with a communist ideology (Kinnvall, 1995). We also hypothesise that the Tet issue would be particularly rewarding as indicative of more general mechanisms in the symbolic construction of continuity and change in the Vietnamese context.

Although there are some 56 different writers in the issue, we will for our purposes be discussing the whole issue as a single body of text. The accuracy of the results is strengthened by the lengthy multidisciplinary discussions (Sachs and Tomson, 1992; Sachs and Krantz, 1997) between the authors, over a period of 3 years, one senior lecturer in journalism, one medical writer, and one senior health

systems researcher/medical doctor and we have also cross-checked data with Vietnamese colleagues.

Content analysis

A classic definition of content analysis is “a research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication” (Berelson, 1952). A later definition extends the field of interest to the surrounding context: “Content analysis is a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from data to their context” (Krippendorff, 1980). In forming categories, we have also sought to follow the approach of looking for cues in the nature of the research problem, the study objective, the content to be analysed, and the type of analysis selected (Budd *et al.*, 1967). The prevention vs cure dichotomy was selected based on the explicit focus of the material in the newspaper, being a newspaper for “health protection guidance”, and the Tet category was selected due to the special issue and our objective to explore a possible connection between ritual and ideology. It should also be said that the ultimate categorisation into four thematic content groups — Prevention, cure, Tet and Fiction, was achieved after repeated attempts at other ways of structuring the material failed to result in an equally satisfactory “fit” of data to content categories.

Discourse analysis

Discourse analysis (DA) emerged as a new trans-disciplinary field of study between the mid-1960s and mid-1970s in several disciplines within the humanities and social sciences (Van Dijk, 1993). Its field of research has for some time been considered too vast for anyone to comprehensively account for (Stubbs, 1983), and the term itself so ambiguous (Schiffrin, 1987), that it is vulnerable to the accusation of being so popular, precisely because it is so vague (Mårtensson, 1996).

Various authors define DA in terms of its systematic approach to argumentation and dialogue (Priest, 1996), its relation to cognition and sociocultural context (Van Dijk, 1993), to language as used in social contexts (Brown and Yule, 1983; Van Dijk, 1988; Fairclough, 1995), and — with the prefix “critical” — as focusing attention on the abuse of power of social élites and the ways in which social inequality is reproduced (Chapman and Lupton, 1994).

Table 1. Framework of discourse analysis

Language function	Variable
I. Textual	1. a) Discourse b) Intertextuality c) Language i) metaphor ii) categorization
II. Ideational	2. Lexical register
III. Interpersonal	3. Modality 4. Rhetoric 5. Argumentation

In the tradition of Foucault (Foucault, 1981; Mills, 1997) and the development by critical discourse analysts (Fowler, 1996), we are interested in this latter definition of discourse, related to power and representation, and the construction of and delimitation of our experience of the world (Foucault, 1977).

Our discourse analysis of the ideology embedded in this body of texts combines selectively applied tools borrowed from Foucault, Fowler, van Dijk, and Fairclough, conceptually organised according to the tri-functional division proposed by the linguist Halliday (Halliday, 1978). All language, he states, simultaneously performs three functions, representational or ideational (content), interpersonal (communication) and textual (structural fabric). A summary of this integrative DA model is provided in Table 1.

Starting within the textual function of language, we identified three discourses in the Health issue, together constituting the newspaper’s “order of discourse”*, and looked for examples of Kristeva’s concept of “intertextuality” (modified in Fairclough, 1995), i.e. hybrid or “polysemic” texts containing a mixture of different genres and/or discourses. Such examples can illustrate what Fairclough calls ambivalence of voice, e.g. between persuasive and technical genres, creating a disjointed text. We also noted the use of metaphors, a factor in differentiating and uncovering representations (Fairclough, 1995), and categorisation (Thompson, 1992), e.g. via lexical registers (Fowler, 1994), i.e. sets of related terms, as two further linguistic devices which may be used for ideological ends.

Proceeding to the interpersonal function, we also wish to highlight Fowler’s discussion of four modalities of texts — the expression of truth, obligation, permission and desirability — referring to the explicit or implicit stance (modality) taken by the writer. Modality suggests the presence of an individual behind the printed text. We also focus on the rhetoric of news discourse (Van Dijk, 1988), often involving persuasive argumentation or propaganda, a word, which in Vietnam — not co-incidentally — is used with a positive connotation as a synonym for

*Van Dijk’s analogous concept “contextual style” is rooted in a social-psychological model of cognition, whereas Foucault/Fairclough’s term “order of discourse” relates more to a repertoire of socially available genres and discourses, and highlights the relationships (overlaps, boundaries) between different discourse types used in the same social domain, e.g. for a newspaper, the discourses in different sections.

communication or education. In attempting to clarify the arguments advanced in the articles, we have collapsed them into a number of “theses” (Thurén, 1995).

Employing these various discourse analysis tools, allows us to discern three separate discourses with distinct characteristics — popular, expert and nationalist.

RESULTS

Content analysis

Sources. Altogether 17 journals are cited as sources for the articles in the issue, 3 Chinese, 1 from Hong Kong, 5 from France, 2 from Russia and 6 from the U.K./U.S.A. With the possible exception of Hong Kong and the U.K., these are all countries with which Vietnam has strong historical ties. The articles from these journals — inadequately referenced and sometimes over several years old — have been used as the basis of a “rewrite” by a journalist or a health professional.

Authors. A total of 56 different signatures appear after the articles. The largest group — 26 — are names of individuals and lack any additional identi-

fying information. One other has a street address. Another 5 authors are qualified by the additional information “journalists” or “reporters”. In addition there are 10 doctors, 1 professor, 1 associate professor, 6 professionals identified by their institutions or towns, 3 pharmacists, and 3 traditional medicine practitioners.

Protagonists. The protagonists mentioned in the articles and stories fall into three main categories:

1. film stars/celebrities
2. scientists/doctors, and
3. historical personages, some fictional.

The first group includes three American and two French singers/actresses. The number of mentions in the second category of scientists/doctors represented is 7 American, 5 English, 1 Canadian, 1 Norwegian, 1 French, 2 Chinese, and 1 from Hong Kong.

Themes. The preventive theme group was larger ($n = 31$) than the curative ($n = 22$) medicine theme group (Table 2). There were 19 articles on modern and 13 on traditional medicine and other themes were, “Tet” and “crime and punishment”. One group of articles in the “curative medicine” theme group covers health campaigns, institutions and projects in Ninh Binh province, and are success stories with a repetitious narrative structure, describing a uniform trajectory from hardship to glory.

Preventive medicine. Conceptually, we regard the preventive theme as representing continuity, implicitly a maintenance of good health from a current positive state to a future state of good health. The health education articles define health according to Chinese medicine as the ability to work hard, rest, adjust to new situations, be positive, not get angry, fearful, sad or anxious, have a sense of responsibility, resist infections, not be overweight, have good eyesight, healthy teeth and gums, and disease is similarly described as primarily due to an imbalance of energy forces in the body, expressed in terms of ying/yang, “hot”/“cold”, and elemental forces like air, and fire. Thus preventive advice focuses on correcting factors which are seen as impinging on health and causing disease, including drugs, alcohol, tobacco, and on exercising, and generally being moderate in all things, including food and sex. Elderly people are recommended to take up hobbies like gardening, rearing goldfish, etc. Ho Chi Minh is used as a role model in terms of exercise, etc, in several articles, underlining the importance of prevention for longevity, though no mention is made of his well-known smoking habit (Page, 1996).

Articles on pharmaceuticals and plant medicines are included in this group if they are mainly described as having preventive actions, e.g. “rejuvenation” drugs, such as vitamins or anti-oxidants, purported to counteract the degenerative aging pro-

Table 2. Themes of content analysis

Continuity	(n)
<i>1. Preventive medicine</i>	
Health education	7
Pharmaceuticals	5
Environment	4
Beauty	4
Plant medicines	3
Blood donation	2
Traditional diagnostics	2
Longevity	2
Sexual and reproductive health	1
Adolescent psychology	1
Sub-total	31
<i>2. Fiction</i>	
Crime and punishment	4
<i>3. Tet</i>	
Pig	5
General	4
History	1
Sub-total	14
<i>4. Curative medicine</i>	
Plant medicines	8
Sexual and reproductive health	6
Pharmaceuticals	2
Rehabilitation	2
Local public health	1
Orthopedics	1
Ophthalmology	1
Epidemiology	1
Sub-total	22
Total	67

cess, here seen in terms of disease. The content of the environment articles reflect a modern view, expressed e.g. via WHO (Pettersson *et al.*, 1992), where health is seen in community-oriented terms, uniting the individual with a larger context of fellow human beings, the physical surroundings and a divine presence. The articles on beauty promote “natural” ways of staying attractive and warn of the dangers of cosmetic surgery. One plant medicine article in this category is about plants said to neutralise and thus prevent the harmful effects of air pollution. The two articles about blood donation are news feature stories about journalists and old people, respectively, heeding the call to donate. An article on “Condom — the reliable friend” is clearly preventive, and another targeted at parents on bringing up teenagers may also be seen as preventive mental health care within the family.

Curative medicine. Conceptually, we interpret the category of “cure” as representing change, implying a health shift from negative (illness/disease) to positive. However, the articles may be differentiated by their temporal dimension. The articles rewritten from foreign magazines, mainly representing the expert discourse, depart from the present and hold out the promise of a cure in the future. The feature articles from Ninh Binh province, success stories, mainly representing the nationalist discourse, however, start off by taking the reader back to a sad past and then bringing her/him up to a joyous present. The largest category within the curative medicine theme group consists of articles on plants, whose main usage is defined by the journal as curative. Each plant or mixture of plants is typically considered to be useful for several ailments, and it was thus not considered possible to categorise these articles by indication. In some cases, different constituents of the same plant may be recommended for different problems, i.e. the oil of the mormodica plant for fatigue, burns, etc, the kernel of the mormodica seed for boils, mumps, etc, and the mormodica root for arthritis, oedema, etc.

The second largest theme group of curative articles, on sexual and reproductive health, includes both feature stories and research-related items on population and family planning services, which while obviously including preventive aspects, fall mainly within the “curative” theme group. Curative drug articles include an article warning of discoloration of the teeth due to overusing Tetracycline (one of the most common drug side effect phenomena in Vietnam), and a general article on a pharmaceutical factory. Negative comments on modern pharmaceuticals are also found in articles on the dangers of human growth hormones (classified as preventive according to the main topic of aging), and of medical technologies such as cosmetic surgery. The rehabilitation category includes feature stories on the training of children and adults. The traditional diagnostics category includes an article

describing the use of hair analysis, and so called Kirlian photography of light-emitting particles from the body’s electric field to diagnose early warning signs of possible pathology. The other four articles in the “curative medicine” group are feature stories on the general health system in Ninh Binh province (the theme province of this issue), a reader Q and A about sacralisation of the vertebrae, a feature about, respectively, a centre for the blind, and about the hygiene and epidemiology station in Ninh Binh province.

Tet. The articles dealing generally with the Tet festival relate customs (e.g. buffalo slaughtering ceremony of a highland ethnic tribe, the Tay Nhuyen. This is part of a celebration of the Genius, the Creator, by a highland ethnic people. The buffalo slaughtering time is also a time of dancing, singing, playing, and for young couples to exchange rings and promises. Thus, the death of the buffalo affirms the possibility of peaceful transformation.

The “Pig” articles deal with the animal generally (1995 was the Year of the Pig) or in terms of pork as food, or the animal as a source of skin allografts for burn treatment, etc. The historical article in this theme group headlined “Clothing, jewels, teeth, hair of the Thang Long during the Ly Dynasty” is a journey into a carefree and glorious past, emphasizing Hanoi’s links with its own history.

Crime and punishment. A fourth group includes fiction where all stories have a common theme — crime and punishment.

In “The price that must be paid”, a 15th century French nobleman is burnt at the stake, after the villagers discover that he had killed hundreds of women and boys in an attempt to extract a youth elixir from his victims. Other stories also illustrate the fatal consequences of man’s hubris in thinking himself immortal. In two stories, regents are punished for selfishly wanting to keep immortality drugs to themselves.

Discourse analysis

Three types of discourse. We found three distinct but more commonly conflated discourses in this body of text, which we term “popular”, “expert” and “nationalist”. The “popular” discourse is mainly found in the articles in the CA “prevention” group. It is characterised by an authoritarian mode of address coupled with a sentimentalizing style. Language is simple, value-laden, and emotional, e.g. employing rhetorical questions, metaphors, absolutist expressions (all, always, every, nothing), and anecdotes. Nostalgia is common. The functions of this discourse are to reinforce patriotic sentiment, and to mobilise people in the interests of disease prevention.

The “expert” discourse is mostly found in the CA “cure” group. It is characterised by lexical registers with a high frequency of specialised terms, references to “scientific” and “research” sources

and a generally positive, “gee-whiz” attitude to science and technology (Nelkin, 1987). It is found in both preventive and curative medicine groups. The function is mainly to entertain and inform about research findings, related to the themes of the Tet issues, i.e. fertility, longevity and prevention.

We call the third discourse “nationalist” rather than e.g. Marxist because it is primarily characterised by praise of the health services, and of official bodies at governmental and other levels, with Marxist rhetoric almost absent. This discourse is mainly found in the CA cure group, which are “success stories” from Ninh Binh province. Several of these articles share common narrative elements, distinct lexical registers of mobilisation, a high degree of administrative and technical words as well as a profusion of statistics, a common rhetorical feature of news discourse used to convey an impression of veracity and reliability (Van Dijk, 1988). The function is to simultaneously provide (health care staff) readers with positive role models and (lay) readers with edifying, system-affirming health-related news from a particular province.

Intertextuality. Intertextuality is broadly defined the propensity of texts to refer to others and to be constructed by that reference to other discourse (Mills, 1997). In the Tet issue, the three discourses — popular, expert, and nationalist — appear sometimes alone, but more commonly interwoven. An article headlined “Spring and Environment” demonstrates all three discourses together:

Popular: “Every time Spring comes, nature seems to suddenly awake! Buds and shoots burst forth, starting a new life cycle. All flowers blossom, all living creatures give up their voices. Human beings and animals all have a feeling of rejuvenation, bustling with high spirits, enthusiastically entering a new year.”

Expert: “The strongest impact is the presence of ions in the atmosphere, rich in short wave. One differentiates between negative and positive ions, light, medium, heavy and super-heavy nuclei. ...the formula of light water is H₂O and heavy water with its formula D₂O has scores of molecules in a litre.”

Nationalist: “Making the most of the advantages of Spring, besides increasing production, preventing pests, we should organise sports festivals, entertainment events, and improve public hygiene to make the cities and villages clean and nice. For the greatest benefit, for lasting happiness, let us encourage the people to follow the teaching of Uncle Ho Chi Minh. Spring is the arborisation festival, to make the country more and more abundant in Spring time.”

We assert that this and other examples of intertextuality creates a lack of discursive integration signalling an ambivalence, which has ideological connotations.

Metaphor. The classic systematisation of rhetoric defined the function of metaphor as simultaneously to inform (*docere*) and to entertain (*delectare*), thus both a didactic, and popularizing function. However, a metaphor can also be seen as a persuasive definition (*persuadere*) (Cassirer, 1986). In the following examples, we may discern all three functions. Metaphors are common in Vietnamese sayings, and are mainly found within the popular discourse in the Tet issue, e.g. the article headlined “Condom — the reliable friend” and the headline “The true friend” about chopsticks. Health is, “a valuable asset”, “more precious than gold and silver”, sun cream “the protecting fence”, the pig providing skin grafts a “collaborator of medicine”, light a “miracle” source, heavy water a “culprit” restraining vitality, whereas alcoholics “drown” themselves in alcohol, “throwing themselves into the game as into the fire”. Exercise is promoted with reference to the Chinese proverb: “Running water does not smell bad”. Two metaphors in one sentence are found in an article on family planning policies as “one of the keys to the eternal Spring in the family and the country”. Here we see metaphor as a tool in a linguistic arsenal, functioning to rally support for the country by emotively fusing popular and nationalist discourses.

Categorisation. Dominated by the “popular” mode of discourse, the issue’s lead article on prevention illustrates the way language is used to create a moral universe, based on categorisation and discrimination, as well as establishing the attitude, modality of the writer (Sachs, 1996).

“Unfortunately, some people are subjective, hyperactive, unable to appreciate health. But worse, they destroy their health without regret...”

As Fowler points out, categorisation is a discursive practice used for discrimination. Here, the article goes on to single out smokers, drinkers and opium addicts, as well as people who have casual sex in parks or with commercial sex workers, as being not only slaves to substances of abuse but also “debauched”, “lazy”, parasitic on society, and arrogant towards older people, who take care of their health. A tell-tale Marxist semantic marker (“subjective”), is derisively used to create a moral universe, and signal a clear message of right and wrong.

Thompson also highlights such discriminatory practices as “Expurgation of the Other” (Thompson, 1992), in this case “European girls”. An article headlined “Tattooing, the strange decorative fashion of some European girls”, describes medically and socially negative aspects of the practice, the author warning that “there are prejudices against tattoos, and girls “of good families” dare not acquire them”.

Similarly in the following examples, two articles on beauty, fusing popular and expert discourse, clearly indicate proscribed behaviour by way of

identifying negative consequences, or role models, respectively. “Dying your hair. Be careful” warns of the dangers of getting cancer from hair dyes. And the article headlined “The perfect beauties” associates the idea of beauty as absolute, “deeply imprinted in the Western culture” with an increase of cosmetic surgery and writes (implicitly in contrast), that: “nowadays, there is a tendency towards *genuine* and *natural* beauty” (emphasis added).

The message of these last three articles, clearly targeted at women, would seem to be that there are dangers associated with vainly seeking to beautify oneself, as women do in the West. We read them as warnings against at once unhealthy, foreign and refined practices, and a celebration of that which is good, healthy and domestically Vietnamese. In the previously mentioned story “The price that must be paid”, an amoral aristocrat — distinguished from honest, poor people by his riches and hideous desires — attempts by horrible means to cheat the aging process and receives his just rewards. Another story warns: “We all know that no-one can avoid death. Yet, some people want to put themselves above the law”.

Lexical register. Here we apply Fowler’s concept of “lexical register”, i.e. clusters of related terms in a text, forming a categorizing taxonomy. In the following examples, we quote the first sentence of the article with the relevant lexical items italicised, and then list only the words which fall into the lexical sets, as far as possible using international terms (not dependent on subtlety of translation). First, an example of the popular discourse, taken from the previously-mentioned introductory article in the issue spelling out the fate of those who abuse drugs, etc. and do not follow health education advice.

“Men are a valuable asset but health is their most valuable one.”

“subjective... hyperactive... worse... waste... destroy... without thinking... regrets... alcohol addicts... drown... intoxicated... unconscious... hospitalized... toxic... cirrhosis... death... crime... traffic accidents... killing... chain smokers... cancer... gamble... sleepless... exhausted... deteriorating... decay... debauched... lazy... thoughtlessly... waste... bad effect... destroying happiness... too late...”

Next, some examples of the expert discourse:

Example (1) “The genii and fairies in mythology and legends were usually described as having *halos* over their head or a *light* emanating from their bodies or their mouths.”

...biological lights... flickering... intensity... volt... aureole... electrical field... kilohertz... high frequency... brilliant... emitted... acupuncture point... fluorescent... neon... cold light... eclipse... intensity... colour... microscopic... technique... diagnose... tissues... photo electronic tube... thyroid gland... pathological... reaction... salts... high tension... meridians...

Example (2) “Recently, researchers in *materia medica* have discovered another important role of *vitamin A*.”

...cetinoic acid... derivative... vitamin... cells... gene... synthesis... congenital deformities... molecule... amino acid... protein... codify... nucleotides... introns... codons... factor... segmentation... epidermis... intestinal... membrane... mesenchyme... vessels... lymphatic... cytohyaloplasm... adhere... activation complex...

Example (3) “Puberty is considered as the *transitional* step in children becoming adults, in both sexes the point of time of half-life physically, and *half-blossoming intellectually*.”

...aspects... development... constitution... biology... psychology... consciousness... personality... manifestation... abnormality... express... unrestrained... actions... character... adapt... imbalance... sentiment... reason... introspective... contradiction... tendency... stability... principles... behaviour... example.

Here we find three distinct types of expert discourses, on biological effects of light, genetics and vitamins, and the psychology of development. Turning to an example from the nationalist discourse, we find an administrative lexical set, the verbs often having a mobilizing connotation.

“The *hygiene and epidemiology station* is *implementing* the prevention *work* and the care for people’s health well”

...cadres... technical... material base... state... branch... management... training... supplied... investment... upgrade... effectively... sources... create... objective... orientation... perfect... centralize... achieve... take care... pay due attention to... maintain... staff... centre... network... department... communal health stations... townships... brigade... activities... focus... communes... invest... budget... guide... manage... increase... number... performed... cooperate... station... indicators... reduce... assign... contingent... train... chief... set up... pilot site... financial and medicinal support... examinations... follow-up... retraining... commune... participate... research... service... program... attend... award... people’s committee... Ministry of Health... government... evaluation... classified... unit...

Modality. According to Fowler, writer attitude (modality) may be communicated via, among others, expressions of truth, obligation, and desirability. In the cases where the attitude is expressed in extreme terms, we may speak of an authoritarian attitude. This is clearly the case as part of the popular discourse type in the Tet issue.

In this example the veracity of the statement is unequivocally established from the outset:

“Men are a valuable resource, but health is their most valuable one. *This is the truth.* (...)”

Statements made in absolutist terms underline the persuasive tone:

“Everyone knows that pork is tasty and nourishing”

This is clearly not a universal statement of fact, as we may safely surmise that e.g. a Jewish or Muslim reader might disagree with it. Nevertheless it is stated in unequivocal, authoritarian terms.

Other examples are:

“Certainly, if people are healthy, without illness, they can achieve anything.”

“Humans and animals *all have* a feeling of rejuvenation, bustling with high spirits, enthusiastically entering a new year.”

“By doing so *it is certain* that everybody will live healthily, comfortably, merrily and enjoy life’s happiness to an old age.”

“...even if they (children, authors’ note) are disabled, they *will always be able* to overcome the limitations of their disability to lead a better life.” (emphasis added).

The attitude of the writer may also manifest itself in statements of obligation. Within the popular discourse there are many examples of obligation expressed by the word “should” as in:

“...we should organize sport festivals, entertainment events, and improve public hygiene so as to make the cities and villages clean and nice.” or

“one thing everyone should know is how to wait patiently” (for a longevity drug)

“In brief, the two main factors we should prevent in the Year of the Pig is wind and heat.”

“Nowadays, doctors in primary health care are obliged to explain to patients about the need to use condoms...”

The authoritarian element of this last example becomes clearer, when we contemplate studies showing that none of the methods requiring male involvement are discussed or actively promoted as alternatives to female contraception in family planning services (Hoa, 1996), a problem not mentioned in the article.

One example will suffice of how the writer’s attitude manifests in the “expert” discourse type, using only the “truth” criterion. It is simultaneously an example of intertextuality, combining elements of the popular (absolutist language) and expert discourse types (a “gee-whizz” attitude).

“Currently, scientists all over the world have the same thought: discovering all the secrets of the human body will open new roads in diagnosis and therapy which will lead human beings to learn more about themselves, bringing hope for health and longevity, which are the most attractive issues for everyone.”

Significantly, in the nationalist discourse type, characterised by mobilizing rhetoric towards higher societal goals, the style is impersonal, the attitude of the writer is less directly visible, via statements which are presented as truths:

“Vietnam’s health services are improving and the national goals for various sectors are being fulfilled.”

“Tet is an opportunity to celebrate national unity in a strong, independent Vietnam.”

“Nowadays, we are proud to be citizens of an independent, united and peaceful Viet Nam, which is integrating itself into the world.”

“...the private sector in pharmacy and medicine is confused and careless, causing many dangers to the child at the very moment when the disease should be treated...”

Rhetoric. Viewing the CA themes in terms of classical rhetorical techniques of inducing hopes or fears, we see that three of the four themes (prevention, cure, Tet) involve projecting hope. A closer look at several texts reveal rhetorical invocations, serving to emotionally influence (*movere*) the receiver. Examples of this phenomenon are from an article on teaching disabled children:

“How touching it is to see with one’s own eyes the charming children, well groomed at the opening day of school...”

“How lucky are these small tots who have suffered so many losses, with such teachers they have a chance...”

Rhetorical questions function in a similar way, as in the article describing how in the past poor families wanted several children but were unable to support them:

“Thus, where is the happiness in having many children?”

In one instance, one rhetorical question is immediately followed by another:

“How can a country, with a narrow territory, a weak economy, which has just got to its feet after nearly half a century of war, with such a level of population growth, become prosperous and strong? With such a country, how can a family achieve complete happiness?”

Mobilizing rhetoric is also employed in the popular discourse type, using a feverish, evangelical style:

“In the explosive, animated Tet festival, the wish for health resounds in different variations and timbres from people of all ages, creating a polyphonic chord out of the spring melody.”

Argumentation. According to classical theories of argumentation, in order for an argument to be convincing, it must also fulfil the three criteria of being (a) tenable (true), (b) relevant and (c) comprehensive (Thurén, 1995). We now analyse four central arguments or “theses” gleaned from articles in all thematic content categories.

1. *Prevention is better than cure*

This argument is certainly relevant to many people in Vietnam, whose access to curative health care and drugs may be compromised by e.g. financial factors. However, clearly this argument — like the next one — is also highly normative and might

thus be differentially relevant to the people, and the editors of the newspaper.

2. *Traditional and modern medicine complement each other, but the former should be preferred*

Western and traditional medicine seem to coexist peacefully in Vietnam (Ladinsky *et al.*, 1987). The State has declared that traditional medicine should be “modernized” (Do Muoi, 1995), i.e. made more scientific. However, this approach is conspicuously absent in the material. Where reference is made to the need for “scientific proof”, it is in articles on biomedicine, not traditional medicines, and never in a way that would pit the two against each other. Thus, for Vietnam, the main clause of the ‘thesis’ is true, and it is indeed state policy. In Vietnam with its health care problems, an argument promoting traditional medicine would seem highly relevant.

3. *Natural things are healthy; unnatural things unhealthy*

The terms “natural” and “healthy” are persuasively linked e.g. in an article on environmental degradation, where the paper focuses on “natural” antidotes, e.g. waste-eating bacteria, or metal-absorbing fungi. Plant antibiotics are preferred over pharmaceuticals, the latter being seen as weakening the system. One article e.g. states that “this medicine is not poisonous as it is manufactured from a medicinal plant”. The inference (that plants are always harmless) is clearly false but may, we assert, still be relevant in the sense of serving an ideological purpose.

4. *Humankind’s dream of eternal life, youth and beauty is hubris; life and youthfulness can be prolonged only through a sensible lifestyle*

The fourth argument is derived from several articles and stories on rejuvenation, drugs, surgery, etc. As all human beings are mortal, the need to come to terms with the fact that eternal life is an illusion is certainly relevant. However, the articles in “Health” do not stop at sadly acknowledging this fact. Instead, it is noteworthy that they regularly include expressions of moral condemnation of mankind’s hubris, arrogance, or greed in striving for immortality.

Interview material. In 1994, before this study was performed, DF conducted one interview with the editors of *Suc Khoe* about a number of issues. They described the role of the newspaper thus:

Besides carrying out propaganda for the policy of the medical branch and giving directions, it teaches people how to take care of their health, treatment, prevention, drugs, including traditional and modern... from pharmacies... or gardens. Due to this... the readers are very interested, especially in using traditional medicines, and fruit and vegetables for therapy. And (we write about) new drugs and how to use them.

There is a renewal in the journalistic field. One of the demands is that we should “socialize” our magazine, which means to bring it into the whole society, broaden, increase the circulation and let everyone participate. Because if primary health care is being socialized, it means

the magazine should be socialized too. It means whoever has the magazine in their hands can find something in there for him/herself.

They said they want to maintain the unique trust which readers have in *Health*.

So that we are very concerned too because we must be responsible for our words and deeds. Because the people consider this journal, it’s voice replaces the voice of the doctor and people believe that. The medical branch and the Minister himself gave us this task. While the managers read the *People’s Newspaper*, just to get the guidelines from the state about health matters, we bring knowledge to the general consumer, aiming to improve their cultural level. And this work demands patience and also hardship.

Uniting content and discourse analysis. In this section we present a tentative, interpretative model, integrating the findings of the health-related content and the discourse analysis. The model is elaborated by adding the following concepts to the content dimensions of prevention, cure, Tet, crime and punishment, and the discourse elements of popular, expert and nationalist.

1. Hope/fear
2. Implicit change in health status/time
3. Change/continuity

The hope/fear dichotomy is a classic element of rhetorical argumentation and represents a general feature of mass-mediated health information, as the media play on plots from classic Greek tragedy and comedy (Lund, 1997). An issue was to what extent this dichotomy could be traced in the *Suc Khoe* material. Prevention, cure and Tet all represent hope, whereas the crime and punishment articles represent fear. The concepts of implicit change in health status over time are introduced based on reflection of the innate nature of the phenomena of prevention/cure. Conceptually, prevention implies no change, i.e. continuity, the maintenance of a positive health status. Cure, on the other hand, represents the improvement of health status from poor to better, either from the present to the future (as in the science articles re-written from foreign journals), or, respectively, from the past to the present (as in the feature/success stories about curative Vietnamese health services in Ninh Binh). Finally, change-continuity is an important dichotomy in our reading of the content as indicative of broader socio-economic processes in Vietnam.

The ensuing analytical schema is shown in Table 3.

DISCUSSION

Combining qualitative and quantitative analysis, we were able to identify four main themes — prevention, cure, Tet and crime/punishment — and three distinct discourses — which we call “popular”, “expert” and “nationalist”. We regard Ho Chi Minh’s statement (which we only discovered after finishing our own analysis) that the literature of the

Table 3. Content and symbolic categories, dominant discourses, rhetorical messages, and implicit direction (+/-) of health change over time (C/P = Crime/Punishment)

Symbolic category	Content category	Dominant discourse	Past	Present	Future	Rhetorical message
Change	Cure/Features	Nationalist	-	+		Hope
Change	Cure/Science	Expert		-	+	Hope
Continuity	Prevention	Popular		+	+	Hope
Continuity	Tet	Popular		+	+	Hope
Continuity	C/P	Popular		-	-	Fear

Vietnamese people should be “popular, scientific and nationalist” (Jamieson, 1993), as a certain validation of our typology of the discourses, and Lund’s work as a confirmation of the usefulness of prevention and cure as analytical categories (Lund, 1997). In our analysis the third category — the Ninh Binh feature stories — have also been categorised into prevention and cure. Although themes and discourses did not completely correspond to one another, and there was some mixing of discourses, it was possible to relate each theme to a dominant discourse. By uncovering the use of various linguistic devices fulfilling textual, ideational and interpersonal language functions — such as rhetoric, metaphor, lexical sets, and argumentation, we see these discourses as having a disciplinary function. Hence, the popular discourse is preventive propaganda in both medical and ideological terms, and reveals, for Vietnam, deeper social anxieties about the control of not only the body corporeal but also the body politic (Lupton, 1994a).

The expert discourse mainly features articles about science, simply rewritten from primarily foreign sources. On a deeper level this discourse works via its facticity in terms of technical terms, numbers and references to scientists and institutions to heighten the credence of the other two — more obviously political — discourses. The main function would appear to be entertainment, as the cures and technologies described lie completely out of reach of all but a fraction of the Vietnamese readers. While containing some warnings of side effects of drugs and other medical technologies, the writers symbolically stand uncritically gaping at the omnipotent expert. The contrast to the popular discourse, in which the writer is clearly discerned as a benevolent, parental presence, could not be more stark.

Entertainment taking precedence over providing appropriate consumer information is probably reflective of the increased competition among newspapers for readers and advertising revenue heralded by the transition to market economy. Now, editors have to create products which succeed in the competitive marketplace without offending the Party. As one observer notes, “It is a tough act to pull off” (Harwood, 1996). Knowing the villains from the heroes and the limits of permissible discourse is no mean task in present-day Vietnam, as norms

themselves and the limits of that which may be expressed are in a state of flux (Vinh, 1995).

In the “nationalist” discourse, the very impersonal nature of the text signals to the reader that it has been carefully doctored. The mechanically similar narrative trajectory in these articles from bad (in the past) to good (in the present) and the celebration of the unselfish achievements of heroic healthworkers in the face of adversity is simply too good to be true. Thus, although on the surface we are dealing with feature stories, this is again edifying propaganda in a well-entrenched tradition of consensus-building (Palmos, 1995).

Although the single issue of Health contained contributions from some 56 writers, a surprisingly homogenous picture emerges. It might be summarised as “keeping the home fires burning”, maintaining a high ideological profile, while keeping the readers happy with hope-inspiring promises of prevention, cure and transformation (Tet). Fear-inspiring rhetoric is presented mainly in fictional form (a less direct/threatening genre?) warning of the consequences of aiming for shortcuts to longevity but also used (interspersed in the cure and prevention articles) to alert readers to the dangerous forces of the marketplace, symbolised by modern pharmaceuticals (Nichter and Vuckovic, 1994), harmful beauty treatments involving tattoos, surgery and creams, and debauchery and drug abuse. Traditional Vietnamese values of modesty, contentment, simplicity, patience and discipline are boosted to counteract the powerful Western-inspired attraction of the technological “quick fix” and “pill for every ill” philosophy of the would-be readers. Yet, because of the ambivalence to science-as-entertainment, these articles also exhibit here a dangerously unproblematic attitude to science. There is an — unsurprising though conspicuous — absence of any criticism of the authorities as being responsible for well-documented adverse health care effects of the “doi moi” (“renovation”) policies in terms of increased inequities (Witter, 1996; Ensor and San, 1996), delays in health-seeking behaviour (Truong *et al.*, 1994), symptoms of breakdown of the public health care system (Chalker, 1995) and widespread, unsupervised self-medication with medicinal drugs, particularly antibiotics (Chuc and Tomson, 1998). Instead, the responsibility for problems, e.g. in

meeting family planning goals, is placed on individuals or groups in the population.

It is important to stress that ideological biases are found in all media discourse on health, and are by no means characteristic only of state-controlled media such as in Vietnam. In terms of media content about health, DA has been applied i.a. to the depiction of high-technology medicine (Karpf, 1988), psychotropic drug dependence (Gabe *et al.*, 1991), breast cancer (Lupton, 1994b), medicines (Svensson, 1996), cholesterol (Finer and Tomson, 1993), and HIV/AIDS (Brown *et al.*, 1996; Lund, 1997). These and other studies show that discourses on health are often ideologically over-determined, drawing on dominant cultural metaphors and narratives, frequently in the service of medical and technological power, often subjugating, stigmatizing, and targeting the individual as responsible for illness/disease.

The reliance on foreign, seemingly rather randomly selected, and frequently inadequately referenced, journals, sometimes several years old, is noteworthy. However, "Health" is primarily a lay publication and should be judged as such. Also, the inconsistent concern in the texts for the issue of scientific validity is an interesting finding. Many of the claims for therapeutic effectiveness in the texts can certainly not be considered scientifically proven from a biomedical viewpoint. This pluralistic attitude to traditional and Western health care traditions, typical for Vietnam today, is a tendency exhibited also in the macropolitical field (The Economist, 1995). Clearly, there are contradictions between our findings and the terms in which the editors express their policy. While prioritizing "propaganda", they reflect a deep sense of responsibility and commitment to improving public health by broadening the appeal of the journal, building on the perceived trust of the readers and its unique position and credibility. This is reflected in the refurbished journal *Health and Life*. While this analysis is of the journal before the change, we question if the top-down model of health education reflected by our analysis is compatible with ideals of empowerment and truth. In this sense, we see the policy as indicative of the problems which top-down messages encounter in the face of liberalisation, possibly signalling a future crisis in confidence and credibility for such efforts. Willingness to comply with top-down health messages seems still fairly high in Vietnam (Craig, 1995) but will probably rapidly wane, as people gain more information and lifestyle options.

Thus, although there clearly are some medical errors in the material — HIV/AIDS can not be transmitted via casual, non-sexual contact, and the putative effects of the many plant remedies can not be considered established — this pluralism is probably warranted also from a public health point of view, given Vietnam's traditions and present

economic level. Also, the scientific evidence for the value of prevention even within the biomedical paradigm, is mounting (Pettersson *et al.*, 1992; SBU, 1997).

Although combining quantitative CA and qualitative DA is discussed in the literature, it has to our knowledge not previously been carried out in the Vietnamese context.

We suggest that the findings of the discourse analysis are generalisable to more media material in Vietnam, particularly on health (Finer and Tomson, 1997), and that the dichotomies of hope/fear and prevention/cure are useful tools in analyzing media health content.

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