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Pós-Graduação Lato Sensu em Língua Inglesa

Motorcycle: A Ride Through Critical Discourse Analysis in Online
Newspaper Articles

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Monografia apresentada ao Programa de Pós-Graduação em Língua
Inglês como requisito parcial para obtenção do título de Especialista
em Língua Inglesa.

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Rio de Janeiro
Dezembro 2008

Acknowledgement

I would like to thank God for everything that happens in my life. I would also like to thank my family, mainly my parents, for all support and love. Finally, I would like to thank Professor Barbara Hemaïs for her patience and encouragement throughout this year.

Abstract

This paper presents a study of the representation of motorcycles and motorcyclists in online newspaper articles. The objective of the study is to examine how linguistic and iconic resources contribute to a negative or positive view of motorcycles and cyclists in these articles. From the approach of Critical Discourse Analysis, the tools of *foreground/background*, *collocation*, *agent-patient relationship*, and *image* were analyzed in twenty online news articles. This paper discusses the notion that the representation of motorcycles and motorcyclists in news articles may influence readers' opinions.

Table of Contents

	<i>PAGES</i>
1 – INTRODUCTION	5
2 – THEORETICAL BACKGROUND	7
3 – METHODS	12
4 – RESULTS	15
4.1 – Foreground/Background	15
4.2 – Collocations	23
4.3 – Agency	25
4.4 – Images	27
5 – DISCUSSION	33
BIBLIOGRAPHY	35
APPENDIX	36

1 – INTRODUCTION

Like many people, I have many passions in life: family, friends, books, music, films, English, and motorcycles. All right, not many people have a passion for motorcycles, but people have hobbies, don't they? For me the motorcycle is not only a hobby or a simple means of transportation, it is much more than that. It is sometimes difficult to explain the feeling I have while riding my motorcycle. Freedom? Sure! But there is so much more to it. Don't think I do not know the motorcycle is dangerous. Believe me, I do know the risks I take while riding my bike in a big city, specially during rush hours. However, I feel much safer riding my bike than driving a car. I am much more careful, more focused, more aware. I pay more attention to traffic and its rules; after all, it is my life, and other people's lives, I am talking about.

I know many people like me. People who share the passion for motorcycles. However, I also know people who have some kind of prejudice against motorcycles and bikers. These people may have their reasons for disliking so much a vehicle. A reason I cannot understand. Some people say many bikers are robbers. We hear news on TV, we read articles on the newspaper about violence and robberies. Some of which are committed by criminals on motorcycles. But criminals do not drive cars? Ride on buses? Mug people while simply walking down the street? I would really like to know where some people get the idea that bikers are robbers.

As I said previously, we hear and read bad news all the time, everyday. Maybe the way bikers and motorcycles are portrayed by the media affects people's opinion on this issue. How are motorcycles/motorcyclists portrayed on the newspaper by journalists? How do pictures contribute to creating the image of motorcycles/motorcyclists in newspaper articles?

McCarthy and Carter (1994) state that culture with a small *c* “refers to the habits, customs, social behaviour and assumptions about the world of a group of people.” They also say that newspaper articles can be cultural sources of information, and as such, they can show how people in society see and perceive other people, issues and things. Based on this, I decided to collect and analyse on line newspaper

articles in order to understand how motorcycles and bikers are portrayed by the media; I wanted to understand bikes and bikers as a reflection of the culture in society.

The Introduction presents my reasons for doing this research, which are totally personal, and the theoretical background. Then Methods describe how I conducted the research. Results are shown afterwards followed by Discussion where I present my understanding from the data collected and also show teachers how they could apply the theory used in this paper in their language classes.

2 – Theoretical Background

People may acquire a negative or positive concept of motorcycles and bikers from newspaper articles they often read. In these articles, reporters may subtly state their opinion of any issue influencing readers, society, and its culture. The way people think and behave may be the result of their reading and the way language is used to manipulate them. Bell (1991, in Amarante, 2002) thinks that the language used in mass media influences and reflects society. Amarante (2002) mentions that many researchers have drawn a relation between cultural elements and linguistic phenomena. She also says that the discussion about the influence of culture in language is old in linguistics and much has already been said about it, for example, the famous Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis that language determines thought. Peoples & Bailey (1991, in Amarante, 2002) define culture as knowledge socially transmitted and shared by a group of people.

As the focus of this research is newspaper articles, it is important to understand the patterns used by reporters to write them. Scollon & Scollon (1995, in Amarante, 2002) analyzed the inductive and deductive patterns in conversations. According to them, in the inductive pattern the secondary points of an argument are presented firstly and later, as a conclusion, the main point is shown; the deductive pattern, on the other hand, presents the topic of the argument before the secondary points. The deductive style is widely used by Americans (Garcez, 1993, in Amarante, 2002). Amarante (2002) mentions that the deductive style is also used in American news articles, where we can observe that a summary is presented at the beginning by the lead (the first paragraph).

Reading a newspaper is a habit of many people around the world. Newspapers are interesting due to the fact that they aim at the public in general and to the variety of genres found in them (Bathia, 1993, in Amarante, 2002).

Bell (1991, in Amarante, 2002) says that the basic structure of news articles was established in the United States in the 19th century and that there are different discursive genres within journalism, each one with its own characteristic, for instance, article, letters to the editor, advertisement, editorial, and news, which is the

most informative one. “Indeed today, genre is easily used to refer to a distinctive category of discourse of any type, spoken or written, with or without literary aspirations” (Swales, 1990, p. 33). Fowler (1991, in Amarante, 2002) says that the way language is used – its grammatical and lexical choices, intonation and rhythm – identifies the kind of discourse and its context. According to Amarante (2002) this is an unconscious knowledge of language genres that we all have.

News is still divided into *hard news* and *soft news* (Amarante, 2002). Hard news is basically accidents, conflicts, crimes, findings, and facts linked to previous issues. Soft news, on the other hand, is a longer article with historical facts and the personal opinion of those who wrote it.

There are a number of characteristics in the work of journalists. One of them is that journalists are storytellers, according to Bell (1991, in Amarante, 2002). In addition, journalists are expected to report news without giving their personal opinion (Amarante, 2002). Vestergaard (2000, in Amarante, 2002) comments that the news articles report facts as they happened. However, fact and opinion are not easily separated. For Halliday & Hassan (1989, in Amarante, 2002) there is no discourse without an opinion of the speaker or the writer because every sentence depends on linguistic choices which reflect their subjectivity. Events and ideas are not and cannot be communicated neutrally for they must be transmitted by a media that has its own structural characteristics. The social and ideological values of the media help determine the perspective used (Fowler, 1991, in Amarante, 2002).

At the same time, these events and ideas must be understood by the reader. For Langer and Smith-Burke (1982) “...when meaning is the focus, it becomes necessary to view reading as a language process involving flexible interactions among the reader, the text, and the context in which the meaning is derived.” Tierney and Mosenthal (in Langer and Smith-Burke, 1982) say that “linguistics, cognitive psychology, and computer science have afforded a number of systems for examining the contribution of text features to discourse comprehension.”

According to McCarthy (1991, p. 5), “Discourse analysis is concerned with the study of the relationship between language and the context in which it is used”. Cabral (2007) mentions that if we apply Discourse Analysis (DA) to media contexts, “discourse practices are the ways in which texts are produced by media

workers in media institutions, and the way texts are interpreted by audiences, as well as how media texts are socially distributed”.

For Huckin (1997:78) “Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a highly context-sensitive, democratic approach which takes an ethical stance on social issues with the aim of improving society”. CDA works on texts with cultural or political aspects analysing the text firstly as a whole and then sentence by sentence.

For Huckin (1997:78) CDA is different from other forms of textual analysis mainly in six respects:

- 1) It shows that authentic texts are not produced, read or heard, detached from any real-world context;
- 2) It integrates three different levels of analysis: the text; the discursive practices and the social context that surrounds the other two levels;
- 3) It is concerned with relevant social issues like: culture; politics; etc. CDA analysts usually select texts that affect many people’s lives;
- 4) These texts are specially chosen not only to call people’s attention to social injustices but also to motivate people to take some alternative action;
- 5) CDA analysts believe reality is constructed by interaction with other people; by language in use. They say this reality can be changed for better. They try to reveal the ways the dominant forces in a society take in order to keep their interests unquestioned, untouched. Doing so, they try to support the minorities who suffer any kind of social injustice;
- 6) As CDA tries to reach people from any social level, analysts avoid using technical jargon in their articles making them as simple as possible so anyone in society has access to them.

The author says that a text may have more than one meaning, principally if this text is written in a social context that involves more than one user.

In Huckin words, CDA is not a linguistic theory and therefore does not provide a complete grammar of syntactic, phonological, or other linguistic elements for any particular language. Nor does it aim to describe any particular text in exhaustive detail. Instead, it tries to point out those features of a text that are most interesting from a critical perspective, those that appear to be textual manipulations serving non-democratic purposes.

(Huckin, 1997: 80)

In order to do Critical Discourse Analyses, Huckin (1997) suggests that analysts should have many text-analytic tools to use and they should also start analysing the text in two stages:

- 1) Read the text uncritically just trying to understand it;
- 2) Read the text critically asking as many questions about it as possible.

Huckin (1997) says that readers do not start reading a text word by word; rather, they first recognize the text genre. Therefore, a CDA analyst should determine the genre of the text being analyzed and observe whether the text is representative of this genre. In doing so, the analyst can observe whether any feature has been deliberately removed from the text. Furthermore, according to Huckin, many writers manipulate a genre. For instance, reporters who supposedly write neutral news articles may manipulate a text in order to favor some dominant interests. CDA analysts know genre knowledge helps them interpret such manipulations critically.

Huckin proposes a number of linguistic elements that can be used for the critical analysis of texts. What follows is a summary of several of the features that are pertinent to the present study.

Foregrounding/backgrounding are terms for the emphasis (or de-emphasis) the author gives to certain concepts. News reports, for instance, have a top-down orientation, so writers give textual prominence to the sentences that appear at the beginning of the report (foregrounding). The sentences written at the end of the report are de-emphasized (backgrounding). (Huckin, 1997).

Another aspect of text that can be analyzed is the use of agent and patient, since, when reading at a sentence-by-sentence level, readers subconsciously identify the agent and patient. For Huckin (1997) it is important to observe those who are being described as the ones performing actions in the texts and those who are undergoing the actions. For the author, those who initiate actions have power over those who receive these actions and are seen as patients. Therefore, according to Huckin, the **agent-patient relationship** is one of the features to be observed when a text is being studied.

Another feature for a critical analysis of news stories is the visual **image**. In news, pictures are also a very important means of framing the story, in the sense that they reflect the perspective that the writer intends to make dominant. Huckin (1997: 82) says that "One particularly powerful way of framing a text is through the use of visual aids".

One final language feature that is useful for CDA is collocation, which has been studied in functional approaches to grammar. Amarante (2002) says that functional grammar has interesting concept for the study of language used in journalism and in communication. Neves (2001, in Amarante, 2002) considers functional grammar as communicative competence, that is, Neves considers the capacity each person has for not only coding and decoding expressions but also for using and interpreting these expressions in a satisfactory way. Therefore, **collocations** can also be analysed in the texts. Cook (2003) says that collocations are “frequent combinations of words”. Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman (1999) state that some collocations are more fixed than others. Sinclair (1991, in Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999: 43) says that “computer-assisted corpus research has demonstrated that a great deal of text in English is composed of words in common patterns or in slight variants of these patterns”.

Consequently, **foreground/background**, **agent-patient relationship**, **images**, and **collocations** are the elements I am going to analyse in the news articles.

3 – METHODS

In order to answer my research questions I had to choose one newspaper in order to analyse its articles. However, which newspaper should I choose to analyse? Where would I get it? Nowadays these questions are easy to answer. Internet has invaded our lives bringing all sorts of information and access to news from all around the world. According to statistics, four out of five people who are on line read news on the internet (www.writtenews.com). So, I decided to get the articles from *The New York Times Newspaper On Line* (www.nytimes.com). *The New York Times* was chosen for being a well known newspaper read all over the world, so many people have access to its articles. The web address of each article used in this research can be seen in the Appendix 1.

The New York Times On Line is divided into sections: Classifieds; World; US; N.Y./Region; Business; Technology; Sports; Science; Health; Opinion; Arts; Style; Travel; Services; Autos; Newspaper.

From *The New York Times Newspaper On Line* (www.nytimes.com) I collected articles that dealt with any motorcycle issue in the period between January 2007 and December 2007.

I was able to collect 47 articles in all. I saved each article under cardinal numbers from 01 to 47 in the order they appeared. After that, I divided them into the sections they were in. I just analysed the articles that were in the World, US, N.Y./Region, and Business sections, and this made a total of twenty articles were analysed. (See Table 1). There were no articles about motorcycles in the Classifieds; Technology; Science; Health; Services; and Newspaper sections.

The reason for not having articles about motorcycles in the Classifieds and in the Newspaper sections needs to be explained. As I looked for articles in the archives of *The New York Times Newspaper On Line*, I did not find any advertisements of motorcycles for sale in the Classifieds section from the period I searched. The Newspaper section shows which articles appear in the print version of *the New York Times* that is on the newstands for sale. As I only looked for articles in the archives I could not find any old articles there. However, I cannot explain the reason for there not being any articles about motorcycles in the other sections.

Table 1: Number of articles per section in the nytimes.com

Sections of the New York Times	Number of Articles about Motorcycles
Autos	18
N.Y./Region	09
World	04
Business	04
US	03
Arts	03
Style	03
Sports	01
Opinion	01
Travel	01
Classifieds	00
Technology	00
Science	00
Health	00
Services	00
Newspaper	00
Total of articles	47

The articles that appeared in the Autos; Arts; Style; Sports; Opinion; and Travel sections were not analysed because they were too specific for my purpose. For instance, the articles in the Autos sections were about the motorcycles that are available in the market and their technical specifications. Those articles look like motorcycle advertisements rather than newspaper reports; therefore, they were not pertinent for the purpose of the research.

After numbering all the articles and separating the twenty texts that were going to be analysed, I uncritically read each one of them for a clear understanding of the articles, as suggested by Huckin (1997). Then I chose the textual elements I was going to analyse in the texts: *Foregrounding/backgrounding*; *Agent-patient relationship*; *Collocations*; and *Pictures*. I did not select more features to study because CDA does not have the objective of describing “any particular text in exhaustive detail” (Huckin 1997).

In order to identify *Foregrounding/backgrounding*, I observed theme and rheme¹ in each sentence and the top-down structure presented on each article.

To identify the *Agent-patient relationship* in the texts, I searched for sentences which contained the words that are related to the means of transportation itself:

¹ “The Theme is the element which serves as the point of departure of the message; it is that with which the clause is concerned. The remainder of the message, the part in which the Theme is developed, is called in Prague school terminology the Rheme.” (Halliday, 1994: 37)

motorcycle, bike, scooter - and words that are related to the person who rides this means of transportation: *motorcyclist, biker, rider, (motorcycle) driver*. Then, I selected the sentences in which these words appeared as agents or patients. No difference was made whether they appeared in subordinate clauses or main clauses. After selecting the sentences, a table was made with this information and I counted the articles that showed those words as agents or patients.

To find *Collocations* in the texts, I searched every occurrence² of the words *motorcycle, bike, scooter, motorcyclist, biker, rider, (motorcycle) driver* and selected the words related to them. Afterwards, I made another table with this information and also compared these findings with those of the *Foregrounding/backgrounding*.

Foregrounding/backgrounding was also observed when I analysed the *Pictures* that appeared in some of the articles. I made another table and described what I saw in the foreground and background of each picture.

The results of this analysis will be shown next.

² This is not considered corpus analysis because it was not done in any specific corpus computer programme.

4 – RESULTS

Twenty *New York Times Newspaper On Line* articles were analysed in order to answer the questions: How are motorcycles/motorcyclists portrayed on the newspaper by journalists? How do pictures contribute to creating the image of motorcycles/motorcyclists in newspaper articles? No distinction was made whether the articles were *hard news* or *soft news*. ***Foreground/background information, collocations, agency, and images*** were studied.

4.1 - Foreground/background

All these results could be drawn through the analysis of theme/rheme of the sentences and the top-down structure of the news articles. The twenty articles foreground different issues related to the motorcycle. These issues are: business, violence, famous people, city problems, leisure, people. (See Table 2 below).

Table 2: Foregrounded Issues

Foreground	Number of articles	Article Numbers
Business	07	01, 13, 15, 20, 23, 24, 43
Violence	05	02, 21, 33, 35, 44
Famous people	03	05, 11, 14
City problems	02	26, 47
Leisure	02	36, 45
People	01	06
Total	20	

Seven articles (35%) foreground business. From these seven, four focus on investments and companies, two on services and one on products. (See Table 3).

Table 3: Business Articles

Foreground	Total of articles	Article Numbers
Investments/Companies	04	13, 20, 23, 43
Services	02	15, 24
Products	01	01

Of the four articles that foreground *investments and companies*, two focus on Harley-Davidson, which is a motorcycle manufacturer established in The United

States in 1903 (www.harley-davidson.com, visited on September 25, 2008). These articles background the weak economic situation of the manufacturer, the decrease in the share value and in the motorcycle sales of the company. Their effort to sell motorcycles to women is also backgrounded in these articles. Another article talks mainly about investments focusing on the American market and the stock value of companies like Harley-Davidson and Winnebago. It defocus the unfavorable economic scenario in the United States. The last article focuses on Eurospeed USA, a Chinese motorcycle manufacturer. It backgrounds the benefits and job opportunities the company would bring to Connecticut once it was settled down there. The following sentences were extracted from the articles above in order to illustrate *foreground/background* in the news reports mentioned above.

- 1) “From the trading floors of Wall Street to the boardroom of the Federal Reserve, the big question being debated these days is whether a recession is looming, especially if consumers already reeling from the housing meltdown cut back on spending.” (article 13, first paragraph);
- 2) “Mr. Muhlenkamp, a mutual fund manager based in Pittsburgh with \$2 billion in assets in the fund that bears his name, closely watches the performance of two classic American companies: Harley-Davidson and Winnebago Industries.” (article 13, second paragraph);
- 3) “Shares of both companies, meanwhile, are near 52-week lows, and Harley-Davidson — known on Wall Street by its ticker symbol, HOG — is down roughly 40 percent from its high late last year, to a current price of \$46.21.” (article 13, thirteenth paragraph);
- 4) “At a recent convention of Harley-Davidson dealers here, Delia Passi, a marketing consultant, was sharing the finer points of selling to women with her audience of about 150, many of whom wore boots, jeans and tattoos.” (article 20, first paragraph);
- 5) “Harley-Davidson executives deny they have any such plans, saying women can now operate any of their motorcycles.” (article 20, thirteenth paragraph).

Among those reports that dealt with business issues, two articles focused on services: articles 15 and 24. Article 15 mainly shows travelling and motorcycle-taxi services. The increased number of motorcycle-taxis shuttling from the airport to the city is in the background. Article 24 foregrounds motor scooters and a promotion offered for parking them in the city. It backgrounds the difficulty of parking in the city, the expense of parking and traffic problems. The following sentences were extracted from these news reports:

- 1) “Sometimes the most stressful part of air travel happens before you even board the plane.” (article 15, first paragraph);
- 2) “City Bird, a motorcycle-taxi operation in Paris, increased its fleet from 2 bikes in 2003 to 12 in 2006; it charges about \$60 one way from central Paris to Orly Airport.” (article 15, third paragraph);

- 3) “In the gladiatorial traffic of New York City, a motor scooter, with or without racing stripes, is something between a motorcycle and a Radio Flyer wagon. Now, however, thanks to a new marketing campaign, it is also something else: a ticket to the closest thing to New York nirvana, free parking. (article 24, first and second paragraphs);
- 4) “Parking spaces for motor scooters are scarce in Manhattan. Parking on the street can lead to costly collisions with automobiles, as drivers try to park them. And it is illegal to park on sidewalks, but riders often do so anyway, sometimes removing their license plates to foil parking enforcement officers. Garages and parking lots often refuse to rent spaces to scooters, sometimes for obscure reasons, even when riders offer to pay motorcycle or even automobile rates.” (article 24, tenth paragraph).

Still on the business issue, one last article (article 01) foregrounds products, mainly Chinese products. It backgrounds the negative economic situation in the city. For instance:

- 1) “The pineapples that grow on the steep hills above the Mekong River are especially sweet, the red and orange chilies unusually spicy, and the spring onions and watercress retain the freshness of the mountain dew.
For years, getting this prized produce to market meant that someone had to carry a giant basket on a back-breaking, daylong trek down narrow mountain trails cutting through the jungle.
That is changing, thanks in large part to China.
Mr. Khamphao and his neighbors all have \$100 Chinese-made television sets connected to Chinese-made satellite dishes and decoders, causing both joy and occasional tension among family members sitting on the bare concrete or dirt floors of their living rooms. “I like watching the news,” Mr. Khamphao said. “My children love to watch movies.” (article 01, first, second, third and fifteenth paragraphs).
- 2) “The improvised bamboo stretchers that villagers here used as recently as a decade ago to carry the gravely ill on foot are history. In a village of 150 families, Mr. Wu counts 44 Chinese motorcycles. There were none five years ago.”

“The enthusiasm for Chinese goods here is tempered by one commonly heard complaint: maintenance problems.”

“The quality of the Japanese brands is much better,” said Gu Silibapaan, a 31-year-old motorcycle mechanic in Luang Prabang. People with money, he said, buy Honda, Yamaha and Suzuki motorcycles. People with lots of money buy cars.” (article 01, eleventh, eighteenth, and nineteenth paragraphs).

Of the twenty news articles studied, five of them deal with violence. This means 25% of the news are concerned with violence. From these five articles, four dealt with violence in traffic and one with the relationship between the police and the Hells Angels, an American bikers club (Table 4).

Table 4: Violence Articles

Foreground	Number of Articles	Article Numbers
Violence in traffic	04	02, 21, 33, 35
Relationship between the police and a biker's club	01	44

The first article that deals with violence in traffic foregrounds violence, problems, accidents, and scooters. It backgrounds the decrease in violence, the increase in road rage and the benefits brought to the city by scooters. The second article foregrounds traffic deaths and highway crashes, mainly caused by motorcycles. It backgrounds the decrease in fatal traffic accidents in the past year as well as the increase in motorcycle deaths. The third one foregrounds the increase in motorcycle deaths focusing on the motorcycle, its popularity, its safety gear (the helmet), and laws. The article backgrounds the fact that more than 50% of the states do not require bikers to wear a helmet while riding their motorcycles. The report states that not wearing a helmet may increase the probability of death in case of a motorcycle accident. The fourth one foregrounds a man who suffered an accident in which a bus is involved. It backgrounds the fact that the victim was a motorcyclist and was on his motorcycle at the moment of the accident. The last one foregrounds the conflicts between the police and the Hells Angels. It backgrounds the illegal force used by both groups, the police and the Angels, in other words, the police using their power to illegally conduct searches at the Angel's clubhouse and the Angel's threats to neighbors or those who go against their rules.

The following sentences are examples extracted from the articles in order to illustrate how violence is foregrounded in the texts:

- 1) "Violence may be down in Iraq, but road rage is up."
"Scooter accidents are increasing. And suicide bombers have been known to ignite their explosives on scooters, so the police and soldiers have begun stopping and searching some scooters and their drivers." (article 02, first and second paragraphs);
- 2) "Traffic deaths in the United States fell to their lowest total in five years in 2006, and the rate of deaths per miles traveled dropped to a record low, a federal safety official said." (article 21, first and only paragraph);
"Motorcycle deaths increased for the ninth straight year and for the first time exceeded pedestrian deaths, ..." (article 21, first and only paragraph);
- 3) "Motorcycles make up far less than 1 percent of vehicle traffic but now account for more than 10 percent of highway deaths, partly because states

are repealing helmet laws, the National Transportation Safety Board said Tuesday.” (article 33, first paragraph);

“That and the popularity of motorcycles have pushed deaths up by more than 100 percent in the past 10 years, according to government statistics.” (article 33, seventh paragraph);

- 4) “A city bus struck and killed a 23-year-old motorcyclist yesterday in Queens, the police said.” (article 35, first sentence of first paragraph);

“The accident happened at about 6:45 p.m. when a bus traveling west on Hillside Avenue hit Mr. Thompson's motorcycle, which was going east on Hillside, near the intersection with 173rd Street.” (article 35, first and only paragraph);

- 5) “By the time a search warrant was issued late Monday, dozens of heavily armed police officers had spent hours in the biting cold outside a fortresslike East Village tenement that has served for decades as the New York headquarters of the Hells Angels. As sharpshooters looked on from rooftops and a police helicopter circled overhead, the standoff lasted all afternoon.” (article 44, first paragraph);

“The more recent lawsuits by the Angels against the city both charged that the police had searched the clubhouse illegally, once in 1999 with a warrant that authorized officers to search only the first floor, and again in 2000 with no warrant.” (article 44, twenty-second paragraphs).

Of the twenty texts studied, three reports (15%) are about famous people. Two of them are about Mr. George Clooney. They background the motorcycle accident he and a friend had. The other article foregrounds Mr. Evel Knievel. It backgrounds his death, his motorcycle accidents, his dangerous way of living and his accomplishments in life (Table 5).

Table 5: Famous people

Foreground	Number of Articles	Article Numbers
Mr. George Clooney	02	11, 14
Mr. Evel Knievel	01	05

The sentences below show how these famous people are foregrounded and the motorcycle is backgrounded in the articles.

- 1) “George Clooney and his companion got top billing when they were treated at a New Jersey hospital after a motorcycle accident last month.” (article 11, first paragraph);
- 2) “The actor George Clooney suffered a broken rib and some scrapes on Friday when the motorcycle on which he and a friend were riding collided with a car as Mr. Clooney tried to pass the other vehicle on the right, the authorities said.” (article 14, first paragraph);

- 3) “Evel Knievel, the hard-living, death-defying adventurer who went from stealing motorcycles to riding them in a series of spectacular airborne stunts in the 1960s and ’70s that brought him worldwide fame as the quintessential daredevil performer, died yesterday in Clearwater, Fla. He was 69.” (article 05, first paragraph);

Of the twenty news articles analysed, two reports (10%) deal with city problems. One foregrounds air pollution in some cities in Asia blaming mainly motorcycles for that. It backgrounds other reasons for the pollution: the increased number of cars and dirty fuel. The other foregrounds the City, mainly Guangzhou, its problem with prosperity and migrants, which backgrounds the real problems brought by prosperity and migrants which is mainly crime caused by migrants on motorcycles. The article reports that, to deal with it, a motorcycle ban will be set in the city (see Table 6).

Table 6: City problems

Foreground	Number of Articles	Article Number
Pollution	01	26
City growing problems	01	47

The following sentences were taken from the texts:

- 1) “A decade ago, bicycles and three-wheeled pedal taxis rode quietly down the tree-lined streets of Vietnam’s capital. Now, 1.8 million motorcycles and scooters buzz through Hanoi every day in a confused and unrelieved cacophony.” (article 26, first paragraph);
 “Motorcycles have become the symbol of economic freedom in Vietnam, as its economy surges. But they are also the main source, together with a growing number of cars, of worrying levels of air pollution, officials and experts say.” (article 26, second paragraph);
 “The air in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City contains dangerous levels of benzene and sulfur dioxide, experts say. Levels of one of the most dangerous pollutants, microscopic dust known as PM10, are moderate compared with other developing Asian cities, but could worsen if Vietnam chooses to build coal-fired power plants to meet the demand for electricity, which is growing at double-digit annual rates.” (article 26, fourth paragraph);
- 2) “Guangzhou, the chaotic export capital in southern China, appeared to hit a major Chinese milestone this month, becoming the country’s first city to reach a per capita income of \$10,000 — more than five times the nationwide figure and a rough threshold for becoming a “developed” country.” (article 47, first paragraph);
 “But in a measure of just how problematic prosperity can be here, the city will institute a ban on motorcycles and motorized bicycles on Monday,

hoping to quell a crime wave that has been building to more than 100,000 offenses a year.” (article 47, second paragraph).

Of the twenty texts studied, two articles (10%) are about leisure. The first one foregrounds Mototown which is a ‘safe’ indoor stadium for motocross, its owners and riders. It backgrounds the dangerousness of ‘racing lightweight motorcycles over dirt cross-country courses’ and the fact that two men died in Mototown USA. The second foregrounds the existence of motorcycle shows, motorcycle club members that attend these shows, their disputes, and members of these clubs. It backgrounds the violence in these motorcycle shows caused by members of motorcycle clubs. It also shows the different kinds of clubs (Table 7).

Table 07: Articles on leisure

Foreground	Number of Articles	Article Number
Mototown	01	36
Motorcycle shows	01	45

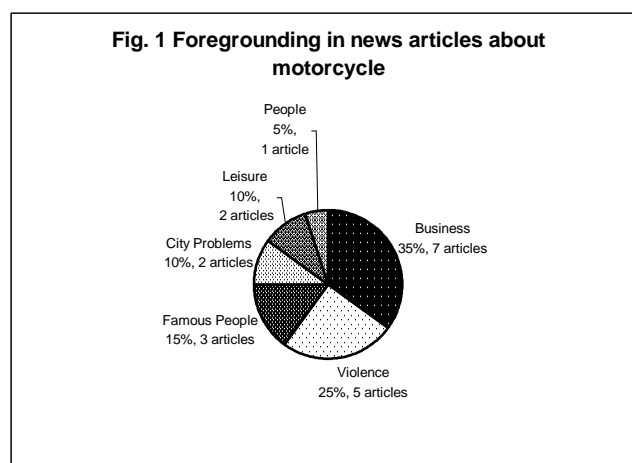
The following sentences were taken from these articles:

- 1) “Little was left to chance when Mototown USA in Windsor opened in September. The 350,000-square-foot stadium — which bills itself as the largest indoor motocross center in the world — has two motocross tracks, for children and adults, and a third for go-cart racing — all surrounded by walls specially designed to absorb the roar of the engines and a powerful ventilation system to remove harmful exhaust and make breathing easier for riders and spectators.” (article 36, first paragraph);
 “But despite those and other safety features, racing lightweight motorcycles over dirt cross-country courses — with obstacles — is dangerous, and two riders were killed at Mototown last month after getting thrown from their bikes.” (article 36, second paragraph);
- 2) “AT times some behaved like gossipy girls, eyeing a rival clique as they passed by.” (article 45, first paragraph);
 “Heads turned whenever members of the many motorcycle clubs sauntered through the crowded Jacob K. Javits Convention Center over the weekend, as other bikers checked out their “colors,” or the patches stitched across the back of vests and jackets.” (article 45, second paragraph);
 “There were dozens of clubs, more than ever at the 25th annual Cycle World International Motorcycle Show, with new names like God’s Outcast and Frontline Riderz sprinkled among familiar ones like Crazy Pistons and Ruff Ryders.” (article 45, third paragraph).

There is only one (5%) article, number 06, that foregrounds the people and the vehicles. Its headline is: “Coram: Man killed in motorcycle crash” and it focuses on Mr. Bush, the truck driver, and the motorcycle. It backgrounds the crash between the motorcycle and the truck that caused the death of Mr. Bush at the scene. This is such a short article that all of it is shown below:

“A Shirley resident was killed on Saturday evening when his motorcycle crashed into a gas truck and burst into flames, the Suffolk County police said. The man, Thomas Bush, 37, of Tallwood Drive, was driving a 2007 Triumph motorcycle south on Route 112 when he lost control of the vehicle just before 9 p.m. and skidded into the opposite lane, the police said. The bike and driver crashed into a Kenworth tractor-trailer carrying 12,000 gallons of gasoline. The motorcycle became wedged under the truck and caught fire. The truck driver was able to escape from the cab without serious injury, the police said. The Coram Fire Department extinguished the flames before the gas truck ignited, the police said. Mr. Bush was pronounced dead at the scene.” (article 6)

The foregrounding of all articles can be seen in Figure 1.



The graph above shows the percentage of the issues foregrounded in the articles: 35% business; 25% violence; 15% famous people; 10% city problems; 10% leisure; and 5% people.

4.2 – Collocations

Collocations appear in all articles and show that the words “motorcycle”, “motorbike”, “bike”, and “scooter” maybe *nouns* or *adjectives*.

As *nouns* the adjectives that qualify them refer to:

- *nationalities (Chinese, Japanese);*

- *value (cheap);*
- *power (110cc; less powerful);*
- *weight (750-pound; lightweight);*
- *size (smaller, low);*
- *appearance/age (shiny new; mud-caked used);*
- *brand (Harley-Davidson).*

The possessive determiners *his* and *their* also appear before those *nouns*. The possessive determiner *her* appears in none of the articles.

As *adjectives* they qualify the following nouns:

- | | |
|-----------------------|---------------------|
| - <i>mechanic;</i> | - <i>taxi;</i> |
| - <i>market;</i> | - <i>business;</i> |
| - <i>row;</i> | - <i>companies;</i> |
| - <i>drivers;</i> | - <i>industry;</i> |
| - <i>licenses;</i> | - <i>sales;</i> |
| - <i>accidents;</i> | - <i>death;</i> |
| - <i>vendor;</i> | - <i>club;</i> |
| - <i>shops;</i> | - <i>riders;</i> |
| - <i>crash;</i> | - <i>plant;</i> |
| - <i>maker;</i> | - <i>show;</i> |
| - <i>chauffeur;</i> | - <i>thieves;</i> |
| - <i>taxi riders.</i> | |

These nouns can be divided into categories: business/profession, violence, and leisure.

Collocations also show that the words “motorcyclist”, “biker”, “rider”, “driver” may occur differently. The word “motorcyclist” is usually an adjective and appears in noun phrases like The Motorcyclist Association and The American Motorcyclist Association. Only once it was used as a noun to refer to a person who rides a motorcycle: “A city bus struck and killed **a 23-year-old motorcyclist** yesterday in Queens,…” (article 35).

The word “biker” maybe a *noun* or an *adjective*. It appeared as a *plural noun* and the following adjectives preceded it: “women” and “female”. It was also preceded by the determiner *other*.

Eg.:

“Genevieve Schmitt, who runs the Web site womenridersnow.com, said the growth in **women bikers** reflected that ‘more women are rising up corporate ladders, women are earning bigger paychecks, more women are remaining single — so they have a say in where their leisure dollars go.’” (article 20).

As an adjective, “biker” qualified the noun *culture*.

Eg.:

“‘It’s not that old gang stereotype, that’s a thing of the past,’ he said, adding that the family-oriented show helps to combat stereotypes about the **biker culture**.” (article 45).

The word “rider” was used only as a *noun*. It was preceded by the adjectives:

- *veteran*,
- *motorcycle*,
- *accomplished motocross*,
- *injured*,
- *new*,
- *motorcycle taxi*.

Eg.: “In 1975, 47 states required all **motorcycle riders** to wear helmets,...” (article 33).

It was also preceded by determiners:

- *every*;
- *all*;
- *50,000 motocross*;
- *more than one million*;
- *other*.

The word ‘driver’ appeared as a *noun* in two articles preceded by the following adjectives:

- *scooter*;
- *motorcycle taxi*.

Eg.: ““It might be because Guangzhou is richer now,” said Lin Mu, 50, a **motorcycle taxi driver**...” (article 47).

The analysis showed that most common collocations are related to the motorcycle as a product: its nationality, size, appearance, value and its brand.

4.3 – Agency

The articles presented the motorcycle/bike/scooter not only as patients but also as agents. The same happened to the words motoryclist/biker/rider (see Table 8 below). These occurrences may happen at the same time in one single article, it means that one article may present the motorcycle or the motoryclist as patient as well as agent.

Tabel 8: Agent-Patient relationship

	Number of articles
motorcycle/bike/scooter as patients	14
motorcycle/bike/scooter as agents	12
motorcyclist/biker/rider as patient	07
motorcyclist/biker/rider as agents	04

Fourteen articles (70%) portrayed the motorcycle/bike/scooter as patients.

Eg.:

- 1) “And suicide bombers have been known to ignite their explosives on scooters, so the police and soldiers have begun stopping and searching some scooters and their drivers.” (article 02).
- 2) “The man, Thomas Bush, 37, of Tallwood Drive, was driving a 2007 Triumph motorcycle south on Route 112 when he lost control of the vehicle just before 9 p.m. and skidded into the opposite lane, the police said.” (article 06)
- 3) “He soon learned that passengers ride on the bike itself, have their own handles to grab onto, and are given outerwear and helmets with audio systems.” (article 15).

In the twenty articles analysed, twelve (60%) showed the motorcycle/bike/scooter as agents.

Eg.:

- 4) “And the Chinese motorcycles often serve as transportation for families.” (article 01).
- 5) “... his bike came down on the rattlesnakes.” (article 05).
- 6) “A Shirley resident was killed on Saturday evening when his motorcycle crashed into a gas truck and burst into flames, the Suffolk County police said.” (article 06).
- 7) “Now, 1.8 million motorcycles and scooters buzz through Hanoi every day in a confused and unrelieved cacophony.” (article 26).

Seven articles (35%) showed the motorcyclist/biker/rider as patient.

Eg.:

- 8) “Soldiers tend to view scooter drivers with less suspicion because, unlike people in cars, their bodies are in plain sight.” (article 02).
- 9) “...because the Japanese companies offer a wider range of smaller bikes that are less intimidating to many novice female riders.” (article 20).
- 10) “In 1975, 47 states required all motorcycle riders to wear helmets; now only 20 do, the board said.” (article 33).
- 11) “As yet, the city has not instituted any restrictions, but the motorcycle ban has already forced thousands of motorcycle taxi riders to leave.” (article 47).

Of the twenty articles, only four (20%) portrayed the motorcyclist/biker/rider as agents.

Eg.:

- 12) “Last year the company lowered the Sportster 883 L even more and also introduced the Sportster 1200 L, a low bike for smaller riders who want more power.” (article 20).
- 13) “And it is illegal to park on sidewalks, but riders often do so anyway, sometimes removing their license plates to foil parking enforcement officers.” (article 24).
- 14) “He also said that all riders must sign a contract that explains the track’s rules and regulations.” (article 36).
- 15) “Heads turned whenever members of the many motorcycle clubs sauntered through the crowded Jacob K. Javits Convention Center over the weekend, as other bikers checked out their “colors,” or the patches stitched across the back of vests and jackets.” (article 45).

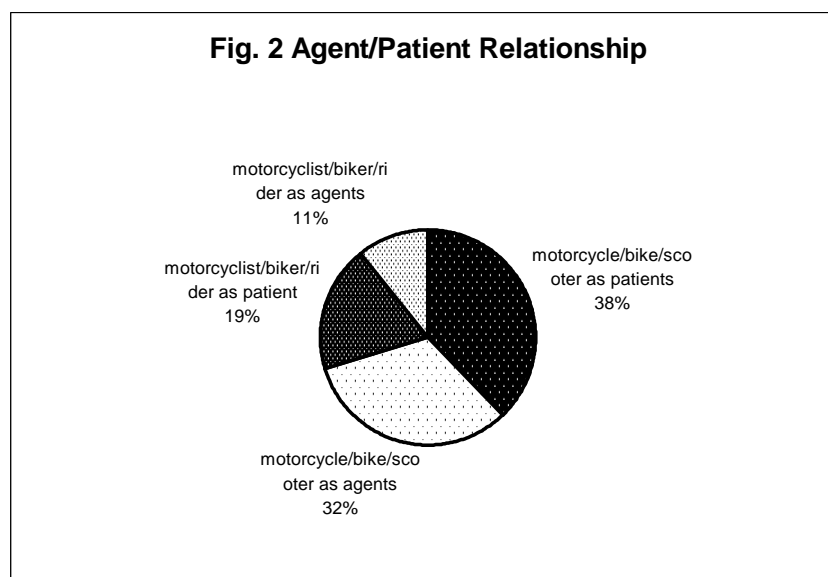


Figure 2 shows the relationship between agent and patient seen in the articles.

4.4 – Images

Of the twenty articles, nine articles (45%) showed no pictures. From the eleven articles that had pictures, seven (35%) showed only one picture; two (10%) showed four pictures each; one (5%) showed two pictures; and another one (5%) showed three pictures. (See Table 9 below).

Table 9: Relation between number of pictures and articles.

	Number of pictures	Number of Articles
	0	09

	1	07
	2	01
	3	01
	4	02
TOTAL	20	20

From these twenty pictures, five (25%) foreground people off motorcycles; five (25%) show bikers on motorcycles; four (20%) show women; two (10%) display maps or graphs; two pictures (10%) show images that apparently have no relation to motorcycles; one (5%) foregrounds a motorcycle; and one (5%) is a cartoon. (See Table 10 below).

Table 10: Relation between issue and number of pictures.

Issue	Number of pictures
People off motorcycles	05
Bikers on motorcycles	05
Women	04
Maps and/or Graphs	02
Not related to motorcycles	02
Motorcycle	01
Cartoon	01

The pictures that show people off motorcycles foreground:

- an old man playing a board game in article 02 on violence (pic 1);
- a black and white picture of Mr. Knieval standing, wearing a jumpsuit, carrying a helmet on his arm and holding a stick in article 05 on famous people (pic 2);
- a hand touching the back of a member of the Hells Angels who looks serious in article 44 on violence (pic 3);
- the back of three standing members of motorcycle clubs at a motorcycle event in article 45 on leisure (pic 4);
- and a dirty working man carrying a motorcycle tank in a storage area in article 47 on city problems (pic 5).



Pic 1: Article 02



Pic 3: Article 44



Pic 4: Article 45



Pic 2: Article 05



Pic 5: Article 47

Bikers on motorcycles appear in five pictures. These pictures show:

- a teacher riding a scooter in article 01 on business (pic 6);
- an old black and white picture of Mr. Knievel jumping a fountain in Las Vegas in article 05 on famous people (pic 7);
- a more recent picture of Mr. Knievel riding a motorcycle in article 05 on famous people (pic 8);
- a street packed with scooters at a traffic light in article 26 on city problems (pic 9);
- bikers competing at a motocross race in article 36 on leisure (pic 10).

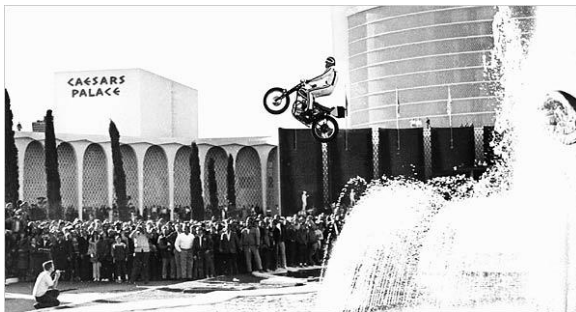
From these five pictures, three of them show bikers wearing helmets (pics 06, 07, and 10), whereas in two of the pictures bikers are not wearing helmets (pics 08 and 09). In the picture that shows the teacher, he is smoking while riding the scooter (pic 06). Two pictures show bikers wearing leather safety clothes (pics 07 and 10).



Pic 6: Article 01



Pic 8: Article 05



Pic 7: Article 05



Pic 9: Article 26



Pic10: Article 36

Pictures of women show: two girls at a motorcycle store looking at the motorcycles in article 01 on business (pic 11); a woman in a store pushing up a motorcycle in article 20 on business (pic 12); two women in an office putting safety goggles on in article 20 on business (pic 13); and a woman posing with a Harley-Davidson leather jacket in article 20 on business (pic 14).



Pic 11: Article 01



Pic 12: Article 20



Pic 14: Article 20



Pic 13: Article 20

One image is a map that shows the distance between two cities in Laos, between which workers usually transport products to and from in article 01 on business (pic 15). The image that is a graph shows the rise number of women buying Harley-Davidson motorcycles in article 20 on business (pic 16).

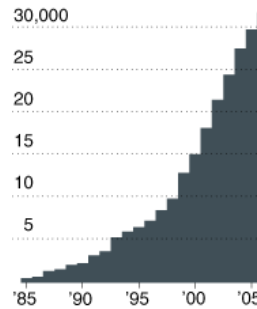


Pic 15: Article 01

Biker Chic

More women are buying Harley-Davidson motorcycles, making them 12 percent of the customers last year.

Women purchasing Harley-Davidson bikes each year



Source: Harley-Davidson

Pic 16: Article 20

Two pictures apparently have no relation with the motorcycle issue. The first one shows a parachute opened in a canyon in article 05 on famous people (pic 17); the other one shows a yellow tape written 'do not cross' blocking a street and a policeman behind it in article 44 on violence (pic 18).



Pic 17: Article 05



Pic 18: Article 44

One picture foregrounds a motorcycle showing an Addison Lee Taxi Bike in article 15 on business (pic 19).



Pic 19: Article 15

The last picture is a cartoon in article 13 on business (pic 20). It shows three men in an office. Two of them are looking at graphs on the wall while the other is taking notes of his observation at the window where he can see a motorcycle and a car in traffic.



Pic 20: Article 13

These results will be discussed in the next Chapter.

5 – DISCUSSION

From the results presented previously, there seem to be some issues to discuss regarding the questions raised at the beginning of this paper. The questions were: “How are motorcycles/motorcyclists portrayed in a newspaper?”; “How do pictures contribute to creating the image of motorcycles/motorcyclists in newspaper articles?”

Four basic elements were taken into consideration when the texts were analysed in order to answer these questions: *Foreground/background information, collocations, agency, and pictures.*

The analysis showed that the articles presented motorcycles as products, means of transportation, investment, the main cause of problems in a city (crash, accidents, robberies or pollution). Motorcycles do things, they take action, whereas Motorcyclists are usually the victims, unless they are members of motorcycle clubs.

It is impressive to observe that 35% of the articles are related to business. This does not show motorcycles in a negative way. However, if we add the number of articles that are related to violence (25%) and city problems (10%) and that foreground famous people or ordinary people but background motorcycle accidents and deaths (20%), we can come up to a total of 55% of articles that somewhat show motorcycles in a negative way. Even the articles that describe leisure activities, such as shows, background biker conflicts, which are also negative. The images do not show crashes or accidents. However, they show pollution related to motorcycles, dangerous scenes (a motorcycle race and a man jumping a fountain), and they show bikers in an unfriendly way. It can thus be argued that these images contribute to a negative idea people may have about bikers.

It is also interesting to observe that there are not many women bikers. We can come to this conclusion through the analysis of collocations. ‘Men bikers’ appeared in none of the articles. So, if the word ‘biker’ appears alone, we can immediately understand that a man is the biker, there is no need to insert the word ‘men’ to understand it. However, there were collocations with, ‘women bikers’ or ‘female bikers’. As a biker is usually a man, when a woman is the biker, the words ‘women’ or ‘female’ must be included; otherwise, we will imagine that the biker is a man.

Images do contribute to creating all these concepts. None of the pictures show women riding a motorcycle. It is interesting that the pictures show women wearing leather jackets or safety goggles, looking at motorcycles, and even learning how to pull them up, as if it were certain that women will fall off the motorcycles and they need to learn how to pull them up. But women are not shown as riders. Men, on the other hand, race, jump fountains, make investments, are members of motorcycle clubs, and even work on motorcycles as taxi drivers.

These are possible applications of this analysis as it may help language teachers apply this theory in their classes. To do this, teachers should choose an article that is relevant to their students' reality. Any subject may be the focus of the analysis: religion, politics, sports, men/women relationships, health, and so on. Teachers do not need to analyse the four elements that were analysed in this paper in one single article. In one article teachers may work on foreground/background, and in another article teachers may focus on the agent-patient relationship, for instance. The most important thing is that teachers should motivate students to read newspaper articles and make them aware of reading them critically.

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APPENDIX

Appendix 1: News Articles Web Addresses

Appendix 1: News Articles Addresses

Visited Date in 2008	Article Number	WEBLINK
15/01	01	http://www.nytimes.com/2007/12/27/world/asia/27laos.html?_r=1&oref=slogin
15/01	02	http://www.nytimes.com/2007/12/25/world/middleeast/25scooters.html
15/01	03	http://www.nytimes.com/2007/12/16/automobiles/16BEAMS.html
15/01	04	http://www.nytimes.com/2007/12/09/automobiles/autoreviews/09VECTRIX.html?_r=1
15/01	05	http://www.nytimes.com/2007/12/01/us/01knivel.html
15/01	06	http://www.nytimes.com/2007/10/22/nyregion/22mbrfs-CRASH.html
15/01	07	http://www.nytimes.com/2007/10/14/automobiles/14NEWBIE.html
22/01	08	http://www.nytimes.com/2007/10/14/automobiles/14CYCLE.html
22/01	09	http://www.nytimes.com/2007/10/14/automobiles/14COURSE.html
22/01	10	http://www.nytimes.com/2007/10/12/arts/12ekins.html
22/01	11	http://www.nytimes.com/2007/10/10/nyregion/10clooney.html
22/01	12	http://www.nytimes.com/2007/09/30/automobiles/autoreviews/30GUZZI.html
22/01	13	http://www.nytimes.com/2007/09/30/business/30maker.html
22/01	14	http://www.nytimes.com/2007/09/22/nyregion/22clooney.html
22/01	15	http://travel.nytimes.com/2007/09/17/business/businessspecial2/17arrive.html
22/01	16	http://www.nytimes.com/2007/09/17/arts/design/17armo.html
22/01	17	http://www.nytimes.com/2007/09/09/automobiles/autoreviews/09BIKE.html
22/01	18	http://www.nytimes.com/2007/09/09/automobiles/autosreviews/09HANDLE.html
22/01	19	http://www.nytimes.com/2007/08/02/sports/othersports/02xgames.html
22/01	20	http://www.nytimes.com/2007/07/25/business/25biker.html
22/01	21	http://www.nytimes.com/2007/07/24/washington/24brfs-crash.html
22/01	22	http://www.nytimes.com/2007/07/22/automobiles/autoreviews/22SUZY.html
22/01	23	http://www.nytimes.com/2007/07/20/business/20harley.html
22/01	24	http://www.nytimes.com/2007/07/13/nyregion/13scooters.html
22/01	25	http://www.nytimes.com/2007/07/08/automobiles/08HARLEY.html
22/01	26	http://www.nytimes.com/2007/07/07/world/asia/07vietnam.html
22/01	27	http://www.nytimes.com/2007/07/01/automobiles/01BIKE.html
22/01	28	http://travel.nytimes.com/2007/05/25/travel/escapes/25adventurer.html
22/01	29	http://www.nytimes.com/2007/05/20/fashion/20poss.html
22/01	30	http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=950DE6D71131F93AA25756C0A9619C8B63
22/01	31	http://www.nytimes.com/2007/05/06/fashion/weddings/06vows.html
22/01	32	http://www.nytimes.com/2007/04/15/automobiles/autoreviews/15HANDLE.html
28/01	33	http://www.nytimes.com/2007/09/12/us/12helmet.html
30/01	34	http://www.nytimes.com/2007/04/15/automobiles/autoreviews/15BIKE.html
30/01	35	http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9F04EFD91330F93BA15750C0A9619C8B63
30/01	36	http://www.nytimes.com/2007/03/25/nyregion/nyregionspecial2/25CTopic.html
30/01	37	http://www.nytimes.com/2007/03/18/automobiles/18NIGHT.html
30/01	38	http://www.nytimes.com/2007/03/18/automobiles/18HANDLE.html
30/01	39	http://movies.nytimes.com/2007/03/02/movies/02wild.html
30/01	40	http://www.nytimes.com/2007/02/25/magazine/25funnyhumor.t.html
30/01	41	http://www.nytimes.com/2007/02/11/automobiles/11MODS.html
30/01	42	http://www.nytimes.com/2007/02/04/automobiles/04SPYDER.html
30/01	43	http://www.nytimes.com/2007/02/04/nyregion/nyregionspecial2/04ctweek.html
30/01	44	http://www.nytimes.com/2007/02/01/nyregion/01angels.html
30/01	45	http://www.nytimes.com/2007/01/23/nyregion/23ink.html
30/01	46	http://www.nytimes.com/2007/01/21/nyregion/thecity/21bike.html
30/01	47	http://www.nytimes.com/2007/01/15/world/asia/15china_LN.html