4. Reporting war: Grammar as 'covert operation'

ABSTRACT

While it is often said that 'truth is the first casualty of war', this aphorism covers only one feature of how wars are reported, namely, the deliberate use of misinformation by parties to a war. But language is by its nature a highly plastic resource: there is never just one way to report a set of events, even when the 'facts' may be uncontested. Drawing on data from newspaper reports and media briefings of the recent war in Iraq, we illustrate some of the basic grammatical systems which underlie the choices a journalist has to make, particularly in reporting 'high impact' events of the war. Using a functional approach to grammar – where grammar is seen not as rules but as a theory of reality – we introduce some basic grammatical concepts for understanding the ideological impact of different grammatical choices in construing the events of war.

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THE SINGLE most important event in shoring up American public and political support for the first Gulf war was one that never happened (Knightley, 2000; Rampton & Stauber , 2003). On 5 September 1990, a report appeared in the London *Daily Telegraph* saying that Iraqi soldiers had pulled babies out of incubators and left them to die on cold hospital floors during Iraq's 1991 occupation of Kuwait. The story was pure fabrication by an American public relations firm, Hill and Knowlton, under contract to 'Citizens

for a Free Kuwait', an organization financed by the Kuwaiti Government in exile (for details, see Knightley, 2000: 486-8; Rampton & Stauber, 2003: 71-5). In the US Senate debate over whether to engage in military action against Saddam Hussein, seven senators spoke directly of this story, and the final vote for action was won on a margin of only five (Knightley, 2000: 487). The story harks back to British propaganda from the First World War, when German soldiers were accused of throwing Belgian babies into the air and catching them on their bayonets (ibid).

Events such as this provide support for the much quoted aphorism that 'truth is the first casualty of war'. This aphorism goes back to 1917 (Knightley 2000) but it has again seen action in the most recent war in Iraq, as journalists, public commentators and intellectuals, and the general public try to understand how the events of this high profile conflict have been presented by military officials, governments and the media.

Phillip Knightley's study (2000) of the war correspondent draws on this aphorism for its title, *The First Casualty: The War Correspondent as Hero and Myth-Maker from the Crimea to Kosovo*. Knightley's study is a very detailed account of how information is managed and controlled in times of war, and the role played by the various political, military and media institutions in these processes. In his account, he makes the important point that war correspondents have short working lives, and their experiences of reporting war have no formal way of being recorded and handed down to other journalists. The military, by contrast, is an enduring institution, in which 'wars are studied, lessons are learnt, systems are devised, tested and polished' (2000: 484). The British Ministry of Defence, the Pentagon and similar agencies of every major military power maintain manuals – updated after every war – on how to manage the relationship with the media during wartime. He notes the following:

> All the military manuals follow basic principles – appear open, transparent and eager to help; never go in for summary repression or direct control; nullify rather than conceal undesirable news; control emphasis rather than facts; balance bad news with good; and lie directly only when certain that the lie will not be found out during the course of the war (2000: 484).

In this list of principles, it is the last to which the complex notion of truth can be unambiguously applied, if only to note that in such instances it has gone

AWOL. But in the other information management strategies described by Knightley, such as 'nullify rather than conceal undesirable news'; 'control emphasis rather than facts' – the concept of truth is not at issue. Instead the issue is the contestable nature of reality, the fact that even when the material 'facts' of a case are not contested, there are nonetheless many quite distinct ways in which they can be presented.

Such questions of perspective are often reduced to dichotomies: 'objectivity' vs 'subjectivity'; 'balanced' vs 'biased' accounts. But since one person's 'objectivity' is another's 'subjectivity', we need to go beyond these simplistic labels to try to understand how different realities are created. By way of illustration, consider the following extracts from two wartime speeches:

> We're not going to just shoot the sons-of-bitches, we're going to rip out their living Goddamned guts. (General Patton, 'Speech to the Third Army' on 5 June 1944, the eve of the Allied invasion of France, code-named 'Overlord')

> Now that conflict has come, the only way to limit its duration is to apply decisive force. (US President George W. Bush, announcing the start of war against Iraq, March 2003, code-named 'Operation Iraqi Freedom')

These two extracts have a semantic affinity: both project a situation of anticipated violence. Yet they make sense of the experience in quite different ways. Patton constructs a highly concrete, material, action based view, in which humans act directly on humans. Bush, on the other hand, creates a meaning which is removed from any sense of physical experience. In Bush's account, there is no explicit human action, and no reference to the effect of the action on humans. In fact, in Bush's account, there are no humans at all.

Patton and Bush have created distinct models of this reality: one model is highly material, physical, visceral and direct, the other is abstract and removed from human experience. While most people respond to the difference between these two models as a question of words – they rightly question the complexity of terms such as 'terrorist' or 'freedom' – there is at the same time a deeper level of linguistic patterning which is the source of these different ways of making sense of things. We are referring to the central, but less obvious, role of grammar in construing our experience of reality. Each of these realities is created out of different grammatical choices from a range of grammatical systems.

Our focus in this paper is to explore the kinds of choices made which move our model of reality from one which is highly concrete to one which is abstract and distant from material experience. To do this, we will consider how 'high-impact' events of war – those which involve death or wounding of people, or the destruction of physical structures – can be depicted. We will present some of the crucial grammatical choices which are called into play when such events are reported. Our examples are drawn from standard news reports from the major Sydney dailies and briefings conducted at Command Central during the war. The analysis we present here is part of an ongoing project investigating the language of war related discourse (e.g. see Butt, Lukin and Matthiessen; in press).

In our examination of ways of reporting high-impact events of war, we will consider just four kinds of issue of representation: 'causation'; 'agency'; 'impact'; and 'semiotic distance'. Under 'causation' we will explore a fundamental grammatical choice between presenting an event as caused by an external agent, or as 'causing itself'. When an event is depicted as being caused by an external agent, a further choice is available over the kind of agent selected, and we will consider this choice in our discussion of 'agency'. 'Impact' concerns whether and how the impact of an event is represented. Finally, we use the term 'semiotic distance' to refer to the option available of presenting reality as dynamic action or a static state of being. These are only some of the choices made by writers and speakers in reporting a particular set of events.

We have used the term 'choice' to highlight a fundamental characteristic of language, namely that in any linguistic act, a speaker or writer has to choose. No experience, no matter how mundane, has one and only one way of being presented. Grammatical choices have to be made, and there are always alternate versions of reality. In the case of reporting war, such choices are deeply involved in managing public opinion, even in the reporting of what might seem to be simply 'the facts'. Since grammatical choices are made largely unconsciously, this paper is part of longer term strategy of raising public awareness about the role grammar plays in the 'covert operations' of war, a role which, we believe, urgently needs to be more widely understood.

Representing 'causation'

Consider the clause *Coalition forces dropped bombs on Baghdad* [1].Here we have a simple, uncontroversial representation of a set of events. In this

example, *Coalition forces* is the 'Agent'[2], which means it is given the grammatical role of the entity which causes the action to happen. The significance of this can be seen if we compare *Coalition forces dropped bombs on Baghdad* with *Bombs fell on Baghdad*. In the second example, there is no Agent. The events are construed as if the bombs fell all by themselves: nothing or no-one caused them to fall.

The distinction between *Coalition forces dropped bombs on Baghdad*, and *Bombs fell on Baghdad* is a fundamental grammatical distinction (see Halliday, 1967/8; 1994 Section 5.8). While both are truthful descriptions of a feature of the 2003 Iraq war, they create quite different versions of that reality. In the first version, the events are brought about by a named Agent. The process is construed as one in which external causation is made explicit.
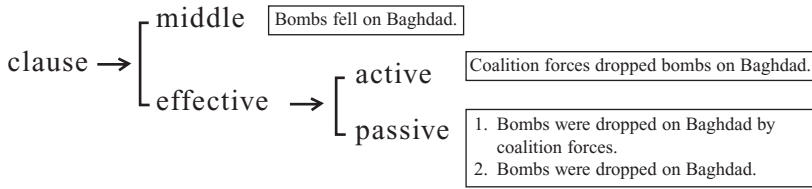
In the second example, the events are presented in quite a different way, because no agency is attributed. There is no external entity which caused these events. The process of 'falling' is instead 'self-engendered' (Halliday, 1994 Section 5.8).

The grammatical distinction we are describing here involves the system of 'voice'. This is most popularly known in terms of the distinction between 'active' and 'passive' voice. The terms 'active' and 'passive' capture the distinction between, for example *Coalition forces dropped bombs on Baghdad* (the active voice) and *Bombs were dropped by Coalition forces on Baghdad* (the passive voice). With the passive voice, the Agent (here *by Coalition forces*) is given the status in the grammar of an Adjunct, which may be left implicit, so that *Bombs were dropped on Baghdad,* is also possible.

But *Bombs fell on Baghdad* is a different way of representing events from either the active or passive voice. Both active and passive clauses construe events as being caused by an external agent: these clauses are 'effective' in agency. This is true whether or not the Agent is actually made explicit. If we say *Bombs were dropped on Baghdad*, even though the Agent is not actually named, the action is nonetheless being presented as having been caused by an Agent.

But in the clause *Bombs fell on Baghdad*, the event is construed as happening without an external agent. This type of clause is known as 'middle'. The choices in the grammatical system of voice are represented schematically in Figure 1.

Figure 1: The grammatical system of voice

clause → middle — Bombs fell on Baghdad.

effective → active — Coalition forces dropped bombs on Baghdad.

passive —
1. Bombs were dropped on Baghdad by coalition forces.
2. Bombs were dropped on Baghdad.

Whenever we speak or write – except when we say things like 'hi', or 'hey John!' – we are choosing from the system of voice. Everything we say involves either construing the events as being caused by an external agent (active/passive voice), or as being self-engendered (middle voice).

The choice of middle voice is a powerful way of effacing agency, because it denies even the possibility of agency. The first clause of Bush's statement discussed above, *Now that conflict has come*, offers a middle voice construal of the situation, presenting the US attack on Baghdad as something akin to a change of season, and, therefore, as inexorable. 'Conflict' has simply 'come' – apparently without having been brought about by anything or anybody. Table 1 presents examples from reports of the Iraq war, in which high impact events are presented as self-engendered processes.

Table 1: Events of war as self-engendered processes (middle voice)

Examples	Source
Battle **rages** in blinding storm	SMH. 26.03.03
At least one Iraqi civilian **has died** since the US led attacks on Iraq began	DT. 22.03.03
Since Sunday night, explosions **have rolled in** to the centre of Baghdad	SMH. 26.03.03
A Tomahawk Land Attack Missile, left, **launches** from the USS Bunker Hill yesterday	Australian. 21.03.03
19 coalition soldiers **have died** in helicopter accidents	SMH. 26.03.03
At least 250 Iraqi troops **surrendered** last night	Australian. 22-23.03.03

The passive voice effaces agency in a different way: by implying, but not naming the Agent. Table 2 presents examples of clauses in which agency is implied, but the Agent itself remains undeclared.

Table 2: Agent left unspecified (passive voice)

Examples	Source
Less than two hours after the admiral's announcement, six planes **were catapulted** off the deck for the Abraham Lincoln's first strike of the war.	SMH 21.03.03
A US marine **was killed** in Iraq.	DT 22.03.03

Representing 'agency'

It may be argued that it is not necessary to specify the Agent of these actions – that the Agent of the reported actions was already known. But when the option to name a grammatical Agent is taken up, a new choice opens up: who or what to specify as the Agent. For instance, when Patton says *We're not going to just shoot the sons-of-bitches…*, the Agent, *We*, is human. In *Our F/A-18 Hornets attack the Republican Guard* (*DT*, 31 March 2003), the Agent is, instead, technology, i.e. *Our F/A-18 Hornets.* Table 3 presents additional examples where some kind of technology is put in the grammatical role of Agent.

Table 3: Technology as agent

Examples	Source
A US Air Force planner said **US warplanes** were likely to drop 10 times as many precision-guided bombs on the first day of a war against Iraq as **they** did to open the 1991 Gulf War.	SMH 21.03.03
US cruise missiles struck Saddam Hussein's main palace and other targets in Baghdad…	FR 22-23.03.03)

In the examples in Table 3, the Agents responsible for these actions of war are *US warplanes, US cruise missiles*, and *British and US fighter jets*. Reports such as these are not likely to be seen as carrying a particular kind of bias. Yet the perspective they bring can be seen when contrasted with other possible options. Consider the difference between *Our F/A-18 Hornets attack the Republican Guard* (*DT*, 31 March 2003), and **Australian forces attack the Republican Guard.* Again, both of these selections are true. The journalist who wrote Our F/A-18 Hornets attack the Republican Guard could have equally written **Australian forces attack the Republican Guard*, but clearly the effect

would have been different. In *Australian forces attack the Republican Guard*, we have a human Agent in contrast to the actual version in which technology is made the Agent.

F/A-18 Hornets are examples of the technology of war, as are the warplanes, missiles, and fighter jets in the examples in Table 3. But note a further distinction: the term F/A-18 Hornets, is a more specific term than *fighter jets*, i.e. it is a particular type of fighter jet. The selection of F/A-18 Hornet as Agent is not only a choice in favour of technology, but also a choice to be highly specific about the nature of the technology.

Given the choices available here, one must ask why technology – including highly specified descriptions of technology – is given prominence by being made the Agent of actions of war. On this question, we note Knightley's claim in relation to the reporting of the technological aspects of the Allied campaign in the First Gulf war:

> Spellbound by the 'Star Wars' nature of the conflict and lacking the knowledge to assess properly what the military were telling them, most correspondents – 'pretty impressively ignorant about technology', according to one Defense Department scientist – unwittingly acted as unpaid publicists to help weapons manufacturers get Government contracts. (Knightly, 2000: 497)

So far we have discussed the following kinds of grammatical choice: the choice of middle versus active/passive voice, the choice of whether or not to specify the Agent, and if the Agent is specified, what kind of entity is selected. Both the middle voice and the passive voice – when the Agent is left unnamed – have the effect of effacing agency. When an Agent is named, but a non-human Agent is selected, this has the effect of effacing human agency. These grammatical selections as a whole, therefore, can be seen to have the particular effect of 'de-humanizing' the construction of war, 'dehumanizing' in the sense of leaving humans out as potential Agents of the events of war. While Patton's discourse may be accused of 'dehumanizing' the 'enemy', by referring to them as 'sons-of-bitches', it is arguably much more 'human' than accounts in which humans do not feature at all.

Representing 'impact'

Another important angle on the choices involved in reporting high impact

events is how the impact of an event is construed. In *We're not going to just shoot the sons-of-bitches, we're going to rip out their living Goddamned guts*, the actions of war are represented as directly impacting on humans. Compare Patton, with the following extract from the most widely celebrated speech of the Iraq war (e.g. BBC Online, 'The secret of good fighting talk', 20 March 2003, http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/uk_news/2868631.stm), delivered by Lieutenant Colonel Tim Collins to his troops: '*We go to liberate, not to conquer*'. In this example, we have human action, but the action does not impact on anything. The potential entity to be impacted through the action, has been suppressed.

We can see the difference between these two representations of the event, by considering one dimension of their grammatical structure. Table 4 shows the structure of the extracts from Patton's and Collins's speeches. In the Patton extract, we have a process of action which extends to, or impacts on a Goal. We use the term 'Goal' to describe an entity which is impacted by an event. In the Collins extract, we have a process of action, but no Goal.

Table 4: Basic grammatical terms for action processes

Source	Grammatical roles		
	Actor	Process	Goal
Patton	We	're not going to just shoot	the sons-of-bitches,
Patton	we	're going to rip out	their living Goddamned guts
Collins	We	go to liberate, not to conquer	

Table 5: Action processes with no Goal

Source	Grammatical roles		
	Actor	Process	Location
Australian, 21.03.03	The first half dozen or so missiles in this so-called " pin-prick strike"	hit	in the Rasheed area in the south east of the city.

Leaving out the Goal effaces the impact of an action. In the example in Table 5, the 'half dozen or so' missiles hit, but what they hit does not get mentioned.

Other grammatical strategies have the effect of minimising the sense of impact. One such strategy involves the choices of the kind of Goal which is impacted. In the example from Patton, the entities which take the grammatical role of Goal are human, or human body parts, which help create the sense of high impact on humans. But it is possible to obscure the impact of war on humans by construing what is impacted as a place, a target, a position, or some other inanimate phenomenon.

In the examples in Table 6, the Goals of the action processes are *Baghdad, targets in downtown Baghdad*, and *Republican Guard positions south of the Iraqi capital*.

Table 6: Use of depersonalised phemonenon as the Goal in a material clause

Examples	Source
cruise missiles and bombs hit <u>Baghdad</u>…	DT 22.03.03
In the Gulf War a dozen years ago, the Nighthawk was the only US or coalition aircraft to strike <u>targets in downtown Baghdad</u>	SMH 21.03.03
The F/A-18s bombed <u>Republican Guard positions</u> south of the Iraqi capital …	DT, 31.03.03

The effect of such selections is to minimize the sense of the human impact. To understand the consequence of such selections, compare *The F/A-18s bombed Republican Guard positions south of the Iraqi capital* with **The F/A-18s bombed Republican Guards south of the Iraqi capital*. In the second of these examples, the Goal has been made human, and thus the event is construed as directly impacting on humans, rather than the depersonalised *Republican Guard positions*.

Consider yet another option:

Australian F/A-18 Hornet fighter-bombers have dropped 2000-pound (900-kilogram) laser-guided bombs on Iraqi Republican Guard units (*Sun Herald*, 30 March 2003).

This example is even less direct than the previous one. This is because the phenomenon which is impacted on, *Republican Guard units*, is not made the Goal of the action. Instead, it is related to action in an indirect way, by being part of the location (in grammatical terms, the 'circumstance', expressed in a preposition phrase) of this event. The grammatical role of Goal has in this example been given to the 2000-pound laser guided bombs: they are the

entities construed as directly impacted on by the action. Table 7 shows the different grammatical structures of these two examples. Table 8 shows further examples in which the impacted phenomenon is a location.

Table 7: Impacted phenomenon as Location Source

Source	Grammatical roles			
	Actor	Process	Goal	Circumstance (Location)
Daily Telegraph, 31.03.03	The F/A-18s	bombed	Republican Guard positions	south of the capital
Sun Herald, 30.03.03	Australian F/A-18 Hornet fighter-bombers	have dropped	2000-pound (900-kilogram) laser guided bombs	on Iraqi Republican Guard units

Table 8: Further examples of impacted phemonenon as Location

Examples	Source
A British military spokesman said the Black Watch regiment outside Basra was firing on Iraqi positions in the city	(Australian, 29-30.03.03)

'Semiotic distance' – choices in 'distance' to experience

So far we have considered some of the grammatical choices available when a high impact event is being reported. In each case, the actions have been presented as actions; for instance of bombing, firing, striking, hitting, dropping, etc. It may seem strange to draw attention to this feature of the examples we have selected, but action does not have to be represented as action. Consider the following example, taken from a briefing on 28 March 2003 at Command Central, the US media centre in Dohar established for the war on Iraq.

> I want to show you a recent example of an attack against an Ababil-100 on its carrier, or as we call it, a transporter erector launcher. The target was near Karbala. Again, the missile is aboard, and so you'll see a fairly significant secondary explosion.
> I have one before and after image to show you today. *The target is a military barracks for a division installation near Baghdad. Again, as*

you can see, the specific places where we target are by design, that's to achieve a specific effect against a particular part of a structure like this one. The aim points are as you see them, and this is post-strike, the results of the attack. The degree of destruction that is — that is sort [sic] after varies depending on what type of weapons system we choose and what the desired effect is. And again, the split. Each attack like this against a military target removes one option from the regime.
<http://www.centcom.mil/CENTCOMNews/Transcripts/20030330.htm>

This commentary, delivered by Brigadier General Vincent Brooks, reports what is without doubt a high impact event. While this event could have been reported as an action of attacking, bombing, striking or hitting, Brooks does not report the event in these terms. Instead, he presents a much more clinical, distanced depiction of the events, in a style which seems typical of a Defence Department official. For many people, this kind of talk feels curiously empty, as if the 'real events' are not being described.

If we probe the grammatical organization of this extract, it is possible to explain why Brooks' discourse has this kind of feel. The extract is set out in Table 9, focussing on the italicised section of the quote, and ignoring Brooks's facilitating comments, such as 'as you can see'. The extract is set out in terms of its 'basic'[5] structure of process and participants (Halliday, 1994). In our earlier examples, the processes were material actions. In Brooks' account, the main processes are two forms of the verb 'to be'. In general terms, this means a shift from representing events as actions to presenting them in terms of states of being.

The structure of Brook's presentation is to offer a 'before' and 'after' shot of the events. In other words, he is leaving out all the action in between what the site 'was' and what the site now 'is'. The fact that we find, grammatically, a shift from material action, such as destroying, striking, hitting, or bombing, to processes of 'being' is, therefore, not surprising. The significance of such grammatical choices, however is that the use of 'be' processes, rather than action processes, creates an utterly distinct account of the events. To see the world as states of being rather than as concrete action is to see it from a fundamentally different perspective. The move from representing reality as action to representing it through states of being is part of a whole syndrome of features through which the world gets made over. As the example above illustrates, a high impact event does not have to be represented as action, and

Table 9: extract from Command Central briefing, 28 March 2003		
	Participant	**Process**	**Participant**
1	The target	is	a military barracks for a division installation near Baghdad.
2	the specific places [[where we target]]	are	by design
3	that	's	[[to achieve a specific effect against a particular part of a structure like this one.]]
4	The aim points	are	[[as you see them]]
5	This	is	post strike, the results of the attack
6	The degree of destruction [[that is -- that is sort after]]	varies	
7		depending on	[[what type of weapons system we choose]] and [[what the desired effect is.]]

human agency or decision making processes significant to making such events happen do not have to be expressed.

Grammatical metaphor

The central feature of this grammatical syndrome has been characterized as metaphoric, but of a kind that we need to take into our critical faculties over and beyond words – it is grammatical metaphor (e.g. Halliday & Martin, 1993; Halliday & Matthiessen, 1999: Ch. 6). Grammatical metaphor is a complex syndrome of grammatical features that creates abstractions like 'collateral damage'. A central part of grammatical metaphor is the process of 'nominalisation', in which something which might typically have been repre-sented as a verb, adjective or conjunction, is re-represented as a nominal (as a noun or other nominal element in a nominal group). In the example from Brooks, actions of targeting, aiming, striking, destroying turn up as nouns, or parts of nominal group structures, for instance *the target, the aim points, post strike, destruction.*

This drift towards nominal forms is motivated by a number of factors, one of which is that a noun can be counted, classified, described and qualified like

no other part of speech. When we turn *destroy* into *destruction*, for instance, then we can also talk about *the degree of destruction*. Turning all of the actions like aiming, striking, destroying etc into nouns means the humans who aim, strike, destroy etc do not have to feature in the account. (There is one instance of a human Agent in *the specific places where <u>we</u> target*. Because *where we target* functions to define *the specific places* (i.e. it is an 'embedded' relative clause, it is grammatically marginalised). Note also in Brooks' description that human decision making processes are also expressed in a way that the human minds which made these decisions do not feature: e.g. *the specific places where we target are <u>by design</u>, the degree of destruction that is <u>sort [sic] after</u>, the <u>desired effect</u>*. Thanks to the passive voice in one instance, and the process of nominalisation in the other two examples, the humans who designed the specific places, who seek after a particular degree of destruction, who desired a particular effect, are effaced. (Again, there is one instance of a human present in a decision making role, *what type of weapons systems we choose*, but the verb *choose* also occurs in an embedded relative clause, and so is grammatically marginalised).

Abstract forms of discourse rely on grammatical metaphor: they could not exist without it. While we do not have quantitative findings as yet, it appears that, along with the other grammatical options we have discussed, that it was a favoured option for US spokespeople at Command Central when reporting on high impact events. Since Command Central provided a major source of information for western journalists reporting on the Iraq war, it is interesting to consider the effect of briefings such as this on the typical patterns of reporting of these high impact events.

The earlier example from Bush also relies on grammatical metaphor. Instead of representing action, Bush construes a state of being: …*the only way to limit its duration <u>is</u> to apply decisive force*. As we saw in the example from Brooks, the use of 'is' combines with a number of other grammatical features, all of which eschew human agency. Recall that in the example from Bush, the 'is' clause was combined with a middle voice clause, *now that conflict has come*, which excludes agency of any kind.

By contrast, Patton's discourse is grammatically non-metaphoric, or 'congruent', thus being closer to the people's experience of taking part in war: actions are construed as verbs rather than as nouns or some other word class. While Patton's word choice is metaphoric (i.e. *sons of bitches*), his grammar is not. Grammatically, he uses material clauses of action where humans are

construed as Actor and also as Goal: in other words, in Patton's discourse, humans both act and are acted upon.

Concluding remarks: Grammar as 'covert operation'

The extent and complexity of the grammatical systems of a natural language like English forces us to be selective in our discussion. Language is a highly complex system because of what it has to do in, and for, human communities. For reasons of technology and rationalisation, new forms of language are called into play in reporting war.

A particular limitation of our discussion is that we have used only short extracts from texts, and considered them in relation to a few core features of their grammar. It is important also to analyse whole texts, such as news reports or media briefings, from which to build up quantitative pictures of how war is being reported as it unfolds. Quantitative pictures would also allow us to model tendencies across these forms of language, tendencies which are often lying hidden, or 'latent', even for the trained observer. Such analysis would then enable us to ask questions which go deeper than simple characterisations of reports as 'objective' or 'subjective'. These questions would include:

■ How, and by whom or what, are people killed in these reports? In particular, are there different forms of report for different groups of people?

■ What kinds of grammatical visibility (roles) are attributed to key political players in conflicts and negotiations?

■ Is technology personified and mythologised by the grammatical roles and responsibilities allocated to it? What omissions result from any foregrounding of technology?

■ For all of these questions, are different newspapers and reporters systematic in the way that they vary? Can we establish 'motivated' selection due to the high level of consistency amongst the choices available to reporters and media outlets? How do we react when one reporter, e.g Robert Fisk, presents a highly congruent grammar, when the majority of reports adopts a new form of grammatical obliqueness?

There is no doubt that, in times of war, truth is often 'missing in action'. But this needs to be put alongside the reality creating potential of language (Hasan, 1996; in press). By understanding how choices of grammar and words together create our models of reality, it becomes possible to reason about meaning, rather than simply becoming habituated to it. No grammatical

distinction in any language is without consequences for meaning. Grammar is the chief tool through which we encompass the complexities of our past and yet to be actualised experiences.

This knowledge, we would argue, is vital for both creators and consumers of media texts. The creators – journalists – are at the same time consumers, since their reports are based in various accounts, from eye-witnesses, other media sources, press conferences, press releases, etc. The journalist needs to bring a critical eye to the information gathered to establish its basis in fact, but also to evaluate how such 'facts' are being presented, and then re-presented in the journalists own accounts.

Our point is that the 'facts' never speak for themselves: they have to brought into existence through choices of grammar and words. When as speakers and writers we choose, this necessarily involves us favouring one kind of view over another.

By understanding what choices have been made and why, we witness ideology at work (Hasan, 2003; in press). This is true for all of our linguistic activities, but, in the reporting of war, there is a particular urgency to understand the role of language and the ideological consequences of the choices made.

Notes
[1] The symbol * will be used to denote an invented example. This is necessary to illustrate some of the grammatical distinctions.
[2] Some terms have an initial capital letter, to indicate that a specific grammatical function is being referred to.
[3] 'SMH' refers to the *Sydney Morning Herald*; 'DT' to the *Daily Telegraph*; 'FR' to the *Financial Review*.
[4] Note that in these examples the Actor is also an Agent, but because an Actor is not necessarily an Agent, we need to use the term 'Actor' here.
[5] This is the 'basic structure' of the clause, when seen from a particular grammatical point of view. There are other ways to analyse the structure of clauses, and each analysis shows a different pattern of organization (Halliday, 1994).
[6] The square brackets '[[…]]' are used to denote a clause that functions as part of a participant, i.e. where we have verbs, but the verbs do not function as the main verb for a clause.

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