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CHAPTER 1

The Study of News Discourse: An Overview

1.1 Introduction

The study of news discourse has been a favourite subject of investigation for decades now. From the process of newsgathering to daily journalistic practices, from the conventions let alone the ideological implications of newsworthiness criteria to a detailed overview of the genres involved and the underlying linguistic choices, news discourse has been studied from the most diverse disciplinary perspectives.

The first two chapters of this volume are designed to provide readers with an overview of the theoretical grounds on which the present study rests. In particular, this chapter is conceived as a review of the multiplicity of credited disciplinary standpoints in relation to the study of news discourse, starting from the practitioner’s point of view (1.2), and then moving on to conversation analysis (1.3), semiotic analysis (1.4), critical discourse analysis (1.5) and social-semiotics studies at large (1.6) in the footsteps of Fairclough’s (1995) synopsis. Accordingly, each section is intended to outline the core of some of the main contributions to the respective research fields: as such, the chapter is expected to provide readers with valuable food for thought on the issues debated in the books, although this survey is not meant to be exhaustive.

Then, the next chapter will be aimed at narrowing the readers’ look-out point, as it were, down to the specific approach adopted for the corpus and discourse study of authentic data envisioned in Chapter 3 and carried out from Chapter 4. Readers with an immediate interest for the main disciplinary assumptions of the analysis spelt out in the rest of the book might therefore feel tempted to skip this chapter and start off from Chapter 2. On the other hand, readers with a more genuine propensity for the methodological premises of the study as well as the analysis of data may prefer to skip both of the introductory chapters and move straight to Chapter 3.
1.2 The Practitioner’s Perspective

The role of language in the news should be of interest to practitioners, who are the primary users of the discursive repertoire analysed here. However, only tangentially has valuable linguistic research been produced by people for whom the proper draft of news texts happens to be the daily bread. An egregious exception to this overall trend is represented by the monograph-length study by Cotter (2010). Herself a former daily news reporter and assistant city editor, Cotter devises a comprehensive study aimed at developing an ethnographic view of the language of everyday journalism, in an attempt to characterise the role of practitioners in the production of news language, and to demonstrate how practice and process shape news discourse.

On the basis of a wide range of data collected through newsroom fieldwork, interviews with practitioners as well as archived news stories from various sources including, but not limited to, *The Oakland Tribune, The New York Times, The Washington Post* and wire stories transmitted by *The Associated Press* and *Reuters*, Cotter focuses on the crucial impact of the news process on the construction of media language and text. Accordingly, she reconciles the brevity of sentences and the spread of related ideas over four or five paragraphs with the journalistic demand for brevity and the avoidance of grey block types that have very little to do with non-journalistic paragraphing standards. Moreover, Cotter (2010: 222-225) points to the concealed tension between the attribution of information to multiple or expert sources on the one hand, and the inclusion of technical elements into news stories on the other. If attributed statements are part of a consolidated strategy to reinforce the news media’s position as cautious, reliable and possibly unbiased reporter of major events, the sense of purported objectivity achieved through the judicious use of technical elements is undermined by the journalists’ habit of oversimplifying as they choose a supposedly reliable expertise to rely on.

Notwithstanding the fact that Cotter’s work is less oriented towards a systematic classification of the most typical discursive resources at the journalist’s disposal than towards a close examination of more ethnographic concepts such as speech events and situations, communities of practice and relationships within the profession and outside, the study of media language might certainly reap the harvest of the uniquely in-depth reflections provided by practitioners. The open-ended questions outlined in the appendix to Cotter’s volume...
are a proof of the potential integration between the professional’s perspective and linguists interested in media language variation – shared cultural knowledge, the interplay of visual and textual information, out-group interpretations of media language – and/or the effects of such factors on the construction of narratives and stories in a media context.

1.3 Conversation Analysis

Conversation analysis (CA) stands out as an ethnomethodological, interpretative approach to sociology focusing on everyday life as an interactional accomplishment to be studied through the direct observation of naturally occurring interaction instantiated by audio and videorecordings (Heritage 1984). The detailed transcripts of these – including silences denoted by numbers in parentheses, overlapping speech denoted by square brackets, and points of emphasis and stress denoted by underlining – serve as the starting point for a qualitative and quantitative investigation of a number of examples of a specific interactional phenomenon systematically analysed with the aim of reaching a full-relief understanding of it (Clayman and Heritage 2002).

The case-by-case method employed by conversation analysts is a careful blend of intuition and the study of the understandings and orientations of participants, often by taking account of the response that each and every utterance receives subsequently in the turn-taking unfolding of conversation. This aspect proved particularly well-suited to the analysis of news interviews as a preferred genre of conversation analysis, commonly broadcast as they are without the intervening stage of editorial review and therefore susceptible of the immediate scrutiny of fellow journalists.

For instance, Clayman (1992) borrows Goffman’s notion of footing determining the nature of participants’ involvement in social interaction, in order to discuss its relevance to the phenomenon of interviewers’ neutralism. By examining stretches of news interviews such as one by Robert Dole, former Senate majority leader for the US Republican Party, Clayman observes that footing shifts in association with relatively controversial opinion statements. More specifically, shifts tend to occur when interviewers display provocative viewpoints for subsequent topical developments, when they confront an interviewee by exploring the other side of the issue, or as they seek to enliven the interview by igniting disagreement between
interviewees. In all these contexts, the study of transcripts reveals that footing shifts allow interviewers to remain personally disengaged from the controversial issues they bring into play, thus achieving the neutralistic posture they are generally expected to keep.

On a parallel methodological note, Greatbatch (1992) explores the relationship between the turn-taking provisions of news interviews and the management of disagreement between interviewees. In the wake of a distinction between disagreements in mundane conversation as opposed to the practices inherent in news interview settings, Greatbatch argues that the latter’s turn-taking system provides for the production of overt disagreements between interviewees, and at once mitigates them through the intervention of a third party, namely the interviewer, conventionally entrusted with the task of managing the exit to disagreements. CA therefore supplies the textual basis, as it were, to explain why panel interviews are so common as a means of combative broadcasting, with broadcasters taking advantage of the spectacular potential represented by the production and sometimes overt escalation of disagreement, and interviewees knowing that they are entitled to put forward their disagreement without being responsible for achieving a way out of them.

Such rich accounts of the organisational properties of media language are part of the unquestionable merits of CA, although the attention to the relational aspects of interaction in news contexts could be well reinforced with studies on both the linguistic substance of media text, and on the contextual variables at work at the level of society and culture, as explored by the two approaches discussed in the following two sub-sections, i.e. semiotic analysis (1.4) and critical discourse analysis (1.5).

1.4 Semiotic Analysis

Semiotic analysis may account for an umbrella term designating a variety of studies. As far as the present work is concerned, the scope of the term is only restricted to the analysis of texts as an essential component of the cultural analysis of media: in this context, reference is chiefly made to Hartley’s (2003) study on the codes and conventions at the basis of linguistic and visual aspects of news stories.

Moving within the multi-layered field of cultural studies as an interdisciplinary area drawing on anthropology and textual theory, socio-political theory and media studies, Hartley develops a steady interest in popular culture which, among others, involves popular me-
dia such as journalism with a view to questions of ideology, hegemony, power and visuality in addition to other non-speech semiosis. In pursuing the task of “displacing, decentring, demystifying and deconstructing the common sense of dominant discourses” (Hartley 2003: 10), he mentions ideologically-laden categories and classifications implicit in or carefully excluded from news texts. Of note, for instance, is the observation that whereas the category of individual personality is largely perceived in news stories, broader categories of social belonging are correspondingly cast aside from official narratives, as it were. Otherwise, other kinds of oppositions that permeate the surface of text – e.g. government as opposed to unions and/or strikers – are overwhelmingly impoverished under a reductive confrontation between us and them.

The intellectual effort to reconcile text, albeit without engaging in a systematic recount of the properties of texture, with underlying power relations is driven towards more linguistically grounded views of text through the impact of critical discourse analysis.

1.5 Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) can be seen as the outgrowth of the approach developed by pioneering researchers based at the University of East Anglia and known as critical linguistics. The latter is based on Halliday’s (1985) systemic linguistic theory, which is essentially transferred to the analysis of media texts: these are seen as representations of the world (ideational function) constructed on the basis of available options in terms of vocabulary and grammar, and they are considered as depicting social relations and identities (interpersonal function).

As Fowler (1991: 67) put it, critical linguistics sought, “by studying the minute details of linguistic structure in the light of the social and historical situation of the text, to display to consciousness the patterns of belief and value” encoded in the language. As such, critical linguistics embraces the view that news is socially constructed: therefore, the choice to report some events instead of others is hardly related to the intrinsic importance of those events, but rather to a set of complex criteria for selection; moreover, the selected news undergoes processes of transformation as it proceeds towards publication in, say, television or newsprint. Both selection and transformation are generally ruled by a system of ideas and beliefs with re-
spect to which language is not neutral, but “a highly constructive mediator” (Fowler 1991: 1).

By taking the most revealing aspects of representation and the ideational function even further, critical discourse analysis came to hold a deserved hegemonic position in the field of media studies. On the one hand, CDA provides a solid theoretical framework by focusing on such crucial contextual factors as the economics and politics of media (Fairclough 1998). Thus, emphasis is given to the pre-eminently profit-making nature of press and commercial broadcasters, who bring audiences closer and closer to advertisers by aiming at the widest possible range of listeners/viewers for the lowest possible financial exposure. Within this market logic, a decisive element doomed to impact on media discourse is represented by patterns of ownership, with the result of a deep integration of the media with capitalist class interests at both a national and an international level. In parallel, depending on the shifting balance between a concept of strong public service demanded to provide accountable and impartial coverage, and a view of broadcasting as primarily commercial, attention is paid to the forms of potential complicity between the media and dominant social classes and élites.

On the other hand, CDA sheds light on a number of interesting textual features, e.g. by studying how events, people and objects are represented in the grammar of clauses. For instance, Fairclough (1995: 25) argues for the ideological significance of a comment issued on BBC Radio 4 broadcast about Russian fish dumped on the British market, namely “the funny thing is it’s not transferring itself to the consumer at terribly low prices at all”. Here, Fairclough notes, the coding of fish distribution with an action process verb – i.e. transfer – employed reflexively, the transformation of the pricing process into a state – cf. at terribly low prices – makes sure that responsibility and agency are left unspecified, leaving the door open to potentially ideological manipulation. Similarly, in disclosing the language choices around the controversial topic of the reprocessing plant at Sellafield (UK), Fairclough (1995: 5) points to the role of a generic attributive form such as critics say... in sentence initial position as a model element designed to “mitigate and disclaim responsibility for a damning judgment by attributing it to unspecified others”. In this context, the writer’s choice is said to be indicative of a high degree of indirectness arising out of the trade-off between the neutralistic stance requested for a reporter, and a more sensationalist demand upon the reporter as entertainer.
Although critical discourse analysts do not generally empower their multi-level approach through a sound quantitative background deriving from the adoption of large amounts of authentic data, they do however spell out three sets of questions about media output (Fairclough 1995: 5) that the present work is intended to take into serious consideration:

- How is the world (events, relationships etc.) represented?
- What identities are set up for those involved in the programme or story?
- What relationships are set up between those involved?

In tackling such questions, CDA advocates a detailed analysis of the language and texture of media text, and it argues for a text analytical approach capable of including intertextual analysis as well, thereby laying proper emphasis on the hybridity of genres and discourses encoded within the heterogeneous linguistic features of media text.

In this vein, a scholar whose work needs full appreciation in that it allowed for a fruitful convergence of CDA and text linguistics is Van Dijk, whose scholarly approach to the study of media texts is reviewed in the upcoming section.

1.6 Social-Semiotic Studies: Van Dijk’s Line of Research

Although Van Dijk’s (1988; 1998; 2006) work is traditionally categorised under CDA, his contribution as a leading theorist of discourse analysis deserves to be accounted for in its own right as an outstanding interdisciplinary framework for the study of text (especially in newspapers) in social context.

Van Dijk may well be credited with the development of an analytical model aimed at unpacking the complexity of news texts in terms of a structure of news articulated through the interplay of a macro- and a micro-structure. On the one hand, the macrostructure of the news text is defined as its general organisation with respect to the overall contents as well as its schematic structure: the former denote the sequence of both general and specific themes dealt with in the text, whereas the schematic structure concerns the structural units through which the text is built, i.e. headlines, leads and reported events. A close link is postulated to exist between each element of
the schematic structure, and the topic(s) informing the thematic structure of news texts.

Subsumed under the macrostructure, on the other hand, is the micro-structure of news discourse, which Van Dijk undertakes to analyse both at the level of semantic relations between propositions, and from the viewpoint of lexical, syntactic and more generally rhetorical properties of newspaper style. The broad-based study of micro-structural components of news texts proposed by Van Dijk (1998) mainly addresses editorials and op-ed articles as the preferred site for the expression of opinions: depending on the newspaper’s stance, opinions bear the traces of the ideological presuppositions underlying them, and at the same time they influence the discourse structures of articles. By taking stock of opinions and ideologies as the outcome of a process involving beliefs and mental representations as well as reflecting social, institutional and political variables, Van Dijk examines a variety of complementary discourse dimensions.

For instance, Van Dijk focuses on lexical items expressing values or norms and therefore embedding a value judgment – e.g. terrorist, racist – and he points out that some predicates straightforwardly entail the formulation of authorial opinions (e.g. beautiful), whereas others alternate a purely factual orientation with a more evaluative one with regard to the value-system taken as a benchmark (cf. polluted). It follows that opinions may also be expressed in subtle and complex ways, namely by means of a skilful use of alliterations (fury and fear), parallelisms and lexical representations (sinister) drawing the attention to specific configurations and polarisations such as the notorious Us versus Them.

In this respect, Van Dijk calls into question the well-known dual ideology, as it were, of Western superiority – emerging through the association of us with positive values like democracy, rationality and non-violence – opposed to Arab inferiority manifesting itself through the attribution of terrorist attitudes to them. Interestingly, Van Dijk (1998: 34) reconciles the use of such heavily connoted lexical items as terrorist crimes, extremists and fanatic determination with the decisive presence of presuppositions that strategically serve “to obliquely introduce into a text propositions which may not be true at all”. Thus, the presumed inclination of Palestinians to hinder any form of peaceful settlement is the element that justifies their hyperbolic representation as irreducible radicals.
The centrality of presuppositions in discourse and the multidimensional approach to text shared by Van Dijk and other critical discourse analysts are among the aspects that encouraged the production of other valuable research in the past few years. On the one hand, Bekalu (2006) chooses five news articles from three Ethiopian newspapers in order to address the issue of presupposed knowledge and to assess the processing efforts thrust upon readers in the access and activation of what is presupposed. Bekalu’s (2006: 168) data show that whereas some presuppositions prove “fair” and “non-controversial”, based as they are on common knowledge and agreement of observable facts, others are more controversial and appear to be employed by journalists for the purpose of propaganda and reader manipulation. When that is the case, there is evidence that the writer’s intention to conceal certain issues borders with the excessive processing efforts readers need to invest in order to achieve the requested cognitive effect of the article.

On the other hand, Li (2009) concentrates on the front page news-articles of The New York Times and China Daily in the aftermath of the diplomatic strains between China and the United States caused first by the accidental NATO bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Yugoslavia back in 1999, and then by the collision of a US surveillance plane with a Chinese fighter jet in 2001. In trying to achieve a full understanding of the distribution of intertextual resources evoking deeply-rooted historical and socio-cultural relationships re-conceptualized in the two newspapers’ representations of events, Li (2009: 114) argues that the highly value-laden lexis pervading the respective news recounts is symptomatic of a strongly connoted construction of national identity, whereby “The New York Times constructs an image of China caught up in wild nationalism […], whereas China Daily develops a discourse that projects China as a nation that promotes peace and justice through a condemnation of NATO’s aggression”.

1.7 Conclusions

This chapter provided a preliminary overview of the variety of theoretical standpoints that may be taken in the analysis of news texts. In spite of the specificity of each approach, what appears to be common to all is a focus on media among scholars working with language and communication at large, from practitioners to academics. As Garrett and Bell (1998: 3) surmise, this is largely due to the con-
vergence of four main factors: first of all, media do constitute a rich source of accessible data for both teaching and research; secondly, media usage exerts a far-reaching impact on people’s use of and feelings about language in a specific community; thirdly, media texts are a reliable source for the investigation of the social meanings and stereotypes reflected by language and communication; and finally, media discourse instantiates a number of crucial mechanisms behind the formation of culture, politics and social life.

The merits of the wide range of studies reviewed in the chapter mainly lie in the ambitious undertaking to examine media texts in their most diverse realisations (from interviews in CA to editorials and op-ed articles in Van Dijk’s works, to name but a few), both in order to elucidate their underlying discursive practices (cf. 1.2) and organizational principles (see 1.3), and with the aim of establishing a link between recurrent formal properties of text – e.g. lexical choices along with the syntax of clauses and sentences – and the overall expression or signaling of ideological assumptions (cf. 1.5 and 1.6).

This book is less concerned with the identification of ideological underpinnings of news discourse than with the attempt to classify and systematically analyse the language tools through which journalists project their professional identity into the news articles where they provide a representation of the ‘other’, i.e. Italy seen from the United States and vice-versa. In order to achieve this goal, emphasis is laid more on text than on contextual variables, and a survey of the approaches on which the study is most keen on drawing is needed. The next chapter is therefore devoted to a survey of relevant studies on news language from a discourse and corpus perspective, which is intended to ground the methodological premises then thoroughly dealt with in Chapter 3.
CHAPTER 2
The Language of News Articles: Towards the Integration of Corpus and Discourse

2.1 Introduction

The first chapter provided a survey of influential theoretical approaches to the study of news discourse, from the practitioner’s perspective to critical discourse analysis and social semiotics. This chapter narrows the analytical concern down to the approach advocated for the study devised in the present volume: a fruitful integration of high-profile contributions from genre as well as discourse analysis and studies on identity on the one hand, and corpus linguistics on the other.

In laying the foundations of a close examination of the language tools employed by professional journalists in constructing their own professional identity as they portray the ‘other’ – i.e. Italy as seen from the United States of America, and the US as represented in Italy – the chapter argues for a profitable cross-fertilisation of corpus and discourse tools, which is discussed here in terms of the underlying theoretical implications, methodologically devised in Chapter 3 and eventually implemented to authentic data over Chapters 4-6.

The chapter starts by articulating the ever-expanding field of genre studies (2.2); it then deals with the insights brought by a number of outstanding discourse studies on various aspects of news texts (2.3); subsequently (2.4), it brings in some key-concepts of studies on identity that appear highly relevant to the upcoming analysis of a sample of collected data, which in turn requires that the corpus component of the study be clarified and fully legitimated. Finally (2.5), information about the organisation of the rest of the volume is provided.

2.2 Genre Studies: Looking for the Rhetorical Specificity of Text

The choice of text as the privileged object of investigation in the context of news discourse poses the question of how to proceed to a reliable analysis of the main communicative events of news settings.
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Following Adam (2001), three main guidelines may be spelt out: first of all, an accurate historical reconstruction of the main genres within the vast area of news discourse; secondly, a descriptive account of the rhetorical specificity of each genre; and thirdly, the study of cross-generic discourse features common to more than one genre. Since the first two analytical directions represent the backbone of genre studies by pointing to its theoretical solidity, they are sketched in this section. By contrast, the study of noteworthy features cutting across the generic spectrum of news discourse is best reserved for 2.3.

The study of discourse as “language in use in institutional, professional or more general social contexts” (Bhatia 2004: 3), and in this case of the specific variety of professional discourse we refer to as news discourse, certainly benefits from the adoption of a finely-grained genre perspective. Whenever we make use of the term ‘genre’ in this work, we take it to designate a class of homogenous communicative events exhibiting patterns of similarity with regard to the overarching communicative purpose determined by the parent discourse community, their style, structure, content and intended audience (Swales 1990 and 2004). Studying text with this notion as a benchmark implies leaving aside any misconceived assumption that a discourse area such as the news can be seen as a substantially homogeneous set of linguistic data, with little to no differentiation bearing on the distinctive rhetorical demands that the network of people concerned with news production, i.e. the discourse community of journalists, intends to pursue by means of each genre.

As Grosse (2001) glosses, the theoretical justification behind the adoption of a genre-based approach in the study of news discourse is three-fold. First of all, the production and reception of news texts is largely constrained by generic variables and related expectations: news articles are not structured in the same way as editorials, nor would ordinary readers expect to be offered the same treatment of an issue across a news article and an editorial. Secondly, the linguistic choices reflecting the communicative purpose of each news text may indeed vary from one genre to the other, with more markedly narrative passages (cf. Genette 1976) news articles are generally credited with, and more clearly argumentative standpoints to be mostly – although by no means exclusively – found in editorials. Finally, newspapers and magazines may be said to owe most of their editorial characterisation and overall reputation to the prominence and authoritativeness they provide for their constitutive genres.
Overall, there is strong evidence that opting for a genre study of news discourse opens a window of opportunity for detailed qualitative and quantitative studies disclosing much of the textual substance of selected texts. From a more encyclopaedic viewpoint, the reconstruction of the historical roots of news genres may tell us a lot about their diachronic development over centuries.

In this respect, a notable work is Grosse’s (2001) investigation of the historical diversification of genres, which he elaborates by taking the Italian daily *La Gazzetta di Mantova* as a reference, the latter supposedly being the only European newspaper founded in the 17th century and still existing. Grosse’s well-documented synopsis shows that the very first genre harboured by newspaper pages was the ancestor of today’s article, i.e. short news containing essential information about who did what, when and where, followed by broadly commendatory elements about any influential personality involved, in order to wriggle out of censorship.

The gradual extension of short news into three- or four-paragraph texts is later observed to produce the first news articles, where the detailed recount of issues combined the key-questions mentioned above with background information related, as it were, to the how and why anything took place. The result was the draft of more complete texts, where the issues of the day were presented with richer thematic accounts – e.g. going through the various resolutions of a war council – and equally exhaustive chronological remarks – e.g. the schedule behind a foreign ambassador’s visit to the Pope.

The further development of these primitive genres was subsequently accompanied by the emergence of others such as advertisements, of an originally informative and eventually more and more persuasive nature boosted by the insertion of visual items and slogans; theatre, concert and book reviews; news reports, however embryonically deprived of today’s predictable components of citations, references to relevant background documents as well as statistics; interviews, the birth of which is associated by Grosse with the need to report the exact words of people about matters of high judicial significance; and finally, the so-called opinion genres, notably readers’ letters and editorials, characterised by both the extensive deployment of argumentation along the guidelines of classical oratory, and a uniquely varied language where irony and parody in addressing the opponent’s language and deeds played their own part. What lies behind the reconstruction proposed by Grosse is a sense of historical cline from informative to more clearly argumentative genres, in
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which full legitimacy came from the outcome of the revolutionary wave of 1848, when Prussian censorship loosened, cultivated people felt more authorised to debate about salient issues, and the press took on the role of a public forum suited for political discussion among enlightened minds.

In recent years, scholarly research has expanded its concerns beyond mainly historical studies to high-value descriptive accounts of the rhetorical specificity of each genre, from glosses (Lüger 1995: 137), with their distinctively polemical style aimed to give further fervent support to a standpoint already advocated in editorials, to news reports (Lüger 1995: 113) as concrete and at times strongly personally-shaped representations of events and situations, where the object of narrative, however factually depicted, is also a mirror-image of the perspective and disposition of reporters as eye-witnesses. Among the several genres of which news discourse is comprised, a particularly prominent place has been occupied by editorials and news articles.

As authoritative moments of discussion of daily events, editorials are entrusted with arguing for or changing a specific standpoint in the readership’s face. In so doing, editorials impinge upon the reader’s value-system by problematising the contents of represented news: in this vein, they stand out as the opinion text par excellence, by undertaking the high moral responsibility of expressing the whole of the newspaper’s or magazine’s orientation about an issue (Herman and Jufer 2001).

The rhetorical structure of editorials has been thoroughly examined in discourse studies. For instance, Lüger (1995) argues that the communicative purpose of editorials to ground the validity of the endorsed standpoints vis-à-vis the readership is transposed into an argumentative text structure close to syllogistic reasoning (Van Eemeren, Grootendorst and Snoeck Henkemans 1996) and best described through Toulmin’s (1975) model of argumentative discourse: a claim or conclusion (C) supported by data (D) by virtue of a warrant (W), a qualifier (Q) indicating the argumentative strength by which (W) enables one to derive (C) from (D), a rebuttal (R) signalling circumstances for a potential refutation of the conclusion, and finally a backing (B) on which (W) relies.

In the wake of the fertile tradition of discourse studies focusing on the structural analysis of discourse units (Coulthard 1977), Bolivar (1994) fleshes out a multi-layered prototypical model for the articulation of editorials. Accordingly, editorials are defined as artefacts sub-
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divided into a number of rhetorical movements, each and every one of which reflects a tripartite sequence – i.e. the triad “lead”, “follow” and “valuate”– of three different kinds, namely “Situation”, “Development” and “Recommendation” (Bolivar 1994: 279-281). Such a complex hierarchical system has the merit of capturing the very textual essence of editorials, where the brief recapitulation of the facts interpreted in text gradually and cyclically cedes the way to the formulation of argumentation envisaging verdicts and authorial recommendations.

The textual authority embedded in editorials has obvious repercussions on the linguistic fabric, as it were, of text, as is convincingly demonstrated by Herman and Jufer (2001). In their investigation of editorials as the newspaper’s or magazine’s ideological showcase, the French analysts show that these texts reveal a tension between subjectivisation and de-subjectivisation. On the one hand, the prevalence of the personal pronouns on as well as the inclusive nous, which clearly outnumber the first person pronoun je, points to the effort to de-subjectivise the editorial as bearing the collective signature of the newspaper or magazine rather than the single editorialist. On the other hand, in the case of texts with limited writer-reader dialogism attested in the Francophone corpus collected by the authors, editorials appear to absorb the readership into a strongly subjectivised editorial voice authoritatively conceived as the spokesperson of the public opinion in addressing the ruling elites.

On a line of subtle continuity with and yet arguably distinct from editorials is the other major genre of news discourse, i.e. news articles. This mainly information-giving genre, at times hardly to be differentiated from news reports mentioned earlier on (Lüger 1995: 113), has been the object of several works over the last decades. In spite of their reputation as communicative events whose producers are credited with clear, exhaustive and objective representations of events deprived of the expression of personal feelings, news articles have been observed to have a far more complex discourse structure than they might seem.

Lüger (1995) asseverates that news articles represent the convergence of a set of four related communicative purposes: reporting how an event took place; explaining how the various aspects of the event belong together; informing of the consequences the event might bring about; and reflecting upon the social, historical, political and cultural contexts the event is to be associated with. As a result of this, the construction of the informative texture of news articles is
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also dependent on such components as background information and, most of all, authorial comments and standpoints.

On these grounds, Lüger (1995: 109) suggests that news articles tend to adhere to the following structure, where optional elements are indicated in brackets:

- Text opening:
  - headline
  - (correspondent’s name)
  - lead

- Body:
  - reported event(s)
  - (quotes / comments / background)

(My translation from German)

This structure accordingly lies behind news texts where a tension arises between a narrative fulfilling the task of providing credible detailed information on the one hand, and authorial evaluation enhancing the interpretive and at the same time interest-raising dimension of news writing on the other. In this context, the presence of evaluative passages is seen as no undermining of the informative task news articles are primarily entrusted with.

On a similar note, Bell (1998) carries out an in-depth analysis of both single-sentence newspaper stories and a full news story on the basis of a very sensibly conceived full-relief discourse structure he proposes as a model for the genre. Bell starts by outlining the three key-moves of attribution – implying the acknowledgement of the source, e.g. a news agency, and the indication of place and time – abstract – i.e. the headline and lead sentence identifying actors and setting involved in the central event of the story – and the story proper, constituted by one or more episodes that in turn may embed one or more events.

These mandatory moves are then supplemented by the three additional moves of background, commentary and follow-up. The background is designed to cover any event prior to the current one on which the articles centre; commentary “provides the journalist’s or news actor’s present-time observations on the action, assessing and commenting on events as they happen” (Bell 1998: 67), and it is therefore eligible to take the shape of additional context offering the reader further guidance in understanding what happened, or evalua-
tive comments on the action and its expected developments; finally, follow-up concerns story future time in that it generally includes verbal reactions by other parties involved.

These analyses demonstrate that the presence of authorial evaluation as a relevant dimension enriching the informative narrative inherent in news articles accounts for a consolidated finding of studies on news discourse. Still, this work is intended to sharpen existing knowledge on that matter by delving more systematically into the language resources at the journalists’ disposal in order to craft their multi-dimensional professional identity as they engage in the representation of the ‘other’ in the stories they sign.

The opportunity of undertaking an investigation where linguistic indicators observed from within a genre framework are a benchmark, is argued in the upcoming section, devoted to a review of noteworthy discourse features across the generic spectrum of news discourse envisaged so far.

2.3 The Discourse Features of News Texts: The Quest for Significant Data across Genres

Regardless of the specific genre they instantiate, news texts are so rich in language resources and underlying discourse strategies, that a comprehensive review of those is a somewhat mammoth task. This section explores a number of outstanding discourse features that were also considered for the analysis proposed in the volume, i.e. verbal tools, nominalisations, evaluatively significant markers such as stance adverbials and larger phraseological patterns, and headlining.

Verbal tools, to begin with, are not only a constitutive element of clauses and sentences, but also an active tool in the journalist’s hands when it comes to the representation of events in print news, whether in news articles or editorials. This applies to at least four dimensions of verbal usage, i.e. transitivity, reported discourse, modality and dialogism. The notion of transitivity, first of all, is crucial to the ideational function of news texts, i.e. the linguistic encoding of newsworthy real-world phenomena: as Fowler (1991: 71) sees it, transitivity denotes “the way the clause is used to analyse events and situations as being of certain types”. The rhetorical choices offered by transitivity at the level of action, process, and state predicates – e.g. shot, sinking and secure respectively – alongside their material, mental or verbal realisations – e.g. killed, dream and arguing respectively – may be highly indicative of the journalist’s point of view or ideologi-
cal standpoint. Accordingly, in the headline *Shot from 9 inches* prefacing an article about a police officer killing a young boy, the passive voice of the material action predicate *shoot* clearly entails a removal of verbal agency and hence the perpetrator’s undeniable responsibility. The effect is the supposedly deliberate, global re-orientation of the focus of the news story from the alleged killer to the victim *per se*.

Reported discourse, secondly, is an overt text-surface indicator of the plurality of interactants behind the production of news discourse. Not only do journalists as text producers interact with readers as they muse upon what they would like readers to learn and what they think readers will intend to know once they have gone past the headline; also, the news text is substantiated by the intervention, as it were, of other participants – e.g. informants from press agencies, witnesses at the crime scene, politicians, consultants of various sorts, spokesmen for institutional bodies etc. – “which the news writer will call upon to add their own voice to the relating of the story in question, having him/herself interacted with them at some point prior to submitting the final version to the editor” (Mansfield 2006: 48). The co-existence of all these voices explains why reporting verbs are among the most widely spread discourse features of news texts, with articles and reports in leading position.

The spate of interest in reporting verbs has led scholars to propose a variety of categorisations for them, with main regard to the discourse area under analysis: in academic discourse, Thompson and Ye (1991) and Thomas and Hawes (1994) group verbs of saying along three main processes: research acts, which may be recognised in statements of findings (e.g. *observe*, *discover*) or procedures (*analyse*, *calculate*); cognition acts related to mental processes (*believe*, *conceptualise*); and discourse acts which imply verbal expression (*ascribe*, *hypothesise*). Hyland (1999: 350) improves the above taxonomy, by arguing that the writer may use reporting verbs in order to represent “reported information as true (*acknowledge*, *point out*, *establish*), as false (*fail*, *overlook*, *exaggerate*, *ignore*) or non-factively, giving no clear signal”. In this case, the writer ascribes a view to the source author, by reporting him/her as positive (*argue*), neutral (*look at*), tentative (*suggest*), or critical (*refute*).

The value of these classificatory criteria can be well extended to news discourse, where Mansfield (2006: 48-51) produces a well-designed survey of reporting verbs as a key-resource other than direct speech, for the writer to base the news story on facts retrieved. This is primarily achieved through the prerogative of reporting verbs
to refer to a presumably reliable source for each reported fact with the aim of avoiding charges of deceptive information-spreading. In this vein, the voices of the several participants to the news text mentioned earlier on are conveyed by reporting verbs that call them in to contribute their first-hand knowledge or opinion, and at once place responsibility elsewhere from the reporter.

In this context, reporting verbs are observed to operate with remarkable syntactic and pragmatic flexibility. First of all, they may stand as introductory tools placed either at the beginning, end or in the middle of quoted statements, as in s/he says/said or s/he tells me. Particularly when inserted at the end of an utterance, the reporting verb appears to be well-suited to join two different statements by the same source, often designed as a general category of people – e.g. experts, police, a Treasury source – rather than as named individuals, and equally often in sequences where the newspaper or magazine stands out as the direct beneficiary of the message – cf. MPs told The Observer that...

Secondly, Mansfield (2006: 49) notes that the choice of reporting verbs is indicative of the writer’s attitude (cf. deny and decline), “his/her state of knowledge (doubt, certainty) and explicitly reveal[s] the illocutionary force of the utterance” (e.g. claim and insist as instances of weak and strong writer’s commitment to the truth value of the attendant proposition, respectively). The use of reporting verbs as effective discourse means to attribute a representation to someone other than the current writer, in order to more or less deliberately distance the writer from the truth-value of reported statements, brings in the issues of modality and dialogism.

Modality is a multi-faceted dimension of language in use (Kress and van Leeuwen 1990; Halliday 1994; Gagliardelli 1999), and it encompasses the word forms – verbs, adjectives, adverbials (see later in the section), nouns – and phrases through which the writer may both quantify or grade the likelihood of a phenomenon, and most of all express his/her judgment on the truth of what is averred in the clause or sentence. As will be shown in Chapter 4, therefore, modality is seen as an open-ended set of language items by way of which journalists take or tend to decline direct responsibility for the accuracy of what they have written. The close association between issues such as the multiplicity of voices informing the polyphonic nature of news texts on the one hand, and the enunciative responsibility of the writer vis-à-vis the content of journalistic recounts on the other, is secured by dialogism.