

FROM GERMS TO GHOSTS: THE POLITICS OF NAMING AN EPIDEMIC

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Abstract

Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) was one of the epidemics that spread rapidly and globally, took away dozens of lives and caused great panic recently. When it first struck Taiwan in 2003, a number of different names were created and imposed on it by the media, which is an unusual scene in covering disease.

In this piece of research, the researcher applied Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) in analyzing the media text, as well as several in-depth interviews with press editors. By doing so, the researcher observes the dynamics of how names of the epidemic were formed underpinning different ideologies. In addition, how the names influenced, as well as entangled with, related discourses of interpreting and representing the diseases.

According to the analysis, the naming of the epidemic can be divided into three phases with different rationales underpinning the discourses. Firstly the market-oriented sensationalism dominated the naming process of the disease in order to sell the news. Secondly, as the epidemic was allegedly under control by the scientists, conventionally recognized legitimate sources and scientific medical terms were the mainstream. However, the epidemic was put down as supernatural forces as soon as an outbreak of SARS took place in a local hospital later on.

The researcher tries to point out that the names of diseases are results of the struggles among factors such as the media industry's pursuit of profit, organizational ideology, socio-cultural ideas and personal feeling. As names can be influential, the researcher endeavors to remind those who work in media to keep reflexive thinking on naming, and audience to develop critical awareness towards words, names and discourses when receiving information from the media.

Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) was one of the epidemics that spread rapidly and globally, took away dozens of lives and caused great panic recently. SARS constitutes a unique case in some ways: firstly, it is caused by an unknown virus, which epitomizes the making of ‘epidemic entertainments’ (Tomes, 2002) as the outbreak of mysterious epidemics becomes the familiar scene of popular culture. When first striking Taiwan in 2003, SARS immediately drew unprecedented massive coverage, with over 12,000 news articles in a single newspaper within three months¹. Secondly, there were a number of different names created and imposed on it by the media, which is an unusual scene in covering disease and raised my curiosity. Why did the media create so many names for the epidemic? What are the meanings underlying these names? Did these names make any impact on the social atmosphere? This article regards the naming of the epidemic as a dynamic process in which different names interact with the social atmosphere, through the decisions made by gatekeeper editors in the newsroom. It applies Critical Discourse Analysis and interview in exploring the discourse in different levels and the attitude of the news editors towards SARS news handling in order to illustrate the relationship between them. By doing so, this piece of research argues that names do not simply represent the nature of the disease or what people think about the disease and cannot be taken for granted; instead, they actively create the imaginations about the disease and invest evaluation through the practice of naming.

WHAT’S IN A WORD?

Before focusing on the naming of epidemics, the discussion will start from exploring the meaning of words. Ferdinand de Saussure attempts to constitute a system of signs and meanings and emphasizes the relationship between language and mind (Culler, 1985). He concludes with at least two features of language, firstly, the linguistic sign is arbitrary, which means that there is not any pre-existing system between what Saussure calls the ‘signifier’, the character and the sound of the word, and the ‘signified’, the meaning of the word. Secondly, language system is much more than a system of naming universal

¹ This is based on the search result from the UDN data (<http://udndata.com/>), one of the major news databases in Taiwan. The search starts from 15 March 2003, when the first SARS suspect case appeared.

concepts, such as the interchangeable translation of dog in English, chien in French and hund in German. Culler (1985:22) contends that if language were only about the interchange of vocabulary, learning new languages would be a lot easier while in fact people know how difficult it is when learning different languages. Quite the opposite, different language systems, owing to their own culture and social context, contain their meanings as well as connotations of language. For instance, there exists a detailed set of words specifying the relationship among relatives in Chinese, while in English the relationship is simplified as ‘cousin’, ‘uncle’ or ‘aunt’.

Opposite to the ‘abstract objectivism’, which focuses on the rules of language, there is a different account arguing that the meaning of language is generated according to the context. Although the authorship of Marxism and the Philosophy of Language has been addressed by many Bakhtinian scholars (see Dentith 1995:10 and Liu, 1995:32) and many of them attributed the writing to Bakhtin, this article follows the argument set out by translators of the book, regarding Voloshinov as the author, as it is beyond the scope of it. Voloshinov on the one hand considers Saussure’s linguistics as ‘abstract objectivism’, in which general rules are prioritized and ideology is separated from language use. On the other hand, he criticizes that there is no neutral words as every word has its accent and evaluation when put in use under certain contexts in which interlocutors are located. Voloshinov (1973:70) argues that:

we never say or hear *words*, we say or hear what is true or false, good or bad, important or unimportant, pleasant or unpleasant and so on. *Words are always filled with content and meaning drawn from behavior or ideology*. That is the way we understand words (original emphases).

Besides contexts, the concept of inter-textuality, as suggested by literary critic Kristeva (1980), should be taken into account when analyzing language. As Voloshinov (1973:93) maintains that every utterance is organized ‘*not within but outside—in the social milieu surrounding the individual being.*’ This is to say, the meanings of words are not pre-existed or fixed, rather, they are constantly changing and their meanings have been accumulated by different speakers and changed according to various contexts. In addition, Tim Shortis (2001) argues that instead of being created, most words obtain new meanings through the language use and many are still relevant to the origins, which have been

value-laden from the outset. He applies etymological analysis on new vocabulary in relation to information and communications technology (ICT) to unveil the underlying ideology. Words such as newbie and snail mail, contends Shortis (2001:43), imply that latecomers in Internet world are technology disempowered and illiterate like babies in real life, and the inferiority of traditional postal service with respect to electronic mailing system.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Naming is a mechanism to know and to categorize the world and through which people make sense to the surrounding environment by selecting and making use of the meaning of words. As an ancient Chinese philosopher, Laotzu, maintains: 'the unnamable is the eternally real. Naming is the origin of all particular things' (Mitchell, 1999). In a similar vein, Friedrich Nietzsche also recognizes the significance of names:

It has caused me the greatest trouble, and for ever causes me the greatest trouble, to perceive the unspeakably more depends on what things are called than on what they are...[I]t suffices to create new names, valuations, and probabilities, to create new 'things'.

Moreover, many believe that names can not only refer to things, but also bear certain power imposed on them. According to Larry Dossey (1999), Jewish people in medieval time changed their names when seriously ill in order not to be caught by the death, and some herbs are named after the Saints, i.e. St. John's Wort, so as to transfer the spiritual magic. Even in modern era, pharmacy companies invest good money on creating eye-catching names for 'branding medicine' as well as on inventing medicine itself (The Economist, 2003). One prominent example is 'Viagra' by Pfizer, which 'suggests vigour and strength', and 'also rhymes with Niagara, evoking images of free and forceful flow' (The Economist, 2003). A study with respect to names of characters of TV drama demonstrates that names do contain connotation and the audience can detect the hidden message with no difficulty (Sumser, 2005). The research points out that naming is considered one of the tools to identify the personality of characters, for instance, women criminals are usually given 'masculine' names such as Phyllis to Phil, Jacqueline to Jack and so on, and wealthy people are usually those having unique names and proper family names (Sumser, 2005). To sum up, names can not only refer to things but also provoke

imagination and they have been resumed in social and cultural value system.

Naming of diseases is understandably a more sophisticated dimension, because diseases cause pain and suffering, sometimes they can even be lethal. Thus, the attribution of disease is often used as a mechanism to denounce certain groups with which the mainstream society conflict. The outbreak of epidemics illustrates the conflict between different groups in society or between different countries as the naming is made to scapegoat certain groups. Syphilis has acquired more than fifty other names in the process of its emergence and distribution since its first appearance in the fifteenth century, including the Spanish Disease, the French Disease, the European Illness, the Chinese Pleasure Disease and the West India Disease, etc., which clearly illustrated the power struggle, ideology, and the stigmatization through the naming of disease (Zhu, 2000). In addition, the most famous epidemic in the twentieth century, Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS), is first known as Gay-Related Immune Deficiency (GRID), suggesting the biased interpretation in attributing the disease.

If the naming illustrates the ideological interpretation of diseases, the media outlets undoubtedly serve as mechanisms to consolidate the ideology and form stereotype. In terms of health-related issues, Greenberg (1990) argues that media are the most dominant source for people to obtain information, and suggests that media have to be responsible for duplicating stereotypes because media prefer human-interest news story than hard news to attract readership, which results in exaggeration and focus on heroic incidents rather than accuracy and team work. Media have long favored extreme cases in covering causes of death and that has distorted the concepts of the audience toward the real world to a significant degree. According to Combic and Slovic (1979), newspaper coverage put a great more emphasis on catastrophes, murders and accidents, rather than chronicle diseases, what in fact kill much more people, and the survey showed the conception of the audience relevant to that presented in media.

From aforementioned discussion, naming can be regarded as a practice to imply and highlight certain aspects of things and deserves attention. In terms of disease-naming, International Classification of Diseases (ICD) is the widely used system among professional medical institutions to categorize the diseases, which usually contains the

index of diseases, syndromes, pathological conditions, injuries, symptoms and other reasons (WHO, 2004:1). According to ICD manual, each diagnosis is assigned a three-digit code given to the infected body parts and can be further sub-classified with an additional two digits, if necessary (Wolper, 2004: 857). ICD is made to possibly cover the diseases to an exhaustive degree, while it is complied with jargons that intimidate lay people. People know diseases by some more popular names and the practices of naming can be divided into some ways. Generally speaking, diseases have usually been named after 'their scientific describer, a famous victim, or the place where they occur' (Bowker and Star, 2000: 78). Famous examples include Parkinson's Disease, which is named after Dr. James Parkinson, the first doctor who demonstrated the clinical report with respect to the disease; in addition, Minamata Disease refers to the disease caused by mercury poisoning incidents in Minamata, Japan in post-war era. There is a trend that these names have gradually been deleted or disappeared, especially those names indicating victims or places, for fear of causing stigmatization. The trend of the 'replacement of the local and specific with the general...the concrete instance with the formal abstraction' (Bowker & Star, 2000: 80) also reflects on the naming of SARS virus. The virus firstly proposed by the research team in the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to be named 'Urbani Virus' after Dr. Carlo Urbani, the fellow in the WHO who was the first to warn the world and died of SARS. Through the investigation of the relationship between the three layers of disease names, media discourses and social culture, this article attempts to draw a larger picture of how names function within the society.

NEWS MAKING: GATE KEEPING AND PROFIT-MAXIMIZATION

However, for media outlets, naming of disease means something radically different than health organizations as they focus more on attracting a larger audience. Providing with the audience the names of disease is part of news making process, therefore, it is meaningful to examine how media outlets in Taiwan have created more than a dozen of names to indicate the epidemic. As studies demonstrate that media outlets are not only the dominant source for people to know the world (Greenberg, 1990), but also events influence the public's view toward the event through framing news (Shah, et al., 2002). Moreover, Chung et al. (1995) suggest that different headlines and leads for the same news article influence the reader's judgement of news events. Thus, what is filtered and

presented in the media by the ‘gatekeeper’ news editors is important as Bagdikian (1983:226) recognizes that to power to control information is the key to controlling the society. Shoemaker (1991) identifies the ‘gate-keeping’ process involves selection, message encoding, shàping, display and transmission from a sender to a receiver. In this process, gatekeepers determine which units pass the gate and be received by the audience and which are left out. Early studies emphasized the power of the gatekeepers, suggesting how their subjective discretion affected the shàping of news (White, 1950). Later studies have gradually transferred the focus on the limits under which news editors are located: editors are provided with limited news sources, and the ideas of the media proprietors have always outweighed those of the editors (Gieber, 1964; Dimmick, 1974). Breed (1955) claims that news editors learn the normative and become assimilated through the socialization process within the institutions, which results in what Bass (1969) suggested ‘the institutionalized individual’. Recognizing the significance of the gatekeepers and their roles in deciding news content, this study conducts interviews with news editors in addition to analyzing media discourse in order to form a more complete picture of the epidemic-naming process.

In terms of news process, this study identifies that two aspects impact the culture in the newsroom, which lead to the unprecedented scenario of health reporting, including: the dominance of market-driven journalism and the rise of fear culture. First and foremost, market-driven journalism has radically changed the definition of journalism and the role of news reporters. Market-driven journalism is characterized with operating journalism in market logic, in which news coverage is regarded as commodity, consumers replace the news producers to evaluate the quality of news coverage and news producers adjust the news focus according to consumer demand (McManus, 1994:4-5). The rise of market-driven journalism can be dated back as early as the ‘Penny Press’ in the 1960s, while the dominance of it has been parallel with the monopoly of media industry in the US since the 1980s. As the aim of every business is to maximize profit, market-driven journalism has long been criticised about distorting information in order to attract readership. Seale (2003) points out the tabloidization of news coverage that there is constant conflict between scientists and media because the media tend to sensationalize and exaggerate the scientific findings and progress. Nancy Tomes (2000) also claims that in the wave of sensationalization of media coverage, the outbreak of epidemic

undoubtedly creates a great opportunity for the media to sell. She presents the relationship between the 'germ panic' and the development of communication technology, suggesting that the progress of new communication technology actually helps arouse the germ panic in the history.

'Germ panic' presented by Tomes succinctly encapsulates the social context in which we are all situated, on the one hand, market-driven journalism greatly changes the environment of media industry and results in sensationalization or tabloidization of news coverage, on the other hand, there emerges a trend of the culture of fear going to permeate every aspect of daily life. Tomes (2000) presents the mode of news coverage with respect to 'superbug' emphasizes the danger of ordinary things that might cause great damage and arouses people's phobia about invisible germs. Echoing with the 'plague of fear' by Tomes (2002: 628), Furedi (2002) argues that 'culture of fear' has characterized the era that we live since the 1990s. In this distinct culture, safety becomes the superior way of judging things and risk has grown to be a prominent business (Furedi, 2002), although the degree of fear is far disproportionate to what people really experience. Altheide (2002) explores the history of fear from centuries ago, arguing that fear starts from things that people are truly afraid about but has transformed to the general attitudes people hold toward life in modern era. His research demonstrates the discourse of fear has greatly grown in the past decades: headlines containing the word 'fear' in newspapers has increased 161% and 171% in terms of usage in TV news coverage between 1985 to 1994.

Coupling with the rapid growing of fear discourse is the attempt of the popular culture to appropriate and transform fear into commodity. From the twentieth century onward, the fear of epidemic has been paramount; both from the massive media coverage in relation to Avian Flu in Asia, Ebola Virus from African, Salmonella egg contamination and 'Mad Cow Disease' in the UK, and the popular cultural commodity, films and fictions featuring epidemic, such as Sahara, 28 Days Later, and Outbreak, just a name a few. Susan Moeller (1999) criticizes that the mass media sensationalize the epidemic coverage in order to 'sell' while ignores the more fundamental public health issues. When analyzing the top ten disasters of the year 2005, Moeller (2006) concludes that the media pay much more attention on 'simple emergencies' such as flood and earthquakes, while leaving 'complex emergencies' untouched.

SARS epitomizes the existence of a risk society, as no one really knows where the virus comes from, how does it spread, and it is beyond the existing system of medical knowledge. Especially when doctors and nurses are infected with the epidemic, when even 'experts' cannot protect themselves from the threat of the virus, the fear has been deepened and mass panic is on the corner. However, Michael Fumento (2003) demonstrates the over-reaction of some leading media outlets including Time, Newsweek, and U.S. News & World Report, arguing the fear of SARS is far disproportionate to what the true picture looks like. The New Zealand Herald on April 29, 2003 had a headline reading 'SARS Surge Could Stretch NZ Says Annette King', while there is only one confirmed case all over the country. Likewise, New York Times intensively published over 330 news articles in the month of May 2003 alone, and economy-centric Wall Street Journal had more than ten articles on one single day. Medical historian Edward Shorter (2003, cited in Fumento) argues it is a collective social hysteria triggered and exacerbated by media coverage. In Taiwan, media have also been incorporated into the collective hysteria as the fierce competition between media outlets results in sensationalized images, unverified rumours, and fearful description (Lin, 2006) to maximized profit.

In order to create a more thorough framework to understand the phenomenon of naming the epidemic with various names, concepts of disease-naming, market-driven journalism, as well as culture of fear are introduced. Moreover, the study also recognizes the news editors' roles in handling the news and how their choice of names influences the social atmosphere. Therefore, the study applies both Critical Discourse Analysis to unfold the media coverage and in-depth interview to examine what issues the news editors have discussed about and how they make the final decision.

RESEARCH METHOD (S)

As the aim of this study is to explore the relationship between the names of the epidemic and their impact on social atmosphere during the process of epidemic outbreak, different levels of language use are taken into account. The study concerns the concepts and imaginations of disease underlying the names, the social contexts from which they emerge, the correspondence with the actual situation, and how they impact on recognition and reaction toward the disease. Research approaches focusing on texts and discourses

have been gaining significance since the 1970s and generating fruitful research results spanning from gendered discourse in academia, market-oriented society, to manipulation of language in political struggles (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997: 258-9). Among them the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) introduced by Norman Fairclough is of help, as it is outlined as a 'three-dimension' framework including analyses of language text, discourse practice, and socio-cultural practice (Fairclough, 1995: 2).

According to Fairclough, 'discourse' means the interaction between text and the outside society, including the production and interpretation of the text, which is a more comprehensive framework than text analysis. Phillips & Jørgensen (2002:1) propose a much broader definition that discourse is 'a particular way of talking about and understanding the world'. Fairclough (1995) considers discourse practice the bridge between the specific language text and the wider context of socio-cultural practice. He presupposes that discourse practice shapes, while at the same time are shaped by, the socio-cultural environment. Therefore, a comprehensive framework has to include text and its interaction with society. Additionally, Fairclough acknowledges the importance of both Althusser's analysis of ideology and Gramsci's analysis of hegemony, and attempts to unveil the ideological and hegemonic structure underlying the order of discourse (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997:260-2). Fairclough (1995: 12) also emphasizes the concept of 'order of discourse' borrowed from M. Foucault, referring to certain discursive practices in particular contexts. Order of discourse can contain different sets of discourses within the same domain, within which these discourses are not necessarily equal. Rather, in certain order of discourse there always exists at least one hegemonic mainstream discourse practice, while the others are categorized as alternative practices. For example, Hsu & Hu (1998) explore the viewpoints in health news coverage in Taiwan, and conclude that western medical knowledge is the mainstream discourse as reporters usually support the efficacy of Chinese medicine in western medical context. Besides, reporters usually end the coverage by warning the use of Chinese medicine from the western medical point of view, which clearly demonstrates that western medical discourse is still the norm.

By applying CDA, this study attempts to explore the following questions:

1. What messages do the news coverage, such as title, lead and body convey?

2. What kind of information has been chosen to highlight the narrative? What are the main sources? What is the mainstream discourse?
3. Are there any changes of order of discourse? If so, what are they?

In addition to order of discourses analyzed from the media coverage, opinions of news editors are also taken into account in order to understand the rationales underpinning the handling of disease news and form a more complete picture of news handling. News editors, unlike reporters, are invisible from the reader's point of view, and thus more difficult to get in touch with. In order to contact those who actually dealt with SARS news coverage, the researcher starts with contacting those who are responsible for the page of 'hot topics', often Page Three of newspaper, and ask for recommendation of another news editor. A total of eight news editors from four major newspapers are interviewed, and the average length of interviews is about one hour and thirty minutes.

Data are divided into three stages in accordance with the significant emergence of different names: the first stage is from February 11 to March 15; second stage from March 16 to April 23, and the third stage from April 24 to July 5, all within the year of 2003. Each date is selected with deliberation: February 11 is the date that first article about the epidemic is covered; March 15 is the date SARS is announced as the official name by the WHO; April 24 is the date newspapers start to use a traditional Chinese word *shà* to refer to the epidemic, and finally July 5 is the date when Taiwan is officially removed from the SARS-affected area by the WHO.

RESULTS ANALYSIS

Stage one: You've got the 'Killer Pneumonia'!

Time: February 11 to March 15, 2003

Names used: Unknown pneumonia, Killer pneumonia, Mysterious pneumonia, Guandong pneumonia / Atypical pneumonia

The first news article about a new pneumonia from Guandong, China, appears on February 11, 2003, focusing on the unknown cause of the disease and most of the news sources quoted from posts from the Internet. Different names including Unknown/ Killer/

Mysterious/ Guangdong and Atypical pneumonia are used, except the last one, none of the others is a medical term officially recognized by medical professionals. Most of the names emphasize the peculiarity of the disease, the difficulties to understand it, and imply that the outbreak will be uncontrollable and disastrous. News sources include staff members from medical institutions, usually unidentified, officials from Chinese, Taiwanese government, and ordinary people, each serves a relatively stable viewpoint. Medical staff presents rather pessimistic opinions, ordinary people queue for purchasing herbal medicine with great panic, while officials warn people to be cautious yet not panic about the emerging disease.

Interviews with news editors show some interesting points as most of the editors do not consider these terms (unknown/ killer/ mysterious, etc.) ‘names’ of the epidemic, instead, they argue they are simply ‘adjectives’ used to describe it. Profit seeking is the reason frequently mentioned about when being asked why they use such adjectives to spice up the disease is, according to a senior news editor:

In the first place, it does not absolutely violate the fact because the epidemic indeed can kill. Secondly, newspapers nowadays are more like advertisement, aren't they? They are put on the stand, compete with their counterparts and wait to be picked. It is the top priority for newspapers to catch people's attraction at the first sight; thus, news editors actually act as advertising creative executives.
(Editor C)

Another editor considers that these terms ‘interchangeable’ and not so importance since there is no fixed official term for the epidemic:

Why do you care about these provisional terms? I do not think there is any big deal since no matter what names do you use, they all the same vagueness and uncertainly of the disease. You can be either slightly more exaggerated or more conservative; it is to your own discretion as long as it is not obviously wrong.
(Editor J)

Stage two: You've got SARS.

Time: March 16 to April 23, 2003

Names used: Unknown pneumonia, SARS

The WHO announced on March 15, 2003 that the new epidemic is officially named

SARS and medical experts have undertaken a lot experiment to explore the cause, which shows the controllability of the epidemic and constitutes as the major discourse in this stage. Compared with the names in the previous stage, news articles using SARS focus more on the symptoms and scientific findings than description of social atmosphere. Once the official name is settled, most of newspaper follow suit on the next day, and authoritative news sources such as the WHO officials, local government officials, and medical experts comprise the majority of the news coverage.

News editors regard the following of the official name the legitimate choice:

We are keen to find something with the support of the authority as everything seems so uncertain at the time, and the name released by the WHO and national Bureau of Health is undoubtedly based on certain scientific research and is at least more proximate to being correct. (*Editor T*)

It is the most concise term with only four English letters, and it can be understood worldwide, which is very helpful for foreigners in Taiwan even though they do not know Chinese. (*Editor C*)

During this period of time, there is an anecdote about the use of ‘Unknown Pneumonia’ by a certain nationwide newspaper; the news editor from this newspaper explains that:

I notice that the journalist still uses Unknown Pneumonia on the day and question about it, other news editors decide not to change it (to conform with that of the BOH) because they think the journalist has equipped with certain medical background knowledge, though I personally do not really agree with it. (*Editor D*)

Another news editor points out that following or discarding the names proposed by government authority actually imply the attitudes of the newspaper towards government:

Taiwan is a extremely politicized country and the newspaper’s policy of either accepting or refusing the decision of government has its political implication.’ (*Editor A*)

In this stage, the formation and transformation of names has witnessed a subtler process in which not only profit-seeking motivation and newsroom convention, but also political struggling all participates in the naming practices of newspapers.

Stage three: You are ‘possessed’!

Time: April 24 to July 5

Names used: SARS, *Shà*

Even though the WHO officially announces the name and seems to form the mainstream discourse, the fear of SARS never fades off but simply transforms into undercurrent because of the fact that SARS is not completely under control. Therefore, the collective infection of municipal hospital in Taipei city resulting in sudden disclosure of the hospital becomes the last straw that kills. The outburst of panic and conflict between ‘the seized’ and the authority is repeatedly broadcast and presented as the main themes of news coverage, echoing with the real outbreak of the epidemic. *Shà* replaces most names of the epidemic and becomes prominent in news coverage. *Shà* is considered a synonym as ‘to kill’ traditionally and can be regarded as a verb or a noun, meaning ‘to kill’ or ‘bad spirit’ (Cheng Chung Bookstore, 1974: 894). *Shà* has been closely related to concept of Ying-Yang and incorporated into traditional folk culture, which still constitutes a significant part of Taiwan’s medical system other than western and Chinese medical system (Kleinman, 1987). When people encounter bad luck or something unable to be explained reasonably, it is likely that they tend to interpret that ‘they are possessed’ and seek ways to dissolve.

Shà as a name for epidemic does not contain any sign of symptom and does not help enhance people’s understanding of the disease, all it conveys is that the disease is server and people cannot do anything but ‘get possessed’, which implies the irresistibility of the virus. In terms of language usage, *Shà* can be used as a verb and a noun like many other Chinese words do; it means bad or evil spirits when used as a noun and means being possessed as a verb. Editors hold different opinions with respect to if the word *Shà* contains the property as equal to ‘the name of the epidemic’ or simply ‘an emphasis’, An editor describes the use of the word *Shà* an element to juice up the story so as to make lurid headlines and sell the papers.

I almost forget having used the word *Shà* were it not for your reminder because it is not an official name, is only used in news headlines and never going to replace the official name of epidemic. It is a temporary emphasis, in order to make the headline more attractive. (*Editor D*)

Others believe that when most people understand a certain term and know what it refers to, it can be viewed as the name of the epidemic:

Shà actually replaces the name SARS and has no problem being identified by the readers. It almost becomes a convention known by all and no alteration of fonts or adding quotation mark is needed given that virtually all media outlets used it.

All news editors interviewed reach a complete agreement about the use of the word *Shà*, arguing it pertinent to describe what happens at the time. Most of them regard the word a ‘vivid’ choice since it not only shares similar sounds of characters with the epidemic SARS, but also ‘epitomizes the feeling of a violent epidemic’. An editor describes the word *Shà* a ‘perfect example’ for it matches with the SARS in terms of form, sound and meaning, the three fundamental elements of Chinese character:

The use of *Shà* is masterly as it conveys the sense of something violent and horrifying; moreover, it represents the similar sound of SARS. (*Editor D*)

People understand immediately what it refers to and the danger of it, I think it is the cleverness of Chinese. Besides, technically speaking, *Shà* is a Chinese word that matches the headlines better than using the four English characters SARS (*Editor C*).

Puns, play of words and rhyming in headlines are popular in media coverage, but they nonetheless fully explain the emerge and the popular use of the word *Shà* as SARS has been used for quite a few weeks but *Shà* has never appeared until the closure of hospitals takes place. The timeline suggests an overt shift of word use on April 24, 2003, when the group inflection in hospital was identified, the hospital was ordered to close down on the same day while more than 900 staff members along with 240 inpatients were kept in the hospital for a two-week quarantine period. The decision shocked the personnel and caused great panic as many tried to break the blockade line, and it is on the same day that *Shà* appeared on media coverage and generated much more momentum afterwards. Furthermore, most editors mention about the uncertainty and the horror of the unknown epidemic when explaining their use of the word *Shà*, indicating that they take into account the ‘social value’ of the word *Shà* bears and use it deliberately other than simply because of the similar sound they share.

Although *Shà* is the mainstream, the name SARS is still used in headlines in this stage, news editors explain that they still tend to use SARS in the headline if the news source of

the coverage is mainly from official authority:

We tend to use SARS when citing official announcement or opinion, and use *Shà* when it describes a certain state. SARS is a professional diagnosis, while I would say *Shà* is more like a name manufactured by the media. It is not appropriate to use *Shà* to cover the opinions of the professionals. (*Editor C*)

The judgment of word choosing clearly demonstrates the idea that the news editors hold towards different words when they attribute the name SARS to medical or official news sources, while impose the name *Shà* on dealing with the everyday life of the mass public. It is inevitable that *Shà* will generate abundant connotation and imagination since it has been invested with so many socio-cultural meanings for a long time. Some editors recognize the risk of stigmatizing people and the dilemma between human rights and profit making:

I do think it is problematic when you use *Shà* to describe the epidemic. If people are infected with SARS, they are considered as patients, which is hugely different from those 'who are possessed', as if there is something evil within their bodies and they themselves become a part of the evil spirits...But what else can you do to attract the readers? It is an inevitable choice for the media industry. (*Editor A*)

According to the aforementioned discourse analysis, the naming of the epidemic can be divided into three phases with different rationales underpinning the discourses. Firstly the market-oriented sensationalism dominated the naming process of the disease. Secondly, as the epidemic was allegedly under control by the scientists, conventionally recognized legitimate sources and scientific medical terms were the mainstream. However, the epidemic was put down as supernatural forces as soon as an outbreak of SARS took place in a local hospital later on. Additionally, in interviewing the news editors, the naming of the epidemic seems more about profit-generation than getting the public well informed. Almost every news editor points out the pressure of pursuing profit, which drives the coverage of an epidemic to profit-maximization practice.

This article attempts to illustrate that names of diseases are results of the struggles between different powers such as the industry's drive for profit, organizational ideology, socio-cultural ideas and personal feeling. As names can be influential, the researcher

endeavors to remind those who work in media to keep reflexive thinking on naming, and audience to develop critical awareness towards words, names and discourses when receiving information from the media.

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