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1 Analysing evaluation in the news

1.1 About this book

This book is about the expression of opinion in news discourse, in particular, the expression of opinion *through language*. How do news writers¹ express their opinion about the events, people, and situations they report on? Do tabloid news writers really express more opinion than broadsheet news writers? And do these two types of newspapers differ in terms of *how* they express opinion? These are all questions that I want to address in this book.

To analyse the phenomenon of speaker opinion – variously known as *evaluation*, *appraisal* and *stance* within linguistics – a new framework of evaluation is introduced as an alternative to and a synthesis of existing approaches. As a springboard for this framework I take Thompson & Hunston's definition of *evaluation* as

the broad cover term for the expression of the speaker's or writer's attitude or stance towards, viewpoint on, or feelings about the entities or propositions that he or she is talking about. That attitude may relate to certainty or obligation or desirability or any of a number of other sets of values (Thompson & Hunston 2000: 5).²

I identify these ‘sets of values’ as *evaluative parameters* (a term adopted from Francis 1995), assuming that speakers can evaluate aspects of the world as:

- good or bad (the parameter of EMOTIVITY),
- important or unimportant (the parameter of IMPORTANCE),
- expected or unexpected (the parameter of EXPECTEDNESS),
- comprehensible or incomprehensible (the parameter of COMPREHENSIBILITY),
- (not)possible or (not)necessary (the parameter of POSSIBILITY/NECESSITY),
- genuine or fake (the parameter of RELIABILITY).

Moreover, I presume that speakers can evaluate propositions as more or less reliable (RELIABILITY: LOW/MEDIAN/HIGH), and that they can make evaluative comments on the language that is used (the parameter of STYLE), on other social actors’ mental states (the parameter of MENTAL STATE), and on the source of their knowledge (the parameter of EVIDENTIALITY).

With the help of this framework the present book will provide a rather different account of evaluation from those which are so far available. It will both present a new method to study evaluation and apply this method to study differences between tabloids and broadsheets.

Chapter 1 sets the work in context, answering questions such as why and how to study evaluation, and commenting on the 70.000 word corpus of newspaper discourse that was used for the analysis. Chapter 2 outlines some of the most important characteristics of the news story, chapter 3 delimits the notion of evaluation, and chapter 4 explains the parameter-based framework of evaluation. Chapters 5, 6 and 7 outline the

findings of the empirical analysis of the corpus. Finally, in chapter 8 I consider some of the implications of this work for a new theory of evaluation.

1.2 Why study evaluation?

But why should it be of interest to study evaluation in the first place? And why study evaluation in the press? Several answers to these questions suggest themselves: Firstly, there is still much research to be undertaken regarding the phenomenon of evaluation. Although it is true that much recent research in linguistics concerns evaluation, this is true only for some areas of inquiry. Thus, evaluation/stance has been researched widely and systematically in the context of English for academic purposes (e.g. Bondi & Mauranen 2003), and, under the name of *appraisal*, within systemic-functional linguistics (e.g. Macken-Horarik & Martin 2003, Martin & White 2005). Additionally, there is some (mostly) large-scale corpus research which analyses markers of stance in different registers (e.g. Biber *et al.* 1999). However, there is hardly any research that tries to apply a parameter-based approach of evaluation to text (exceptions are Lemke 1992, 1998, Thetela 1997, and, to some extent, Hunston 1994), and the only grammar that devotes a section to stance is Biber *et al.* (1999). All in all, nothing is settled: the ground is still shifting beneath our feet, and evaluation remains a mostly unexplored territory within linguistics.

Secondly, evaluation itself is a significant element of our lives: as a device for interpreting the world and offering this evaluation to others, it pervades human behaviour: when we interact with the world around us, we perceive, categorize and evaluate what we encounter. Our short-term evaluations may then turn into long-term

values, which are as important to our lives as our beliefs. Our values arguably determine to a large part who we are personally, which path of life we choose to take, and which friendships we form. Furthermore, evaluation is extremely important in actual discourse, in that it is difficult if not impossible for human beings (and perhaps not even desirable) to speak with a completely “objective” voice, *not* to impose evaluations on one’s utterance, and *not* to communicate value judgements (compare e.g. Vološinov 1986: 105). The importance of evaluation also derives from its multifunctionality: it can simultaneously be used to express the writer’s opinion, to construct relations between the writer and the reader, and to organize the text (Thompson & Hunston 2000: 6ff).

Thirdly, it must be pointed out that although we can find a wealth of research on the media in general, much of it is either non-linguistic (in a strict sense) or of a limited scope (focussing on a few aspects of media language, offering case studies etc). Neither is there much linguistic research on tabloid newspapers. Such research would help to challenge traditional assumptions of the objectivity of news discourse (on such assumptions and their critique see White 1998: 1f, 279ff; Gruber 1993: 469, Iedema *et al.* 1994, Bell 1991: 212, Almeida 1992: 234ff). For instance, Biber & Finegan (1989) label the cluster that includes press reportage ‘faceless stance’ (Biber & Finegan 1989: 108), noting that this cluster is ‘marked by the relative absence of all affective and evidential stance features considered here’ (Biber & Finegan 1989: 108).

1.3 The corpus

Since media language is very complex in terms of its socio-economic and communicative context (chapter 2), any analysis of it must first deal with a number of

methodological decisions. According to Bell (1991: 12) the analysis of media language demands decisions in three areas:

- the genres: news, advertising etc (type of media content)
- the outlets: the publications, radio stations etc (carriers of content)
- the outputs: specific newscasts, programmes and the time period to be covered (and the days to be sampled within that period)

In this book I concentrate on the print media, in particular the ‘hard news’ (Bell 1991: 14) story in British English tabloids and broadsheets. The corpus on which my analysis is based consists of 100 news stories taken from ten British national newspapers: five broadsheets (*The Financial Times*, *The Guardian*, *The Independent*, *The Times*, *The Daily Telegraph*) and five tabloids (*The Sun*, *The Star*, *The Daily Mail*, *The Daily Mirror*, *The Daily Express*). I have chosen to keep the subject matter constant in all of the ten newspapers so that the corpus consists of ten topics that are reported in each of the ten newspapers. This was felt to be necessary for the establishment of a comparable corpus, and simultaneously, it ensured that a topic which is central to society was chosen (a topic that is covered in all newspapers seems to be most significant). More importantly, this also avoids the influence of the topic on the analysis of evaluation to a certain degree. Since I shall comment on the content of these topics in the analyses in chapters 5 and 6, a short summary of them follows:

Topic (date)	Content
“Israel” (6.10.2003)	an Israeli attack on Syria and a suicide bombing in Israel.

- “Rio” (8.10.2003) the decision of the Football Association to exclude Rio Ferdinand (then defender with Manchester United) from the English team for the 2004 European championships because Rio Ferdinand did not provide a sample to drug testers on September 23.
- “IDS” (10.10.2003): Iain Duncan Smith’s (leader of the Conservative Party at that time) conference speech at the Conservative Party conference in Blackpool.
- “Iraq” (13.10.2003): an attack on a hotel in Baghdad by a suicide car bomber in Iraq.
- “HIV” (15.10.2003): the sentencing of Mohammed Dica, who was found guilty of infecting two women with the HIV virus.
- “Barclays” (17.10.2003) Matthew Barrett’s (then chief executive of Barclays) utterances concerning the expensiveness of credit cards at a hearing with MPs.
- “Di” (21.10.2003) a note written by Princess Diana to her former butler, Paul Burrell, published by him to coincide with the publication of his book, *A Royal Duty*. In the note she writes about someone planning an “accident” involving her car.
- “IRA” (22.10.2003) the Northern Irish peace process and David Trimble’s (Ulster Unionist leader at that time) rejection of the destruction of weapons by the IRA because not enough details were given about this destruction by General John

de Chastelain (then leader of the independent body overseeing arms decommissioning).

“Police” (23.10.2003) racist utterances by police recruits that were pronounced on a documentary made by Mark Daly, an undercover reporter for the BBC.

“Madam” (24.10.2003) the sentencing of Margaret MacDonald, a British woman who was convicted of prostitution by a court in Paris, and sentenced to four years in prison and a €150,000 (£104,000) fine.

Table 1 lists the word count (based on an automatic count with Word 2000 for Windows) for the individual news stories in the corpus (see appendix 1 for additional methodological decisions):

Table 1: The corpus

Topic/Newspaper	Broadsheets					Tabloids				
	FT	GUAR	IND	TIM	TEL	SUN	STA	MAIL	MIR	EXP
ISRAEL	367	1118	700	976	390	410	298	903	424	440
RIO	688	771	889	803	1088	968	927	832	1229	1244
IDS	584	983	1204	1017	782	638	291	1011	475	689
IRAQ	508	781	752	746	672	312	278	556	143	595
HIV	239	575	521	479	494	815	423	892	1131	755
BARCLAYS	269	538	831	369	642	282	334	710	467	614
DI	340	1036	866	1362	1150	532	448	946	1200	1569
IRA	487	810	847	1144	720	453	294	481	481	402
POLICE	413	518	1350	906	771	801	338	836	487	676
MADAM	539	791	639	1043	896	754	318	1659	221	814
Total:	4.434	7.921	8.599	8.845	7.605	5.965	3.949	8.826	6.258	7.798
	37.404					32.796				
	70.300									

As becomes evident, the corpus is quite balanced in that there are only slightly more words in the broadsheets than in the tabloids.

1.4 How to study evaluation

This book aims at providing an account of evaluation in news discourse that combines corpus analysis with discourse analysis, trying to integrate corpus-based research with manual text analysis. It therefore includes *quantitative* calculations of the distribution of evaluations, and *qualitative* comments on their discourse functions, and involves both manual and automatic analyses. The manual analyses demand the use of a small-scale corpus and are required because of the special nature of evaluation:

- Evaluation shows ‘context-dependent polysemous functionality’ (White 2001a: 18), and in its analysis the wider context must consequently be included.³
- Evaluation is a very complex *textual* phenomenon, as many researchers have pointed out:

[W]hen we consider the meanings made by extended, cohesive texts that are not made in individual clauses, we often encounter phenomena of language that reveal new semantic resources at the text level. This is particularly true of the semantics of evaluation because of its tendency toward ‘prosodic’ realizations, i.e. realizations that tend to be distributed through the clause and across

clause and sentence boundaries (Lemke 1998: 47; for similar assumptions see Thompson & Ye 1991 and Bublitz 2002).

This suggests that the phenomenon of evaluation can only be correctly understood, interpreted and analysed when looking at its context. On the one hand, linguistic means of evaluation are highly context-dependent; on the other hand, analysing the discourse semantics of evaluation shows how evaluation extends like a wave over the text and lends a specific “evaluative prosody” to it (for the wave metaphor in connection with evaluation see Hunston 1994: 200). Martin states the case strongly: ‘we will never understand the function of evaluation in a culture if our studies are based, however quantitatively, on the analysis of “deco-textualized” examples’ (Martin 2003: 177). Thus, the evaluative force of linguistic expressions may not be noticeable in an automatic corpus-based study (Stotesbury 2003: 331). Moreover, such an analysis would not only pick up instances of writer evaluation but also instances where evaluation is simply quoted.

- Many evaluative means belong to open classes. There is no clearly defined list of linguistic means of evaluation (called *evaluators* in the following) that could be looked for in a large-scale corpus with the help of a computer. The list of lexico-grammatical means that can be used for evaluation is endless, and it would be futile to take a list of possible evaluators as a starting point and check which of them occur in the corpus, since this would only provide a limited perspective on the evaluation present in this corpus.

Furthermore, there are no existing large-scale corpora that are suitable for the analysis of the object of investigation. Corpora such as LOB/FLOB (<http://helmer.aksis.uib.no/icame.html>) contain only a mixed category (A) called *press: reportage* which does not distinguish between daily and Sunday newspapers, between regional and national newspapers or between the categories of political news, sports news, society news, spot news, financial news and cultural news (<http://khnt.hit.uib.no/icame/manuals/flob/kata.htm>). This is a problem because these categories differ so much from each other (Bell 1991: 14). Moreover, these corpora include samples rather than complete texts, and in total, category A consists of only 44 texts of roughly 2.000 words each, i.e. only marginally more than my own corpus. Other potentially suitable corpora like the BNC (Aston & Burnard 1998, Burnard 1995), the Bank of English (<http://www.ccl.bham.ac.uk/phrasebox/svenguide.html#Some> references), the Reuters corpus (http://about.reuters.com/researchandstandards/corpus/LREC_camera_ready.pdf), the Rostock Historical English Newspaper Corpus (<http://www.phf.uni-rostock.de/institut/iangam/sitemap.htm>; on its design see Schneider 2000), the Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English (LGSWE) corpus (Biber 2003), and the Zurich English Newspaper (ZEN) corpus (Fries & Schneider 2000) either consist of samples rather than complete texts, or do not include all of the ten national newspapers considered in this book, are diachronic rather than synchronic, or do not distinguish between the category of hard news and other categories. To my knowledge there are thus no existing corpora that would have been suitable for my purposes. The only other alternative, to design a large-scale corpus myself, would have been far too time-consuming (although broadsheets are obtainable on CD-ROM, the tabloids are not).⁴

In view of these issues I decided upon a smaller corpus as a basis for my analyses. Even though this may mean that the conclusions are not always statistically definite and wholly representative of British newspaper discourse as a whole, I believe that the analysis of the corpus strongly indicates certain trends in this variety of English. Furthermore, representativeness is a thorny issue in corpus linguistics in any case, and it might be more important to linguistic analysis to know the corpus that is used very well, and to interpret the results accordingly (Mahlberg 2004).

A different methodological issue involves the identification of evaluation. How can we determine that linguistic items are evaluative or not? In this book a combination of methods was used:

- previous (often corpus-based) research was surveyed to identify potential evaluative means;
- native speakers were questioned: when they gave contradictory responses (as was frequently the case) or when expressions were only identified as ‘a bit/slightly negative’, or ‘hard to say’ the linguistic expressions were excluded (as not unequivocally evaluative);
- the Bank of English (BoE, a general corpus of spoken and written English from Britain, the US, Canada and Australia, which stood at 450 million words at the time of the analysis) was the basis for extensive corpus research concerning the evaluative potential of individual linguistic devices. If this did not yield satisfying results (because there were not enough occurrences), WebCorp (a search engine for the internet which was designed for use by linguists; <http://www2002.org/CDROM/poster/67/>) was employed for the same purpose.

- a corpus-based dictionary was used to check the evaluative force of linguistic expressions (COBUILD, COBUILD 1995).

Thus, the manual analysis of my news story corpus is based both on ‘first level’ corpus research (Bank of English, WebCorp) and on the ‘second level use of corpora’ (Neale 2006) (corpus-based research such as Thompson 1994, COBUILD); in other words the discourse analysis is supported by what Louw (2005) calls ‘data-assisted reading’. The study analyses 5158 individual evaluators, and is to be regarded as a contribution to the ‘prolonged fieldwork’ on interpersonal meanings demanded by Stubbs (1996).

Notes

1 In this book the terms *writer/speaker* and *reader/hearer* are used alternatively – the one implies the other, though we are only concerned with writers and readers in news discourse.

2 Thompson & Hunston’s (2000) definition is similar to Biber’s concept of ‘social evaluation’ (1988: 32). For different views of evaluation see Gruber (1993) on the concept of *evaluative utterance*, Jordan (2000) on the notion of *assessment* and Bayer (1982) on *Bewertungen*. Opinion/attitude in itself is a concept that is notoriously difficult to define (and no attempt to do so will be undertaken here) (see van Dijk 1998: 29f for one proposal and Almeida 1992 for theories of factuality).

3 I use the term *context* in this book to refer to the textual, the situational and the socio-cultural environment of linguistic expressions, although it will mostly be the textual environment that is particularly significant.

4 Concerning the advantages and disadvantages of designing a newspaper corpus from CD-ROM see Ljung (1996) and Minugh (2000). Charles (2004) mentions four overlapping problems concerning large-scale corpus-based research on stance (i.e. evaluation): (1) corpus-based methods cannot retrieve implicit stance; (2) they cannot retrieve combinations of stance; (3) they cannot reveal indeterminacy; (4) the multi-layering of stance leads to uncertainty in quantification. What corpus linguistic research can do, however, she concludes, is to quantify certain linguistic realizations of stance as well as to identify key sites of stance construction. For examples of corpus-based research on stance/evaluation see e.g. Hunston & Sinclair (2000), Charles (2003), Biber & Finegan (1989), Conrad & Biber (2000) and Precht (2003).