

Start-ups, Stagnancy, and Story-telling Strategies: Western Business News Writing on Japanese entrepreneurialism.

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Abstract. This paper reports research into the written reporting on Japanese entrepreneurialism in western, English-language business news. After explaining the author's method of sampling from a six-year survey of major-circulation newspapers and business magazines, the project's main methodology is described – a qualitative form of rhetorical research known as Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), focused on uncovering and critiquing the ideological biases and presuppositions, both explicit and implicit, in texts such as business news stories. The paper's following analytic section then applies many of the explained CDA concepts to close discursive analysis of one news article on Japanese entrepreneurialism, randomly selected from a larger set of studied sources, with comparative insights drawn from two other news articles also randomly selected for close analysis.

This illuminates a variety of journalistic shortcomings common in western business journalism on Japan, mostly involving an understated or even surreptitious authorial effort to frame reported issues and events as though the neoliberal demand for Japan's political-economic westernization – specifically the aspiration towards a 'Silicon Valley' model of entrepreneurialism – were the only rational interpretation for readers to adopt. Primary examples include: the attempt to 'prime' audience interpretation of reported phenomena and events by exaggerated or false declaratives, in titles or body text, followed by qualifying or corrected statements; an overstated attribution of centrality and causality to the dramatized actions of elite or sympathetic individuals, thereby obscuring broader socio-cultural and political-economic factors and contexts; the use of loaded and euphemistic terms to subtly slant reader comprehension in favour of the author's overt or underlying propositions; and implied support for criminal or discriminatory behaviour and discourse. The paper's concluding discussion issues a call for less ideologically and ethnocentrically biased reportage

in western business journalism on Japan, whatever the ideology advanced by writers and publishers, and for more variety of perspective and debate.

1. Introduction

This paper reports some of my recent primary research into representations in English-language business news of Japanese entrepreneurialism and the frequently linked term innovation. Such analysis illuminates an ideological and often ethnocentric presumptuousness underpinning the bulk of this journalistic coverage. A need is thereby established for more variety of perspective in western mainstream-media commentary on this aspect of Japan's economy.

The paper begins by briefly relating the circumstances and interests that sparked its inception, chiefly the JSAC 2014 call for papers, with its invocation of "post-growth" innovation. The following methodological section describes this news study's method and supporting theory: a content scan of English-language business journalism, covering approximately six years and analyzed by means of a theoretical framework combining insights drawn from critical discourse analysis and news-framing studies, as informed by secondary research into theories of entrepreneurialism and innovation. Findings are then reported and discussed, followed by a concluding call for further critical research into business-press Japan coverage, with the aim of raising its standards for journalistic excellence.

2. Background & Methodology

In late winter 2014, I received the Japan Studies Association of Canada (JSAC) call for papers: *Designing Japan – Innovation in a post-growth society*. Later the same day, I read a business-news article (or blog) addressing Japan's growth prospects; but the author and publisher escape recollection, because the piece echoed a message and a tone so commonplace in English-language commentary on the Japanese economy. The writer urged Japan to intensify its dismantlement of lifetime employment and embrace 'creative destruction,' in the name of entrepreneurial innovation. Yet simultaneously, he or she seemed to be implying that it was likely too late for such radical shifts to save Japan from decline, given its aging population and massive debt. Like all contemporary Japan observers, I had read many other writings of similar intent and inflection. But on this occasion a counterpoint came to mind from the JSAC 2014 call I'd just read: "Insights on what is working, or not, in Japan are of great interest to Canada and other countries which may soon find themselves facing a similar demographic and economic predicament." It occurred to me that my daily scanning of news on Japan never rendered this line of thought – that some of what Japan is already doing, societally and economically, might not only be working, but also prove innovative and instructional to other countries, given the seeming possibility that 'slower-to-no' growth will become a new normal in much of the world. I then resolved that my JSAC 2014 paper would investigate the seeming absence of this notion in mainstream English-language media.

For four weeks between September and October 2014 (the month of my JSAC 2014 presentation), I surveyed the coverage of Japan's economy in several prominent English-language newspapers and news magazines, going back about five years to January 1, 2009, and running a search with the keyword terms 'Japan,' 'innovation' and 'entrepreneur.' The latter keyword was added after preliminary reading made clear a pronounced tendency in journalism on Japanese innovation: asserting its present dearth and pinning hopes for its revivification on a Japanese entrepreneurial efflorescence of Silicon Valley-style start-ups, helmed and manned by those who would otherwise be salarymen, but who are freed from this fate, voluntarily or perforce, especially by the authors' called-for liberalization of labour markets. Whereas my JSAC 2014 talk reported initial analysis of English media on Japanese innovation more broadly, this present paper focuses on a subset of news articles about Japanese entrepreneurialism, and I limit discussion to that subject. I expanded my search on this subject in May 2015, to include sources published between then and October 14, so the final time range to date spans just over six years.

While my overall scan has taken in various mass media such as economics blogs and consultancy white papers, I focused on prominent mass-circulation news dailies and weeklies from majority English-speaking countries such as The United States, Britain, Canada, and Australia. By 'prominent' I mean those that either have an explicitly national or international scope (*Macleans*, *Forbes*, *The Economist*, *Financial Times*, etc.) or are nominally affiliated with a major city (*The New York Times*, *the Washington Post*, *The Globe and Mail*, etc.). In this particular selection of periodicals I sought to capture the 'mainstream' of English-language business media by encapsulating influential voices ranging a slim ideological spectrum, relative to one another. The more conservative and/or neoliberal end of this span is occupied by papers or magazines such as *Forbes* and *The Economist*, whereas publications more centre-left in editorial alignment, or at least the bulk of reportage, include *The New York Times* and *The Globe and Mail*.

Within the approximately six-year (2009-2015) timeframe delimiting my search, between twenty-five and thirty articles – substantive news reports, investigatory pieces, op-eds, etc. – were determined to be focused primarily on Japanese entrepreneurialism. For the purposes of this paper, three of these articles were randomly chosen for close rhetorical analysis. From those three analyzed articles, one was randomly chosen to provide the focus for this paper, with observations from the other two analyses providing comparative points.

This news study was methodologically guided by a prominent tradition of communication studies, critical discourse analysis (henceforth CDA), along with insights drawn from cognate journalism scholarship. CDA is a 'school' of scholarship dating back to the 1970s, comprising various, chiefly qualitative methodologies. Its roots lie in a British branch of 'critical' sociolinguistics intent upon "isolating ideology in discourse" (Trew, 1979, p. 155), so as to illuminate and counter the subtle or overt ways in which language functions to help maintain social iniquities, especially through propagating or normalizing conservative and/or neoliberal worldviews and ideologies (aka, 'big D' Discourses in the Foucauldian sense; see Gee, 1990).

Critical linguists and the formative CDA scholars were ideologically inspired by WW2-era neo-Marxism, especially the critique of mass media by Frankfurt School 'critical theory' and Gramsci's reconceptualization of hegemony: Gramsci here argued that in modern democracies, dominant classes maintain their rule not so much by the exercise or threat of force, but rather by using propaganda, advertising, or more subtle communicative strategies – such as euphemism or impenetrable jargon – to convince dominated populaces that their political-economic conditions are just or at least inevitable. Contemporary CDA practitioners have broadened their focus beyond linguistics to analytically integrate nonverbal and visual communication, and they have adopted for this extended purpose a variety of mostly qualitative methodologies. Current CDA also draws for theoretic insight from various fields of post-Marxist 'critical theory' such as post-structuralism, post-colonialism, and feminism.

In terms of methodological technique, many prominent CDA approaches (e.g., Fairclough, 1995a, 1995b; van Dijk, 1988, 1993) involve analytic 'oscillation' across three domains of inquiry – the text and two concentric layers of surrounding context. These three analytic levels are in some senses only separable in the abstract; but they can be understood, in essence, as follows:

- (1) Fine-grained scrutiny of the text, often including extra-linguistic elements (font shape and colour, paper quality, vocal tone, volume, etc.).

- (2) Consideration of medial (mid-range) institutional and interpersonal contexts involving textual production/distribution and audience/interactant reception. For example, such production/ reception contexts might include the culture and institutional mandates or cost-cutting pressures of a publishing organization (such as a news agency); the personalities or moods of speakers and/or the relationship between them; or the ambience of a setting in which the text has been received or later reflected upon.

- (3) Consideration of the broadest distal contexts both influencing text and medial contexts, and ultimately influenced by them. These contexts primarily include (big-D) Discourses (worldviews, ideologies) and their underpinning, actuated historic and political-economic realities. In other words, distal contexts are the objective truths which studied texts either impart or reflect, explicitly or implicitly, or do not – whether erroneously, duplicitously (or fancifully, as in the case of art).

CDA practitioners generally emphasize the importance of analytically concentrating on all three levels – text, medial context, and distal context. This ensures one's research findings are grounded empirically, particularly through attention to text and medial contexts, and theoretically, especially through integration of distal contexts. However, different CDA approaches give each dimension very different terminology and treatment. Text can be analyzed by various analytic traditions, sometimes in combination – for examples: a branch of linguistics or literary criticism; pragmatics or 'conversation analysis'; 'discursive psychology'; chronemics or proxemics; semiotics, and so on. As for the medial contexts surrounding text production and reception, some CDA (e.g., Van Dijk, 1988, 1993) engages the thorny questions of text

reception – whether, how much, and how audiences interpret communication and are influenced by it cognitively and behaviourally. But some CDA focuses exclusively on production or distribution processes and producer intentions – what a text means to its author or their sponsor, and what they want their audience to feel or believe. Such narrowing of scope, to production only, might owe to space limitations for a research project. It can also stem from a belief held by some scholars in all communication fields: that both text producers and media scholars remain highly circumscribed in their capacity to know – much less predict or control – how an audience interprets a given text or will do so (e.g., Boyd-Barrett, 1994; Cottle, 2000; Ede & Lunsford, 1984; Widdowson, 1995a, 1995b). Both of these reasons inform this paper's focus on the messaging strategies of English-language journalists and their publishers, as opposed to the interpretation of their writing by western or Japanese news readers.

Regarding the distal contexts – the socio-political, economic realities either reflected or distorted by studied texts – for nearly all CDA, the theorization of this dimension is predicated upon political and moral perspectives informed by one or more branches of critical theory, from Marxism to post-colonialism. However, in CDA as elsewhere, not all of these approaches perfectly align, in ideological, normative and epistemological terms. Moreover, founding CDA figure Norman Fairclough once mused that “a CDA of the Right is quite conceivable, directed for instance at left-wing or feminist texts” (1996, p. 52). Whatever the philosophical underpinnings of a practitioner's distal contextualizations, this ‘macro-analytical’ level of CDA often requires of the analyst some specialist knowledge, apropos of the specific discourses being studied. In the case of this project, such insight was primarily generated through my secondary research into the scholarship of innovation and entrepreneurialism, as well as my pre-existing secondary and primary research into Japanese business, culture, and political economy.

CDA has turned its critiques on a myriad of interpersonal and institutional communication, and news media have long been a frequent focus, dating back to the field's 1970s inception in critical linguistics (e.g., Fowler et al., 1979; Kress & Hodge, 1979; Trew, 1979). Typically, such analysis presages or expands upon the thesis most famously advanced by Noam Chomsky in *Manufacturing Consent* (Herman & Chomsky, 1988): that ‘the media,’ especially because of its reliance on advertising and its increasingly capitalist ownership structure, serves a “system-supportive propaganda function” (p. 306). In this measure, journalism overtly and subtly – hegemonically – moulds public sentiment into favouring, or at least consenting to, the economic, political, and societal agendas of conservative and/or neoliberal elites. These interests are conceived of by such theoreticians as being opposed to the democratic, common weal – which would be served, according to Chomsky and almost all CDA practitioners, by a much more socialist and pacifist governance than exists in most or all ‘liberal-democratic’ nations.

Early semantic and syntactic insights from ‘critical linguistics’ have continued to be updated. Such analysis has explored the selective choice of loaded terminology, such as ‘terrorist’ as opposed to ‘freedom fighter,’ or ‘rioter’ instead of ‘demonstrator.’ Another key focal point has been the ascription of inevitability to events, or the deflection of institutional and individual responsibil-

ity, for example through nominalization and passive constructions: ‘the market,’ ‘globalization,’ ‘mistakes were made,’ etc.

Two of the most prominent CDA scholars working today are Norman Fairclough, emeritus Professor of Linguistics at Lancaster University, and Teun van Dijk, a Dutch professor of discourse now teaching at Pompeu Fabra University, in Barcelona. Both are field-founding figures, and both have devoted books to critical analysis of news texts. Fairclough's 1995(b) *Media Discourse* scrutinizes a range of journalistic communication, chiefly news writing and editorials. This work critiques the oft-noted rhetorical devices by which journalists and their publishers convey the impression of disinterested objectivity or authoritative expertise. Fairclough puts the lie to such claims by focusing most closely on the increasing prevalence of what he terms the marketization and conversationalization of public discourse such as the news. Discursive marketization refers especially to, (1) the deployment of advertising, PR, and other ‘strategic communications,’ or just their principles and techniques, throughout all types of organizational communication; and, (2) the rhetorical devices by which ‘market logic’ such as short-term profit maximization and cost-cutting are implied to be inherently desirable or necessary, as though such imperatives are beyond reasonable debate.

Conversationalization is a more multivalent discursive phenomenon, with both negative and positive manifestations and potentials. It refers to the adoption by organizational communication, including news and news production, of informal and colloquial language or imagery. It often involves what Fairclough terms synthetic personalization: “the impression of treating each of the people ‘handled’ en masse as an individual” (2001, p. 52). General organizational examples would include the ingratiating faux-folkiness of much advertising, branding, and social-media posting; and of some bosses (“Call me Bob/Barbara”); and of all service staff engaged in ‘emotional labour’ (Hochschild, 1983). More positive instantiations would involve current trends and policies for ‘plain language’ communications.

Conversationalization has many other manifestations. Interrelated developments that are distinct to news organizations, and that are the targets of much critique, involve the contemporary blurring or replacement of (relatively) fact-based reportage with editorial or talking-head opinion; the selection and redesign of ‘infotainment’ as news; the new prominence of blogs in place of institutionalized ‘gatekeeping’ journalism; and today's arguable increase in ‘advertorial’ content, trendily relabeled with such terms as ‘brand journalism.’

Teun van Dijk is most well-known for his ‘sociocognitive’ approach to CDA, through which he examines how ideology is inculcated psychologically in both text producers and text recipients. Much of this analysis focuses on the construction and reinforcement of binary worldviews, especially the ‘us versus them’ cultural schemas and scripts that result in stereotypes, nationalism, and racism. Van Dijk often analyzes journalistic communication, and many such insights were first fully formulated in his 1998 book *News as Discourse*. With his work here on ‘sociocognition,’ van Dijk focuses on professional journalistic norms such as the ideal of objectivity, along with newspaper writing's genre-structural tra-

ditions (from the ‘5 Ws’ and the ‘inverted pyramid’ to typesetting choices). He examines how these formats help to constrain and construct ideological ‘frames’ of understanding, both for journalists and their editors or employers, and for news readers.

Van Dijk (1988) emphasizes that news writing consists primarily of propositions – empirical and ethical truth claims, both explicit and implicit – and that journalism is an essentially persuasive discourse, notwithstanding claims of disinterested objectivity. In van Dijk’s method of discourse analysis, an important first step is to parse studied news stories into their constituent and overarching propositions, obvious and implied. This can be an intricate task, not least because news-writing sentences tend to be long and complex. (This perhaps ironically owes to the requirement of reducing the overall number of sentences, for the sake of article brevity). The compound nature of these sentences often implies causal connections between referenced events, people, and things. But closer examination can reveal such propositions to be less than logically founded.

Van Dijk recommends a particular analytic focus upon headlines, including subheadings, and lede sentences or paragraphs. He explains how, partly because of the ‘inverted pyramid’ mandate to pack all essential information into the beginning of an article, these initial utterances implicitly and explicitly yield rich cues as to the author’s (or other headline writer’s) main propositions, also termed ‘semantic macrostructures’: the interpretation of covered events that they wish to instil in readers. Van Dijk advises similar rhetorical attention to final paragraphs, which is where news writers tend to explicitly include more of their own opinion. (However, these sections are often excised by editorial fiat, since a news story’s essential information – the ‘5 Ws’ – should have been conveyed by then.)

Partly with reference to previous scholarship on journalism, van Dijk (1988, pp. 84-85) offers a three-point itemization of the often-interrelated ways in which news stories work persuasively:

2.1 *Facticity*

Most obviously, but in frequently subtle ways, journalists seek to establish the objectivity of their reported information. Of course, this includes reportage of numbers, such as statistics and head counts. But upon close examination – rhetorical, mathematical, or commonsensical – such figures often prove to be dubious, de-contextualized, or of little actual relevance to their related propositions.

Facticity is also conveyed more qualitatively, through direct description of events, people, and scenes, along with the requisite inclusion of eyewitness reports and direct quotes. Typically these personal perspectives are solicited from experts and other societal elites, or at least from individuals who voice support for the article’s main propositions. Van Dijk’s research into news-story quotes has established not only that they are selective, but that very commonly, they are far from verbatim, being altered for summarization purposes and for propositional support.

2.2 *Relational structure*

News writing regularly states or implies causal connections without sufficiently establishing such propositions. As already mentioned, the need to condense propositions into complex sentences can lead to such implications, perhaps without any conscious authorial intent. Journalists also commonly insert reference to previous events or more well-known, putatively relatable events. This points readers toward a proposition, through a type of ‘shorthand reasoning.’ Likewise, news writing commonly encourages the imputation of false, reverse, or overstated causality through the inclusion of commonplace sociocognitive schemas and scripts – ‘us versus them,’ for prime example. Moreover, news ‘stories’ usually impose a narrative arc involving clearer-cut and more interlinked beginnings, climaxes, and resolutions than real life typically, actually delivers.

2.3 *Attitudinal/emotional dimension*

If as van Dijk asserts, news writing is intrinsically persuasive and narrative, then an affective element must be omnipresent. And indeed, journalism research and pedagogy long ago established the centrality of ‘human interest’ to newsworthiness (e.g., Galtung & Ruge, 1965). Almost always, what western media selects and narrates as news involves the dramatic actions of individuals and small groups. These exemplars are usually societal elites or otherwise implicitly symbolic of thematic propositions – i.e., plucky underdogs who succeed or suffer with true grit and initiative, as opposed to collective effort or government assistance. In this, journalism arguably oversimplifies happenings and leaves ‘socio-structural’ inequities unchallenged, by aggrandizing personal agency and obscuring broader political-economic and historic contexts and causes. However, despite journalism’s general individuation of agency, when culture is referenced in the news, even well-meaning stereotypes consistently overstate innate, group-based differences, so reinforcing national and ethnic prides and prejudices. Finally, there is the well-known rarity of mundane or ‘good news’ stories. Journalism nearly always selects and emphasizes sensational, sexual or negative events such as scandals, disasters, crime, and conflict. This helps to engender in audiences an anxious ‘mean world syndrome,’ if not a support for authoritarian policy drives and drift.

3. **Analysis**

The foregoing shortcomings in journalistic discourse, both overt and subtle, are rife throughout English-language business and economic reporting on Japan. They manifest in ways particular to this particular sphere of commentary; however, their illumination offers provides a global context furnishing new insights into business-press discourse in general, the scholarship of which suffers from west-centricity (Downing, 2012; Thussu, 2012). This will come clear in the following report of close analysis of one news article on Japanese entrepreneurialism, which was randomly selected from a data set of three closely analyzed articles. For purposes of analytic discussion, some comparative points are drawn from my analysis of the other two articles. These samples were randomly chosen from a full set of 25-30 articles determined to

be focused upon Japanese entrepreneurialism, out of a broader set of about 150 articles about Japanese innovation and/or entrepreneurialism. These were published online between 2009-2015, in English-language news periodicals, either general interest (with business sections) or focused on economics and commerce. The sources all exemplify ‘mainstream media,’ in that they are mass circulation and international or national in scope or nominally affiliated with a major city. They span a narrow ideological bandwidth in terms of explicit editorial alignment and the bulk of reporting, from professedly neoliberal to ‘moderately’ centre-left.

The closely-analyzed article randomly selected to profile in this paper was published in a 2013 issue of *The Economist*. This U.K.-based news magazine is focused on business, economics and politics, and its officially declared editorial slant favours “free trade and free markets” (and “the extreme centre”) while also advancing a number of ‘progressive’ causes, from gay marriage to the abolishment of capital punishment (*The Economist*, n.d. para. 10). My analysis of the article mostly focuses on discursive traits commonly found across reviewed news sources and on scholarly concepts highlighted in the foregoing methodology section. It also highlights some points idiosyncratic to the studied article and some points that I have not found addressed in CDA or journalism scholarship.

3.1 Title and headings

The studied article appeared in *The Economist*, on August 31, 2013. The author is not named, which is standard for this publication, which “speaks with a collective voice” (*The Economist*, para. 8). It is entitled “Entrepreneurs in Japan – Time to Get Started,” with the subheading “Shinzo Abe is Giving New Hope to Japan’s Unappreciated Entrepreneurs.” As previously noted, van Dijk (1988) recommends close analytic attention to titles and other headings. He argues that even when these aren’t penned by authors, they typically encapsulate or imply key overarching propositions: interpretations of the reported events that the author and/or editorial interests want audiences to accept as common sense.

Propositionally, this article’s title overemphasizes the lack of entrepreneurialism in Japan – which is in fact a nation of backstreet small businesses. The article goes on to specify and thereby qualify this claim, reporting that the country’s growth rate of start-ups “as a proportion of existing ones is less than half that in America and Britain.” However, an enjoiner to ‘get started’ indicates that the desired activity has not yet begun, meaning it is nonexistent. This type of extreme-case formulation is common in news-story titles. According to van Dijk’s sociocognitive research (e.g., 1988, 1993), such declarations often exert a powerful ‘priming’ effect on readers’ subsequent understanding of a news story’s referenced content. This article’s subheading implicitly backtracks from the title’s declaration, in that it mentions the existence of entrepreneurs. However, it contains its own sweeping statement – that the entrepreneurs are unappreciated, as opposed to just under-appreciated or rarely appreciated. A similar headline framing – implying an absolute dearth of entrepreneurialism in present-day Japan – takes place with many other reviewed articles. The two other closely analyzed news stories had the following titles: “Start-

up Spirit Emerges in Japan” (Fackler, 2013) and “A Subculture of Entrepreneurship hatches in Japan” (Makinen, 2015).

3.2 Personalization

As previously noted, it has been long observed that news stories, at least in western journalism, tend to focus on the ‘personal stories’ of individuals who support main authorial propositions. Such attention implicitly or explicitly attributes to these exemplars a centrality, causality, and usually a rectitude, regarding the reported event or situation. These profiled characters are typically societal elites and/or sympathetic underdogs.

True to form, *the Economist* article opens with a dramatic quote: “It begins from now.” Perhaps translated into English, this was tweeted by young Japanese software mogul Takafumi Horie upon his 2013 release from prison, where he had served twenty-one months for securities fraud. To journalists writing about Japanese entrepreneurship, Horie’s rise, downfall and current strivings present an archetypal script for understanding Japanese entrepreneurialism and its new-media business sector. In his quick rise to riches, his flashy lifestyle, and his brashly anti-authoritarian stylings, words, and deeds (such as hostile-takeover attempts), during the mid-2000s Horie symbolized both rebellion against Japanese conservatism and the increasing importance to Japan’s economy of software, internet-based business, and social-media services.

Horie’s significance has become more bivalent since his arrest and imprisonment. At one end of the interpretive spectrum, this event testified to the moral superiority of traditional ‘Japan, Inc.’ and the iniquity of ‘American-style’ capitalism. Horie’s supporters draw the opposite lesson. They envisage him as a martyr, arguing that conservative powers, from corporations to the courts, conspired to hand down a sentence much harsher than that typically received by white-collar criminals, because of the threat and the insults Horie directed at the status quo.

As with all reviewed articles, *the Economist* author is clearly in support of the venture-backed entrepreneurialism that Horie represents. And all of the articles that discuss Horie adopt a circumspect or equivocal evaluative stance regarding the aforementioned debates – despite the fact that he clearly did falsify corporate records to deceive investors and other investigators. The article’s opening paragraph, after mentioning Horie’s “emerging from prison this Spring,” goes on to describe some of his involvement “in no fewer than 30 new companies.” It concludes by stating that if any of these ventures succeed, then “Mr. Horie, who was convicted of fraud in 2011, may show that a fallen Japanese entrepreneur can make a comeback.” The following paragraph observes that “[f]or the past few years,” Horie has been “exhibit A in the case” presented by Japanese conservatives for viewing entrepreneurs as “greedy hustlers.” Syntactically deconstructed, these two sentences propose that Horie has given reason for suspicion; however, the courtroom metaphor reserves judgment as to his criminality, as does the reference to hustling and greed, neither being illegal.

A similarly ambiguous stance is advanced in the article’s other related statements, appearing toward the end: “Japan’s en-

trepreneurs still feel vulnerable to sudden crackdowns, and fear they would be punished more harshly than big-business chiefs. Last year [social-gaming business] GREE unexpectedly found itself under investigation for possibly violating gambling laws.” The compound qualification of “unexpectedly” and “possibly” is a noteworthy rhetorical choice – it doubly emphasizes the prospect of GREE’s innocence.

Of the other two closely analyzed articles, one likewise focused on Horie as an entrepreneurial exemplar, and in similarly ambiguous terms. *New York Times* Japan specialist Martin Fackler (2013), in an otherwise freely (if implicitly) opinionated essay, withholds any comment on the following observation: “For other young entrepreneurs, his guilt or innocence was not the story. They saw his downfall as a cautionary tale of how Japan’s graying establishment would crush those who challenged its rules.” It is often noted in news framing scholarship that presenting reported opinions without any authorial observation often implies approval (e.g., Babe, 2000).

Aside from Horie, the other personage profiled in this *Economist* article is Japan’s Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. In terms of a basic proposition, the author credits Abe with striving to reshape Japan’s economy and society so that the country ‘starts’ being more conducive to entrepreneurship. In the first paragraph that concentrates on Abe’s relevant policies and proposals, the article highlights his character, thereby humanizing the Prime Minister’s agenda and signalling support for it. Abe is introduced as a “come-back kid,” owing to his being “a second-time prime minister after a disastrous first term.” Then the article offers a personal anecdote of a personal anecdote: “He reportedly described for guests at his home this summer how the young Walt Disney ran his business into the ground five times before he at last succeeded.”

3.3 Lexical/semantic and syntactic choices

Prime Minister Abe is first mentioned in the second paragraph, where he is introduced as being “Japan’s first leader to treat entrepreneurs as something more than greedy hustlers.” The phrase ‘greedy hustlers’ bears mention. As observed by a *New York Times* columnist, the prose style of *The Economist* often distinctively combines an “authoritative” and “sardonic” tone, styling a striking alternation between formal and informal diction (Peters, 2010, para. 4). Discussing the ‘conversationalization’ of organizational discourse, Fairclough (e.g., 1995b, 2001) notes that this type of code-switching can rhetorically imbue a complex or contentious point with ‘common sense’ legitimacy. In this case, *The Economist* thereby augments the implication that Japanese conservatives reject Horie-style entrepreneurs not for rational reasons but just from visceral dislike. Another instance of code switching in this article works in the opposite register, with an increase of tonal formality imparting gravitas. Here the author writes that Abe’s moves toward “radical deregulation” in “new ‘special economic zones’” hold promise for entrepreneurship, “[i]f this pledge is honoured.”

The article’s choice of words is telling throughout. In its first mention of the debt guarantees that Japanese banks demand for loans to entrepreneurs, the author describes these as “onerous,”

without offering an argument that this is in fact the case. A few paragraphs later, after ‘priming’ the reader’s understanding in this manner, the article returns to the subject in more detail. Here, the value-neutral descriptor “extensive” is used to describe the loan guarantees – but in combination with the banks “demanding” rather than simply ‘requiring’ them. Here an argument of sorts is offered, with the observation that the risk of losing their homes to banks means would-be entrepreneurs “give up before they start.”

In discussing *The Economist* article’s titling, I observed that the subheading backtracked propositionally from the declarative content of the headline. A similar semantic dynamic was observed at the body-sentence level in one of the other two closely analyzed articles, *New York Times* 2013 “Start-Up Spirit Emerges in Japan,” written by the newspaper’s Japan specialist Martin Fackler. More than once the opening sentence of a paragraph qualifies or even contravenes an assertion voiced in the previous paragraph’s conclusion. For example, one ending sentence reads: “The nation that produced Sony, Toyota and Honda has created few successors.” The next paragraph leads with a contradictory statement to the effect that there are many such successors, though they are sector-specific: “Although Japan has a long tradition of entrepreneurship in blue-collar trades like manufacturing, it has had only limited success in extending that to more knowledge-based industries ...” I haven’t seen this internal-contradiction dynamic conceptualized in the CDA literature. But van Dijk (1998) similarly notes that opening assertions in article titles often cognitively exert a powerful ‘priming’ (issue-framing) effect, thereby muting whatever propositional qualifications may follow.

3.4 Rhetoric and ‘risk’

This *Economist* writer’s propositional stance on Japanese entrepreneurialism articulates a (‘big D’) discourse on ‘risk’ that abounds not only throughout most English-language coverage but also Japanese neoliberal policy circles. This line of thought, talk and text argues that the Japanese need to be more willing to take the kinds of risk involved in starting up businesses. Often, this assertion is coupled with the call for more failure-softening ‘safety net’ measures, such as this article’s call for entrepreneurial debt forgiveness – with risks unloaded onto banks, and presumably, a backstopping government’s tax base. But typically, in terms of called-for policy changes, more text is devoted to urgings for ‘looser labour markets’ in Japan. This would, in theory at least, make it easier for a failed entrepreneur to rejoin corporate ranks after a period spent working on their own company. And again in theory, an increase in layoffs from allowing companies to further downsize their ranks would compel more Japanese to form start-ups.

This article mostly hints at such propositions, focusing instead on less-commonly forwarded recommendations such as debt forgiveness. But “thorough deregulation” is called for in the final paragraph – where main propositions are often most assertively advanced (van Dijk, 1988). The author here resorts to a rhetorical tack common in journalistic conclusions: invoking the direst consequences should authorial recommendations not be followed (van Dijk, 1988, 1993). Citing claims by “Jeffrey Char, an entrepreneur

and investor,” the closing sentences warn readers that should the author’s urged “rupture in the corporate climate” not be followed, then Japan could face a sovereign-debt crisis in which “many of Japan’s biggest firms could collapse.” And this would “leave people with no choice but to start their own businesses.”

In *The Economist* article, a peculiar risk-related ‘sub-discourse’ is worth final noting. It is given its own subheading – “The Mother-in-law Factor” – which imparts or at least implies credibility. Here, the author paraphrases Japan’s METI (Ministry of Economy, Trade, and Industry) head of new-business policy, Yoshiaki Ishii, who pins blame on Japanese women for the country’s purported dearth of entrepreneurial spirits: “Wives, mothers and mothers-in-law exert a strong influence on men not to join risky start-ups.” This sentiment of Ishii is also quoted, directly, in one of this paper’s other two closely-analyzed articles, written by *Los Angeles Times* staffer Julie Makinen (2015): “‘The fact is, even if a guy wants to start his own company, it’s often their wife, their mother or their wife’s mother who stops them,’ Ishii said. ‘They’ll say it’s too risky to quit their job. Somehow, we have to get them to think that not taking a risk is also a risk.’” Ishii’s reported ‘somehow’ adverbial modifier here is interesting. It seems coy, because the simplest way to increase the riskiness of not taking career risks in Japan is obvious to all commentators: remove Japan’s traditional job security by making it easier and more common for Japanese companies to lay off full-time staff (i.e., ‘loosening labour markets’). But publicly calling for this outright, as a means of frightening women into approving their menfolk’s entrepreneurial efforts, could well prove politically contentious, at least in Japan.

Ishii’s sexist denunciation warrants but challenges further analytic contextualization. It seems to have only received positive press attention, at least in the western business news. But although his statement hasn’t sparked controversy, it’s hard to not relate the declaration, in terms of distal (‘big D’) discourses, to infamous gaffes by other Japanese politicians. Many have proven inclined to publicly blame women for all manner of perceived societal ills, from crass consumerism to the low birth rate (Nakata, 2007; Soble, 2015). That Ishii hasn’t aroused the ire provoked by likeminded officials in more prominent departments perhaps bespeaks his lamented Japanese inattention to entrepreneurialism. In any case, thusly highlighting where D/discourses ideologically entwine – in this case neoliberal entrepreneurialism with Japan’s tradition of misogyny – can help in developing strategies to rhetorically and politically challenge them (Fairclough, 1995, 2007). Doubtless, it can also help to more effectively craft them. And arguably, the neoliberal framing of Japanese entrepreneurialism has its case undermined by the journalistic decision to draw for support from, and to broadcast approvingly, the bashing of Japan’s wives and mothers.

4. Final discussion and conclusion

Many more critical insights could be profiled from the three articles closely analyzed for this paper. For prime example, in many – probably most – of the scanned and reviewed news stories on Japanese entrepreneurialism or innovation, the rhetorical content in the headlines and lede paragraphs was devoted, both explic-

itly and implicitly, to casting in absolute opposite terms traditional Japanese organizational culture versus the entrepreneurial mindset, and/or Japan generally versus the west. As previously noted, with this paper’s closely-studied *Economist* article, the headlines did most of such work by implying the utter lack of entrepreneurialism in Japan.

The other two closely analyzed articles relied more strongly in their headings and ledes on the powerful priming devices of figurative and visual language. Makinen’s 2015 *Los Angeles Times* article renders Japanese entrepreneurialism as innocent and vulnerable with its title: “A Subculture of Entrepreneurialism Hatches in Japan.” It reemphasizes this framing throughout, for example by profiling a teenaged entrepreneur whose face is (redundantly) described as “still boyish.” Fackler’s 2013 *New York Times* piece opens with imagery vividly contrasting the “gray suits” of traditional corporate Japan against a scene conflating entrepreneurialism with American tech-industry start-up culture: “The 20-somethings in jeans sipping espresso and tapping on laptops at this Tokyo business incubator would look more at home in Silicon Valley than in Japan.”

The most ubiquitous, and probably the most propositional-fundamental, rhetorical feature in headings and ledes among scanned and studied articles was an explicit and underlying argument, common both to those focused on entrepreneurialism and those discussing innovation more generally: that Japan’s economy is bad, and has been so since the ‘bubble economy’ withered in the 1990s. It is primarily upon this perspective that the authors predicate their recommended changes to Japanese culture, business, economics, science and law. Such statements and suggestions are almost always delivered as given facts, without much if any argument. Their ‘facticity’ relies much more on commonly repeated, extreme descriptors for the Japanese economy: “stagnant,” “malaise,” “lost decade(s),” etc. It has often been noted in rhetoric that the use of oft-repeated extreme phrases (‘God-’ or ‘Devil terms’) is a powerful issue-framing device for priming audience understanding, through the activation of ‘commonplace’ understandings (e.g., Weaver, 1985/1983). To the extent that this strategy works, business-news audiences are conditioned to believe that the Japanese economy is ‘stagnant’ – and therefore non-innovative and non-entrepreneurial – because the readers have read this exact declarative so often before.

Indeed, out of the hundred-plus scanned ‘mainstream media’ news pieces on Japanese innovation and/or entrepreneurialism, at most a handful of authors wrote against the notion of Japan’s economic and competitive paucity. *Economist* Paul Krugman’s officially affiliated *New York Times* blog entry of February 5, 2013, is a prominent example. Krugman declares that “the whole tale of Japanese stagnation is a myth.” He argues this on “demographically adjusted” grounds – that between the late 1990s and 2007, “real GDP per working-age adult” grew by “about 1.2% per year ... actually not bad” (para. 5). The same point is made in a 2011 *Financial Times* piece by the paper’s Asia editor David Pilling. He argues likewise that “the case for Japan’s decline” is predicated upon two dubious presumptions: “The first is that a successful economy is one in which foreign businesses find it easy to make money. ... The second is that the purpose of a national economy is to outperform its peers” (para. 4). Pilling proposes that, just as

reasonably, “the business of a state” could be “to serve its own people.” He points to Japan’s low unemployment and crime rates, long life expectancy, and high customer-service standards as “hard facts” evincing Japan’s continued economic success or even superiority. He cites as “thought provoking” a 2010 guest editorial by Japanese literature professor Norihiro Kato. Kato argues that Japan is modeling for other advanced democracies how to successfully adjust to a “post-growth” future – and that Japanese youth are both innovative and entrepreneurial in their leading position at the global “vanguard of the downsizing movement” (para. 8).

Pilling and Krugman advance extremely contrarian perspectives within the field of English-language journalism on Japanese business and economics, where over ninety percent of found articles echo the standard neoliberal line. To wit: Japan is no longer competitive, or innovative, or entrepreneurial; and to escape this stagnant malaise before it metastasizes into economic and societal ruin, the country must radically deregulate and otherwise conform to Anglo-American business-cultural and political-economic norms. Yet both Pilling and Krugman are prominent writers on business and economics, and so they are far from being ideologically radical or liminal. Therefore, the fact that they and a few likeminded commentators make up such a tiny minority in the Japan-focused business press speaks to the presence of a stifling hegemony. This fact does not indicate the rightness or wrongness of any particular angle on the reported issues. But it establishes a lack of variety and debate that in itself is problematic.

Along with such group-think, the rhetorical tactics and ties illuminated by my ongoing research into business journalism on Japan could fill a book of critical discourse analysis. Some such observations would illuminate authorial idiosyncrasies, while others would expose commonalities. And some of these would mostly apply to English-language news discourse on Japanese entrepreneurialism, while others would be more broadly applicable to journalistic shortcomings as a whole. The point of such critique is not to argue against the neoliberal – and arguably Anglo-American – framing of Japanese entrepreneurialism advanced in nearly every analyzed and scanned news article on the subject. Perhaps such perspectives are right in causally conflating Japan’s purported dearth of entrepreneurialism with Japan’s purported ‘stagnation,’ and its resurgence with Japan’s overall deregulation. But wherever such claims are couched in rhetorical subterfuges, and in subtle or blatant prejudice, they must be exposed as such and ‘read against’ by both scholars and lay audiences.

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