

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 writers express their opinions 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 and 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 and 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 and Mauranen 2003), and, under the name of *appraisal*, within systemic-functional linguistics (e.g. Macken-Horarik and Martin 2003, Martin and 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. Volosinov 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 and 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 (focusing 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, Jedema *et al.* 1994, Bell 1991: 212, Almeida 1992: 234ff). For instance, Biber and Finegan (1989) label the cluster that includes press reportage 'faceless stance' (Biber and Finegan 1989: 108), noting that this cluster is 'marked by the relative absence of all affective and evidential stance features considered here' (Biber and 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 23 September.
'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, <i>Royal Duty</i> . 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 1.1 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).

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

Table 1.1 The corpus

Topic/ Newspaper	Broadsheets										Tabloids												
	ISRAEL	RIO	IDS	IRAQ	HIV	BARCLAYS	DI	IRA	POLICE	MADAM	Total:	ISRAEL	RIO	IDS	IRAQ	HIV	BARCLAYS	DI	IRA	POLICE	MADAM	Total:	
FT	367	688	584	508	239	269	340	487	413	539	4434	367	688	584	508	239	269	340	487	413	539	4434	37,404
GUAR	1,118	771	983	752	521	831	1,036	810	518	639	7,921	700	889	1,204	746	521	831	866	847	1,350	639	7,921	8,599
IND	700	803	1,017	746	479	369	1,362	1,144	906	1,043	8,845	976	803	1,017	746	479	369	1,362	1,144	906	1,043	8,845	9,760
TIM	976	1,088	782	672	312	642	1,150	720	771	896	7,605	390	1,088	782	672	312	642	1,150	720	771	896	7,605	3,949
TEL	390	968	638	278	143	282	448	453	801	754	5,965	410	968	638	278	143	282	448	453	801	754	5,965	32,796
SUN	410	927	291	291	1,011	475	689	1,244	424	903	8,826	298	927	291	291	1,011	475	689	1,244	424	903	8,826	3,949
STA	298	832	1,229	832	1,229	424	903	832	1,229	424	903	298	832	1,229	832	1,229	424	903	832	1,229	424	903	298
MAIL	903	832	1,229	832	1,229	424	903	832	1,229	424	903	903	832	1,229	832	1,229	424	903	832	1,229	424	903	903
MIR	424	832	1,229	832	1,229	424	903	832	1,229	424	903	424	832	1,229	832	1,229	424	903	832	1,229	424	903	424
EXP	440	1,244	689	595	755	614	1,569	402	676	814	7,798	440	1,244	689	595	755	614	1,569	402	676	814	7,798	440

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 and 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 (www.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 (www.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 and Burnard 1998, Burnard 1995), the Bank of English (www.ccl.bham.ac.uk/phrasebox/svenguide.html#Somereferences), the Reuters corpus (www.about.reuters.com/researchstandards/corpus/LREC_camera_ready.pdf), the Rostock Historical English Newspaper Corpus (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 and 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; www.2002.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 5,158 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 and 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*. Opinton's 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, for example, Hunston and Sinclair (2000), Charles (2003), Biber and Finegan (1989), Conrad and Biber (2000) and Precht (2003).

2 The news story in its context

This chapter discusses previous research on media discourse, and examines the socio-economic and linguistic context of the news story. This provides the background to the empirical study in Chapters 5 and 6.

2.1 Approaches to media discourse

There is in fact a great diversity of scientific research devoted to describing the media, of which I shall only mention the major and most influential approaches. The non-linguistic approaches among this research are often concerned with issues such as ideology, mediation, mass communication (van Dijk 1988a: 5–16), the semiotics of the news (Hartley 1982), the concept of popular culture (Conboy 2002), and media standards (Sparks and Tulloch 2000). However, although these studies shed some light on the nature of mass media and newspaper bias, they offer little in terms of a systematic linguistic analysis of media language.

Within linguistics, we can distinguish between two vantage points of linguists: that of discourse structure and linguistic function, or according to its effect as ideology-laden discourse (Cotter 2001: 417) or, as Scannell calls them, 'the ideological and the pragmatic' (Scannell 1998: 251) approach to media and language. More specifically, there are at least eight major approaches to media language (elaborated from Cotter 2001, Jucker 1992, Bell 1991, Fairclough 1995a and Bell 1995):

- *the critical approach*: studies that work to reveal power relations and ideology, and often invoke a call to social responsibility (e.g. Hodge 1979, Trew 1979, Fairclough 1988, 1995a, 1995b, Fowler 1991, Talbot 1995, van Dijk 1988a, 1988b, White 1998, Weiss and Wodak 2003, Caldas-Coulthard 2003)
- *the narrative/pragmatic/stylistic approach*: work which focuses on discourse-level elements and explanations, concerned with the structure and language of news discourse (often involving pragmatic analyses, discussions of presentation and perspective, genre status, style and register) (e.g. Crystal and Davy 1969, Verschueren 1985, Carter 1988,