ANALYSING ATTITUDE: POSITIVE VERBAL PROCESS SUB-FUNCTIONS AND MEDIA BIAS

by

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Much reporting in UK newspapers is based on speeches, statements and replies to questions. Fowler (1991) points out that there are conventions for rendering such speech newsworthy and that critical analysis should pay particular attention to the way speech is transformed.

The verbal process category of M.A.K. Halliday's System of Transitivity is an ideal tool for doing this. Verbal processes are the element of the clause used to introduce speech. Analysis of verbal processes in media texts can reveal much about the journalist's attitude towards the person whose words are being reported (the sayer) and about how the journalist can push the reader towards a certain view of that person.

Chen (2005) identified three sub-categories of verbal process – positive, negative and neutral – and showed how the occurrence of negative verbal processes in media texts could indicate negative bias on the part of a journalist towards a sayer. This study analyses 50 texts from the UK *Times* to look at use of positive verbal processes. These can be indicators of a positive bias by journalist towards sayer. They also function to enrich a text dramatically by introducing a sense of conflict and tension between the participants whose words are being reported.

1. Introduction

British newspapers play a complex and multi-faceted role in the society in which they operate.

Principally, perhaps, they are businesses: commercial organisations which rely on sales to generate revenue from advertising and, less importantly, cover price. Curran (1977) points out that as early as the mid 19th century the traditional state control over the press in Britain had broken down and been replaced by a 'new and more effective control system based on remorseless economic forces which, unlike the law, could be neither evaded nor defied' (Curran 1977:226).

Fowler (1991) sets out clearly the essentially commercial nature of the British print media. 'The main economic purpose of newspapers appears to be to sell advertising space', he asserts (Fowler 1991:121). This in turn affects the news values and the ideologies expounded by the print media:

> Consumer advertising is based on the representation of ideal fictional worlds, i.e. sets of beliefs about desirable personal and social behaviour in relation to such products as cars, deodorants, coffee, hair care, washing powders and sweets. The texts of newspapers themselves also offer fictional model worlds, for example the obsessive discussion in the tabloids of television soap operas as if real, of actors, personalities and stars, the escapism of the travel pages in the middle class papers. (ibid:121)

Both Curran (1977) and Hall (1977) note the role of the print media in Britain in upholding the status quo. The press in Britain, Curran writes,

> remains a powerful integrative force in society. It has contributed materially to the remarkable stability and high degree of allegiance to British political institutions that has persisted in Britain despite her loss of empire. (Curran 1977: 26)

Hall, meanwhile, asserts that the media in Britain underwrite and reproduce an underlying unity and consensus which goes beyond mere party political differences – a unity which consists of

> all the presuppositions, the limits to the argument, the terms of reference, etc., which those elements within the system must share in order to 'disagree'. (Hall 1977:346)

That role of bringing cohesion and a degree of unity into its representation of the world is one of three functions of the media Hall identified in 1977: the others being the provision and selective

construction of 'social knowledge' through which an audience perceives the world and the lives of others; and the classification, ranking and ordering of that social knowledge.

The media, in other words, as well as helping to underwrite an establishment consensus, also construct and order the way reality is presented. Philo (1983, quoted in Fowler 1991:13) makes the same point:

> 'News' on television and in the press is not self-defining. News is not 'found' or even 'gathered' so much as made. It is a creation of a journalistic process, an artifact, a commodity even.

As does Fowler himself:

> The news media select events for reporting according to a complex set of criteria of newsworthiness; so news is not simply that which happens, but that which can be regarded and presented as newsworthy. (Fowler 1991:11)

Another feature of the British print media noticed by a number of commentators is their appetite for conflict and for negative news stories. Thus, the then editor of the British-influenced South China Morning News – based in Hong Kong – is cited in Knight and Nakano (1999:173) as saying:

> News is conflict. News is where there is disagreement...News is where someone puts up something and someone else on the other side says where they have problems with it.

The tension between the British media's natural tendency to be a non-radical consensus-building force and their hunger for negative or even voyeuristic storylines is highlighted by Fowler as one of the causes of what he calls the 'double standards so distastefully and distressingly

displayed in the popular press,' (Fowler 1991:53). 'The ostensible morality of the consensual model,' he continues,

> is denied by a desire for the negative on the part of newspapers and their readers: rapes are newsworthy not for the reason that rape has been made a serious issue in sexual politics in recent years, but because they gratify a prurient voyeurism.

So where does this leave us when attempting to define the complex role played by the media in a society such as Britain? Chen (2004:700) categorises the Western print medium thus:

> It is commercial, relying on newspaper sales to generate advertising; it is independent of direct political (though not commercial) control; it thrives on conflict and negative reporting, including adopting a questioning, sceptical attitude to the words and actions of authority figures.

To which can be added that the media are non-radical, consensus-building (even though there is an extent to which this is in tension with their thirst for negative news), and creators of news and of a certain world view.

As linguists, we should expect these many (sometimes conflicting) roles that the print media play in a society such as Britain to be reflected in the language used by journalists. Fortunately, a tool has been developed for examining the way in which news and other texts embody such values and beliefs. The method of applied language analysis known as critical linguistics was in fact devised in part precisely to make it possible to identify the values and beliefs, the 'invisible ideology', that permeates language, Fowler says (Fowler 1991).

One possible tool Fowler advocates for the analysis of media texts is Halliday's System of Transitivity. Transitivity is one of Halliday's three main 'systems' of English. It is, according to Simpson (1993), part of the 'ideational' function of language: and as such, it enables us to

study the way speakers and writers encode their mental patterns of reality.

Central to the System of Transitivity are what Halliday calls processes: what might generally be termed predicate verb-phrases. These processes, Halliday says, are hugely important elements of the structure of a text because they serve to introduce representations of what Halliday calls the 'goings on' of reality.

> Our most powerful conception of reality is that it consists of 'goings on': of doing, happening, feeling, being. These 'goings on' are sorted out in the semantic system of the language and expressed through the grammar of the clause. (Halliday 1985:1)

Transitivity enables the linguist to analyse how, by choosing certain verb processes rather than others, the producer of a text is able to 'foreground' certain meanings in discourse while others are suppressed, thus pushing the reader's perception of the meaning of a text in one direction rather than another. The system is particularly powerful because it takes into account not only how the 'goings on' themselves are represented in a text, but also the way in which the participants involved in those goings on are represented.

Halliday identified six categories of process within his System of Transitivity. This paper focuses on just one, namely verbal processes or 'processes of saying' such as 'he said it was easy'. More particularly, it focuses on a sub-category of verbal process identified by Chen (2004) and labelled 'the positive verbal process'. Use of positive verbal processes is examined in a series of newspaper reports published in the UK *Times* between January and March 1998. The aim is ultimately to demonstrate how valuable Transitivity can be as a tool for analysing and understanding media texts.

2. *Verbal processes*

Verbal processes are a particularly useful tool for the linguistic analysis of media texts because they are what Halliday calls predicates of communication. That is, they are the element of the clause by means of which the authors of a text introduce the speech of those they are reporting on. The verbal processes can thus reveal much about what a journalist feels about those whose words are deemed reportable; and also much about the way in which a journalist pushes the reader towards a certain view of that person. As Fowler points out (1991:231):

> In the papers, a large amount of report is based on speeches, statements, replies to questions and interviews. Critical analysis should pay particular attention to how what people say is transformed: there are clearly conventions for rendering speech newsworthy, for bestowing significance on it.

In an earlier analysis of 50 texts from the UK *Times*, Chen (2004) identified three sub-categories of verbal process: positive, negative, and neutral verbal processes. Negative verbal processes she defined as those which, because they conveyed an element of doubt or scepticism as to the veracity of what the speaker being reported was saying, demonstrated a certain negativity of feeling on the part of the writer towards the person whose words the verbal process was being used to introduce. An example of a negative verbal process cited from that paper is the process insisted in the following sentence: 'Mr Blair's official spokesman *insisted* that the Prime Minister still had the highest regard for Mr Brown'.

The author of the text, Chen argued, could have substituted for the verbal process *insisted* any one of a whole range of other verbal processes (*said*, *claimed*, *pointed out*), which would not have materially affected the meaning content of the clause.

The effect of choosing these alternatives would rather be to indicate something of the attitude of the text's author towards the participant whose words he or she was reporting, and towards the truth or otherwise of what the participant was saying.

Thus while 'Mr Blair's official spokesman said that the Prime Minister still had the highest regard for Mr Brown' is neutral in regard to the author's attitude to the participant and what he or she is saying, 'Mr Blair's official spokesman insisted that the Prime Minister still had the highest regard for Mr Brown' implies that Mr Blair's official spokesman has some resistance to overcome if he or she is to persuade his or her audience of the truth of what is said. This element of doubt is conveyed entirely by the choice of the verbal process insisted, a choice made by the author of the text. (Chen 2005:36)

Other negative verbal processes identified by Chen in the corpus of *Times* texts analysed included *denied*, *claimed* and *admitted* (see Table 1).

Positive	Negative	Neutral
pointed out, announced, explained, declared, indicated, urged	denied, claimed, admitted, insisted, complained	said, told, described, asked, commented

Table 1: *Verbal processes found in the corpus of texts, by sub-category (from Chen 2004)*

Neutral verbal processes, by contrast, Chen defined as those, such as *said*, which are neutral in tone and carry no indication of the writer's attitude towards the speaker whose words are being reported. Other neutral verbal processes identified in the corpus of texts included *told*, *described* and *asked*. Positive verbal processes, finally, were those which 'somehow promote in the reader a feeling that the person whose words are being reported is wise, authoritative, benign or in some other sense

positive' (Chen 2005:39). Examples cited included *announced*, *explained*, *declared* and *indicated* (see Table 1).

Chen's 2005 paper focused on negative verbal processes. The present paper builds upon that earlier study by focussing upon positive verbal processes.

Again, 50 texts from the UK *Times* – one of the longest-established broadsheet national daily newspapers published in the UK, and arguably one of the country's most influential newspapers – were analysed and the types of positive verbal processes used recorded. Individual instances of positive verbal process were then qualitatively analysed in some detail in the context of the article in which they occurred, to tease out what they revealed about the attitude of the journalist towards those whose words were being reported, and the way in which the journalist might be trying to push the reader's perception of a text and of the participants whose words are reported in that text in a certain direction. The analysis also shed light on the way in which the dramatic content of the text, and the sense of conflict and tension between participants, can be enriched and heightened by the journalist choosing certain verbal processes rather than others.

The criteria for selection of texts for analysis was as follows: articles of between 200-600 words in length, about 'home' news, published over the internet in the period January to March 1998. With the exception of these criteria, texts were chosen at random: the first 50 texts found that satisfied the criteria being selected.

3. Positive verbal processes

Positive verbal processes are those that in some way cast the sayer in a positive light, as authoritative, benign, decisive, or perhaps in some way seeming to occupy the moral high ground. Consider the following, all encountered in the corpus of *Times* texts analysed:

1. 'Tony Blair *has condemned* as tacky and inappropriate the mush-rooming speculation about the death of Diana…'

2. 'There will be no return to partitionist rule, he [Mitchel McLaughlin, chairman of Northern Ireland nationalist party Sinn Fein] *declared*.'

3. 'Mr Portillo *announced* nearly £4 billion of equipment orders for the armed forces.'

4. 'Mrs Cheffers-Heard *suggested* that Prince Philip might appreciate it.'

Condemnation may seem essentially negative. *Has condemned* in sentence 1 is a positive verbal process, however, because it reinforces the impression that the sayer, Tony Blair, occupies the moral high ground. The journalist could have written 'Tony Blair *has said* that the mushrooming speculation about the death of Diana is tacky and inappropriate…'. *Has condemned* is much stronger, strengthening the sense of Mr Blair's moral repugnance at the speculation. The journalist's choice of such a verbal process hints that in some way he or she shares Mr Blair's repugnance (and is also perhaps attempting to share some of the moral high ground with him). By introducing an overt element of moral right and wrong, the phase is also far more colourful and dramatic than the neutral *said*.

Declared in sentence 2 is positive because it makes the sayer, Mitchel McLaughlin, seem confident, determined and strong. The journalist could have used the neutral verbal process *said*, but this would have had none of the colour or resonance carried by *declared*. In some way, we feel that a person who declares something, rather than just saying it, is making a commitment to bringing about what he or she has declared he or she will do. To make such a declaration implies confidence, and the strength and determination to see something through. That the journalist chose to use such a process indicates that in some way the

journalist is ascribing these qualities of strength, determination, commitment and confidence to McLaughlin. Use of the negative verbal process *insisted*, by contrast, would have made McLaughlin look weak and querulous: the implication would have been that the journalist did not believe McLaughlin had the strength or determination to see his desire for an end to partitionist rule through.

Announced in sentence 3, like *declared*, also has a bright, confident ring to it, as well as making Michael Portillo seem powerful. Only powerful people, after all, are able to announce things. It is, however, functionally different from *declared* in sentence 2. With *declared*, the journalist could have chosen to use another process – the neutral *said*, or the negative *insisted*, for example. There is arguably no such freedom of choice in the case of *announced* in sentence 3, because *announced* here is more than a simple verbal process. It represents a verbal action committed by Michael Portillo. The decision to spend £4 billion on military equipment may have been agreed, signed and sealed behind closed doors: but it is Portillo's action of announcing it that makes it public and, in a sense, commits to and activates it. To have written 'Mr Portillo said that nearly £4 billion would be spent on equipment orders for the armed forces…' would not have conveyed the essential element of committing to and activating the deal by announcing it and making it public.

Suggested in sentence 4 is interesting. Mrs Cheffers-Heard is the landlady of a pub the Queen has visited. Mrs Cheffers-Heard gives the Queen a case of beer especially brewed to commemorate the Cheffers family's 101 years of running the pub, suggesting that her husband the Prince might enjoy it. The journalist could quite easily have used the neutral verbal process *said* here, but the choice of *suggested* instead certainly adds something. There is a hint of warmth about it; and a sense that Mrs Cheffers-Heard is entirely unthreatening, and in fact benevolent and well-meaning towards the Queen and her husband. All these qualities are ascribed to Mrs Cheffers-Heard by the journalist by use of the verbal process *suggested*. There is also a certain restrained and

slightly old-fashioned charm about it, in keeping with the tone of the whole article – as well as perhaps a hint of deference.

All the verbal processes in sentences 1-4 above cast the sayer in a positive light. The way they do this, however, is different. As was the case with negative verbal processes in Chen's 2004 paper, three sub-functions of positive verbal process can be identified. These are:

1. **Material positive verbal processes**, which represent an action (often only superficially verbal) committed by one of the participant individuals or organisations – for example, a declaration of independence. Such verbal processes, as in the case of *announced* in sentence 3 above, operate almost like another of Halliday's six categories of process, the material process or 'process of doing'. Because material positive verbal processes represent a verbal action, the author of a text often has little choice over which process to use;

2. **Attitudinal positive verbal processes**, which encode a journalist's (or newspaper's) own attitude to those whose words are being reported;

3. **Relational positive verbal processes**, which are used to represent real or perceived relationships of power, authority or moral superiority between participants.

Many positive verbal processes actually express more than one of these sub-functions simultaneously – especially in the case of attitudinals and relationals. Thus while *announced* in sentence 3 above is clearly an example of a material positive verbal process, *suggested* in sentence 4 is both attitudinal and relational. It is attitudinal because by using it, the journalist effectively ascribes to Mrs Cheffers-Heard certain qualities (benevolence, mildness, reticence, old-fashioned charm). It is relational because of what it tells us about the relationship between Mrs Cheffers-Heard and the Queen. There is perhaps a hint of deference in *suggested*;

it certainly conveys the suggestion that Mrs Cheffers-Heard would not dream of being so bold as to assume or assert that the Prince will like her beer.

Has condemned in sentence 1 might seem to be operating partly as a material positive verbal process. If a judge condemns a man to death, after all, he is doing something (sentencing a man to death), not merely saying something. It could be argued that similarly the process *condemned* in sentence 1 is being used to convey Tony Blair's verbal act of censuring those responsible for 'tacky and inappropriate' speculation about Princess Diana's death. It is open to debate, however, whether this process of verbal censuring really amounts to the committing of an act in the sense that a judge's condemning of a man to death does. What is undeniable is that *has condemned* in sentence 1 presents Mr Blair as being in a position of moral superiority to the gossip-mongers. By doing so it reveals something of the journalist's (and the newspaper's) own values and their attitude towards both Mr Blair and those whom he condemns. The journalist seems to approve of Mr Blair's indignation, and even to share it – or at least to want to give the impression of sharing it, in which case it is also an indicator perhaps of the journalist's, or newspaper's, awareness of, and relationship with, the intended readership and the values they hold. It is also worth noting that use of *has condemned* rather than the neutral *said* introduces an element of drama, colour and excitement to the report of the proceedings: a whiff of sleaze and censure that derives from the apparent attitude of one participant in the events being described towards others. By doing so, it makes the report more colourful and more readable: a further probable indicator of the journalist's awareness of the newspaper's relationship with its intended audience.

The analysis of individual positive verbal processes occurring in a corpus of media texts such as those studied here so as to identify to what extent they are material, attitudinal or relational can clearly be quite revealing, not only of the journalist's attitude towards individuals whose words are being reported, but also of the journalist's reading of the relationship between the various sayers.

To aid that analysis, the verbal processes encountered can usefully be broken down into a number of categories, according to the nature of the role they impart to the people whose words are being reported. These categories cut across the sub-functions identified above, but are useful as an analytical tool. In the corpus of texts studied, six different categories of positive verbal process were identified (see Table 2). Each of these will be looked at in turn, and examples of each type will be analysed for what they reveal about the journalist's attitude.

Category of process	No. of occurrences	Instances found
Declarative	8	announced, declared
Authoritative	13	ordered, demanded, required, emphasised, indicated, stated, expressed, inquired, called (a meeting), spelled out, explained
Exhortative	21	urged, recommended, warned, suggested, proposed, appealed for, called for, called on, pointed out that, argued that, advocated
Accusative	16	accused, condemned, blamed, rebuked, criticised, questioned, rejected
Informative	4	reported, explained
Predictive	15	will call for, will be urged, will be ordered to, will be announced, are to spell out, will demand, will accuse, will announce, will be required

Table 2: *Categories of positive verbal process encountered in the corpus of texts*

4. *The Analysis*

4.1. Declaratives

Declaratives convey the impression that the sayer is powerful, is confident, and is a man (or woman) of action. Those identified in the corpus of texts are *announced* and *declared*. Declaratives are sometimes but not always material positive verbal processes. Where they are – where, for example, a powerful man is announcing a decision to spend £4 billion on military equipment and by announcing it, commits the verbal action of activating the decision, as in sentence 3 above – the journalist has little choice but to use them. Where they are not, however, they are the result of journalistic choice. In such cases the journalist chooses to convey the impression that the sayer is powerful, confident, and a man or woman of action. The power of non-material declaratives to convey this impression presumably comes from the fact that they masquerade as material positive verbal processes and lend to the sayer some of the sheen of power associated with those who have the authority to make important announcements or declarations.

As well as sentences 2 and 3 above, examples from the corpus include the following:

5. 'George Mitchell, the talks chairman, *announced* that the participants had all undertaken to proceed promptly…'

6. 'He [film star Sean Connery] *declared* his support [for the Scottish Nationalist Party] on television…'

In sentence 5, despite the use of the process *announced*, there is no suggestion that Senator George Mitchell has actually committed a genuine verbal action (that of making a substantive decision that comes into force in the act of announcing it). The journalist could easily have written 'Senator Mitchell *said*…' (neutral), for example, or 'Senator Mitchell *insisted*…' (negative). By choosing to use the process *announced*

instead, the journalist makes Senator Mitchell seem powerful and determined; attributes perhaps associated with people who have the power to make substantive announcements.

Declared in sentence 6 is a genuine material positive verbal process in that in the act of making his declaration, Connery commits his support to the Scottish Nationalists. The journalist could not have substituted another verb (such as *said*) without losing this essential element of an action being committed. The commitment Connery makes is only a personal one. It is not a declaration the making of which will materially affect the lives of others. Nevertheless, use of the verbal process *declared* makes him appear confident, strong and influential.

4.2. Authoritatives

Authoritatives have the effect of making the speaker seem powerful, authoritative or influential. Examples encountered in the corpus of texts include *demanded*, *ordered*, *emphasised*, *expressed* and *inquired*. They achieve the effect of making the sayer seem authoritative in a number of ways. In the case of *demanded* and *ordered* it is through the associations the words have: only powerful people are able to demand or order. In the case of a process such as *inquired*, however, it is different (see sentence 9 below). Here, it is more the formal register of the word that imparts an impression of stateliness and authority.

The authoritatives encountered in the corpus of texts are generally speaking not material positive verbal processes (though there are a few instances of these, such as in sentence 8 below). Use of the processes is usually therefore a matter of journalistic choice, and hence revealing. Examples include:

7. 'More involvement will be needed from parents if three-quarters of all eleven-year-olds are to meet their [maths] standards by 2002 as the Government *has demanded*.'

8. 'The inspector *was ordered to be* re-instated.'

9. 'The Queen *inquired* whether it would fit in the boot of her Rolls Royce…' (*Times* article 40, 'Queen pops into haunted local').

Has demanded in sentence 7 reveals a good deal about the journalist's attitude towards the Government (at least in relation to its policy on maths education). It emphasises the fact that the Government's attainment targets for pupils in maths are held to be non-negotiable – and also that the Government has the power to make them so. The journalist could have used *has requested* or even *has insisted* instead. The former might have implied a certain lack of power on the part of the Government to ensure that its policies are adhered to; the latter (a negative verbal process) that the Government had opposition to overcome on the part of those charged with ensuring its targets are met.

Like *has demanded* in sentence 7, *was ordered to be* in sentence 8 also conveys the information that the re-instatement of a police inspector (woman police inspector Cydena Fleming, previously suspended for discipline offences) is non-negotiable. It is functionally different from *has demanded*, however. The process is in the passive form: but the text makes clear that the order comes from an industrial tribunal. It therefore has the full force of law behind it. *Was ordered to be* here is a material positive verbal process, in that by committing the act of ordering the inspector's re-instatement, the tribunal brings that re-instatement about. The journalist could not have used any other process: to write, for example, that the inspector *was requested to be* re-instated would not have conveyed the full legal force of the order.

Inquired in sentence 9 is revealing. Sentence 9 comes from the same report of a visit by the Queen to a local pub encountered in sentence 4 above. The pub's landlady Mrs Caroline Cheffers-Heard has presented the Queen with a case of beer; and the Queen inquires whether it will fit in the boot of her car. The journalist could very easily have used the neutral process *asked* instead of *inquired*, yet chose not to. What the

formal register of *inquired* achieves in sentence 9 is to enhance the impression of stateliness and formal authority. It also somehow conveys the impression of good breeding and good manners; to inquire about something seems to be somehow less brusque and therefore more good-mannered than to simply ask about it. The journalist, by choosing *inquired* here rather than *asked*, seems to be attempting to capture something of the formality, stateliness and good breeding he or she no doubt observed in the Queen's behaviour. Use of the process also perhaps conveys a certain deference towards the Queen on the journalist's part, however: an unwillingness to challenge the convention that reports of the Queen's activities should be couched in language that reflects her status.

4.3. Exhortatives

Exhortatives create the impression that the sayer is a person of wisdom; someone who knows best and is trying to encourage others to behave in ways that will be to their own good, but who does not necessarily have the power to force those others to do what they want. There can even sometimes be a hint of weakness or deference. Examples encountered in the corpus of texts include *urged*, *recommended*, *warned*, *suggested*, *called for* and *appealed for*.

Exhortatives are relationally very rich, often serving as indicators that the journalist perceives the relationships between participants in the events being reported on to be quite subtle and difficult, with dominance not clearly established. Because of this, they heighten the sense of drama in a text. In choosing to use an exhortative over a neutral verbal process, the journalist therefore reveals much about his or her understanding of the relative power and influence of sayers – and also, perhaps, about his or her desire to create a dramatic, relationally-rich, readable text. They can also be very revealing of the journalist's own attitude towards the sayer.

As well as *suggested* in sentence 4 above, with its intriguing overtones of deference and good-will, instances encountered in the corpus include:

10. 'Tony Blair *appealed for* her [Princess Diana's] sons to be spared further books or films about the Paris car crash.'

11. 'His [Ulster Democratic Party leader David Trimble's] delegation *urged* the prisoners to stick with the talks…'

12. 'Rattle [conductor Sir Simon Rattle] *warned* that music culture would slowly and surely decline…'

Appealed for in sentence 10 appears in the same sentence as *has condemned* in sentence 1 above. In other words, sentences 1 and 10 are fragments of the same larger sentence, which contains two positive verbal processes. The sentence in its entirety reads as follows:

13. 'Tony Blair has condemned as tacky and inappropriate the mushrooming speculation about the death of Diana, Princess of Wales and appealed for her sons to be spared further books or films about the Paris car crash in which she and Dodi Fayed died.'

As we saw, the use of *has condemned* in this sentence has the effect of making the sayer, Mr Blair, appear to be occupying the moral high ground. It conveys his moral repugnance at the constant speculation surrounding the death of Princess Diana, and even suggests that the journalist shares this (or wishes to appear to do so). The juxtaposition of *has condemned* in the full sentence (sentence 13) with *appealed for* a little later on, however, suggests that while Mr Blair may be adopting the moral high ground on this issue, he is essentially powerless, despite being the Prime Minister. Had he had the power to ensure that authors, journalists and film-makers (presumably the audience to which his

appeal is addressed) cease their speculation, the journalist would presumably have written that Mr Blair *ordered* or *instructed* or at least *demanded* (although the latter might have seemed a little petulant) that they do so. By choosing to use *appealed for*, the journalist suggests that the relationship Mr Blair has with the group of people he is addressing is such that he does not have this power.

Appealed for is nevertheless positive: it suggests that Mr Blair is decent and, on this issue at least, well-intentioned (if powerless): and that he clearly believes that what he is asking for is right. This is all information successfully conveyed by the use of *appealed for* that would have been lost by use of the neutral *asked for*. And even though it portrays him as essentially powerless, it does not make him seem desperate, as would be the case if the journalist had chosen to use *pleaded for* or, even more strongly, *begged*.

Appealed for here therefore reveals a great deal both about the journalist's perception of Mr Blair's relationship with those he is speaking to, and about the journalist's own attitude towards Mr Blair and the message Mr Bair is delivering.

Urged in sentence 11 is similarly revealing; in this case about the journalist's attitude towards a delegation of David Trimble's supporters (the sayer) and about his or her reading of the relationship between this delegation and the Loyalist prisoners in Northern Ireland's Maze prison that the delegates are visiting. Trimble's Ulster Democratic Party (UDP) was at the time the leading loyalist party (i.e. a political party committed to Northern Ireland remaining part of the United Kingdom) in Northern Ireland. A delegation of his supporters was visiting influential loyalist paramilitaries (essentially terrorists dedicated to using violence rather than political debate to keep Northern Ireland in the UK) in the Maze, Northern Ireland's top-security prison for terrorists. While both the UDP and the loyalist paramilitaries wanted essentially the same end (for Northern Ireland to remain part of the UK), the relationship between them was complex. The UDP, being a mainstream political party, could not be seen to be associated with the paramilitaries, whose activities were extreme and illegal. Nevertheless, the paramilitaries were

influential with many in the Northern Ireland population at large, and if they were seen to be supportive of peace talks being held in an attempt to find a solution to the problem of how best to govern the province, the chance of those talks succeeding would be greatly improved.

The use of *urged* reflects the journalist's attitude towards the delegation and his or her perception of the delicate relationship between the two parties. The journalist could easily have used a different verbal process – the neutral *said* or *asked*, the negative *begged*, even the positive (and authoritative) *demanded*. *Said* or *asked* would have been flat and uninteresting, doing none of the extra work in defining the relationship between the parties that *urged* does. *Begged* would have made the delegation seem weak, even desperate (and would have hinted perhaps at a certain contempt on the part of the journalist). *Demanded* would have made the delegation seem to be in a position of authority over the paramilitaries. By using *urged*, however, the journalist creates the impression of a UDP delegation that believes itself to be right, that is somehow well-intentioned and believes what it says to be in the best interests of all, and yet does not have the power to force the paramilitaries to do what it wants. *Urged* here is thus both attitudinal and relational. Attitudinal in that the journalist chooses to ascribe to the delegation qualities of being informed and well-intentioned; relational in that the delegates are simultaneously portrayed as being in a position of powerlessness relative to the paramilitaries.

Warned in sentence 12, just like *appealed for* and *urged* in sentences 10 and 11, conveys the essential nature of conductor Sir Simon Rattle's powerlessness to change things (other than by voicing his opinion). It also, however, suggests his emotional commitment to music education in the UK, and his anger or worry about its prospects. The journalist could have chosen to write 'Rattle *said* that music culture would decline…', but this would have been detached and colourless. *Warned* does far more work in describing the conductor's state of mind. It also suggests that Sir Simon is knowledgeable (since only someone who is, can be in a position to warn about the consequences of something) and

that therefore what he says may be worth listening to. It is both relational and attitudinal.

4.4. Accusatives

Accusatives have the effect of making the sayer seem to occupy the moral high ground. They are also very dramatic: indicating the presence of conflict and often strong disagreement or even a sense of anger or betrayal by one of the parties to an event being reported on. As well as conveying more information about the participants in events being reported, and the relationship between them, they also therefore crank up the sense of drama and excitement. Examples encountered in the corpus of texts include *condemned*, *accused*, *blamed* and *rebuked*.

Has condemned in sentence 1 is a good example of the way in which an accusative can reveal much about the journalists' own values, their attitude towards those whose words they are reporting, their reading of the relationship between the sayer and those towards whom his or her words are expressed, and even their desire to create a sense of drama in a text.

Other instances of accusatives encountered in the corpus of texts include:

14. 'Francis Maude, Tory spokesman on culture, *accused* ministers of turning the lottery into the Government's lottery.'

15. 'Mr Blair indirectly *rebuked* Mr Brown during last Thursday's cabinet meeting.'

16. 'Mr Trimble *blamed* Government appeasement of Sinn Fein for the crisis.'

One effect of *accused* in sentence 14 is to introduce an element of conflict, tension and drama into the events being described. This

element would have been entirely lacking if the journalist had chosen instead to use the neutral *said*. The choice of *accused* achieves something more, however. It places Maude in a position of some kind of power – he is in possession of certain information, the information necessary to make an accusation, and moreover he is the accuser, and therefore on the attack – while also suggesting that he in some way occupies the moral high ground. It portrays him as indignant, and concerned to do what is right. To an extent, by choosing to use the process *accused,* the journalist is complicit in granting Maude this moral high ground. If the journalist had chosen to write instead that Maude *claimed* ministers were turning the lottery into the Government's lottery, the effect would have been very different. The journalist would have implied doubt about what Maude was saying, and thus weakened his position, making him appear more like a political opportunist than a crusader for what is right.

Rebuked in sentence 15 is equally rich, particularly in what it reveals of the journalist's reading of the relationship between Tony Blair and Gordon Brown. It is less confrontational and condemnatory than *accused*, hinting at a much more subtle relationship between the two participants. While still censorious, there is a mildness about *rebuked* which hints at the fact that perhaps Tony Blair is insufficiently sure of his authority to openly or directly criticise Mr Brown. To a certain extent, *rebuked* here could be viewed as a material positive verbal process. The giving of the rebuke is in itself a kind of action; it is almost immaterial what Mr Blair actually said. And yet it is still revealing of the journalist's attitude towards the two men, and of his or her reading of the relationship between them. The journalist could have written 'Mr Blair indirectly *criticised* Mr Brown…'. The effect of using *criticised* instead of *rebuked* would have been to subtly shift the balance of power between the two men in the mind of readers, making Mr Blair seem stronger. Yet *rebuked* is nevertheless positive, the slightly formal and old-fashioned register of the word lending to the Prime Minister an appearance of schoolmasterly authority; of mild, well-intentioned sternness.

The use of *blamed* in sentence 16 appears similar to the use of *accused* in sentence 14. It introduces an element of acrimony and conflict, and again gives the suggestion that Mr Trimble is seeking to occupy the moral high ground: that he feels he is in the position to make judgements and apportion blame. It is revealing, however, for what it shows about the journalist's attitude towards Mr Trimble. The process *blamed* carries a suggestion of weakness and impotence: Mr Trimble is presented as a man who is critical of the Government, but powerless to do anything about it. Had the journalist written 'Mr Trimble *accused* the Government of causing the crisis by its appeasement of Sinn Fein', the Ulster Democratic Party leader would have been portrayed as a more forceful and effective man than he appears as a result of the process *blamed*. Whereas the journalist, by using the powerful process *accused*, seemed almost to collude in Francis Maude's assumption of moral authority in sentence 16, that is not the case here. The journalist does not take sides in the blame game that is being played out.

4.5. Informatives

Informatives have the effect of making the speaker seem wise, knowledgeable and responsible; to be in possession of information which they are patiently passing on to those less well-informed than themselves. Informatives are comparatively rare in the corpus of texts. The main one encountered is *reported*.

17. 'Labour MPs… have reported huge disquiet among their constituents [about levels of new housing]…'

There is an element of the material positive verbal process about *have reported* here. The journalist could have written 'Labour MPs *say* there is huge disquiet among their constituents'. This, however, would not have captured the full force of the fact that MPs have officially reported the disquiet, and by doing so brought it into the public domain. What *have*

reported also does is give the impression that the Labour MPs are responsible individuals who, being in possession of certain information (about their constituents' concerns) have made this information public (or at least have officially relayed it to the appropriate authorities).

4.6. Predictives

Predictives have been identified as a discrete category of positive verbal process, not because they impart a particular kind of role to the people whose words are being reported, but rather because of what they reveal about the role of the journalist him- or herself. All the processes in this final category could in fact be assigned to one or other of the categories identified above; and as such all are revealing of the journalist's attitude towards sayers. Predictives, however, reveal something more: a shift in the role of the journalist away from being a mere reporter of the doings of others to something more pro-active; someone who is unafraid to make his or her own voice heard, and even to intervene to 'create' news in advance of its actually happening.

The unique feature predictives have in common is that they all occur in the future tense. They are used by journalists to introduce pronouncements that have not yet been uttered. They are predictions – very often reported with confidence even though little or no evidence is given in the text itself – about what a sayer is going to say or announce or declare in the near future. Because of the lack of sustaining evidence that is often given the reader is frequently expected to take this on trust. Predictives thus reveal the journalist to be taking on a much more active role. Rather than apparently passively reporting the words of others, the journalist is pre-empting them. In a sense, the journalist is intervening in the narrative, and saying: this is the way things are going to be.

The following are just a few of the many examples encountered in the corpus of texts.

18. 'A Government task force *will call for* a new partnership between home and school…'

19. 'Schools *will be urged* to spend an hour a day on numeracy…'

20. 'The expansion of music tuition *will be announced* by Chris Smith, the culture, media and sports secretary.'

Sentences 18 and 19 are taken from the same text. Headlined 'Parents urged to give more maths coaching at home', it is an account of British Government proposals to improve numeracy amongst school pupils. The first two paragraphs of the text in which the two sentences in question occur, read as follows:

> Parents will be given a key role in an official blueprint to be published this week on improving numeracy. A Government task force will call for a new partnership between home and school to met ambitious targets.
> A six-month enquiry commissioned by David Blunkett, the Education and Employment Secretary, will back a return to traditional teaching methods with more teaching of the whole class, an emphasis on multiplication tables and less use of calculators. Schools will be urged to spend an hour a day on numeracy, echoing the requirements for a sharper focus on literacy.

Both *will call for* in sentence 18 and *will be urged* in sentence 19 could be categorised as exhortatives. *Will call for* gives the impression of a Government task force that is influential, confident and well-intentioned – but does not actually have the power to enforce its recommendations. The verbal process chosen by the journalist is presumably a recognition of the relationship between such a task force and those its recommendations are aimed at – parents in their own home. The task force can only exhort them to spend more time

teaching their children numeracy: not order them to do so. The same is true of *will be urged*.

What is really striking about these two verbal processes, however, is that nothing has yet been said. The journalist, who has presumably got hold of a copy of the 'official blueprint to be published this week' (which is, again presumably, a copy of the report and guidelines drawn up by the Government task force) is drawing upon it to write about something that has not happened yet. In effect, the journalist is creating a news story by pre-empting predicted future events. There are two apparent sayers: in the case of *will call for*, the Government task force; in the case of *will be urged*, the enquiry commissioned by David Blunkett (the two are in fact presumably one and the same, although this is never quite spelled out). Despite this, what is notable about the text as a whole is that at no point is anyone involved with the Government task force directly quoted to substantiate the *Times* article. Possibly no one was willing to comment until the 'blueprint' was actually published. Undeterred, and using the copy of the blueprint document he or she has presumably seen (or has a copy of) as source material, the journalist uses predictives to create a news story in advance of its actually happening.

The journalist could perhaps have simply quoted directly from the report itself. This, however, would have come across as very dry. The other feature of the predictive here is that the journalist is able to make the events being reported seem as though they involve identified participants, rather than simply a dry report. The name of David Blunkett appears prominently at the beginning of the second paragraph, giving the impression that ultimately he is the man behind the guidelines (as he may well be). Elsewhere in the text, Professor David Reynolds, the task force chairman, is named (though never directly quoted). These, the text implies, are the people who will be calling for and will be urging the measures outlined in the blueprint to be adopted. The text is thus personalised, and made more dramatically interesting.

The same features are found in sentence 20. This is drawn from a text headlined 'Lottery cash to help every child play an instrument', a report of British Government plans to channel lottery money into music tuition in schools. *Will be announced* is a declarative. Again, however, the plans have not yet been officially made public: and while the *Times* journalist feels sufficiently confident to write that they *will be announced* by Chris Smith, Mr Smith has not yet made any such anouncement. Again, noone from the Government is directly quoted to substantiate the story (though there may well have been an off-the-record briefing, or an outline of the Government proposals may have been passed to the reporter in question). Effectively, the journalist is interposing his or her own voice to tell readers that such and such is what will happen, and associates this journalistic speculation with named individuals or organisations, who are cast in the light of sayer but in fact are not. Ultimately, the reader is expected to take the journalist's word on trust.

This technique is common in the corpus of 50 texts analysed. Of the 77 positive verbal processes identified in total, no fewer than 15 are predictives, making it the third most common category in the corpus of texts analysed (See Table 2).

5. Conclusion

This paper has looked at the use of positive verbal processes in a corpus of 50 texts from the UK *Times.*

Analysis of the corpus of texts made it possible to identify three discrete but often overlapping sub-functions of positive verbal process. These were:

1. Material positive verbal processes, used by journalists to represent an action (often only superficially verbal) committed by one of the participant individuals or organisations – for example, a declaration of independence;

2. Attitudinal positive verbal processes, which encode a journalist's (or newspaper's) own attitude to those whose words are being reported, and make it possible for a journalist to subtly push the reader's perception of a sayer in one direction or another;

3. Relational positive verbal processes, which are used by journalists to represent real or perceived relationships of power, authority or moral superiority between participants, and also to help heighten the drama and human richness of a text.

In the case of material positive verbal processes, journalists may have little choice over which verbal process to use. In the case of attitudinal and relational positive verbal processes, however, there is a much greater degree of author choice, making them more revealing.

In addition to these three sub-functions of positive verbal process, and in order principally to facilitate the analysis, six categories of positive verbal process were also identified. These were the declarative; the authoritative; the exhortative; the accusative; the informative; and the predictive. These categories were distinguished according to the nature of the role positive verbal processes of each category imparted to the people whose words were being reported and to the relationships of these people with other participants who feature in news reports alongside them. The predictive was distinguished as a discrete category because it reveals the journalist being pro-active by intervening to 'create' news in advance of its actually happening

The study has demonstrated that analysis of positive verbal processes can be highly revealing, not only about a journalist's attitude towards individuals whose words are being reported but also, in cases of reports where there is more than one participant whose words or actions are being reported, about the journalist's reading of the relationship between participants. Positive verbal processes have also been demonstrated to reveal something about the journalist's (or the newspaper's for which he or she works) own values. They can also

sometimes be employed by journalists to subtly push the reader's perception of certain individuals in one direction or another.

Particular examples of positive verbal processes analysed in this study have the effect of imparting to the people whose words a journalist is reporting qualities of being variously powerful, confident, authoritative, wise, well-informed, well-intentioned and morally superior, amongst other things. Generally, as this study has demonstrated, it can be shown that it was the journalist's choice to ascribe such qualities to the people being quoted.

Another effect of the use of positive verbal processes identified in this study is to enrich the human drama of a news report, by introducing – through the relationships attributed by use of one verbal process rather than another to the various participants whose words or actions a journalist is reporting on – elements of conflict and tension, blame and counter-blame, power and powerlessness. Again, the study has demonstrated that it is generally the journalist's choice of process which does this extra relational work.

Finally, the study has revealed that in some circumstances one effect of using certain positive verbal processes is in a sense to ally the journalist with the sentiments being expressed by the person whose words are being quoted. In other circumstances, uses of certain processes serve to distance the journalist from sentiments being expressed. Again, since the choice of process used was the journalist's own, such processes can be revealing of the journalist's (or his or her newspaper's) own values.

The study is interesting for what it reveals about the attitudes of journalists working for the UK *Times*. More widely, this researcher would argue, it is a demonstration of how valuable a tool Halliday's System of Transitivity – in this case, specifically verbal processes – can be when applied to analysis of media texts.

At the outset of this paper, it was noted that as linguists, we should expect the many (sometimes conflicting) roles that the print media play in a society such as Britain – commercial, non-radical, often politically independent, yet generally sceptical and questioning of authority, and

thriving on conflict and negative reporting – to be reflected in the language used by journalists. It would be impossible, from a single study such as this, to be specific about the ways in which the language used by the journalists does reflect the roles played by the newspaper which employs them. It might be tempting, however, to speculate for example that the use of accusatives (often to introduce the words of anti-authoritarian figures) reflects the generally sceptical and questioning tendency of a newspaper such as the *Times*; or that the use of positive verbal processes to establish character relationships and crank up the sense of drama and conflict reflects the commercial nature of the newspaper (in that it needs to attract and hold readers to build up circulation and boost advertising revenue).

At this stage, this would be mere speculation. Comparative analyses of a wide range of different newspapers to build up a larger database of information which could be cross-referenced might make it possible, however, to draw firmer conclusions about the way the language of newspapers reflects the role they perform in society.

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