# From Icon to Naturalised Icon: a linguistic analysis of media representations of the BP Deepwater Horizon crisis

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## Thesis summary

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Synopsis:

This research explores how news media reports construct representations of a business crisis through language. In an innovative approach to dealing with the vast pool of potentially relevant texts, media texts concerning the BP Deepwater Horizon oil spill are gathered from three different time points: immediately after the explosion in 2010, one year later in 2011 and again in 2012. The three sets of 'BP texts' are investigated using discourse analysis and semi-quantitative methods within a semiotic framework that gives an account of language at the semiotic levels of sign, code, mythical meaning and ideology.

The research finds in the texts three discourses of representation concerning the crisis that show a movement from the ostensibly representational to the symbolic and conventional: a discourse of 'objective factuality', a discourse of 'positioning' and a discourse of 'redeployment'. This progression can be shown to have useful parallels with Peirce's sign classes of Icon, Index and Symbol, with their implied movement from a clear motivation by the Object (in this case the disaster events), to an arbitrary, socially-agreed connection. However, the naturalisation of signs, whereby ideologies are encoded in ways of speaking and writing that present them as 'taken for granted' is at its most complete when it is least discernible. The findings suggest that media coverage is likely to move on from symbolic representation to a new kind of iconicity, through a fourth discourse of 'naturalisation'. Here the representation turns back towards ostensible factuality or iconicity, to become the 'naturalised icon'. This work adds to the study of media representation a heuristic for understanding how the meaning-making of a news story progresses. It offers a detailed account of what the stages of this progression 'look like' linguistically, and suggests scope for future research into both language characteristics of phases and different news-reported phenomena.

**Key words:**

Discourse analysis, crisis communication, semiotics, news media

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I extend my grateful thanks to my research supervisor Judith Baxter, who has been a dedicated and inspiring research and teaching mentor over the last three years. Amongst many other things, Judith has encouraged me to embrace what 'doesn't fit' as an opportunity to learn, and has shown endless patience in advising me on my writing style. She has combined intellectual rigour with allowing me significant independence of thought, and I enjoyed every supervision session. Thanks also to Urszula Clark for being my Associate Supervisor – Urszula's early advice about the need for stamina has been much in my mind over the past few months of writing!

When I began this thesis in 2011, our eldest daughter Hannah had finished her degree the year before and was still training, and Alice and Alex were both still at university. They have been wonderfully supportive and interested in my work, and I hope to make them as proud of me as I am of them. This timing meant that it fell to my husband Jonathan to support four of us financially, and (as the children had the good manners to study hundreds of miles away) one of us emotionally. He has never questioned either my desire or my ability to complete this PhD thesis, and I thank him for making 1) cups of tea 2) a happy working environment 3) the whole thing possible.

I started my thinking about the BP Deepwater Horizon crisis by carrying out a series of interviews. The names of my interviewees remain confidential, but I am warmly grateful to them for their time and their expert insights. Two, whom I interviewed in London, were closely involved with the BP events from the perspectives of PR and crisis communications. In the US, I interviewed an environmental scientist at the respected University of New Orleans, and a journalist in my hotel room in the Garden District of New Orleans (this last adding a dash of undercover glamour sorely missing from my subsequent close examination of texts).

Finally I would like to thank all my friends at Aston at and home, and the rest of my family (especially Susan, Gill and Steve) for their interest and their support, and above all for knowing when a glass of Sauvignon Blanc is in order.

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Fig. 1.1: Bernie, The Spectator, 8th October 2011.

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# 1 Introduction

This thesis aims to explore how business crises are constructed through language, specifically the language of the news media. By investigating media texts that portray the events of the BP Deepwater Horizon explosion of 2010, I aim to explore how the media make meaning of catastrophic events, and whether and how this changes with distance from the events. Although a particular business crisis is the topic for discussion, this is a project about language: what language choices are made by journalists to frame, explain, analyse or challenge what a business crisis might mean to their readers? I will set out my assumptions about the constructive function of language, as well as my understanding of language as a meaningful sign in my literature review in Chapter 2. In this introduction, I will state why I believe this research is significant, and set out some background information about business crises in general, and the BP Deepwater Horizon events in particular.

## 1.1 Why this topic at this time?

My primary academic interest is in the study of language in contexts and how language choices realise the functions of communication. However, my previous career was as a professional marketing researcher, and I am particularly interested in the points at which business and language intersect. Crisis communications is one such area of intersection, where what is said, and (importantly) how it is said at a time of great business stress, can be crucial to how long and how significant a business crisis can be. There is a considerable amount of work in the area of organisational management about how to handle a crisis, and there is a growing field of research that deals with crisis communications in particular (Section 1.1.1, p12). However, applied linguistic work on specific texts relating to business crises is rarer, despite there being a well-established field of research on institutional discourse in general and discourse in both business and the mass media in particular. This thesis aims to build on the wealth of technical writing about how language operates to explore in some depth the media representation of one particular crisis as a case study, that of BP after its Deepwater Horizon drilling platform exploded on April 20th 2010 (Section 1.1.2, p14). Investigating a set of events that generated millions of media texts involved an innovative approach to methodology, which allows for a degree of robustness (are the patterns I am seeing 'real'?), together with close textual analysis (why this language choice here?). This

challenge has been addressed by other scholars in a number of creative ways, but as far as I know, my methodological approach in this work, tailor-made for the problem and texts at hand, is unique.

The choice of business crises as an object for linguistic research is relevant, as business crises appear consistently on both the front and business pages of news publications (and their online equivalents). Over the last 30 years our perception of global events has changed considerably: the speed of communications technology and the proliferation of online and offline media channels has allowed us virtually instant access to information about events across the world. Events such as natural disasters that were once considered entirely out of our control are now subject to scrutiny as we become aware of our own part in environmental change. In the world of business, an awareness of unpredictability has been incorporated into the fabric of corporate strategic thinking. At a time when many organisations operate in a diverse global environment, when the pace of technological development is accelerating and when corporate actions are more visible and more deeply scrutinised than ever before, there are few business organisations that do not practise some form of crisis planning. Business studies students are taught that flexibility will be a key skill in the 'real' world, and that business strategies that prioritise ongoing learning are replacing the linear planned strategies of the 20th century, as the operating environment becomes more volatile and unpredictable (Mintzberg et al, 1998).

However, even against a backdrop of chronic flux, certain business crises stand out. Over the past few years alone, there has been considerable public attention paid to, for example, the BP Deepwater Horizon oil spill, the collapse of various financial institutions, including Lehman Brothers, AIG and Northern Rock and the unethical practices within some divisions of News International. Crises that stand out in the media are often not only those that are significant in size or impact, but that appear to exemplify some particular aspect of modern life. For whatever reason, certain crises are given more attention and move from controlled private setback to major public affair. Language is understood to both reflect and shape social phenomena of all kinds. This study aims to investigate how one currently relevant phenomenon – the business crisis – comes to be understood through its linguistic representation in the media.

I should be clear at this point that, despite its inclusion in my thesis title, I regard the word 'crisis' as contentious. Since I take the viewpoint that social phenomena are both shaped by and shape discourse, it follows that I should be aware that calling the phenomenon a 'crisis'

(rather than, say 'disaster', or 'event' or 'set of events' or any alternative descriptor) already implies a set of presuppositions, and I shall deal with this critically. The rest of this chapter gives a brief overview of the nature of business crises, and the BP events in particular. I go on to discuss how my approach to my research, which has been iterative and recursive, has entailed a particular organisation of this thesis. I finally outline the content of the remaining chapters of the thesis.

### 1.1.1 What is a business crisis?

As I mentioned above, the area of business crises has been widely researched from a business studies perspective, covering management aspects such as recognition, handling and recovery, and areas more specifically related to language, such as the nature and delivery of the message both internally to staff and externally to the media and thence to the general public. Business research has established frameworks for considering taxonomies of crises, phases of crises and effective messages. I refer to each of these in my overview below.

Pearson & Clair (2008: 3) define organisational crises as events characterised by high consequence and low probability, ambiguity and decision-making time pressure.

> An organizational crisis is a low-probability, high-impact event that threatens the viability of the organization and is characterized by ambiguity of cause, effect, and means of resolution, as well as by a belief that decisions must be made swiftly.

Within this general definition, writers have found types of crisis to be significant in determining business response. Coombs (2004) proposes typologies based on attribution of responsibility. Using Attribution Theory, Coombs explores three types, or 'clusters' of crisis: Victim Crisis (e.g. natural disasters); Accidental Crisis (e.g. technical errors); Intentional Crisis (e.g. human error and misdeeds). In media coverage of the Deepwater Horizon oil spill, all three of these have been suggested as relevant at certain points, but the most applicable category would seem to be the 'Accidental Crisis'. In Accidental Crises, the organisation may be perceived as potentially negligent but not wilfully damaging.

A crisis is not viewed as a single event, but as a process, consisting of a number of phases (Hale et al., 2005; Pearson & Mitroff, 1993). These phases are most commonly characterised as crisis prevention, crisis response, and recovery from the crisis. Fink (1986) amplifies the prevention stage to propose five stages: crisis mitigation, planning, warning, response, and recovery, and in keeping with business priorities the focus of attention here is on planning and

prevention. However, media coverage starts at the point when the crisis is made public, and my own media investigation will focus only on the final two of Fink's five stages – response and recovery. This view of progressive stages can imply that the set of responses to a crisis follows a linear pattern from start to finish. However Hale et al. (2005: 123) suggest that an iterative pattern is more likely, whereby responses are made, assessed, revised and made again. I remarked earlier that the language used to describe and inform stakeholders about a crisis can be critical to how it progresses. The assessment and revision stages proposed by Hale et al. often relate to the success or otherwise of particular communication strategies, as well as the technical and logistical handling of crisis consequences.

Turning to communication and message strategies, it is clear that the type of crisis will affect the organisational response in terms of tone and content, as stakeholder views are generally determined by the company's perceived role in originating the crisis. Coombs (1995) categorises and labels possible communication strategies as 'non-existence', 'distance', 'ingratiation', 'mortification' and 'suffering'. Each of these five strategies may have a number of instantiations – for example a 'non-existence' strategy might consist of denial, or clarification, or attack, or intimidation. These organisational responses are typically communicated to the media through press releases, press conferences, and television and press interviews. In the case of the BP events, television and press interviews were frequent and high profile. What is ultimately published in the media (which is the area of interest for this thesis) is of course not under the control of the organisation, although research shows that press releases are often reproduced verbatim (Jacobs, 2000). The tone of the organisational response is likely to be picked up and either endorsed or dismissed by the publication depending on its political stance and likely readership response. Response strategies are tailored to the intended audience, and Stephens et al. (2005) draw on stakeholder theory to discuss the shifting importance of varying stakeholders at a time of crisis (stakeholder salience). The intended audience for the text is found to make a difference to structure and tenor, as well as content and level of detail. This is particularly crucial for crises that require technical explanation, as is the case for BP Deepwater Horizon. The problem of 'technical translation' (Stephens et al., 2005: 398) is highlighted, where a lack of understanding by the lay public can demand a number of different remedial strategies, highlighting the complexity of formulating messages where a number of different stakeholder groups require information. Again, this sensitivity to stakeholder requirements can be mediated, and potentially distorted, by the demands of the press and other channels. As well as research into appropriate communication according to audience, writers have addressed the issue of

suitable spokespersons. In an article calling for more academic attention to business rhetoric, Cyphert (2010) suggests that one of the reasons this area has been neglected is the difficulty of dealing with multi-voiced discourse, co-created by individuals, such as the Chief Executive Officer, the Communications Director and any other writing professionals involved, as well as by the company culture, and indeed the norms of the industry within which it operates. The balance between the corporate and the personal in crisis communications was a potentially interesting aspect for language study. In the next section I allude to the well-publicised difficulties BP itself encountered in finding an effective public communications approach.

### 1.1.2 The BP Deepwater Horizon crisis

The BP Deepwater Horizon crisis is only one of many recent business crises that I might have selected for investigation into how crises are constructed through language, as illustrated so sharply by the Spectator cartoon that prefaces this thesis. I found the BP crisis to be a particularly suitable case for research in that it can be seen as a single set of events, and is therefore more 'manageable' as a research topic than, for example, the UK's financial crisis that dates from 2007 and is still a media topic today. Both causes and consequences of the BP crisis are multi-dimensional – encompassing human, technical, environmental, political and business aspects. There is a great quantity of available data: much was written in the immediate aftermath of the events of April 20th, 2010, as well as later with hindsight. It continues to be referenced widely today, as an example of new challenges to the PR industry (for example Burt, 2012), as an archetype of a multi-billion dollar compensation case (for example in Cahalan, 2012) and, as of July 2012, in an HBO television series 'The Newsroom', with a script by Aaron Sorkin. BP Deepwater Horizon offers an exemplar of speakers and writers competing for the right to define the history of a crisis.

On 20th April 2011 an oil drilling rig in the Gulf of Mexico, that was operated by Transocean on behalf of BP, exploded. 11 rig workers were killed, and 17 were injured. BP's report on the crisis (BP incident investigation team, 2010), as well as a US National Commission report for the President (National Commission on the BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill and Offshore Drilling, 2011), described how a series of faults and failures contributed to the catastrophic event, each of which in isolation might have been controlled. These included the suitability of the design of the well, faults in the construction (particularly the failure of the cement fixing), the failure of various early warning systems, the failure of the blowout preventer, and human

error. In his book telling the story of the BP Deepwater Horizon explosion and BP's subsequent handling of the crisis, Bergin (2011) suggests that this range of direct causes can be situated within two broad background contexts – a management and organisational culture within BP that encouraged productivity improvements at the expense of health and safety, and a US regulatory system for the industry made lax by the historically strong influence of oil interests on the US Government.

Heading the handling of the media story personally, Tony Hayward, the CEO of BP at the time of the explosion, had very early tried to dissociate BP from the failures leading to the disaster (Bergin, 2011) and named its partners on the rig, particularly Transocean, as being primarily to blame, while accepting BP as ultimately 'responsible' in the sense defined by the US Environmental Pollution Act of 1990. The BP report names eight failures, of which seven can be attributed to sub-contractors. The National Commission report highlighted nine causal factors, that were very similar to those BP identified, but placed the blame 'at BP's door' for seven or possibly eight of these.

From a media perspective, the focus of the 'story' changed over the considerable period in which it was covered by news outlets, and these myriad aspects of the story make it of particular interest for research, as the crisis is shown in the media to have resonance from a number of socio-cultural perspectives. The search for the eleven missing men was abandoned within a few days, and Tony Hayward and his team expressed their deep condolences for the tragic loss of life. Crisis teams, both technical and communications, were assembled immediately, and work on both fronts carried on day and night. There was significant uncertainty about controlling the oil spill; the rig was working in deeper water than had been attempted before, and there had been so many equipment failures in the lead up to the explosion, that standard options for containment were no longer available. From the onset of the crisis, Tony Hayward insisted personally on being the face and voice of BP during this crisis period (Bergin, 2011: 228). The BP communications team was trying to control speculation, but had limited information to impart, and journalists working on the story at the time recount the frustration within the media community as questions at press conferences were heavily restricted. These restrictions had the outcome that journalists sought interpretations from a range of sources. After a week of daily press releases concerning the efforts to block the oil spill, Quarter 1 financial results for BP were issued. Some of the news stories mentioned the financial results in passing, while financial reports and business pages mentioned the oil spill in terms of its likely impact on the business health of the company.

The Deepwater Horizon oil well was finally capped in July of 2010 after twelve weeks of oil spillage. In September 2010 Tony Hayward was forced to resign, owing to concerns about his management of the spill, and his handling of the media. He was replaced as CEO by American Robert Dudley, previously head of BP's joint Russian venture TNK-BP. BP accepted legal responsibility for the spill, that is that in a specific legal sense they accepted that they were liable for clean-up and other compensation costs. With the co-operation of local agencies, they co-ordinated a significant clean-up operation. Compensation mechanisms were set in motion for individuals and communities affected by the spill, and compensation disputes, as well as more positive stories, were the focus of much media coverage. Compensation payments ran concurrently with legal proceedings to determine the causes of and specific responsibility for the spill. The results of BP's own investigation into the incident were published in September 2010 (BP incident investigation team, 2010), and those of the National Commission on the BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill and Offshore Drilling were published the following January (2011). Apart from their different readings of the 'facts' mentioned above, the tone and presentation of the two reports are substantially different. The BP report (BP incident investigation team, 2010) reads something like a UK Government report, using plain language that suggests objectivity. The National Commission Report from the US, in contrast (National Commission on the BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill and Offshore Drilling, 2011), is given an informal title ('Deep Water'), is illustrated with non-technical photographs and is dedicated on the first page to those who died and their families. These two texts on their own provide an early insight to how even broad agreement on the 'facts' of the case can give rise to significantly different discursive constructions of the crisis.

Once clean-up operations in the Gulf were finished, the waters of the Gulf and its wildlife continued to be monitored by BP and other US agencies. The costs of the clean-up and compensation, estimated at over $40bn by March 2014, as well as the sale of assets to fund them, left BP in a fragile financial position, exacerbated by falling oil and gas prices in early 2012. Legal claims still continue to be made at the time of writing in 2014. BP entered into several high-profile sponsorships, most notably as an official partner of the London 2012 Olympic Games and as sponsor of the World Shakespeare Festival.

## 1.2 The argument of this thesis

### 1.2.1 My research journey

My approach to this research project was data-driven, that is, I started my investigation of media coverage of Deepwater Horizon by experimentally selecting and closely reading relevant media texts in order to conceive and develop an appropriate research methodology. As I developed a methodology, I continued to read texts, raise hypotheses about significant language patterns and refine my research approach. This early iterative interplay between inductive and deductive processes had the result that the work did not always follow the more typical pattern of a research thesis (where a study of the literature suggests a gap in research, that can be addressed through relevant methods of studying a particular data set). In the course of writing this thesis, I found that I needed to take certain account of my findings in choosing what to present as background support, particularly in my literature review and methodology chapters. I explain my reasoning in more detail here.

My initial approach to the research topic was broad. I intended to explore the media coverage of the BP Deepwater Horizon events with no preconceptions, rather investigating the data according to a bottom-up approach and seeking language patterns as they emerged from the texts. I intended to use discourse analysis methods in the widest sense, as 'accounts of regularities of various kinds which can be made to be apparent in texts, as signs of social (or social-psychological) organizations which are manifest in the text.' (Cobley, 2001: 184). This meant that the starting point was the data themselves. Full details of my methodological process are shown Chapter 3, but I began with a preliminary close reading and re-reading of the texts, noting potential language patterns for analysis. A second stage of preliminary analysis refined the initial observations to a list of patterns that appeared to be significant, showing changes, expected or unexpected, or lack of (expected) change. This allowed for three important decisions in my research process. One related to methodological detail: I was able to pinpoint the specific types of research paradigms (qualitative and semi-quantitative) and analysis tools (grammatical analysis, rhetorical analysis and so on) that would be appropriate to investigate the patterns I had identified. The second was a hypothesis for exploration – the 'linguistic picture' at different time points seemed to me to have strong correspondence with a categorisation more usually relevant to the study of semiotics. Thirdly, my concern to explore how the detailed patterns I was seeing related to social organization (as proposed by Cobley, above) suggested another conceptualisation from the field of semiotics. This was derived primarily from the work of Barthes (1972, 1974, 1977) and explored the

interplay between the sign (in this case written language), the codes or systems within which signs are organised, the myths inherent in social expression, and the ideologies that promote the myths. Each of the significant 'language features' that I had identified related to a level of representation, and as a whole, my discourse analysis tools served to place these features within a semiotic framework.

This preliminary analysis and early reading provided a focus for my work. However, it also entailed that I would need to make decisions about what was relevant to my introduction and literature review, based on my research process. Therefore, and perhaps unusually, I have deliberately directed my literature review to align with some of the findings of my research. In the first place, I have structured the literature review according to a semiotic framework, as this will be relevant to the exploration of my hypothesis. Then, rather than covering research on a wide range of linguistic phenomena, I have discussed only those nine features of language that I decided to analyse after my preliminary immersion in the data. It would have been possible to present these early chapters in such a way that the final outcome of my research remained hidden until revealed in the last chapters, but I judged that this approach would lack focus and clarity.

### 1.2.2 The structure of this thesis

As outlined in my comments above, Chapter 2 provides an overview of relevant research. I discuss initially the concept that our perception of the world is only mediated through language, and how phenomena such as the BP Deepwater Horizon crisis are constructed through being spoken and written about. I then discuss research on how the mass media offer particular representations of 'reality' that are constrained by their own organisations and practices. Chapter 2 continues with an overview of the study of semiotics and the key theories of the two most influential schools of thought. There follows a consideration of language as sign, and how it is socially organised into codes, how it operates at a second level of signification in myth, and the operation of ideologies through myths. Within these sections, I cover the nine main areas of language that I shall go on to analyse in detail. Chapter 2 ends with the research questions for this thesis. Chapter 3 outlines the principles and process of my methodology for analysis, covering in detail the recursive approach I have alluded to earlier in this introduction. Chapter 4 is an introductory chapter for the data analysis – it presents a semi-quantitative investigation of my data set, providing a context within which the close text analysis can be located. This chapter describes the nature of the data set – what publications

the texts are drawn from, their country of origin, the genres of media texts to which they belong and the salience of the BP story within the texts. Chapters 5 to 7 cover the main analysis of linguistic features. The data comprise three data sets, one drawn from 2010, which is analysed in Chapter 5, one from 2011, analysed in Chapter 6, and one from 2012, analysed in Chapter 7. In each case, the nine language features, identified in the Methodology chapter, are explored for presence, frequency and function in context. As the analysis progresses, a picture is built up of the changing representations of the business crisis at different stages – how does each feature behave over the years, and what patterns emerge? Chapter 8 discusses the findings, reviewing how each of the data sets reveals a particular representation of the Deepwater Horizon events, and considering what patterns are evident throughout the data sets. I then propose a framework within which the BP story can be understood as constructed to have social meaning. Chapter 9 offers conclusions and places this work within the context of scholarship in semiotics and discourse analysis, as well as discussing implications for understanding business crisis representation.

# 2 Literature Review

This chapter presents an epistemological overview of scholarship in two main areas related to this project which investigates how the BP Deepwater Horizon crisis has been constructed in the media. The first section (2.1) concerns the relationship between representation and versions of reality. This thesis is written following a social constructionist view of language, according to which versions of reality are constructed by means of representations in verbal language (and other forms of communication). Scholarship on the constructionist view is reviewed in Section 2.1.1, while the more specific practices and constraints of media representation are explored in Section 2.1.2.

The second, and closely-related, topic, is how meaning is constructed through signs, which is the enterprise of semiotics, and Sections 2.2-2.6 cover literature in this area. My focus in this thesis is primarily on *language* as a sign for making meaning. However (to pre-empt my findings for the sake of the relevance of my literature review, see Section 1.2.1), my findings will point to an analogy between the linguistic representation of the BP crisis and *visual signs*. In order to make sense of this analogy, I will address the study of both linguistic and visual sign systems. Sections 2.3 to 2.6 are set out according to a semiotic heuristic (Bignell, 2002; Chandler, 2007) that will reflect my approach to the study of my data, namely a micro-linguistic textual analysis within a socio-cultural context. This heuristic proposes a hierarchy of potential meaning that moves from the individual *sign*, to the cultural *codes* by which signs are organised, to the consideration of *myth* or the shared understandings readers bring to texts, that reflect the dominant ideas and beliefs of the time and place in which the texts are produced. The broadest level is that of *ideology* which concerns the interests and power relations implicated in the creation and perpetuation of myths. These four levels together allow for a consideration of the linguistic representation of the BP crisis as a culturally-situated artefact. Finally, Section 2.7 sets the research questions for this thesis.

## 2.1 The representation of social phenomena

### 2.1.1 The construction of social phenomena through language

In order to explore how the Deepwater Horizon crisis has been *constructed* in the media, I am asserting that this thesis will be written according to a constructionist view of reality. For the

last 150 years philosophers, anthropologists and social scientists have questioned the adequacy of the positivist, rational, objectivist approaches that have characterised research into the natural sciences, for the investigation of social phenomena (Harrington, 2005; Turner, 1988). Those areas of linguistic study that take a constructionist and interpretivist approach, such as pragmatics and critical linguistics, are based in traditions of anthropology that argue for contextualised explanations of social phenomena from the individual's perspective. In particular they have drawn upon the work of Goffman (1959) on performing social roles and Garfinkel (1967) on the study of ethnomethodology, and the constructionist approach is now the dominant paradigm of language research. Very broadly put, it holds that language (in all its multiple realisations), rather than being a descriptive tool that represents an objective external reality, is the only means we have to conceptualise and express experience, and so is intricately, inseparably bound up with realising that experience. As Coupland & Jaworski (2001: 145-6) write:

> Language, as a social phenomenon, is both a product and a reflection of the values and beliefs of the society that employs it. Thus, the construction of any message designed to represent some reality necessarily entails decisions as to which aspects of that reality to include, and then decisions as to how to arrange those aspects. Each of the selections made in the construction of a message carries its share of these ingrained values, so that the reality represented is simultaneously socially constructed.

This particular emphasis on the primacy of language as the medium through which versions of reality are created has led to language becoming a principal object of study not only for linguists but also those in other fields, particularly various branches of psychology (e.g. Billig, 1987; Burr, 2003; Collier, 1998; Potter & Wetherell, 1987) sociology and business. Areas of business research that have acknowledged the centrality of language in constructing realities, or how we 'talk organizations "into existence"' (Cornelissen, 2007: 81) include organisation studies (e.g. Al-Amoudi & Willmott, 2011; Milne et al., 2006) and leadership and management studies (e.g. Cornelissen & Harris, 2010; Cornelissen, 2007; Grint, 2005).

However, to present language as the prime medium for representation is not necessarily to vouch for its adequacy. Butchart (2011: 294) suggests that events (particularly unexpected, unprecedented events) are impossible to know, measure or represent both because they cannot be anticipated, and because they are never 'closed':

> the event [is] a phenomenon that is unknowable in all of its parts, and thus immeasurable in its magnitude (the historical event gives too much to be fully

> synthesised). By imposing itself – landing by surprise for example – the event cannot be anticipated, thus cannot be aimed at or measured. (2011: 294)

Butchart posits a '"missing link" between word, object and concept' which means that representation will always fall short of capturing the event. This leads, he argues, to either an excess or a lack of meaning-making signs in the case of unusual events.

If adopting the broad principles of a constructionist view is no longer unusual or contentious in sociology, psychology, business studies or the study of language, still the boundary lines between any kind of material reality and a discursive representation of it are set at very different points for different scholars. It is particularly necessary for me to be clear about my own conception of material reality relating to the Deepwater Horizon and its aftermath, as I will go on to discuss in detail the theoretical relationship between the representation of the events and its real-world referents. Baudrillard (1994) presents one extreme view. He expresses in an essay a denial of the reality of the First Gulf War, arguing that the visualisation or imagining of the war *preceded* the war itself, thus rendering the war a simulacrum (as though it were imagined into being). Although I will go on to draw on Baudrillard's concept of simulacrum later in my argument, I do not wish to argue alongside Baudrillard for an entirely subjectively-conceived reality. I have found the distinction made by Edwards (1997), and further explored and clarified by Edley (2001) to be helpful. (It should be noted that these authors are writing about social constructionism from the perspective of discursive psychology.) They propose a distinction between *ontological* and *epistemic* forms of social constructionism. In this line of argument, a material reality can exist but not be fully known or understood separately from the constructing processes of language. As Edwards notes (1997: 47-8), 'In discursive psychology, the major sense of 'social construction' is epistemic; it is about the constructive nature of *descriptions*, rather than of the entities that (according to descriptions) exist beyond them' (emphasis in original).

What this view means for the conduct of my research is that I accept the material reality of the Deepwater Horizon explosion, the shocking injury and loss of life, and the consequent environmental damage, but not that these phenomena can be understood through any other than the value-laden medium of language. My research will concern the version of reality constructed through one particular language filter – that of the English-speaking news media at selected time points after the events.

### 2.1.2 The construction of social phenomena by the media

This research study will draw upon news media texts that cover the BP Deepwater Horizon events, and I next consider the environment in which media writing is produced, and the generic conventions encountered in texts. Kress (1983: 43) presents the meaning-making job of the news media as both similar to that of any individual, and different in terms of the reach of its influence. On the process of integrating 'real world' information into the ideological systems that underpin media institutions, he writes:

> This process involves the deletion and classification of events and their restructuring, reclassification and evaluation in the reports which the media present. In that respect they do not differ from any individual who is trying to make sense of the world, in accordance with a given ideology or set of ideologies. Their political effect arises from the fact that the media attempt to make sense of the world for others, namely the consumers of media products.

The field of news media discourse, encompassing the particular circumstances, constraints, day-to-day practices and language usages of the news media that give rise to differing constructions of reported phenomena, has been widely investigated in academic research. I will review this research in three main areas – *influences*, including proprietorial, political and financial constraints; *practices*, including collection and selection of information, writing and editing; and *language* – which refers to specific language usages. Note that I use the word 'publication' as a shorthand for any news media outlet, whether a newspaper, news website, online blog, newsletter or television news programme.

*Influences*

Fowler (1991) and others give accounts of the many stakeholders involved in producing news articles, from the news outlet proprietors, editors, journalists and other staff, to those routinely consulted about affairs in the public eye (politicians, business representatives, non-commercial organisations, community representatives, the police and so on) and those only consulted expediently (for example, eyewitnesses and victims of crime). Of these, some will have greater and more regular access to 'voice' (Blommaert, 2005) than others, and it follows that these will have a greater influence on the way the story is eventually presented for public consumption. Van Dijk (1996: 86) summarises:

> Most obvious and consequential are the patterns of access to the mass *media:* who has preferential access to journalists, who will be interviewed, quoted and described in news reports, and whose opinions will thus be able to influence the public? That is,

> through access to the mass media, dominant groups also may have access to, and hence partial control over the public at large. (emphasis in original)

Accounts of influence outside and inside publications focus on money and political interest, or both. Proprietors and editors of newspapers may have an overt political stance that is made clear to their reading public (van Dijk, 1996), although what this means in terms of the web of connections between the publication and other interested parties is less clear. Also less obvious is the influence of advertisers, usually a major source of income for mass-media publications. Advertisers buy space in publications whose readership and stated values already fit their own, but researchers have argued that there is evidence that their money buys a degree of influence over content (Roberts & McComb, 1994), and it is certainly the case that the perceived behaviour of publications affects advertising spend, as the demise of the News of the World in the UK after phone-hacking scandals shows (Keeble & Mair, 2012). Touching on economic factors and the priority given to advertising, Cotter (2010: 193) writes of the 'news hole' – namely 'what is open to editorial content – news stories – after the advertising has been positioned'.

Other influence on content and language use has been shown to come from pressure groups, PR agencies, and corporate communications departments, all of whom have close relationships with the media as part of their function (e.g. Burt, 2012). Jacobs has shown convincingly (1999, 2000a) how organisational skills in writing press releases directly affect the likelihood of uptake and extent of reproduction of the given wording. (Corporate press releases are generally publicly available as data for comparison to researchers undertaking studies of media texts. This is certainly the case for BP.) McLaren-Hankin (2007) has demonstrated how naming practices in press releases and finished articles can, however, diverge in the event of a crisis. Given the diversity of stakeholders attempting to put pressure on content, the influence of peers and colleagues on journalists can be overlooked. Scollon (1998: 5) contends that journalists largely orient their writing towards other journalists:

> The primary social interactive purposes of journalists are to write for other journalists, to position themselves among those journalists in relationship to the newsmakers on the one hand and the owners of the media on the other.

Scollon makes the argument that we cannot treat the news interaction with readers in the same way as other interactions such as conversations. This throws emphasis on the community of practice (Wenger, 1998) at the point of production.

The role of the reading public and its relationship with individual publications has been a topic of academic interest. In iterative fashion, media publications both orient to and constitute the attitudes of their readership (Bignell, 2002; Cotter, 2010). For many years, this relationship was one-sided, with readers/listeners/viewers having limited opportunity to respond to media content and tone. In 1996 (p86) van Dijk wrote 'Except for letters to the editor, the public generally has passive media access only as readers or viewers'. Letters pages have been routinely positioned as separate and distanced from the 'main' news stories (Bazerman, 2000; Wahl-Jorgensen, 2002). Wahl-Jorgenson argues that letters pages can serve to pay lip-service to democratic engagement by newspapers, while diminishing their perceived value alongside 'news'. Cook et al. (2006) show how the dominant views of newspapers (in this case on GM foods) are reflected in full-length articles whereas opposing views are presented in letters pages, and so feature less prominently. However, new forms of digital communication – increasing in line with the significant fall in the sales of print newspapers – have allowed much greater access to response for individual readers, who are encouraged to comment via Twitter, Facebook and online news forums, as well as having opportunities to reach huge audiences, at least in principle, through personal blogs and their own social networking offer. This has turned at least some of the reading public into the writing public, and many journalists have responded to the new opportunities this has created, particularly in opinion pieces, where their interchange of views with their readership simulates (although is not in fact) a conversational structure. Nevertheless, Schultz (2000: 217) argues that there is a widening gap between the 'information rich' and the 'information poor' in terms of the access of some groups to new technologies. Lack of availability of new technologies, often in already disadvantaged groups, can have the outcome that certain groups are not able to share the increasing access to 'voice', or participate in the interactive possibilities that new technologies afford.

*Practices*

The language of news media texts cannot be separated from the context in which they are produced, and this study of how a particular story comes to be constructed needs to take account of the writing and editing practices that constrain news writing, from the collection and selection of information, to the organisation of stories to meet the particular news cycles and space constraints of the publication. Such time and space considerations might range from the daily cycle of a print newspaper with its relatively regular number of pages, to a 24-hour TV channel, to a news website with regularly updated content and space considerations

that are only limited by writing resources. Galtung & Ruge (1973) have shown that, given that news outlets need to select what is included in publications (they cannot cover everything), then certain characteristics make some stories far more likely to be considered 'newsworthy' than others. The authors identified twelve main criteria for 'newsworthiness', many of which were relevant to the case of the BP Deepwater Horizon explosion. Among the twelve criteria are: frequency (although the aftermath of the BP explosion was lengthy, the initial events and the varying attempts to control the spill provided fresh 'sub-stories' to suit the daily cycle of newspapers); threshold (the size or intensity of an event): unambiguity (in relation to news codes rather than understanding the event itself – the BP explosion was understood as a catastrophic event, even as its causes and outcomes remained in doubt); meaningfulness (for the UK a UK connection, for example, as in the involvement of BP); unexpectedness; continuity; reference to elite nations (the US) and reference to something negative (such as disasters). Based on Galtung & Ruge's criteria, the BP story was an obvious candidate for being reported. The larger point is that what is considered news is not naturally pre-determined, but selected and prioritised according to journalistic codes (Section 2.1.2, p23). These codes are culture-specific, and reflect the ideologies of politics, power and social agreement that are at play within large institutions like media publications. For example, one of the ways in which social order is defined and maintained is in the making 'other' of what is seen as 'deviant' behaviour (Galtung & Ruge, 1973), and the identification of different 'others', for example single mothers or immigrant communities. Stories about 'deviant' behaviour are designated newsworthy for their ideological social purpose. While story-selection procedures are broadly shared by the media (a story such as the BP events would be likely to appear in most news publications) they also vary by publication – tabloids and quality newspapers regularly choose different lead stories (Bignell, 2002), or select different aspects of the stories they both report on.

Far from compiling information for 'news' stories from scratch, news organisations have at their disposal a complex, ongoing network of information sources. These include press releases from corporations and institutions and news agencies such as Reuters and Agence France Presse which are positioned as neutral and unaffiliated in their standpoint. Agencies distribute news stories via newswires to other news organisations, mainly newspapers, television and radio. The customer publication may use the output in full or in part, so repeated forms of words in different publications are common. Other sources include the publication's own reporters 'on the ground' in various locations at home and abroad, who often initiate the coverage of 'breaking news', as well as contacts in business, Parliament, the

police, pressure groups, universities and other groups and institutions. Bignell (2002: 88) calls these:

> "accessed voices" to whom the media have access and who expect access to the media. The discourses of these groups therefore become the raw material for the language of news stories, since news language is parasitic on their discursive codes and ideological assumptions.

As these relationships develop, some of the contacts develop considerable journalistic skills themselves, with business communications departments writing press releases in such a way that they can be used almost unaltered (Jacobs, 1999), universities developing a sense of what lies within a theoretical piece of research that makes it an item of general interest (Baxter, 2014) and the police finding ways of using media access to the public that can contribute to the effectiveness of their own work.

Some of the most interesting work in writing and editing practices has taken an ethnographic approach to 'tracking' the life cycle of articles, and looking at what selections, deletions and other changes are made in the process and why. Cotter (2010) gives a comprehensive account, including in particular the role of the story meeting in '[d]eciding what's fit to print' (p88). She argues that these meetings are a less visible, but potentially more revealing reflection of a publication's priorities and values than the editorial pages. Van Hout and Macgilchrist (2010) present another such case study, and find that 'framing' decisions, that is the selection and emphasis of certain information elements at the expense of others, can be due as much to technical (space) constraints as to ideological considerations.

*Language*

Representation choices in the news media concern how information is communicated once selected, and these linguistic choices can function to emphasise, de-emphasise, alter and omit social actors and actions (Kress, 1983; van Leeuwen, 2005). Studies on the collection, writing and editing practices discussed above overlap with research into specific language usages within media and news writing. Most research into this topic adopts a broadly critical perspective on the language studied, and writers who work within the field of Critical Discourse Analysis have found media texts to be a particularly productive data source for the study of the exercise and maintenance of power. Key works on the language of the media from this critical perspective include Fairclough (1995, 2000), van Dijk (1985, 1988) and Fowler (1991). A recent challenge to the assumption of manipulative intent in the press has been made by Martin (2004) and Macgilchrist (2007), who argue that some media pieces challenge

and reframe dominant ideologies in a way that runs counter to expectation. They call this enterprise 'Positive Discourse Analysis'. Alongside these works which offer a broad perspective on media discourse itself, sit diverse research projects on particular news stories, which take these as case studies to demonstrate how a range of discourse features construct versions of reality. Topics for study have included such diverse subjects as the discourses surrounding the discussion of genetically-modified foods (Cook, 2004; Cook et al., 2004; Cook et al., 2009), the diachronic study of European crises in the media over a 50-year period (Krzyźanowski, 2009), a pharmaceutical company scandal (McLaren-Hankin, 2007) and the St Paul's riot in Bristol (Potter & Reicher, 1987).

Most analysis of the language of specific news articles, or of a number of articles that follow a particular news story, is presented as illustrative of language within the genre 'news writing'. An overview of genre, including a review of media genres is found later in this chapter (Section 2.4.2.1, p45), but it is important to emphasise here that any study of the language of the media only makes sense in the context of its genres and sub-genres. Media language is usually also the product of many voices (Van Hout & Macgilchrist, 2010). These will almost certainly be those of the journalist and sub-editor, but can, as discussed above, include interviewees, directly or indirectly quoted, or other voices that are partly or wholly unattributed, arising from general debates, background research, and written input from interested parties. This form of intertextuality in the media is explored in work such as Bednarek (2006), Oliveira (2004) and Macgilchrist (2007). Studies of intertextuality in news articles explore the extent to which journalists can converge around ways of presenting information (for example naming practices), partly because so many of their sources are shared, and much of their writing is drawn from others' previous work on the same news item. Ready access to global accounts both in print and on television increases the resources that are available for journalists to draw on, as source texts to be either endorsed or challenged. Other work on intertexts considers the extent to which writers variously align themselves with, or distance themselves from, others' texts and voices using speech presentation strategies, modality resources (Roberts et al., 2008) and the Appraisal System (Martin & White, 2005; White, 1997).

Despite the frequent use of shared resources mentioned above, the lexis used by tabloid and broadsheet newspapers has been found to be specific not only to each format (Conboy, 2007) but also to individual publications, through the imposition of style guides (Cameron, 1995; Cotter, 2010). Each publication will identify with a certain audience and set of values, and will select newsworthy items and language usages appropriate to this positioning. Tabloid

newspapers use a more oral and conversational style (Bignell, 2002; Fowler, 1991), marked by contractions, slang, idioms, nicknames, indications of audible stress such as italics or bold type and a restricted set of vocabulary, which, while not always representing its readers' own language use, is recognisable and shared. The kind of wordplay used in tabloids, such as alliteration and puns, is different from that used in 'quality' newspapers, which often favour metaphor. Bignell concludes that the connotations of the oral style are familiarity, camaraderie and entertainment. 'Quality' newspapers on the other hand tend to use a style that connotes authority, formality and seriousness. Vocabulary and structures belong to a more 'written' and formal register, with longer sentences and no creative misspelling. Quality newspapers, through their patterns of modality and personal pronouns, are more likely to give an impression of objectivity and even-handedness in contrast to the impression of subjectivity and shared values given by tabloids.

Even within one newspaper type the stories that are presented as 'hard news' will have a different set of linguistic conventions from 'soft news' stories, and I outline some of these distinctions by media sub-genre in Section 2.4.2.1, p45. Because language usage by newspaper type (e.g. tabloid and quality) and by media sub-genre (e.g. hard and soft news) can be so varied, the concept of 'the language of news' in the corpus-based work of Biber et al. (1999) has been challenged (e.g. Landert, 2014) for being so broad as to be unhelpful as an explanatory category.

Nevertheless, a degree of *standardisation* of language across publications is still evident. One aspect of language shared by both tabloid and quality newspapers is highly emotional lexis. White (1997: 108) discusses the tension between an 'objective' media perspective, and the use of such lexis (e.g. 'rage', 'trail of destruction') which he calls a 'semantics of intensification'. Conboy (2007: 108) shows how repeated forms of words activate an understanding of shared values and ideologies – he uses the example 'our boys' to describe British soldiers on active duty – that sets them within a discourse of patriotism. Cotter (2010) explains how reports of ongoing news stories 'recycle' language expressions used in previous news reports: she calls these formulations 'boilerplate' (2010: 171). The use of press releases and newswires encourages repetition of the same, readily-available wording.

This section presents only a limited overview of influences, practices and language in media writing, but is intended to illustrate that news media texts are both highly *disparate*, yet also in some ways relatively *circumscribed* in terms of their representation: by external technical, political and financial considerations, by space and time constraints, by a very strong set of

generic expectations and by the demands of collaborative processes. As Cotter (2010: 192) writes:

> News discourse is rule-governed, routinized, and follows on from profession-specific norms and routines. Journalistically, standardization involves the rules of writing for the appropriate modality ... the newsgathering conventions of the profession ... and the proliferation of core journalistic ideals such as balance of sources, attribution of sources, and responsiveness to audience.

It is therefore legitimate to propose that a study of sets of media texts, however apparently disparate, will be revealing in terms of a socially-shared understanding of world events.

## 2.2 A semiotic approach

### 2.2.1 The study of semiotics

I set out in my introduction (Section 1.2.1, p17) the reasoning for taking the principles of semiotics as a framework for my consideration of the language of media representation of the BP Deepwater Horizon events. Semiotics has been developed as a field of study over the last century, and foregrounds the concept that our experience of the world is primarily mediated by signs of all kinds, of which language is only one. A sign is any form of representation, or as Peirce (1931-58, 2.228) puts it, 'something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity'. (Note: I will follow the convention in referring to Peirce's work of using paragraph rather than page references). Following this broad definition, the study of signs can offer us a comprehensive way of studying how representation makes meaning. As Chandler (2001: np) writes:

> Semiotics provides us with a potentially unifying conceptual framework and a set of methods and terms for use across the full range of signifying practices, which include gesture, posture, dress, writing, speech, photography, film, television and radio.

The study of these signifying practices has not developed as a single strand. In the early and mid-20$^{th}$ century, two different movements developed, one in France centred around the work of Ferdinand de Saussure, that concerned itself primarily with *language* as a sign system, and that de Saussure labelled 'semiology'. The other originated in the USA, and was based on the work of Charles S. Peirce. Peirce's 'sem[e]iotics' also gave an account of visual signs, and was rooted in the study of philosophy. Later developments in the field have included Social Semiotics, which lays particular emphasis on locating the study of signs in their cultural contexts (Hodge & Kress, 1988; van Leeuwen, 2005), studies in multimodality (Kress & van

Leeuwen, 2001, 2006; Machin, 2007) and visual social semiotics (Harrison, 2003), which also take a social semiotic perspective. I will focus in this literature review on the European work in Semiology and Peirce's work on Semiotics, because these are the two areas from which I will draw the concepts relevant to this thesis.

### 2.2.2 Semiology – de Saussure, Barthes, Baudrillard

The European strand of semiotic work took as its starting point the work of Ferdinand de Saussure (1959) who was concerned to identify deep structures in language. He understood language as an arbitrary system in which signs carry meaning only in their relation to other signs. This entails that signs themselves have no fixed meaning, but meaning derives from their differentiation from other signs. To explicate the fact that day-to-day language can show extreme variation yet remain comprehensible, de Saussure posited the existence of an underlying and complete system for each language – the *langue* – which finds varied expression in the day-to-day usages of speakers – the *parole.* In his work on signs, de Saussure proposed a dyadic model, consisting of a *signifier*, or the form taken by the sign, and the *signified* or the concept referred to by the signifier. He did not concern himself with the 'real world' referents that signs represent – both signifier and signified are psychological constructs (Appignanesi & Garratt, 1995; Chandler, 2007). De Saussure's own work primarily focused on language as a sign system, although the terms *signifier* and *signified* have been appropriated by later semioticians in the discussion of visual, linguistic and other signs.

Barthes continued to explore the concept of the sign, broadening its application considerably from de Saussure's focus on language, to myriad other cultural phenomena and representations. In 'Mythologies' (1972) he proposes that such diverse phenomena as steak and chips, soap powder and the hairstyles of Romans as depicted in films are understood as carrying more than everyday functional meaning, and that such meaning is culturally constructed.

> The starting point of these reflections was usually a feeling of impatience at the sight of the 'naturalness' with which newspapers, art and common sense constantly dress up a reality which, even though it is the one we live in, is undoubtedly determined by history ... I wanted to track down, in the decorative display of *what-goes-without-saying*, the ideological abuse which, in my view, is hidden there. (Barthes, 1972: 11, emphasis in original)

The fact that we think that the meaning of many everyday phenomena remains at a *denotative* or literal level is a concern for Barthes, as he argues that a range of additional meanings are encoded at a *connotative* level, in other words that we bring to our interpretation of signs all the social, cultural and personal associations we have collected and absorbed through our lifetimes. These are the *myths* or 'mythologies' to which the title of his book refers, and he suggests that such cultural myths are commonly perpetuated in the service of particular power interests. The less evident the accumulation of associations becomes, the more ostensibly straightforward yet potentially deceptive is the sign. Barthes calls this process *naturalisation.* This thinking led Barthes in his later work (1974: 9) to suggest that there is no such thing as denotation, as it is impossible to divorce any representation, however neutral-seeming, from the cultural associations with which it has become invested.

> denotation is not the first meaning, but pretends to be so; under this illusion, it is ultimately no more than the *last* of the connotations (the one which seems both to establish and to close the reading), the superior myth by which the text pretends to return to the nature of language, to language as nature (emphasis in original)

Barthes argues here that the more naturalised the meaning ('what-goes-without-saying') the more denotative it appears, and this seemingly circular process of apparently transparent to densely associative and back to apparently transparent meaning, is one that will be critically explored in the rest of this thesis. Barthes' terms are also those that inform the heuristic, discussed in the introduction to this chapter, that is used to organise subsequent sections of this literature review. The different semiotic levels of sign, code, myth and ideology refer to semiotic concepts at levels of increasing abstraction (from micro- to macro- level), and can be directly attributed to the work of Barthes.

The argument that naturalisation is ubiquitous and serves power interests is pursued by Baudrillard (1994), who, in 'Simulacra and Simulation', also explores the topic of representation in late 20$^{th}$ century Western culture. Writing of the 'image' (which covers a broad range of representation types) he identifies four successive phases (1994: 6):

1. It is the reflection of a profound reality
2. It masks and denatures a profound reality *(art imitates life)*
3. It masks the *absence* of a profound reality
4. It has no relation to any reality whatsoever: it is its own pure simulacrum

Baudrillard here presents progressive stages from signs that offer some reflection of reality to signs that refer only to other signs and have no relation to reality at all. In discussing

relationships between simulacra (loosely, 'signs') and 'reality', he draws on concepts of both physical resemblance and authenticity. He alludes in his work to the premodern and modern periods which he identifies as having at least some relationship, however distorted, with the real and original, but his main arguments deal with the nature of late 20th century society, where he suggests that not only are the real and original unrecognisable, but that they have evaporated. To illustrate this argument, Baudrillard draws on a fable told by Borges (1999) in which, in an ancient Empire, 'the Cartographers Guilds struck a Map of the Empire whose size was that of the Empire, and which coincided point for point with it' (Borges, 1999: 325). Eventually the map rotted away, leaving only a few remaining shards in remote places. Baudrillard claims that we have reached a stage where it is actually the *territory itself* that has crumbled away, leaving only the *map* as a representation of a reality that no longer exists.

Baudrillard makes a further crucial point about simulacra and hyperreality in his well-known discussion of Disneyland. In his view Disneyland fulfils a particular function in the United States:

> Disneyland exists in order to hide that it is the 'real' country, all of 'real' America that is Disneyland ... Disneyland is presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real, whereas all of Los Angeles and the America that surrounds it are no longer real, but belong to the hyperreal order and to the order of simulation. (Baudrillard, 1994: 13)

I understand this to mean that Baudrillard finds the parts of America that are *not* theme parks, are in a fundamental sense *less real* than theme-park America, partly because Disneyland is at least genuine in its acknowledgement that it is a simulation.

Jakobson's extensive body of work in linguistics drew on both that of de Saussure and that of Peirce, and one aspect of his work is of particular significance to this thesis. Jakobson developed de Saussure's thinking on language concerning the two types of relations between signs within a language system. (The binary structure of 'paradigmatic' and 'associative' relations in de Saussure's (1959) terms became better-known as 'paradigmatic' and 'syntagmatic' relations in Jakobson's terms (Chandler, 2007)). Paradigmatic relations are those that are concerned with the selection of a particular type of sign from alternatives to represent a meaning, and syntagmatic relations are concerned with the combination of signs in a systematic (shared, comprehensible) way. Jakobson (2002) was not just concerned with these two sets of relations in terms of how language is 'put together', but further argued that these concepts can be perceived in extended discourses. He suggested that the paradigmatic

axis can be characterised as a 'metaphoric order', relating as it does to selection and substitution, and this order predominates in poetry, lyrical songs and surrealism. He saw the syntagmatic axis as a 'metonymic order', relating to contiguity and association, whose principles are most clearly evident in prose, journalism and realism. Or as White (1973: 33) put it (critiquing the over-simplicity of the concept) 'a romantic-poetic-Metaphorical tradition' and 'a realistic-prosaic-Metonymical tradition'. Simple or not, this fundamental idea offers some insights that are useful to a consideration of different types of journalism, not all of which may be ranged squarely along the metonymic axis.

### 2.2.3 Semiotics – Peirce

Peirce (1931-58) named his own theorisation of the sign 'sem[e]iotics', which became a more widely-used term than 'semiology'. Seeking to encompass all possible instances of representation, he eventually theorised over 59,000 sign types (Cobley & Jansz, 1999: 30). From this extremely complex logic system, only a few of Peirce's taxonomies are regularly drawn upon in current scholarship, and I will discuss here only two key ideas. The first is the Peirce's triadic view of the sign, and the second is his taxonomy of three sign forms – Icon, Index and Symbol – which are ways of expressing three relationships that the sign or representation has with a real-world referent.

Unlike de Saussure's dyadic view, Peirce's view of the sign was triadic: the element he acknowledged in addition to de Saussure's conception was that of some real-world referent, which he termed the *Object*. This referent did not need to be material; it could also be concepts, theories or ideas. Further, Peirce did not presuppose an external reality in which the Object was a fixed, unalterable entity. To define Peirce's Object of the sign, Chandler (2007) uses an elegant analogy of the sign being a labelled box containing the Object – the point being that the Object is only knowable via the sign, remaining, as it does, hidden inside the box. In addition to the *Object*, Peirce considered that the Sign consisted of a *Representamen*, or formal sign (broadly equivalent to de Saussure's *signifier*), and the *Interpretant* (broadly equivalent to de Saussure's *signified*). Peirce (1931-58: 2.228) explains the Interpretant as follows: '[A Sign] addresses somebody, that is, creates in the mind of that person an equivalent sign, or perhaps a more developed sign. That sign which it creates I call the *interpretant* of the first sign'. Cobley & Jansz (1999: 23) explain this as 'the sign in the mind that is the result of an encounter with a sign'. The importance of this way of seeing it, is

that this 'sign in the mind' is then open to further interpretation, creating a further Representamen and so on, in a process that Eco (1976: 69) with reference to the work of Peirce, Barthes and Derrida, calls 'unlimited semiosis', in other words, an endless and unfixable generation of meanings.

Peirce proposed three forms of the sign, depending on their relationship with the Object, and labelled these Icon, Index and Symbol. Prototypically, an *Iconic* sign is one that relates to its Object via a relationship of *likeness* (Peirce, 1931-58: 2.276). It represents the Object by 'looking like' it, as a portrait might its sitter, an engineering diagram its realised article, or the Underground map of London its system of train lines. These representations may be different *kinds* of likeness, but their form is recognisably related to their Object, and all are labelled as Iconic by Peirce. Under the heading of Iconic signs, Peirce also placed the *metaphor*, on the grounds that metaphors posit a relationship of likeness between one entity and another.

An *Indexical* sign is characterised as being in a relationship of *contiguity* with its Object (Peirce, 1931-58: 2.276) rather than a relationship of *resemblance*, as is the case for Iconic signs. Peirce's notion of Indexical signs can be elusive to grasp, as this relationship of *contiguity* can be manifest in a number of different ways (Eco, 1976; Grutman, 2010; Lock, 1997; Sørensen, 2010). Contiguity can take the form of cause-and-effect relations, such as that between smoke and fire or footprints and the presence of a person. It can be realised in metonymic and synecdochic relations, where a part of an entity stands for the whole, or a single instance can stand for an entire class, such as a sign showing a coffee cup with a red line through where the coffee is a metonym for 'all drinks'. Whole-for-part relations are also synecdochic, and thus Indexical, shown in language by expressions such as 'BP announced', where the organisation here stands for a person/people within it. A sign can be Indexical when it points to or indicates the presence of something else, so that arrows and pub signs, for example, are Indexical. These prototypical instances are relatively straightforward, but some signs are more difficult to locate, or show complex relationships with their Object, for example a Jaguar car can be seen as both Index and a Symbol of wealth. A photograph may be regarded as an Icon because it shows a resemblance to its Object, or an Index because it represents a point-to-point correspondence with reality (Chandler, 2007: 38-9). The examples I have cited above are instances of individual signs, but Fowler (1991: 170) goes further to discuss media representations as entire indexical signs, where references to events become 'a shorthand, a metonymy, for an underlying 'it' of a more abstract kind'.

A *Symbolic* sign is one that is related to its Object only arbitrarily and by convention (Peirce, 1931-58: 2.249). It neither looks like the Object, nor is it related diagrammatically, nor is it associated causally or through part-whole relations. It is understood only through social agreement, it has acquired meaning through the development of conventional systems, which have to be learned to make sense. For Peirce, Symbols had meaning through rules and 'laws' rather than through instinct and observation. Words are prototypical Symbolic signs, as they (generally) have no relation to their Object apart from that which has been conventionally agreed. Peirce's view largely accords with that of de Saussure, which is that language is a set of arbitrary, rather than motivated signs. Other Symbolic signs include mathematical symbols or literary or artistic symbols (such as a lamb in a painting, intended to represent innocence).

I describe the definitions above as 'prototypical' because signs need not be (indeed seldom are) pure versions of Icons, Indexes or Symbols. Most Symbols have at root an Icon and/or Index – for example red can be a symbol of 'danger' through convention, but this convention is likely to be based on an association of red with blood, or fire, or the fact that red is a highly visible colour. These associations are primarily in Indexical relationship with the concept 'danger'. Similarly (alphabetically) written signs, which are seen as arbitrary and Symbolic by Peirce's definition, and which de Saussure argued only have meaning in relation to each other, are often originally based on systems of pictograms that have an Iconic basis – for example a tree or a snake (Singleton, 2000). A single sign can be argued as Iconic, Indexical and Symbolic. If I pursue the example of Jaguar: the bonnet ornament on Jaguar cars is Iconic in that it is a direct likeness of the animal, however we attach Indexical associations of strength, power, speed, sleekness and beauty, which we transfer from the animal to the car itself. But we also understand the ornament as a Symbol of the car through the cultural knowledge that the *signifier* 'Jaguar' not only represents the *signified* 'animal' but also 'a car manufacturer'. Further, we might interpret the bonnet ornament as an Index of wealth, or indeed a Symbol of wealth. As mentioned above, writers developing Peirce's trichotomy in the area of metaphor stress the interconnectivity of the three sign forms in creating a metaphor (Abrams, 2002; Haley, 1995; Ponzio, 2010; Sørensen, 2010). As Merrell (2001: 37) writes:

> Now, everything I have written in this section suggests that a sign can be in varying degrees iconic, indexical, and symbolic, all at the same time. A sign's evincing one sign type does not preclude its manifesting some other sign type as well. There are no all-or-nothing categories with respect to signs. As one sign type is, another sign type can become, and what that sign was may become of the nature of the first sign that the second sign now is. Putting things into neat pigeon-holes might allow us some security, but it is a tenuous game, since signs simply cannot stand still. Their incessant

> dance cannot help but whisk us along the semiosic stream, in spite of our stubborn need for stability.

Merrell illustrates that Peirce's three sign modes are separate only in theory: not only can a sign *manifest* more than one sign type, but also one sign type can *become* another. This quality of mutability is potentially significant for my diachronic study of representation.

### 2.2.4 Four levels of semiotic interpretation

As outlined in the introduction to this chapter, I will discuss language from a semiotic perspective at four levels - the individual *sign*, the cultural *codes* by which signs are organised, the consideration of *myth*, and the *ideologies* implicated in myths. These four levels provide a framework within which I can eventually locate the different levels of my text analysis, that range from close examination of the text to a consideration of the discourses that run through them which are connected to the culturally-situated beliefs and attitudes that constitute ideology.

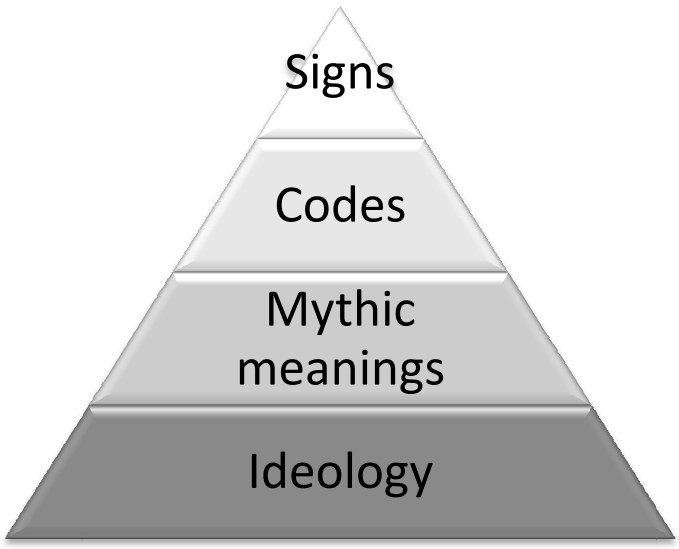


Fig. 2.1: A semiotic heuristic for considering representations

In the sections that follow, I will present an overview of each of the four semiotic levels of language shown in Fig. 2.1, and then, following the practical approach to this literature review discussed in my introduction, I will focus on literature about the specific features of language that I will consider in my analysis.

## 2.3 The level of the sign

### 2.3.1 Language as sign

Verbal language has had more scholarly attention than any other sign type because of its ubiquity, complexity and relative interpretability (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). By interpretability, I mean that verbal language offers a more complex, wider and better agreed potential for meaning than other sign systems. Work in the area of multimodality (e.g. Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001, 2006; Machin & Jaworski, 2006; Machin, 2007) contrasts language with other sign systems. Reviewing the case for regularities of interpretation in visual and other modes, writers have recognised that modes such as typography (van Leeuwen, 2005), colour (Gage, 1999) and still photography (Harrison, 2003) have limitations in the extent to which they can offer agreed meanings, even taking into account cultural understanding and contextual cues. Critiquing Kress & van Leeuwen's (2006) project to outline a 'visual grammar', Machin (2007: 186) argues that photographs, for example, have less clear communicative intention than language, no obvious separate components (with which to form a 'grammar'), an unpredictable set of 'rules' that may or may not be activated in each viewing, and an inability to communicate, say, negatives, conditionals or questions effectively. In other areas, of course, modes other than language have different and possibly richer types of meaning potential – music for example communicates in quite a different way from language (Monelle, 1999).

Exploring the relative meaning potentials in different sign systems, Machin (2007: 186) makes the following distinction between language and still photography: that for language, 'code [is the] first layer of meaning' and for photographs, 'context [is the] first layer of meaning'. In other words language cannot be understood without first knowing the code. What Machin partly alludes to here is the fact that language is a 'doubly-articulated' sign system (Chandler, 2007; Singleton, 2000; van Leeuwen, 2005). The level of first articulation is that of meaningful units (for example words) that can be combined into larger meaningful units according to systems or codes. The level of second articulation is that at which recurrent but meaning*less* units, whose function is to differentiate between higher-level units, can be combined to form units. The result of double articulation is a great economy of meaning possibilities derived from a restricted and finite number of 'building blocks'. Language can be considered a sign at various points in this process. Individual words are signs in that they have a *signifier* (the written word or spoken sound pattern) and a *signified* their 'meaning' or mental concept in context. However, larger stretches of language can also be signs.

> As a rule we do not communicate through isolated signs but rather through groups of signs, through **organized masses that are themselves signs**. In language everything boils down to differences but also to groupings. The mechanism of language, which consists of the interplay of successive terms, resembles the operation of a machine in which the parts have a reciprocating function even though they are arranged in a single dimension. (de Saussure, 1959: 128, my emphasis)

The implication of de Saussure's assertion above is that language can function as a sign at different levels – that individual words, groups of words and individual texts are all signs, and by extension, that sets of texts may be considered as signs.

### 2.3.2 Language and Peircean sign forms

*Language as a Symbolic system*

In the terms of Peirce's definitions of Iconic, Indexical and Symbolic signs, language is considered to be a Symbolic system on the grounds that its relation to its Object is arbitrary and unmotivated, a product of conventional systems or rules that can vary according to culture. (This observation is to be distinguished from the idea of 'symbolic language' which is language that deviates from the naturalistic, using general and literary symbols (Wales, 1989: 446).) This notion of arbitrariness is most easily illustrated by the fact that different words are used in different languages to denote the same referent. De Saussure, although he did not use the word 'symbol', shows that meaning is made within a language system only by reference to other elements in the same system – so 'cat' differs from 'rat', '*Katze*' from '*Ratte*', '*chat*' from '*rat'*.

> Everything that has been said up to this point boils down to this: in language there are only differences. ... Whether we take the signified or the signifier, language has neither ideas nor sounds that existed before the linguistic system, but only conceptual and phonic differences that have issued from the system. (de Saussure, 1959: 120)

Peirce wrote less extensively about language as a system than did de Saussure, but he specified that in terms of his sign forms it was Symbolic: 'All words, sentences, books and other conventional signs are symbols' (Peirce, 1931-58: 2.292). Yet the idea of the complete conventionality of language has been challenged in certain aspects. Writers have argued that there are ways in which language is not a completely arbitrary system, and can be conceived as either Iconic or Indexical, and I discuss literature on these perspectives below.

*Iconicity in language*

In my earlier discussion of the multiple forms of signs under the Peircean system, where iconic origins can be detected within Symbolic representations, I mentioned the case of written alphabetic systems that emerged from pictograms that themselves were originally Iconic representations of real-world referents. What appears now to be purely arbitrary – Symbolic – shapes such as letters, may have at root an Iconic representation (Singleton, 2000: 93). As these 'Iconic' pictograms developed to become more stylised, partly because of the practicalities of the materials used, and partly because of the desire to express increasingly complex concepts, they moved in a process from Iconic to Symbolic.

In spoken language, a further challenge to arbitrariness is the case of onomatopoeia, where sounds are intended to represent their Object through a relationship of aural likeness. As a retort to this challenge, de Saussure (1959: 69) pointed to the wide variation in onomatopoeic words within different languages, arguing that 'they are chosen somewhat arbitrarily, for they are only approximate and more or less conventional imitations of certain sounds (cf. English bow-bow and French ouaoua).'. Related to onomatopoeia in the field of literary linguistics, is 'sound symbolism', where 'certain sounds or sound clusters are felt to ENACT or to be in some way appropriate to the meanings expressed' (Wales, 1989: 426). Sounds have been described metaphorically as 'lighter' or 'darker', and this can be used to create particular effects beyond the 'meaning' of the words themselves, particularly in poetry or poetic prose. Rhyme can be said to work in a similar way. While these poetic effects can be argued as both intended and understood, Simpson (2004) points out that they are still contextually determined (for example we read poetry with a heightened expectation of sound symbolism that we may not bring to, say, the reading of a text book). Cook (2001) points to the graphological presentation of words so that they have an Iconic relation to their intended meaning; he discusses this particularly in relation to advertising but it is also evident in some poetry.

At a syntactical level, Iconicity has been argued in various ways (Givón, 1995; Nöth, 2001; Radwańska-Williams, 1994; Simone, 1995). One of the most obvious manifestations of Iconicity in language is word order, where sequential ordering suggests temporal unfolding of events. Cobley & Jansz (1999: 145) use *'veni, vidi, vici*' as an example. Jakobson argues (Caton, 1987: 237) that the form of words often relates directly to meaning in a relationship of likeness. His examples are of Russian verbs, where tense aspects indicating expanded meaning are almost always longer than tense aspects indicating restricted meaning. Similar claims are made in English for, for example, related words such as 'big', 'bigger', 'biggest',

where the longest form indicates the most expansive concept. Similarly, Iconicity has been claimed in the use of grammatical subordination and focus, where the location of information can indicate its importance (Wales, 1989: 226). The examples of Iconicity given above show that the connection between Peirce's category and language and linguistic representation has been researched primarily in terms of phonological, morphological and structural features. That is, researchers have focused on the *form* rather than the *function* of language. Language is held to be iconic if, in its *form*, it somehow 'look[s] like the things it stands for' (Simone, 1995: vii).

*Indexicality in language*

There are various perspectives from which language has been considered Indexical, rather than Symbolic. Jakobson proposes that deictics are in Indexical relation to the speaker, because they have a 'pointing function' indicating time, place, person or specificity, all of which can change with the context of the utterance (Caton, 1987). Jakobson refers to such expressions as 'I', 'you', 'here', 'that' as 'shifters', following Jespersen (1922). I raised earlier (Section 2.2.3, p34) another linguistic realisation of Indexicality, namely that of metonym. As Wales (1989: 297) writes: 'In semiotic terms, metonymy is an indexical sign: there is a directly or logically contiguous relationship between the substituted word and its referent.'. I discuss metonymy in greater detail in Section 2.5.2.1.

The scholarly work outlined above concerning the Indexicality of language (and some of the work on Iconicity), does not deny the fundamental conception of language as primarily Symbolic and arbitrary. Rather, writers are using Indexicality (and Iconicity) as an analogy to certain types of discursive function. So, for example using the metonym 'red tape' and declaring it to be in Indexical relationship with a concept labelled 'bureaucracy' does not deny that the words 'red' and 'tape' are Symbols. The Indexical qualities sit at a different level from the words which are still part of a Symbolic system. Peirce's Icon-Index-Symbol trichotomy has been more widely applied to visual than linguistic signs, but this brief overview shows that it does offer a perspective from which to look at verbal language. Peirce's aim for his logic system was to offer a comprehensive understanding of all types and modes of sign, of which language was just one.

### 2.3.3 Language features at the level of the sign

In my introduction I explained that I would occasionally need to pre-empt the findings that emerged from my inductive analysis in order to offer a relevant literature review. In this section I will focus specifically on three language features at the level of the sign that I will find to be significant. Those analysed features are:

1. Naming practices with respect to events
2. Naming practices with respect to participants
3. Categorisation

When I propose that these language features belong at the level of the 'sign' in my semiotic heuristic, I am using the word 'sign' in a the sense of a 'building block' for greater units of meaning. These 'building blocks' are put together according to systems or 'codes' which are culturally constituted. While this does not deny the possibility of a very broad sense of 'sign' which might comprise a whole text, or even a body of texts, I mean to restrict my definition here to signs as words or groups of words that have yet to be assembled according to a code. The code will be the system (of grammar, or genre for example), and the sign will be the building block in my discussion of language features.

#### *2.3.3.1 Naming practices (events) and naming practices (participants)*

Fowler (1991) discusses how the names and attributions given to both people and events shape how these people and events are understood, and in an exploration of how crises are constructed through language, naming practices are of central interest. Such practices help us to organise our world: 'We manage the world, make sense of it, by categorizing phenomena' (Fowler, 1991: 92). Srivastra & Barrett (1988:34-5) call attention to the fact that the practice of naming entities is not simply organisation for convenience, but can affect action towards the entities:

> The process of giving language to experience is more than just sense-making. Naming also directs actions toward the object you have named because it promotes activity consistent with the related attribution it carries. To change the name of an object connotes changing your relationship to the object and how one will behave in relationship to it because when we name something, we direct anticipations, expectations, and evaluations toward it.

In writing about crises, the importance of naming strategies directed at both the events themselves and the participants involved, has been frequently explored (for example in Butchart, 2011; Lischinsky, 2011; McLaren-Hankin, 2007). Because of their reach, the media

have an important role to play in what events and people come to be called and this can be a site of struggle between the media and organisations' communications teams.

#### *2.3.3.2 Categorisation*

Once an individual or phenomenon is named or labelled, it is much more easily placed into groups of other entities with similar characteristics, in a process of categorisation. The rhetorical device, 'classification', as described by Connor and Lauer (1985: 314-5) 'involves putting the subject into a general class and showing the implications of the subject's membership of that class'. We draw inferences about the subject based on the category in which it is placed. Fowler (1991) examines the importance of categorisation in building consensus, and for organising and managing the understanding of 'reality'.

> Experience is sorted into agreed categories in conversational exchange, and these categories are then the "taken-for-granted" background in ongoing conversation (Fowler, 1991: 58)

The point that these 'taken-for-granted' categories are socially constructed, is made clearly in Foucault's 'The order of things' (1970) where he cites Jorge Luis Borges' hoax classification of animals from a 'Chinese Dictionary'. Borges' classification of animals begins: '(a) those that belong to the emperor, (b) embalmed ones, (c) those that are trained, (d) suckling pigs, (e) mermaids, (f) fabulous ones ...'. The sheer unexpectedness of Borges' groupings is intended to exemplify that our categorisations are not objective or natural, but rather agreed and constantly reinforced through use. The categories commonly used in news writing become a shorthand to positioning individuals and entities, and leading the reader to understand them in particular ways.

> News reporting makes a distinction between the categories associated with hard news (politicians, experts, government representatives, business leaders) and those with soft news (celebrities, 'ordinary' people, occupational groups, minority groups), implying a hierarchy of social positioning ... Categorisation is therefore a powerful way of naturalising social divisions and hierarchies that are the effects of cultural and economic factors, including the institutional conventions of media reporting. (Fulton et al., 2005: 249)

The implication of Fulton et al.'s observation is that the categories they mention are to an extent homogenous, for example in some ways (their warrant to speak, their likely knowledge about certain topics) , 'politicians' can be expected to be a rather homogenous group. Readers are expected to have a shared conception of what a 'politician' is like, built up through media and other texts and this will affect their reading of a particular text.

## 2.4 The level of the code

### 2.4.1 Semiotic codes

This section moves to a different level in the notional hierarchy of semiotic representation to review the concept of 'codes' or systems within which individual signs are organised and understood. Individual signs can only have meaning within a system, and the concept of 'codes' in semiotics refers to the many types of system that provide a framework for our understanding and interpretation of signs.

> Since the meaning of a sign depends on the code within which it is situated, codes provide a framework within which signs make sense. Indeed, we cannot grant something the status of a sign if it does not function within a code. (Chandler, 2001: np)

Codes are specific to places and times, but are widely shared within a culture. Because of this, they can appear entirely natural, and so virtually invisible. They provide a set of 'rules' to aid the interpretation of signs, and in this way they can guide or restrict the understanding of texts. In other words, although multiple interpretations of signs are available, readers are likely to find a 'preferred reading' (Hall, 1980: 124) based on their knowledge of the code within which the sign is presented, as well as other contextual cues. There are not limitless possibilities for interpretation – we interpret according to the codes to which we have access. Chandler (2001: np) suggests a broad taxonomy for codes.

- *Social codes.* Language codes of all kinds, including grammar. Paralanguage, gesture, gaze. Fashion. Behaviour.
- *Textual codes.* Scientific codes, including mathematics. Genre, aesthetic and stylistic codes. Mass media codes, including those applicable to photography, film, newspaper.
- *Interpretative codes.* Perceptual codes (for example of visual perception). Ideological codes such as feminism, capitalism, materialism (and resistant codes: anti-feminism, anti-capitalism and so on).

All three types of code are of interest for this thesis, but it is the first two on which I shall focus in this section of the literature review, leaving ideological codes, which I take to mean the ideological 'lens' through which a text is both written and interpreted, to be discussed in Section 2.6 (the ideological level of representation). Under *textual codes* are the special codes we recognise as belonging to particular genres. The understanding within newspaper

publications of what constitutes a 'newsworthy story', which I mentioned earlier (Galtung & Ruge, 1973), is an example of a genre-specific code. Generic codes can be stylistic, structural or technical, and a discussion of work on *genre* is found in Section 2.4.2.1 below. I also include under 'codes' a discussion of *intertextuality* (Section 2.4.2.2). The implications of intertextual relations are so broad that they can be considered at the levels of sign, code, myth and ideology, but I have chosen to locate my commentary on intertextuality at the level of code. This is because the network of other texts and other voices are just one of the systems or frameworks within which we locate, understand and interpret individual signs. As Chandler writes 'every text and every reading depends on prior codes.' (2001: np). There is also a close relation between genre and intertextuality which justifies them being discussed as interdependent theories. One aspect of intertextuality is the concept that prior texts constitute what we recognise as genre, and created texts serve to construct and modify our future understanding of genre (Bhatia, 2002; Johnstone, 2008). Finally, under *language codes*, Chandler points to systems such as syntax, phonology, prosody and so on, as interpretative frameworks. In line with the practical organisation of my literature review I will discuss one particular language code – *modality* – as a key language feature from my research (Section 2.4.2.3).

### 2.4.2 Language features at the level of the code

#### *2.4.2.1 Genre*

The concept of genre in language texts has been borrowed from that of genre in literature and art. While art forms have long been quite readily labelled as belonging to a certain genre (cartoon, Romantic poetry, detective novel and so on) considerable recent academic attention has been paid to how institutional and other written genres might similarly be identified. Swales (1990), Bhatia (1993) and Dudley-Evans (1994) suggest that genres can be characterised by commonalities across a range of aspects, including purpose, audience, structure, content and features of style. Bhatia's (1993: 13) definition of a genre is typical:

> ... it is a recognisable communicative event characterised by a *set of communicative purposes* identified and mutually understood by the *members of the professional or academic community in which it regularly occurs*. Most often it is *highly structured and conventionalised* with constraints on allowable contributions in terms of their *intent, positioning, form and functional value*. (my emphases)

More recent writing on genre (Bazerman, 2000; Beghtol, 2001; Bhatia, 2002, 2004; Herring & Wright, 2004; Kessler et al., 1997) has expanded the area of scholarly interest from the relatively narrow 'professional or academic' contexts referred to by Bhatia above, to a much wider understanding of genre as a type of text regardless of institutional status.

Commonalities of purpose are partly identified through an understanding of what type of rhetorical act, or 'generic value' (Bhatia, 2002) is realised in a text, for example argument, narrative, description, explanation, instruction, persuasion, evaluation. In the area of news media, two particularly prominent rhetorical acts are those of *description* (in news reports, for example) and *evaluation* (in editorials and letters). Texts that are primarily evaluative might also feature elements of argument, persuasion or instruction. These overarching rhetorical aims will affect the kind of language choices made within texts.

Defining what counts as a genre can be complex: Yates & Orlikowski (1992: 303) point out that genres exist at various levels of abstraction, so, for example, a business letter is of a different order of genre from a letter of recommendation. Bhatia (2004: 59) proposes a comprehensive hierarchy of genre from *genre colony* (his example is promotional genres) to *genre*, defined by specific communicative purpose (for example advertisements, book blurbs and so on) to *sub-genres*, definable by medium (TV, print), and/or product (car, holiday) and/or participants (business travellers, holiday travellers). An equivalent for this current work would be: the *genre colony* of journalism or news writing, the *genres* of news story, editorial, feature and so on, with *sub-genres* by medium (print, radio, TV), 'product' (travel features, movie reviews) and participants (businesspeople, non-professionals). Considering 'newspapers' as a particular type of overarching genre, Hoey (2001) labels these as 'colonies' with embedded 'sub-colonies'. According to Hoey, colonies have the characteristics that they are not in order and do not form continuous prose. They need a framing context (for example a title), they tend to acknowledge either no, or multiple, authors and have components that may be accessed separately, with many components serving the same function.

Despite varying approaches to the study of genre, writers tend to agree that genres are fluid and permeable. There may be prototypical characteristics, and these are isolated and foregrounded in texts such as 'template' letters or CVs, or in spoofs or parodies of film or television genres. However most texts exhibit some generic characteristics while remaining unique. Genres are subject to continuous change. Not only does each instance of a text written in a certain genre serve to construct an ever-changing interpretation of that genre, but new communication needs, new technologies and creative play with generic texts all play a

part in redefining the generic landscape. The fact that the boundaries of genres are permeable is shown in the prevalence of 'genre-mixing' and 'genre-blending'. Genre-mixing is the overlap between genres, for example business leader reports that have both an informative and a motivational function (Prasad & Mir, 2002; Thro, 2009). Genre-blending (although sometimes the two terms are used interchangeably), is arguably a more deliberate use of two or more genres to create a different kind of text. This is common in many areas, for example film (the 'comedy-western', the 'sci-fi thriller') and advertising and business, for example 'advertorials' (Cook, 2001; Fairclough, 1995) and most recently 'advergames' (BBC, 2014). Forms arising from new technologies, such as web pages or blogs, may draw on prior genres, such as newspapers, posters or personal journals, but introduce new characteristics that are appropriate to the medium, the audience and the purpose of the text (Herring & Wright, 2004; Johnstone, 2008).

The importance of the study of genre to this thesis cannot be overstated. In identifying features that may be characteristic of the representation of a crisis, and monitoring their change, I need to be aware that the genres and sub-genres of media writing to which they belong each have their own stylistic characteristics. If the writing genres change, the linguistic characteristics of texts will change. I mentioned earlier the work of Biber et al. (1999) on the register of newspaper language (the other three registers studied were conversation, fiction and academic prose). Biber et al. were able to isolate through corpus analysis a number of features which were characteristic of 'news texts', for example a high use of nouns and prepositional phrases, a low use of pronouns and a high proportion of complex phrases compared with other text types. They found the present tense to be used more than the past tense in news texts: although news items tend to describe past events, they make use of present tense commentary as well as direct quotation. However, these findings do not take account of the differences between newspaper types (tabloid and quality) or types of news item such hard news report, feature, soft news, editorial, all of which are distinctive in their language characteristics. I set out below some of the media text types for which research has identified specific characteristics of lexis, syntax, structure or language feature.

*The news report*

Scholars of news media regularly make a distinction between 'hard news' and 'soft news' (Bird & Dardenne, 1988; Fulton et al., 2005; Martin & White, 2005; White, 1997). Bird & Dardenne summarise that 'hard news' is 'important' whereas 'soft news' is 'interesting'. Fulton et al. (2005: 143) further describe the difference:

> ‘Hard’ news reports on politics, economics, the doings of the powerful and international affairs – in other words, on those aspects of a nation’s public life that are considered to have the greatest influence on the lives of its citizens. It is contrasted with ‘soft’ news, which is about ‘human interest’, about celebrity, crime, the smallscale and domestic.

Fulton et al. point out that it is not necessarily the content of the story, but the discursive approach and positioning that distinguish 'hard' and 'soft' news reports. In the case of a disaster such as BP Deepwater Horizon, for example, the main news story might present the latest overview of events, while a 'soft news' story might turn to family stories of victims, or the heroic actions of a single participant. Cotter (2010: 145) makes a useful three-part distinction in terminology between 'news stories' (hard news), 'feature stories' (features) and 'news feature stories' (soft news), suggesting that soft news shares generic characteristics with both hard news and features.

Large-scale events such as political, business and financial crises, as well as accidents and disasters, are generally reported as 'hard news', and a number of features of style and structure are associated with these types of report, for which I will use the term 'news report'. Although the term 'hard' implies definitive, objective and factual, the genre 'news report' cannot be considered a representation of fact – as there is no single objective reality to be reported on. Rather news reports are one of the many discursive practices that mediate our perception of events. As I discussed (Section 2.1.2, p23), news writing comprises a complex set of practices, constraints and choices, all of which mitigate against a neutral representation. Fulton et al (2005: 232) write that 'Objectivity is a style, a set of linguistic practices that we have learned to recognise as signifiers of factuality and impartiality.' The authors draw attention to a number of linguistic practices in factual reporting (2005: 233):

- high proportion of empirical information regarding dates, places, times, amounts of money and so on
- third-person narration; narrative voice externalised and elided
- lack of modality; preponderance of declarative (that is, not conditional) verbs indicating certainty

Suggesting that a news report places an emphasis on empirical information does not imply that opinion and evaluation play no part – on the contrary, comment from eyewitnesses and experts is an essential feature of news reporting. What is significant is that such comment is clearly positioned as being separate from the (neutral) factual report, usually through the use of direct and indirect quotation. As Martin and White explain (2005: 168, emphasis in

original), in these types of text 'those values of **judgement** which occur are always mediated through attribution (the journalistic author is never their immediate source).'. As judgements are overtly positioned as personal opinion through attribution, the rest of the report is, by contrast, positioned as objective and neutral. This is related to Fulton et al.'s third point above, where modality and (un)certainty are available to both the journalistic voice or reported voices but, the authors argue, are less typical of the journalistic voice in hard news.

On the subject of 'narrative voice' (bullet 2 above), White (1997: 101) suggests that the hard news genre exploits 'a journalistic register in which certain interpersonally charged register variables are severely circumscribed'. The journalistic register is characterised by an authorial voice that presents itself as 'neutral and anonymous and thus as directly and mechanically determined by the events it portrays' (1997: 129). I take White's comments to be more applicable to 'quality' news publications, as others (e.g. Bignell, 2002; Fowler, 1991) find that tabloid discourse is more personal, conversational and subjective. White argues that an impersonal, objective voice is achieved through the omission of language that is high in interpersonal meaning, and he goes on to explore the tension between the quest by journalists for 'objectivity', and the use in the journalistic register of language that is typically intensified: he cites '"axed" for "dismissed", "shake-up" for "reorganisation" and "torrential rains lashed" for "heavy rain fell"' (White, 1997: 108). The tensions between impartiality and evaluation, and neutral and intensified language reflect the challenges for news journalists in meeting the conflicting aims of representing the world 'as it is', taking account of institutional interests, and engaging the reader. This conflict is also noted by Fulton et al. (2005: 232) who cite the use of metaphor to introduce 'an element of modality or appraisal which enlivens (and ideologically positions) an otherwise bald account.'

The role of modality in news media texts has been found to be complex. On the one hand (bullet 3 above and White's comment's on the anonymous authorial voice) the expectation is that in news reports modality will be low in the journalistic voice, connoting authority and objectivity, and either high or low in reported voices. On the other hand, modality can be one of the strategies used by the journalist to *construct* objectivity. As Droga & Humphrey (2003: 63) write:

> Expositions and discussions can be made to seem more objective by using modal clauses such as "experts agree (that) ..."; "it is necessary that ..." and "if ... then"

Therefore the incidence of modal expressions is not in itself an indicator of a construction of objectivity or subjectivity, but needs to be understood within an analysis of modality type and context.

Metaphor has been found to be a characteristic feature of news reports. In a quantitative study, Krennemayr (2011) takes the same four categories as Biber (1999) (news, conversation, academic prose and fiction) and finds that news writing is quite highly metaphorical, using more metaphor than fiction, and considerably more than conversation, and being second only to academic writing. Further, 'hard news' writing was found to be more metaphorical than 'soft news' writing. Krennemayr explains her findings as follows:

> hard news is commonly more abstract and may thus need metaphors to explain complex situations and concepts to the average reader. [...] Soft news, in contrast, usually presents topics (e.g. descriptions of a landscapes [sic] in travel news or book reviews) that are easier to digest, and may thus have less need for metaphorical mappings. (2011: 115)

In interpreting these perhaps slightly counter-intuitive findings, two further observations may be relevant. One is that financial writing has been found particularly likely to employ a large number of spatial and physical metaphors (Cornelissen, 2007), for example prices, shares and production levels are said to 'rise', 'plummet', 'crash' and so on. Secondly, Krennemayr (2011: 294) categorises certain language uses such as 'the US has talked of ...' as metaphorical, whereas many writers (e.g. Radden et al., 2007) would consider this to be a metonym of the type PLACE FOR PEOPLE.

As well as typical patterns in metaphor and other features described above, news reports show regularities in structure. An account of structures in media writing is found in van Dijk (1985), and Fulton et al., (2005) explicate a number of structures typical for media sub-genres, including the 'inverted pyramid' structure of the news story. The 'inverted pyramid' model is the characteristic structure of 'hard news' stories. The use of a section at the start that summarises all key points results in a story that is not chronological, but rather has temporal shifts, and journalists learn to present information in a 'hierarchy of information elements' (Cotter, 2010: 139), through which narrative sequences are necessarily reordered. The pyramid structure appears to facilitate a brief but accurate assimilation of 'the facts', however Bird & Dardenne (1988: 77) point out that it can encourage a partial, and highly-directed, reading.

*The feature article*

Feature articles position their information and participants in quite a different way from news stories. Feature articles are not tied directly to the news of the day, and because of this can be 'slotted in' when there is space to be filled. Unlike news stories, they do not present 'just the facts', but generally present human interest stories within a much broader, less time-bound way (Cotter, 2010). Their structure will tend to be narrative, rather than an inverted pyramid structure, and so events often happen in chronological order, and it is notable that there is a high presence of deictics (Fulton et al., 2005: 236). The typical narrative structure means that the 'point of closure' (that is, the outcome) of a feature tends to be near the end, rather than at the beginning, as it is in the hard news story. The structure of personal tellings of events has been captured in Labov & Waletzky's (1967) work, which suggests regular inclusion of the following elements: abstract, orientation, complicating action, evaluation and resolution. The items 'evaluation' and 'resolution' serve to provide a point of closure for the story at the end of the story. Bird & Dardenne (1988) make a useful distinction between the 'chronicle' that is primarily descriptive, and the 'story' which follows a more 'subjective', narrative pattern. They point out that while the former is more aligned with journalistic values that foreground a perspective of objectivity, the latter approach is more successful in engaging readers, and suggest that media writing typically seeks a balance between the two, which can be more or less successful.

Other typical generic characteristics of the feature article (Fulton et al., 2005) are that the characters are often recognisable stereotypes brought to life by quotations, and that there can be a conflict or parable, leading to the outlining of a (shared) moral position. Landert (2014) notes a high usage of first and second person pronouns in soft news. Where there is a third-person narrator, the viewpoint of the writer is foregrounded, and he/she directs the attention towards the desired reading.

*The editorial, blog, commentary and reviews*

In my introduction to this section, I suggested that the two rhetorical acts of description and evaluation were particularly relevant to news writing. The genres discussed so far – news reports, financial reports and feature articles – tend to realise a more descriptive act. Other types of mass media journalism are more evaluative, and the remaining genres I mention here are of this type; namely editorials, blogs and commentary pieces as well as reviews and letters pages.

In considering evaluative texts, a number of issues to do with language choices are relevant. Martin & White (2005) propose that evaluative texts are rich in expressions that communicate judgements in the areas of affect, ethics and aesthetics. As discussed in earlier comments on the differences between the quality and popular press (Section 2.1.2, p23), emotive and judgemental lexis can be a feature of both news reports and opinion pieces in the popular press, whose concern is to reinforce values that they share with their readers, whereas the quality press tend to avoid evaluative language in news reports. Martin & White identify two ends of a cline ranging from more descriptive to more evaluative journalistic texts. In their analysis, they found three types of text, according to their framework:

> (1) those in which there was no unmediated inscribed **judgement**; (2) those in which there was unmediated, inscribed **social esteem** (**normality**, **capacity**, **tenacity**) but no **social sanction** (**veracity**, **propriety**); and (3) those in which there was both unmediated **social esteem** and **social sanction**. (Martin & White, 2005: 166, emphasis in original)

The authors found that the texts in group 1 tended to be news reports, and those in group 2 tended to be more evaluative news texts, editorials and commentary. (The third group, evidencing unmediated social esteem and social sanction was too small in their research for worthwhile analysis). So, unsurprisingly, the language of judgement and evaluation is far more likely to appear in articles that analyse events than articles that report them. Just as news reports are said to exhibit a lack of modality, in evaluative texts, the writer is more likely to indicate his/her own view on propositions through the use of modal expressions. This applies not only to the expression of (un)certainty, (in)ability and permission/obligation, but to the degree of 'modal responsibility' exhibited in the modal expressions chosen (e.g. the choice between 'it seems to me that' and 'I think that') (Thompson, 2004). Thompson (2004: 73) further argues that there can be specific patterns of modality usage within the evaluative genre:

> In newspaper leaders – articles expressing the newspaper's view on a current event – you often find modalization occurring as the writer ponders various aspects of the event and the possible implications, followed by a move to modulation as the writer explains what should be done.

Thompson's point here is not only that modality is characteristic of evaluative texts such as editorial articles, but that *within a text* it can move from one type (modalisation, or epistemic modality) to another (modulation, or deontic modality).

As a final point, one of the rhetorical acts performed by editorials and blogs is to persuade the reader of the validity of a point of view, and to this end, we would expect this genre to exhibit

rhetorical features associated with persuasive argument, such as end-focus or tricolon forms (Cockcroft & Cockcroft, 2005).

I mention weblogs as a particular type of commentary writing partly because they make use of a different channel from print news, and this can imply different language characteristics, and partly because their writers are less constrained by the influences and practices I mentioned earlier as being typical of journalistic writing for institutional publications. Weblog writers are not necessarily trained journalists, but can be 'lay' individuals with a particular interest in a topic. Herring & Wright's (2004) genre analysis of weblogs identifies diverse types, from those that share similarities with editorials and/or letters to the editor, to those that have commonalities with the personal journal, and those that invite an exchange of views. The authors found overall that writers exaggerated the extent to which weblogs offered an interactive, multimodal, externally-oriented form of participation in the news. Rather they tended to be 'individualistic, intimate forms of self-expression' (Herring & Wright, 2004: 1). Any generic analysis of this type of writing should take this into account.

*The letters page*

Limited research has been carried out on letters from the reading public as a genre, although letters of other kinds have proved a fruitful resource for business communications analysis (e.g. Prasad & Mir, 2002). Wahl-Jorgenson's (2002) ethnographic work in a newspaper office reveals how letters written by the public are distanced from other newspaper content, with letter authors even in some cases being positioned as 'crazy' within the newsroom. Bazerman's (2000) review of the history of letter-writing as a genre describes it as highly socially-situated and personal (thus idiosyncratic) but as fundamental to the development of less variable genres, such as newspaper reports (he cites the formulation 'from our own correspondent'). Although these observations are interesting, he does not offer an overview of the characteristics of the genre 'reader's letter'. A recent editorial in the 'i' newspaper (Duff, 2014:np) offered the paper's own perspective on what is likely to help a letter get published, and this may in itself offer some insights to generic characteristics. The key points were: brevity, making one point only, wit in moderation, opening up debate rather than shutting it down and first-person perspectives. 'The best letters start with something in the writer's experience, that the reader wouldn't know about without the letter, and go on to make a point of general application.'

#### *2.4.2.2 Intertextuality*

The study of intertextuality explores the relationship of texts with other texts that inform and shape them, and texts that they will in turn influence and shape. As Allen (2011: 1) explains:

> Meaning becomes something which exists between a text and all the other texts to which it refers and relates, moving out from the independent text into a network of textual relations. The text becomes the intertext.

The term 'intertextuality' and the foundation of the area of study are the work of Kristeva (1980) following the principles set out by Bakhtin (1981). Bakhtin proposed that all utterances (and writings) are infused with the traces of previous utterances, as well as with the anticipation of a response from the audience. Both writers suggest that all texts are dialogic, responding to and being shaped by a multiplicity of previous texts of all kinds, and anticipating the response of either a present or imagined receiver.

This view of intertextuality suggests that all the texts read, spoken or written by the writer, as well as conventions of genre, and the constraints of social practices realised in language are potential influences on any given text, and that to the reading of that text readers will also bring all their awareness of their own accumulation of previous texts. The implications of this fluidity and complexity are explored in the work of Derrida (Stocker, 2007) and Barthes (1977), who reject the notion that any fixed meaning intended by the writer is the final message of the text. Seen in this way, the notion of intertextuality is so diffuse as to potentially defy analysis. Allen (2011: 59) outlines some problems of definition and understanding, a number of which are shown below:

> Is intertextuality a manageable term, or is it essentially unmanageable, concerned with finite or infinite and overwhelming dimensions of meaning?
> Does intertextuality provide us with a form of knowledge, or does it destroy what was previously considered to be knowledge?
> Is the centre of intertextuality in the author, the reader or the text itself?
> Does intertextuality aid the practice of interpretation, or resist notions of interpretation?

The research or analysis of intertextuality must account for the fact that textual influence can be taken to exist in myriad forms: from the most overt and specific (e.g. an exact sourced quotation in an academic essay) to the virtually untraceable (e.g. general shared language resources, a fifty-year old conversation, or a commonly-held belief). Conceptual frameworks for intertextuality have frequently reflected the fact that the majority of input from other texts will be irretrievable. Bazerman (2004: 83) uses the metaphor of a 'sea of words'.

> We create our texts out of the sea of former texts that surround us, the sea of language we live in. And we understand the texts of others within that same sea. Sometimes as writers we want to point to where we got those words from and sometimes we don't. Sometimes as readers we consciously recognize where the words and ways of using words come from and at other times the origin just provides an unconsciously sensed undercurrent. And sometimes the words are so mixed and dispersed within the sea, that they can no longer be associated with a particular time, place, group, or writer.

Expanding on this final observation, Bazerman (2004: 87) refers to '[b]eliefs, issues, ideas, statements generally circulated'. The concept of texts that cannot be pinned down was articulated by Riffaterre (1980), who acknowledged that not all intertexts would be identifiable, but that it would be sufficient for analysis that we recognise that they exist: he calls this ' the presupposition of the intertext' (1980: 239).

I will touch briefly here on some important conceptualisations of intertextuality. Kristeva (1980: 65-6) posited three key dimensions in the consideration of texts – the 'writing subject', the 'addressee' and 'exterior texts'. She envisaged these dimensions being connected by a horizontal and a vertical axis, where the vertical axis connects the writing subject and the addressee, and the horizontal axis connects the text with other texts.

> Hence horizontal axis (subject-addressee) and vertical axis (text-context) coincide, bringing to light an important fact: each word (text) is an intersection of word (texts) where at least one other word (text) can be read. (Kristeva, 1980: 66)

The concept of the intersection of axes emphasises the idea that there is no fixed single meaning of a text, but rather that writer, reader and other texts come together *within* the text at multiple points. This allows us to envisage that 'Authors communicate to readers at the same moment as their words or texts communicate the existence of past texts within them.' (Allen, 2011:39).

Unlike Kristeva, whose work was mainly set within a poststructuralist paradigm, Genette (1997) pursued the study of intertextuality from the structuralist perspective that texts are part of a (closed) system, and that it is the job of the analyst to uncover their place in the system. Genette's primary focus in his discussion of intertextuality is literature. Literature for Genette is an example of Saussurean *parole*, from which the analyst seeks to recreate the *langue* within which it is created. Genette offers a classification of five types of what he called 'transtextuality' (1997), including intertextuality (quotation, plagiarism, allusion); paratextuality (relation between text and paratext such as titles, headings, prefaces, epigraphs etc); architextuality (text as part of genre); metatextuality (explicit or implicit critical

commentary of one text on another text) and hypertextuality (relation between text and text/genre on which it is based). In keeping with Genette's interest in poetics, these categories are appropriate for a study of literature, but less useful for considering texts in other fields. For example, direct quotation of either another's words or a document would not find an obvious place in the framework above. Further, Genette's approach starts at the point at which intertextuality becomes discernible, thereby leaving unacknowledged the myriad voices that make up the author's and reader's hidden 'sea' of language.

An alternative framework for considering intertextuality is that of Bazerman (2004: 86-9) whose work is more specifically directed towards the practice of discourse analysis of a variety of texts. Bazerman also outlines six types of intertextuality, but he proposes them as levels, moving from an extremely explicit to an extremely broad understanding of the phenomenon as points along a cline.

1. Prior texts as a source of meanings to be used at face value (e.g. direct quotation).
2. Explicit social dramas of prior texts engaged in discussion (e.g. indirect quotation).
3. Background, support, and contrast (e.g. mentioning a person, document or statement).
4. Beliefs, issues, ideas, statements generally circulated (e.g. evaluation of a statement, text or invoked voice).
5. Implicitly recognizable kinds of language, phrasing, and genres (e.g. recognisable phrasing, terminology, association with groups of people or ideas).
6. Available resources of language – the language of the period, and the cultural world (e.g. genre, register, stock phrases, patterns).

Bazerman's approach (particularly bullet 6) allows for the text influences discussed earlier, that form part of his 'sea of words' and are difficult to place or attribute, even should the speaker wish to do this. Although Bazerman suggests that all levels are potentially retrievable, he makes the point (2004: 89) that those types of intertextuality that occur earlier in the list are 'most easily recognizable and therefore most easily analyzable.' However, although the list can be recognised as a cline from the most specific to the most general, some of the categories appear to overlap, or are difficult to disentangle. For example, in my view, there is no qualitative distinction between 'statements from another source' (point 1) and quotations from encyclopaedias, newspaper reports or literature (point 3), in terms -=of intertextual type, although Bazerman may argue for a difference in use – either as 'face value' evidence or as 'support'. Bazerman also refers to generic intertextuality in both points 5 and 6, and, although

he may be making a point about degrees of specificity of connection (that is, that the resources in point 6 are even less explicit than those in point 5), the location of generic influences in the framework remains unclear.

The final approach I discuss here is Fairclough's (1992a, 1992b) approach to intertextuality. He makes a distinction between 'manifest intertextuality', which encompasses more or less explicit allusion to other texts, and 'constitutive intertextuality', or interdiscursivity, which draws upon conventions of different genres and discourses.

> I shall draw a distinction between 'manifest intertextuality', where specific other texts are overtly drawn upon within a text, and 'interdiscursivity' or 'constitutive intertextuality'. ... On the one hand, we have the heterogeneous constitution of texts out of specific other texts (manifest intertextuality); on the other hand, the heterogeneous constitution of texts out of elements (types of convention) of orders of discourse (interdiscursivity). (Fairclough, 1992a: 85)

Fairclough's approach is more unified than either Genette's or Bazerman's, and points to a fundamental difference between what might perhaps be termed 'conscious' and 'unconscious' borrowing. Fairclough writes that certain types of 'manifest intertextuality' are also a feature of certain types of 'interdiscursivity'. If we take the example of a directly-quoted witness statement in a news report, we might feel it to be a clear case of manifest intertextuality – as it is a 'specific other text [...] overtly drawn upon within a text'. Indeed Fairclough includes 'discourse representation' (or 'speech reportage') as an instance of manifest intertextuality. However, the witness statement is so common in the genre 'news report' as to be considered an interdiscursive feature – a marker of this particular type of writing – and so in some way 'constitutive'. Both of Fairclough's categories refer to intertextual relations that are relatively retrievable, either as recognisable prior texts, or as identifiable characteristics of genre or discourses, and he does not move beyond this to general characteristics of language. Fairclough's notion of 'interdiscursivity', referring to *discourses* as well as to conventions of genre, relies upon his belief that discourses can be retrieved and identified systematically (Fairclough, 1989, 1995a), even if not always linked with specific texts.

The approaches above, summarised and simplified, indicate three broad areas of intertextuality:

- *Intertextuality as retrievable texts.* Reported voices, quotations, allusions, parody.
- *Intertextuality as identifiable style/register/genre.* Generic and stylistic characteristics of both form and content.

- *Intertextuality as irretrievable texts.* Historical and current language resources, beliefs, issues ideas, 'presupposed intertext'.

These categories considerably simplify the complexity of intertextual research, but provide a starting point from which to consider a framework for media text analysis, which I will expand on in Methodology Chapter 3. Retrievable texts (the first category above) that regularly appear in the mass media include reported voices, which have been explored in depth in work by Fairclough (1995b), Fowler (1991) and van Dijk (1988). Jacobs (1999, 2000) has written extensively about the role of press releases as contributing texts. The role of images in news reporting has been explored in the work of Bignell (2002), van Leeuwen, (2005), Kress & van Leeuwen (2006) and Machin & Jaworski, (2006). Other retrievable texts include official reports of all kinds, previous news reports, and the idiosyncratic use of cultural quotation and allusion by individual journalists. Genre in media (the second category above) has been explored in Section 2.4.2.1, p45.

#### *2.4.2.3 Modality*

As well as the overarching codes of genre and the related study of how texts act upon other texts, grammatical systems of all kinds are considered to be semiotic codes, that is, frameworks within which individual signs can be contextualised and understood. One particular aspect of the broader lexico-grammatical system is modality. I will offer an account of modality here, as it is central to my study of the news media genre. Modal expressions are one of the resources used by journalists to signal their commitment to the validity of the propositions they make in their news reports, and their presence or absence can be a marker of subjective or objective styles.

At its simplest level, the system of modality is said to 'construe the region of uncertainty that lies between yes and no' (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004:147). The resources of the modal system allow the speaker or writer (in the case of this data, the journalist, blogger etc) to interpose her or his own judgements about the propositions they are making. For Halliday, the modal system is part of the *interpersonal* function of language, that is, the resources used by language to facilitate interpersonal communication. Halliday & Hasan (1976:27) characterise the interpersonal component of language as 'the speaker in his role as intruder'. However, this 'intrusion' can be realised in ways that allow speakers and writers to associate themselves with or dissociate themselves from responsibility for the views they are expressing. This is referred to as 'orientation' in Halliday's terms (Halliday & Matthiessen,

2004:619), or, more usefully I feel, as 'modal responsibility' (Thompson, 2004:69). Degrees of modal responsibility can be expressed along two dimensions: objective-subjective and implicit-explicit, and these dimensions can provide useful ways of commenting on degrees of engagement of the journalist with his/her materials.

This 'region ... between yes and no' contains different sorts of uncertainty, in the areas of probability, usuality, obligation and inclination (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004:150), and the resources in the English language used to express these four areas of interpersonal perspective are substantial. Writing just about probability and usuality (epistemic modality), Chen (2010:28) suggests that 'Over 350 lexical devices are found and used for expressing doubt and certainty in English.' These resources include modal auxiliaries, adverbials, adjectives, nouns, phrases and clauses. While modal auxiliary verbs, such as 'would', 'ought to' and so on, are a relatively restricted group, many other verbs can be used with modal import, for example 'try to', 'hope to', 'refuse to', 'be important to' and so on (Roberts et al., 2008). Within each of these grammatical realisations, and for each type of modality, there are also degrees of modality, from high through medium to low (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004:150). So for example, in the area of *probability*, the following are possible. A mix of grammatical realisations are shown for each:

> High modality: certainly, surely, certainty, it is definite that
>
> Medium modality: probably, may be, fairly, tend to suggest
>
> Low modality: possibly, possibility, could, would appear to suggest

The choice of grammatical realisation is meaningful in itself, for example modal clauses and phrases can suggest the writer/speaker is less of an 'intruder' than some other grammatical choices, for example modal auxiliary verbs, as Droga & Humphrey (2003: 61) argue:

> Modal clauses and phrases (interpersonal metaphors) are a more indirect way of expressing modality and are therefore often used to make texts seem more objective and difficult to argue against.

Choice of modal expression is part of a mix of linguistic strategies that can signal the construction of objectivity or subjectivity, and patterns of modal choice vary by news media genre.

The modal areas of probability, usuality, obligation and inclination can be expressed in terms of two main types of modality: what Jespersen (1924) calls 'propositional modality' and 'event

modality'. Palmer (2001) describes propositional modality, which consists of *epistemic* and *evidential* modality, as expressing the *speaker's judgement of the proposition* (probability and usuality). Of the two types, epistemic modality is by far the more common, with evidential modality found to occur relatively rarely (de Haan, 1999). In propositional modality, there is no element of will. On the other hand, event modality, which comprises *deontic* and *dynamic* modality, expresses the *speaker's attitude to a potential future event* and does contain an element of will. Deontic modality includes permission and obligation, while dynamic modality is concerned with ability and willingness or inclination.

A final perspective on writer judgement and the related issue of subjectivity and objectivity is offered by work in Appraisal Theory. Appraisal Theory has been most fully developed by Martin & White (2004) and has at its core many of the same issues as the study of modality, indeed Halliday & Matthiessen (2004: 608) present appraisal categories alongside modality categories in direct correspondence. Martin & White (2005: 1) describe the topic as follows:

> This book [*the Language of Evaluation*] is concerned with the interpersonal in language, with the subjective presence of writers/speakers in texts as they adopt stances towards both the material they present and those with whom they communicate.

Where Appraisal Theory offers alternative analytic resources to modality studies is in the study of lexis. The framework examines evaluative lexis expressing attitudes of three broad kinds: *affect*, which deals with emotional reactions, *judgement*, which concerns the evaluation of behaviour and ethical issues, and *appreciation* which relates to aesthetic evaluation. Appraisal Theory systematises ways of analysing the force (how strong) and the focus (how typical) of terms used in texts of all kinds. It also provides ways of assessing the engagement of the speaker or writer by looking at processes of attribution, modality, proclaiming and disclaiming. This analytical procedure has been used effectively to comment on the ways crises have been depicted in the media (e.g. White, 1997).

## 2.5 The level of mythic meanings

The next level in the semiotic heuristic that structures this literature review is that of 'myth'. Myths, in the sense that Barthes (1972) conceived them, are the ideas, beliefs and attitudes shared by cultural groups that generally go unremarked, so taken-for-granted are they. One of Barthes' endeavours was to uncover and analyse these taken-for-granted myths, or 'what-goes-without-saying' (1972: 11), and thereby make clear the ideologies and interests that they

support and perpetuate. Barthes (1972) recognised myths not only within verbal language (in fact he argued that myth *is* a language) but in many forms of cultural practice which we do not readily recognise as ideologically informed. In fact he purposely selected objects for study that were as far as possible from literature and the literary application of the word 'myth'.

The concepts of myth and ideology pervade *all* levels of meaning-making. In this literature review, semiotic 'codes' have been presented as being at a different level in the hierarchy from mythic meanings, but this does not imply that their constitution does not serve an ideological purpose. On the contrary, as outlined earlier, the frameworks within which we understand signs, are culturally and temporally specific, and thus potentially as subject to myth-making as all communication practices. It is simply a convenience to discuss a semiotic view of language by following a line of thought: building blocks→systems→meaning potential→ideology behind meaning. Put simply, both building blocks and systems in language are already myth- and ideologically-laden.

### 2.5.1 Connotation

One of the ways in which Barthes was able to expose and describe myth was by making a distinction in his early work between two types of meaning for signs, namely 'denotation' and 'connotation', and I described in Section 2.2.2, p31, how 'denotation' can be considered the literal, face-value 'meaning' of a sign, and 'connotation' the additional associations, both socio-cultural and personal, that the sign generates for the person who perceives it. Barthes conceptualises this such that the *signifier* and *signified*, being the denotative meaning at the level of language, together form another *signifier*, to which the receiver of the sign attaches a further *signified*; this 'second-order semiological system' is termed 'myth' (Barthes, 1972: 114). This process can lead to an infinite chain of signification – an 'infinite semiosis'.

Barthes argues not that denotative and connotative meaning are on a continuous spectrum and difficult to disentangle (although this may also be true) but rather that the ultimate connotation may appear to be the most 'innocent', to use Barthes' term, by being the least burdened with non-literal association. As Lacey (1998: 68) writes: 'Myths are connotations that appear to be denotations'. It has been argued that there are no denotative meanings at all, as 'literalness' and 'simplicity' are as much constructs as representations that appear to have complex and diverse meaning. Hall (1980: 122) suggests that the distinction between

denotation and connotation is no more than an analytical convenience, with denotative meanings simply being those that attract a wider consensus than connotative meanings.

> It is useful, in analysis, to be able to apply a rough rule of thumb which distinguishes those aspects of a sign which appear to be taken, in any language community at any point in time, as its 'literal' meaning (denotation) from the more associative meanings for the sign which it is possible to generate (connotation). But analytic distinctions must not be confused with distinctions in the real world. There will be very few instances in which signs organized in a discourse signify only their 'literal' (that is, near-universally consensualized) meaning.

Earlier observations about the construction of 'fact' and 'objectivity' in the media serve to illustrate this point. What is presented as a simple description of reality, is mediated through a set of discursive practices that we have learned to interpret as 'simple description'. In effect the genre 'news report' presents itself as denotation, where in Barthes' terms, it may be 'no more than the last of the connotations'.

### 2.5.2 Language features at the level of mythic meanings

In considering language that is connotative rather than denotative, we are dealing with language as it communicates in a figurative rather than a literal way. Here language is not purely representative and transparent, but has a meaning beyond 'what it says'. In the study of rhetoric, figurative language can belong to one of four main tropes (Cockcroft & Cockcroft, 2005): irony, metaphor, metonymy and synecdoche. Each trope represents a desired meaning via a different, and non-literal relationship between word (signifier) and concept (signified), and these relationships are understandable through codes. Once again, I shall relate my literature review to my eventual findings, and discuss below the three tropes relevant to these findings, namely metonym, synecdoche and metaphor.

#### *2.5.2.1 Metonym and synecdoche*

Both metonym and synecdoche are forms of language that create meaning by association. In that sense, they are the linguistic realisations of Peirce's Indexical sign. This association is seen in part-whole relationships, for example 'two heads are better than one', where 'heads' stands for 'people' or 'people's ideas', and in relationships where an associated entity stands for the actual referent, for example 'the White House made a statement today' where 'the White House' stands for the US President or his/her spokespersons. The metonymical relationship covers a very broad range of actual instances, but its distinguishing feature from metaphor is

that both entities (the metonym and the referent) are drawn from the same domain, or semantic field. (In metaphor, on the other hand, one entity is described in terms of another from a different domain.) However, some linguists, including Lakoff & Johnson (1980) have argued that metonymy is simply a type of metaphor. There are certainly areas where the two interact, and the work of Goossens (1990) theorises 'metaphor from metonymy' and 'metonymy within metaphor', also coining the word 'metaphtonomy'.

The distinction between metonym and synecdoche is not always agreed, but many linguists (e.g. the early Jakobson (Jakobson & Halle, 1956)) would see synecdoche as falling under the larger heading of metonymy. In my own work, I agree with Lock's (1997: 323) droll assertion: 'I shall follow the early Jakobson and treat synecdoche as a synecdoche of metonymy.' Synecdoche is generally considered to be a part-whole or whole-part relationship, while metonymy also includes relationships of association. (I will use the convention of denoting metonyms in capitals with the connection 'FOR'). These examples are taken from Radden et al. (2007) and Wales (1989):

PLACE FOR EVENT – 'he was shocked by Vietnam' – metonymy

OBJECT FOR USER – 'the sax has flu today' – metonymy

AUTHOR FOR WORK – 'I love Proust' – metonymy

PART FOR WHOLE – 'strings [stringed instruments]' – synecdoche→metonymy

WHOLE FOR PART – 'England thankful to avoid serious injury' – synecdoche→metonymy

The fact that metonymy (used henceforth as the umbrella term) draws both of its elements (the signifier and the signified) from the same domain, and that the two are already associated in experience, can suggest that metonymy is somehow less figurative and more realistic than metaphor. Jakobson (Jakobson & Halle, 1956; Jakobson, 2002) certainly argued that they were quite different: his metonymic 'pole' associated metonym with prose and writing in a realistic tradition, whereas metaphor was associated with romanticism and invention. Metonymic usages may be seen as less creative than metaphoric ones, but they share with metaphor the fact that they *select* certain aspects of the signified to foreground, and *discard* others. For example, both proverbs 'Two *heads* are better than one' and 'Many *hands* make light work', use parts of the body synecdochically to mean 'people', but select those parts that

are most relevant to the meaning (connections with 'intelligence' and 'strength/skill' respectively). This selection can be meaningful, and can direct the audience's attention to particular desired readings, while discarding or suppressing others. In his review of metonymy in a corpus of business texts, Cornelissen (2007) finds the metonym ORGANISATION FOR MEMBER (for example 'BP announced ...') to be widespread and significant, and discusses how it works together with the common business metaphor A COMPANY IS A HUMAN BEING, to direct the reader to envisage that the company is a person with single goals and purposes who can speak with a unified voice. This selective direction is of particular significance in journalism, where the principle of economy of expression is important (Bhatia, 1993; Biber et al., 1999).

#### *2.5.2.2 Metaphor*

Unlike metonymy, through which signifier and signified have a relationship of *association* or *contiguity* based on a *single* domain, metaphor proposes a relationship of *likeness* between the target (entity being described) and the source (entity used to describe) across *different* domains. It is this relationship of likeness which caused Peirce to classify metaphor as an Iconic sign (Peirce, 1931-58: 2.277): a view that I will problematise below. Metaphors are extreme instances of figurative language, and as such can be a source of innovation and creativity. Van Leeuwen (2005) describes metaphor as one of the two main agents of semiotic change, alongside connotation. Citing Aristotle, van Leeuwen explains that metaphors are less concerned with creating new ideas, than finding new ways of expressing ideas. It is this aspect of metaphor that Jakobson (Jakobson & Halle, 1956) emphasises when he writes that the metaphoric pole is the dimension relevant to poetry, surrealism and romanticism. This drive to innovation is clearly evident in the case of fresh metaphors that use unexpected juxtapositions to shed new light on existing concepts. Yet the broadest definition of metaphor – describing one entity in terms of another – encompasses a vast number of metaphorical usages that are so commonplace that their literal meaning is no longer recognised.

These 'taken-for-granted' usages are the subject of Lakoff & Johnson's 'Metaphors we live by' (1980) in which the authors argue that most metaphors we use are not unusual, creative and poetic, but rather fundamental ideas, often with an experiential basis, that structure our thinking in particular shared ways; they are at the very root of how we conceptualise experiences, entities and practices. Once a metaphor is shared widely enough, it ceases to have the power to make us understand experience in new ways, but rather reinforces shared ways of seeing (and in that sense has a mythical or ideological dimension). It can become

difficult for the analyst to isolate what is a metaphorical usage and what is not. To illustrate this problem, Lakoff & Johnson call forth an imaginary 'objectivist' who argues with them that in many cases a word used in a metaphorical sense is actually a homonym of the literal term with an alternative dictionary definition.

Researchers can choose to view these commonplace metaphors in two ways: one is that they are so routinised as to simply have the status of a literal meaning. The other view would hold that such metaphorical usages should be identified and scrutinised critically, on account of this very ability they have to normalise a way of seeing that is a product of society and culture, and that may reinforce power relations of certain kinds. This is an argument made by Koller (2003) in her examination of how common metaphors in business can legitimise unequal gender relations. Like metonyms, metaphors are selective in the sense that they choose one aspect of an entity or phenomenon to describe by comparison with another entity. This aspect becomes the focus of attention, and excludes other aspects of the phenomenon. This concept is illustrated in Milne et al.'s (2006) article, which argues that the metaphor BUSINESS IS A JOURNEY can be used by organisations in connection with their environmental commitments. By conceptualising business in this way (rather than as, say, WAR or SPORT), organisations can imply that they are making progress, without committing to a final goal. In this case, metaphors do not shed new light on abstract issues but rather delimit them. As Tsoukas (1991: 582) writes

> Metaphors tend to be used as substitutes for deeper knowledge, and they tend to be constitutive of, and prescriptive in relation to, the social phenomena they are connected with.

Tsoukas makes a three-way distinction between 'dead', 'dormant' and 'live' metaphors. His definition of dead metaphors broadly corresponds to Lakoff & Johnson's 'conventional metaphors':

> ... frozen or dead metaphors have become so familiar and so habitual that we have ceased to be aware of their metaphorical nature and use them as literal terms. (Tsoukas, 1991: 568)

The category of 'dormant metaphors' is potentially useful for analysis, in that it encompasses terms that are widely-used, with commonly shared meaning, but that are still recognisable as metaphorical:

> ... dormant metaphors are quasi-literal terms through which we restrict ourselves to seeing the world in particular ways; however, the metaphorical nature of these terms can be easily exposed. (Tsoukas, 1991: 568)

Dormant metaphors can be reawakened to shed productive new light on the target, or can go on to be dead metaphors, only used in a literal sense. 'Live metaphors' are those that are more unusual and creative, where the writer has as his/her purpose to encourage the reader to conceptualise one entity in terms of another in a way that gives *unconventional* insight into the target domain (the concept or entity that is being described). It is generally live metaphors, or rather metaphors in the 'live' part of their life cycle, that are agents for semiotic change.

Peirce's (1931-58) classification of a metaphor as an Iconic sign was not motivated by the fact that many metaphors have ceased to be creative, as described above. Rather he saw it as a logical outcome of the fact that metaphors resemble their Objects in a relationship of likeness. Pierce did not write extensively about metaphor, and there is little further guidance or support for his decision other than his mention of metaphor as one type of Icon. Other semioticians have recognised that the disparity between the source and target domains may require interpretation through codes and rules that suggest that there the metaphor can also be Symbolic. Some scholars (e.g. Haley, 1995; Ponzio, 2010; Sørensen, 2010) have argued that both sign forms are present in metaphor. Chandler (2001: np) writes:

> The basis in *resemblance* suggests that metaphor involves the *iconic* mode. However, to the extent that such a resemblance is oblique, we may think of metaphor as *symbolic.* (emphasis in original)

It is the aspect of juxtaposition of one concept with another that gives the metaphor its mythical quality, in the Barthesian sense. Selection of both the aspect to be compared and the entity with which it is to be compared, foregrounds ways of looking at objects and ideas that cannot help but be value-laden, whether the metaphor is conventional or innovative. Indeed conventional metaphors can be considered those in which these particular ways of looking at things have been naturalised.

## 2.6 The level of ideology

I have mentioned ideology in the previous two sections, in the context that both myths and codes serve to naturalise ideologies. An ideology is a set of beliefs and attitudes that structures all kinds of social practices, and allows for group identity. As Coupland and Jaworski write:

> We understand the term ideology as a set of social (general and abstract) representations shared by members of a group and used by them to accomplish everyday social practices: acting and communicating (Coupland & Jaworski, 2001: 144)

This definition suggests that ideologies can only be maintained and distributed through 'representations', that is through language and other meaningful social practices. Further, ideologies are ubiquitous and necessary – ideologies are what bind groups together, allow for group identities, and in effect allow for the workings of society to be intelligible to its members. It is understood that any number of competing ideologies may operate in the daily social life of individuals. However, not all ideologies have access to the same resources for awareness and understanding. Certain groups will have a greater level of power and access to voice, for example politicians, media publications or celebrities. These more powerful groups are better equipped to establish their views, attitudes and ideas, than are less powerful groups. Uncovering the working of power behind the representation of ideas is the project of work by Barthes and Foucault, as well as later writers in the school of Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 1989, 1992a; van Dijk, 1985b, 2008; Weiss & Wodak, 2003; Wodak, 1996, 2000). Essential for the operation of power is compliance (Foucault, 1980) and what concerns critical linguists is the extent to which the workings of power are hidden, in ideas that are 'taken for granted' or naturalised. As Eagleton (1983: 117) puts it: 'Ideology seeks to convert culture into Nature, and the 'natural' sign is one of its weapons.'.

I discussed the concept of naturalisation above in connection with myth and connotation. Hall (1980: 122) suggests that it is at the level of connotation that ideologies can be identified:

> It is because signs appear to acquire their full ideological value—appear to be open to articulation with wider ideological discourses and meanings—at the level of their 'associative' meanings (that is, at the connotative level)—for here 'meanings' are not apparently fixed in natural perception (that is, they are not fully naturalized), and their fluidity of meaning and association can be more fully exploited and transformed. So it is at the connotative level of the sign that situational ideologies alter and transform signification. At this level we can see more clearly the active intervention of ideologies in and on discourse.

I argued earlier that the news media are one of the 'power groups' that has special access to voice, and named some of the other groups that have regular and unquestioned access *through* media channels to the general public. The news media do not only have the power to express their own institutional opinions in the form of editorial and opinion pieces, but also the power to select and interpret the views of others and to police what counts as news. As Parmentier (2009: 146) notes, 'anyone who manipulates or regiments the flow of interpretants thereby indexes social power or cultural capital'. Through connotation and

intertextuality the press can access shared social meanings that can indicate an ideological position. For example the now well-used device of attaching '-gate' to words to indicate a scandal ('Monicagate', 'Cheriegate', 'Plebgate') by analogy with the Watergate affair, can quickly imply a shared moral position on some sets of events (Conboy, 2007: 98). (But interestingly not on others. I have yet to see the formulation 'BP-gate' widely used in media texts, despite extended coverage of alleged safety weaknesses). Investigating the linguistic strategies that encode ideologies is an important element of the broader aims for this thesis.

### 2.6.1 The investigation of ideology through discourses

Foucault (1980) proposes that ideologies are maintained and distributed through language via *discourses*. These are regularly articulated sets of ideas in circulation at a particular time and place. In Mills' (2003: 53) definition: 'A discourse is a regulated set of statements which combine with others in predictable ways'. In using the word 'regulated', Mills refers to the dimension of power that is able to regulate what 'counts' as knowledge and what does not. Foucault argues that defining and excluding certain groups (such as the 'mad' or the 'sexually deviant') limits the possibilities for discourse. Other limitations include restrictions on who is allowed to speak, and exclusive distinctions between academic disciplines. Some discourses have much more support and wider distribution than others, which understanding leads to the observation that some are 'dominant', although opportunities can occur for 'resistant' discourses to be heard, and even to become dominant themselves in time. The news mass media have a primary role to play in the construction and distribution of discourses, both dominant and (less often) resistant. Discourses serve to position subjects (Foucault, 1972), in other words discourses offer roles to individuals, that they can accept or reject. Rejection of a positioning is not without cost – as it can transgress social expectation. It should be noted that these 'positions' are multiple and changing, rather than unified and fixed (Weedon, 1987).

The academic exploration of discourses usually takes place within critical traditions of linguistics, although some traditions have a more overtly emancipatory agenda than others. In the field of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), Fairclough (1989, 1992a, 1995a), Wodak (Weiss & Wodak, 2003; Wodak & Meyer, 2001; Wodak, 2000) and van Dijk (1985, 1996, 2008) have sought to uncover the workings of ideologies through language through a range of frameworks for identifying repeated discourses. Each of these authors has carried out extensive work on news media texts. It has been argued (e.g. Graham, 2005) that in following its agenda for change, much work in Critical Discourse Analysis is inclined to make its own claims to truth and

objectivity. Widdowson (1995), in a frequently-cited debate with Fairclough about the theoretical validity of CDA as an analytic approach, criticises Critical Discourse Analysts for bias in seeking out examples of text that support their own political viewpoint. In the tradition of Poststructuralist Discourse Analysis (PDA) writers (e.g. Baxter, 2002, 2008; Weedon, 1987) reject the possibility of a definitive reading of a text, and the discourses that it may encode. Poststructuralist writers acknowledge reflexively within their theoretical approach the situated, deferred and partial nature of the analysis of discourse(s). However to accept this perspective is not to accept that there is an infinite number of possible interpretations of a text, and 'preferred readings' can be indicated through socially-shared codes and contexts.

As well as CDA and PDA, an important approach to the identification and analysis of discourses is found in the Discourse Analysis work of Potter & Wetherell (Potter, Edwards, & Wetherell, 1993; Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Potter, 2003; Wetherell, 1998). Linguists of this school seek to identify 'interpretative repertoires', which are 'broadly discernible clusters of terms, descriptions, common-places … and figures of speech often clustered around metaphors or vivid images and often using distinct grammatical constructions and styles' (Potter et al., 1990: 212). These clusters of language usages are understood to be flexible and 'selectively drawn upon and reworked according to the interpersonal context' (Wooffitt, 2005: 154). Wooffitt is inclined to draw a distinction between Foucauldian discourses and interpretative repertoires based on this variability, but other writers who use this approach do not, for example Talja (1999: 461) suggests that the two concepts of 'interpretative repertoires' and 'discourses' are equivalent.

Discourses have been found problematic to analyse systematically, and the work of Foucault does not provide specific methodological guidance (Graham, 2005). Sunderland points out (2006: 166) that discourses are 'partial', 'non-finite' and 'non-ubiquitous' – and subject to the perspective of the individual analyst.

> Different discourses are accordingly likely to be ‘spotted’ by different social groups of readers and analysts – for example those who favour a feminist perspective and those with a more traditionalist perspective – even when looking at exactly the same textual set of linguistic traces.

A great diversity of individual and mixed method approaches have been used in the identification and analysis of discourses, including content analysis (Potter & Reicher, 1987), grammatical analysis (Fairclough, 1989), conversation analysis (Speer, 2001), post-structuralist approaches (Baxter, 2008; Wetherell, 1998) and corpus methods. Many analysts propose a

mixed method approach in their selection of tools for analysing discourses (e.g. Cook et al., 2009). Baxter (2010: 132) writes:

> there is much value to be gained from a multi-perspectival approach that combines different methodological tools in a functional way as befits the task in hand.

I present my own approach to identifying and exploring the discourses of media representation in my Methodology chapter (Section 3.6.9, p105). The semiotic heuristic I have used in this literature review points to the fact that signs, codes and mythic meanings all contribute to the construction and perpetuation of ideologies. My investigation of discourses will explore how these ideologies are made manifest in news media texts, and how they are intrinsic to the construction of the BP crisis.

## 2.7 Research questions: a semiotic analysis of a media case study

I outlined in my introduction my justification for considering business crises from a specifically linguistic perspective. From a firm belief that our understanding of a crisis can only be mediated through language comes an interest in how such language 'works', and what it 'looks like' in the case of a crisis that we perceive as developing over time. I am interested in investigating how news media representation constructs this perceived development. Semiotics, which can be described as the study of representation, provides a heuristic within which to examine the construction of meaning. Semiotics is non-prescriptive in methodological approach, but is concerned with how meaning is made from the micro-level of the patterning of text choices to the macro-level of the socio-cultural origins, organisation and implications of texts. Within this framework I intend to investigate some of the linguistic characteristics of one particular crisis, and propose the following questions as a guideline.

> How has the BP Deepwater Horizon crisis been constructed in the media?

- What patterns and characteristics of language can be identified within and across media texts about Deepwater Horizon? What do these patterns reveal about the process of crisis representation, and how we come to make meaning of crises over time?
- If we understand the representation of the crisis as a semiotic 'sign', what elements of a sign come to the fore with the passage of time? Does this way

of looking at the linguistic representation of phenomena shed light on how shared cultural understanding is constructed?

The next chapter on Methodology is concerned with how I selected my texts for investigation, and the range of language analysis tools I chose as most appropriate to identify the patterns and characteristics of my data set.

# 3 Methodology

## 3.1 Overview of the research process

I stated in my literature review chapter that my view of language is that it both reflects and constructs phenomena according to social contexts. I outlined my constructionist ontological perspective that does not deny a material reality, but asserts that such a reality can only be known through the filter of values and experience that are socially and culturally constructed. It follows that my epistemological view is that phenomena are understandable only within the context of individual experience, although individuals share values and belief systems as social groups, and these ideologies are subject to influence by those who have various means of power (such as the news media). My research methodology will therefore be located within a constructionist paradigm: it will not assume that there is an objective reality that my methods will uncover, but rather it will seek to investigate the ways in which individual and shared realities are created and recreated through the means of the written language of news media.

My choice of research methodology will align with this set of principles. I will seek to explore the different ways in which language expresses views of reality, without assuming that any one writer's expression is privileged, although I recognise that news media writing has greater access to influence over their readers than some other forms of discourse. I intend to use a mixed method approach to my investigation of language. It has been typical (Bryman, 2004) that quantitative research is used for research within a positivist or post-positivist paradigm, and that qualitative research is more frequently used for research within an interpretivist or constructionist paradigm. However I follow linguists such as Wodak (Weiss & Wodak, 2003) and Cook et al. (2006) who use quantitative methods such as surveys, feature counts and corpus methods as part of their range of methodological tools for investigating linguistic phenomena within a constructionist worldview. The purpose of quantitative and semi-quantitative work within my research is not to identify and definitively describe language features, but rather to provide one way of looking at patterns across data sets. It will not be enough to find that a feature type increases or decreases over time: that movement will need to be described and explored within context. However, a comparative count of features will be one form of evidence that changes may be present. Other analyses will be qualitative in nature, exploring the function of a language feature in the context in which it appears, and in interaction with other features. I discuss quantitative and qualitative approaches in more detail below.

A significant innovative feature of this thesis is that the methodology I will describe sits at a medial level of data description that is uncommon in language research. By this I mean that my methodology is situated in between the decontextualised, large-corpus approach characteristic of Corpus Linguistics and the highly-detailed analysis of one or a few texts which characterises much discourse analysis. This middle-level approach is apparent in this research thesis in both data selection and data analysis. I will largely work with three data sets of 20 texts, this number falling between the norms for Corpus Linguistic and close text analysis studies mentioned above. My analysis approach will combine semi-quantitative 'counting' methods with depth analysis of particular texts and text extracts in order to investigate and contextualise the findings suggested by frequency counting. This medial level of investigation has several advantages for research questions that, like my own, are broad in scope. It allows me to construct reasonably robust 'maps' of language patterns through the analysis of frequencies of language-feature occurrence, without the loss of rich contextual detail. The approach is effective both to confirm that the patterns of language features that I propose are indeed consistently present (the usual province of Corpus Linguistics) and to describe what these features 'look like' in the context of the news media genres in which they appear.

As I explained in my introductory remarks about my research process (Chapter 1), my analysis approach was suggested by preliminary findings from an initial stage of immersion in the data, followed by early analysis and then a return to the data. Continually testing and rejecting or accepting hypotheses gave a shape to the analysis process that was not predictable from the outset. I present below what appears to be a linear process of data collection, selection, choice of features for analysis and the analysis itself. In reality much of the research process was concerned with investigating whether the existence of apparent patterns was supported by the linguistic data, and what features, specifically, were contributing to these patterns. This iterative interplay between theory-building and theory-testing was significant in practical terms in that it entailed carrying out and rejecting analyses that proved unproductive, as well as those that showed significant findings. However, the methods used to generate and test theory can be described straightforwardly, and I do this below. Section 3.2 of this chapter will address the ethical implications of my research, and outline how I went about collecting data and selecting my final data sets. Section 3.3 will present an overview of my analysis strategy, expanding on the complementary roles of qualitative and quantitative analysis, and justifying my choice of a Discourse Analysis approach to my data. Section 3.4 discusses a 'contextualisation' phase which gives a semi-quantitative summary of the full data sets. Section 3.5 outlines a phase of preliminary analysis based on reduced data sets, to show how I

organised my emergent analysis. This section includes extracts of texts to illustrate how I identified nine language features that appeared to be of particular interest for discussing the representation of BP events. Section 3.6 sets out the theoretical frameworks and methods I used to identify and evaluate each of the nine features selected for examination.

## 3.2 Data collection and selection

### 3.2.1 Ethical issues

My research concerns how the BP Deepwater Horizon events were represented in the public domain by the news media, through articles, letters, editorials, transcribed television and radio interviews and articles, newsletters and blogs. I will focus on written texts, although transcriptions of TV and radio interviews will reflect some aspects of spoken texts. The documents that will constitute my data set are available from an online news database, as described in the following section. From the perspective of academic research, the use of documents in the public domain does not generate particular ethical considerations. I append a completed ethical approval form in Appendix 11.1 p254 of this thesis. (This form makes reference to ethical approval for personal interviews, but these were not eventually included in my data.) Documents of this kind are non-reactive (Bryman, 2004: 381), that is, they are not affected by work carried out upon them. However, as outlined in Chapter 2, it is my ontological position that through the selection and combination of documents in this research thesis, as well as in the exploration of how the events have been constructed in the media, my own work will affect how the texts are perceived and perhaps contribute to future texts, so I will be self-reflexive about the ways I affect the process of representation, even though the texts will remain unaltered.

### 3.2.2 Choosing the source for texts

The BP Deepwater Horizon oil spill of 20th April 2010 was an event of international significance, and has been widely reported upon by the global media from that date to today. While this intense media coverage makes the oil spill an interesting and relevant topic for study, the main implication for anyone wishing to study the representation of events is that millions of texts on the topic exist. My concern in terms of the data was how to create a data set that

was both manageable and robust, that is, that it had some degree of internal coherence which would bear the weight of claims made about it.

I chose the database Nexis UK as my source of media items for a number of reasons. Nexis UK is a database of media texts that covers hundreds of media sources in many different countries. Publication types include both press and web channels: broadsheet and tabloid national and regional newspapers, international trade and industry magazines and online newsletters, blogs and reports (Nexis UK, 2014). Items are included from all sections of a given publication or website, so there is no particular focus on, say, news or finance, and features, letters and reviews are included. The database is reliably *searchable*, meaning that users are able to specify dates of publication, language and topic keywords in order to identify relevant texts. Individual texts are *complete*, in that they are not edited or rearranged, although they do not include accompanying images. The texts are also presented with *additional information*, such as word length and a categorisation of publication type.

*A note on terminology*: In referring to my data, I follow the terminology set out by Braun & Clarke (2006: 79) where:

- *Corpus* refers to the entire set of data collected for a research project
- *Data set* refers to the data used for a particular analysis (in the case of my analysis the texts of 2010 will make up one data set, and the texts of 2011 will make up another and so on)
- *Data item* is used for an individual item of data. I will also use the word *text* in the same way, as each of my data items is an individual media text
- *Data extract* is used to refer to a smaller segment of a *data item* or *text*

### 3.2.3 Compiling a data set

Initial work on identifying texts that mentioned the BP Deepwater Horizon oil spill showed that there are many thousands in the Nexis database alone (Nexis informs the user when searches exceed 3,000, and only returns the first 1,000 of these, so exact numbers are not available). My aim was to extract a greatly reduced text data set in a systematic way. I was potentially interested in both synchronic and diachronic patterns of representation – in other words, how were the events represented (at a given time) and did this change over time? One way of deriving a data set that would enable me to address both of these questions, while at the

same time reducing the text numbers to a manageable level, was to look at all the texts on a number of single days. My first selected date was April 27th 2010. The reasoning behind this choice of one week after the Deepwater Horizon explosion was to allow reporting on the events to have become widespread across a number of publication types. Muralidharan et al (2011) note that the first tweet and Flickr photo from BP were both posted on April 27th. However, the date chosen could equally well have been the day after the explosion, or three or four days later, as long as the 'crisis' period was still in train. What I felt to be important, having chosen a preliminary date, was that subsequent 'phases' should be the same date in the years up to the time of analysis for this thesis, that is April 27th 2011 and April 27th 2012. This would generate texts from three days, each separated by one year. Using all the data from each date would allow for an exhaustive study of texts relating to the BP events within a narrowly specified time frame, although this does not entail that the dates are representative of general BP coverage.

Concurrently, in order to determine how many texts this time-based search would generate, I needed to define what constituted 'texts relating to the BP events'. As mentioned, the Nexis database is searchable for a number of keyword terms. The main search term would be 'BP' as there were no other viable candidates (the former name 'British Petroleum' was superseded by 'BP' in 1998, and is not used in news media texts). Additional terms can be added, and I used three others that my own reading of newspaper and online reports suggested were reliably present each time the events were covered. These were 'crisis', 'oil spill' and 'disaster'. A search for any one of these three plus 'BP' should, in my view, have found virtually all of the texts coving the BP events. I therefore carried out an initial search based on the following terms:

- BP AND
- 'crisis' OR
- 'oil spill' OR
- 'disaster'

From my previous reading of news reports on the BP oil spill, I felt that these terms would return a near-complete set of texts, however I was also aware of other references to the events that paired names such as 'Macondo' (the company name for the well) and 'Deepwater Horizon' (the name of the Transocean rig) with 'oil spill' and so on, referring to exactly the same events. I wanted to test the possibility, particularly in shorter or later texts, that BP might *not* be a default descriptor. Further, if I was going to examine, for example, how the

events were named, I needed to feel secure that I was not simply replaying the search terms I myself had defined. To address these issues, I performed an alternative search as follows:

- BP OR
- 'Macondo' OR
- 'Deepwater Horizon' AND
- 'oil spill'

This alternative search produced almost identical lists to the original search, which supported my reasoning.

*Refining the search results*

Nexis has a filter for duplicate texts, both those with high similarity and those with moderate similarity. Having experimented with all three settings (no filter, removing moderately similar duplicate texts, removing highly similar duplicate texts), I removed highly similar texts through the search filter and hand sorted the rest for duplication, finally excluding some remaining exactly duplicated items (for example identical reports appearing in more than one publication) and retaining those where, for example, a proportion of the text was similar or the same, but not all. In many cases this partial duplication appeared to arise from the direct reproduction of the wording of press releases. I next weeded out all texts that were not related to the BP events. The most common cause for this was the appearance of 'bp' as an abbreviation for 'basis points' in financial reports, together with reference to the financial 'crisis'. Finally, in one case, a text was split into fourteen separate items (this was the report of BP's first quarter results of 2011), and I counted this as an instance of a single text. The result of these selection decisions was three separate data sets: 169 texts for April 27th 2010, 94 texts for April 27th 2011 and 31 texts for April 27th 2012.

My research questions state that I intend to consider how the BP crisis is constructed in news media texts, and that I will investigate this construction by seeking patterns in representation. Patterns may be found not only within the language, but at a broader level, for example the types of text in which the BP story appears, their geographical origin, and the proportion of news items related to the BP story. This type of information serves to contextualise the specific language patterns I will explore. I considered that the separate data sets above would contain a workable number of items for broad, contextual analysis to be carried out, using quantitative methods, although any number-based findings from 2012 would need to be treated with caution as this is a small data set (31 texts). The majority of my analysis would be

qualitative, for which I judged a smaller sample was appropriate. I discuss in more detail the complementary roles qualitative and quantitative analysis play in my research in Section 3.3.2 below. I selected 20 texts from each data set for deeper qualitative analysis, using systematic random sampling, that is choosing every *n*th text in the larger data set to give me 20 texts (this does not imply a that my sample is 'random' in any other way). So, for example, from 94 texts in 2011, I selected every 5th text plus the final text, which yielded 20 texts. The final sample is shown in Table 3.1 below.

| | **Search term 'BP' AND 'crisis' OR 'oil spill' OR 'disaster'** | **Sample for depth analysis** |
|---|---|---|
| **April 27th 2010** | 169 | 20 |
| **April 27th 2011** | 94 | 20 |
| **April 27th 2012** | 31 | 20 |

Table 3.1: Sample of BP-related texts from Nexis UK database

Table 3.1 shows my *two* data sets for each year, a larger and a smaller data set. To clarify which data set I am referring to throughout the analysis, I will use the following convention: I will firstly denote the year, then the text number/data set total, for example (2010, *Text 5/20*). This example would refer to the 5th text in the smaller data set. This same text would have a different number if referred to as part of the larger data set. So (2010, *Text 5/20*) is (2010, *Text 37/169*) in the context of the larger data set.

### 3.2.4 Text, co-text and context

My research questions state that I will analyse 'patterns within and across texts'. To analyse across texts, I propose three synchronic analyses – one for each annual date – and use each of these sets to explore diachronic patterns. This poses the challenge of whether the disparate texts at each time point will somehow have more in common with each other and as a group than they will with the texts at another time point. If I can identify such commonalities, I can present a 'picture' or 'map' of the representation of the BP events in 2010 that will differ in some distinctive ways from the 'maps' of representation in 2011 and 2012. In this way, I can trace a development in how the media, and by extension, society in general, have made meaning of the BP crisis. Yet every text will be unique in terms of the combination of writer,

publication, purpose, audience and many other factors. This *particularity* of understanding poses challenges for my project of finding commonalities of representation at different time points. I need to be careful that my search for patterns and regularities across my data sets does not obscure the fact that this is a very loose aggregation of very different texts, from different channels, with different purposes, writers and audiences.

Not only will texts vary by origin and purpose, but also in their relationship with the BP story. Texts might be entirely concerned with the BP Deepwater Horizon story, they might touch on the story as part of a wider background (for example a business page piece about oil), or they might only mention it in passing. One straightforward approach would be to analyse *only* those sections of the data items that are directly related to the BP events. However, it will be useful to observe whether and how the importance of the BP story *within texts* changed over time. Given the concern of semiotics with intertextuality and the concept that all texts are acted upon by myriad other texts, it will also be of interest to understand what the BP story was mentioned *with*. I also need to recognise that it may not always be self-evident what texts are 'about'. For example, in a letters page, it will be quite a straightforward task to separate out a letter about the BP oil spill from a different letter on a different topic. Without the context, it might be less straightforward to separate out coverage of the immediate effects of the oil spill from a general discussion of the current energy picture in the US.

I decided on the following strategy. I will consider all data set texts in their entirety for a contextual analysis of genre, source, geographical location and salience of the BP story. The handling of text and co-text in the detailed qualitative analysis involves finer judgements, and I outline below my specific decisions in respect of my data. For the detailed qualitative analysis, I judge it necessary to look at only those parts of the texts that refer directly or indirectly to the BP crisis. To take my earlier example of a letters page: the quantitative overview might indicate that the BP events (one letter) were less than 25% of the coverage of the full data item (all letters). However, it would be meaningless to analyse all letters, so I will select only the BP letter for study in my reduced data set of 20 texts. I use the following guidelines in all cases:-

- Letters page – use only the letter relevant to BP
- TV news programme – use only the section referring to BP
- Tweets or other news summaries – use only the section referring to BP
- General discussions of business crises, energy, oil industry, politics and business, including reference to BP – use only the section referring to BP

In a handful of cases I will have to make judgement calls. If the topic relates to, say, decisions made about the oil industry relating to the aftermath of the BP events, and the piece is relatively short, I will include it in its entirety. If the BP events are mentioned – albeit intermittently – throughout the piece, even if the piece does not focus primarily on the events, and the piece is relatively short, it will be included in its entirety. The guiding principle in cases of doubt is – if the item or section of the item refers to the BP events – however broadly – it will be included. This still leaves texts whose coverage is related to the BP events to greater and lesser extents. One further question to be addressed was whether I should consider features of language *only* insofar as they relate directly to references to BP events, or whether there is an argument for looking at features of language within BP references *and their surrounding text*. My approach will be the latter: once I have defined what is a text, according to the principles I describe above, I will then consider the language features within the *whole* text. Nevertheless in my commentary, I will make reference to the relevant differences between features that relate specifically to the BP events and features that relate to surrounding co-text. This flexible approach to co-text will allow me to form a view about a particular aspect of the construction of the crisis through language: once the oil spill has ceased to be a main news story, in what contexts is it considered to be relevant?

## 3.3 Data analysis strategy

### 3.3.1 Discourse Analysis

In order to explore 'patterns and characteristics of language' in my data set, I shall use a discourse analysis approach. Discourse analysis is a collection of theories and methods aligned to my research question: its purpose, in its diverse forms, is uncovering patterns in language. Cook (2011: 431) defines discourse analysis as follows:

> Discourse can be defined as a stretch of language in use, of any length and in any mode, which achieves meaning and coherence for those involved. Discourse *analysis* can be defined as the use and development of theories and methods which elucidate how this meaning and coherence is achieved. (emphasis in original)

Cook goes on to point out (2011: 440) that the term 'discourse analysis' is now applied across such a wide range of theories and activities and across so many academic fields, that it may have outlived its usefulness.

> It [discourse analysis] has become a superordinate term for a wide range of traditions for the analysis of language in use, so general and all-inclusive that it is hardly worth using. Perhaps the term discourse analysis has had its day. It is now so built into the fabric of applied linguistics that any analysis of language in use is discourse analysis of a kind.

Some of the main traditions in discourse analysis have already been mentioned (Section 2.6.1, p68), and I will touch on them again here. (I distinguish here between 'traditions' or 'approaches', and the analytical 'tools' they use. All of the approaches mentioned below have used diverse methods to analyse their data, including grammar, rhetoric, Interactional Sociolinguistics, Conversation Analysis, content analysis and corpus methods.) Critical Discourse Analysis would have been a valid choice of approach to answer my research questions, and one I considered. Critical work in the field of media representation has shown effectively how news stories, far from being an objective representation of 'what is out there', offer a version of the world that is shaped by political, financial, institutional, personal and temporal constraints. Different CDA approaches (Fairclough, 1989; van Dijk, 2008; Weiss & Wodak, 2003; Wodak & Meyer, 2001) offer fully-developed analysis frameworks, which have in common that they place the individual text at the heart of a set of social practices and cultural norms that tend to both reflect and perpetuate the interests of those with power and voice (Blommaert, 2005). Although I start from the principle that media representation does not reflect 'the truth', but is instrumental in constructing one (albeit influential) version of 'the truth', I do not wish to pursue an agenda for change from the outset, as is the declared aim for CDA. It is important to me that I come into the research process with as few preconceptions as possible. I fully expect to find evidence of power and convention rooted in interest in the texts I will study. However, in choosing a research approach that starts with the identification of patterns in the texts, however derived, I hope that any necessary critical perspective will follow, rather than precede, my analysis. I agree with Coupland & Jaworski's (2001: 145) observation that 'In all but its blandest forms, such as when it remains at the level of language description, discourse analysis adopts a ‘critical’ perspective on language in use.'. My attitude to my findings will be consistently critical and interrogative.

The 'Discourse Analysis' approach developed by Potter and Wetherell (1987), which is related to Discursive Psychology, was also potentially an appropriate option. Discourse Analysis was developed from the work of Gilbert & Mulkay (1984) on how research work has been constructed and positioned within the scientific community. Writers in the Discourse Analysis

tradition have more frequently used conversations and interviews as data, but the approach has also been used in the study of written media texts (e.g. Potter & Reicher, 1987). Its focus is on the flexible, contingent and sometimes contradictory nature of interpretive repertoires, and how local contexts and practices act on language choices in an ongoing negotiation of meaning. This approach would have been in line with my research aims.

However, my preliminary analysis drew me to conceive my sets of texts as representational 'snapshots' or 'maps' of how we see a business crisis at a given time. This conceptualisation led me to place my version of discourse analysis within a framework of semiotics, in order to explore the meaning potential of verbal language as a semiotic sign. In this way my approach has been closer to the third main tradition of Poststructuralist Discourse Analysis, than the other two traditions already mentioned. I note the importance of poststructuralist writers (particularly Barthes and Baudrillard) to the study of semiotics, I share with PDA an understanding of representations as partial, unfixable and subject to the negotiation of writer and reader. However, I would define my approach as discourse analysis set within a semiotic framework, using a range of analysis tools selected as relevant for purpose.

It is important to explain what this definition means for this set of data in this research thesis. I focus on examining language in use, rather than as an abstract system. In this view, meanings, both representational and interpersonal, can only be derived from a study of language in context, as informed by relevant social and personal practices. I have described some of these practices, as they relate to the media, in my literature review. When I proceed to analysis, one of my concerns will be to place texts in context by genre, and show how purposes and practices of text production are crucial to an understanding of linguistic choices. I will be working on 'stretch[es] of language in use', as in Cook's definition. My own work will combine detailed work at word and sentence level with work on paragraphs and sections of articles and whole articles, finally investigating whether there are patterns that can be said to hold across news media texts from different publications, countries and channels. In her exploration of what 'discourse analysis' means, Johnstone (2008: 5) mentions two types of analysis that are typically undertaken: breaking down into parts and breaking down into functions. Both are important for this research. I will consider specific language choices within texts ('parts'), with a view to asking bigger questions about function – such as 'what does media representation of crisis "look like"?'.

I explained above that I will explore my topic (media representation of a crisis) within a framework suggested by semiotics. This means that my discourse analysis methodology will be informed by the semiotic heuristic I outlined in my literature review. As my research questions suggest, I will be looking for language patterns at different semiotic levels of meaning. Choices of individual sign will be meaningful, as will how these signs are combined according to codes, both at a grammatical level, and at a social/discursive level (newspaper and journalistic codes). Language choices are not expected to be neutral, but are value-laden, and support the generation and maintenance of myths, informed by ideologies. By using a range of analysis tools, which will be described in more detail in Section 3.6 and most of which are commonplace in discourse analysis studies, I can consider how specific choices serve the interests of larger meanings.

### 3.3.2 The complementary roles of qualitative and quantitative methods

I have established that my investigation of how the BP crisis is constructed in language would use diverse tools, as the research question demanded. My research questions are concerned with *patterns* of language through the researched time span – what are these patterns and how do they change? These patterns can be investigated using a mixed method approach – quantitative analysis to establish broad trends and movements, and detailed qualitative research to investigate how language choices were used in context. To turn first to my quantitative method: I prefer to refer to a semi-quantitative than a quantitative approach where this is used, using this term to refer to a systematic analysis on a fairly robust sample that offers indicative values (Wellington & Szczerbinski, 2007) rather than a statistically significant, large-sample study. The statistical significance of my own sample is restricted. In the case of the 2012 texts, the number of texts (at 31) is too small to be reliable at a good level of certainty. Once I reduce my sample to 20 texts in order to count linguistics features, I can only make tentative comparisons. Although the 20 texts have been selected using the principle of 'every *n*th text of the full data set', I have no guarantee that they are 'representative' of that set, or of other BP texts at that time. Despite these limitations, I am particularly interested in two types of pattern that a semi-quantitative analysis would be appropriate to uncover:-

- Patterns in *text types*. How many texts are there on the selected dates that refer to the BP events? To what news genres do they belong? What is their country of origin? How 'important' (how big) is the BP story within them?

- Patterns of *linguistic features.* Does the researched feature occur in the data set, and how often? If there are different sub-categories of the feature, which are present and in what proportions? Do these occurrences change over the time span of the data sets?

I suggest that approaching these questions via semi-quantitative methods gives a degree of confidence that the patterns I detect in my data sets are actually behaving in the way they appear to be. Widdowson (2000) argues that the analysis of linguistic data using quantitative methods is limited in usefulness because it necessarily entails the decontextualisation of language: this is a characteristic of any method that counts and groups linguistic features. The danger is that such an approach focuses on the *form* of linguistic features (those things that are recognisable in order to be countable) rather than the *function*, and I hold to the belief that form does not equal function in a systematic way (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004; Thompson, 2004). The *function* of language, the way in which language is used by certain people to do certain things in specific contexts is my primary focus of attention here. Despite his reservations, Widdowson argues that a quantitative approach can (only) be useful to answer *certain types* of question. As I describe above, I make use of 'counting features' in both my overview of the full data set and in my examination of features in the yearly data subsets, and when I do this, I aim to ask only those questions that a quantitative analysis can be expected to resolve. The answers to such questions do not tell me *why* these changes are occurring, or whether the changes are peculiar to certain contexts, or indeed they go hand in hand with other phenomena. However quantitative data of this kind are one way of demonstrating confidence *that* such changes are occurring. These answers are by no means the answers to my research questions, but they provide a firm foundation for further questioning.

It is to the complementary strategy of qualitative analysis that I will turn to explore in depth which language choices are made and how they are functioning in context. By 'qualitative analysis', I do not just mean simply analysis of a smaller data set: indeed I use counting of features as a strategy in the reduced as well as the larger data sets, in order to understand whether a particular feature is increasing or decreasing in frequency. Rather I mean that I will engage with the data at a detailed level, using individual instances of language in context to try to build a picture of how language is working for particular users to do particular things. In addition, each analysis chapter will finish with a discourse analysis of a full text, which aims to

show how individual features cohere (or indeed conflict) in a complete piece of communication. Table 3.2 summarises the stages of my analysis process:

| | **Data** | **Research method** | **Analysis aim** |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Stage 1**<br>**Contextualisation stage** | Full data sets<br>2010 (169 texts)<br>2011 (94 texts)<br>2012 (31 texts) | Semi-quantitative | Overview of publications, genres, salience of BP story. |
| **Stage 2**<br>**Preliminary analysis stage** | Data subsets<br>2010 (20 texts)<br>2011 (20 texts)<br>2012 (20 texts) | Qualitative | 'Immersion' in data to identify significant features of language use. |
| **Stage 3**<br>**Depth analysis stage** | Data subsets<br>2010 (20 texts)<br>2011 (20 texts)<br>2012 (20 texts) | Semi-quantitative<br><br>Qualitative | Analysis of frequency and type of significant features.<br>Analysis of language usages in context. |

Table 3.2: Three stages of data analysis

The next sections of this Methodology chapter describe the three stages of my research shown in Table 3.2: contextualisation, preliminary analysis and depth analysis.

## 3.4 Contextualisation stage

The purpose of this stage of analysis is to describe the data sets of texts that mention the BP oil spill using a small number of analyses that will help to set the texts in context, to support the close text analysis. Nexis UK provides information on the texts in its database, including word length, name of publication and type of publication. From publication information, it is generally possible to determine the country of its origin, although this is not always clear for online publications. Nexis UK categorises texts into publication type, and this analysis is included. However, this does not systematically equate to text genre, for which I will propose a separate analysis. Finally I judge that an interesting area for investigation is the 'size' of the BP story within the given text – is the story co-terminal with the whole text, or is it just mentioned as a small part?

In sum, my contextualisation analysis would consist of:

1. Average word length of texts
    - Determined by dividing the total word count of the full data set by the number of texts.

2. Country of origin.
    - Determined, where possible, from the identified name of the publication.
3. Nexis publication type.
    - Nexis UK offers a categorisation by publication type, which I will use to count publication types and present them as percentages.
4. Genre of texts.
    - A full account of how I will analyse genre is given in Section 3.6.1 below. My method applies to both the contextualisation and the depth analysis stages.
5. Salience of the BP story.
    - In order to explore how 'important' the BP story is within texts each year, I will analyse the proportion that the BP story represents of each full text in my data sets. This is analysed by word count to determine what proportion of the words in the individual text relate to the BP Deepwater Horizon crisis. I will present this in the following bands: up to 25%, 26-50%, 51-75% and 76-100%. (Number of texts where the BP story represents up to 25% of the words of the whole text, and so on).

These five analyses are intended both to offer an initial picture of the kinds of text covering the BP oil spill, and to support and enhance the later depth analysis of language features.

## 3.5 Preliminary analysis stage

### 3.5.1 Immersion in the data

The preliminary stage of my analysis involves 'immersion' in the data, that is reading and re-reading of the texts to identify language usages of interest. This approach has something in common with other inductive methods such as content analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). These methods are used to identify recurrent themes in spoken and written text as a way of isolating what content is most important in a stretch of communication. Analysts build relevant categories from the data themselves rather than pre-determining likely categories, and aspire to be exhaustive, often uncovering unexpected or counter-intuitive insights about their data, as well as confirming expectations. However, my approach differs from either of these methods in two ways. Firstly my area of interest is less that of theme and meaning, than how such meanings are expressed. In many ways form and content are inseparable: as Halliday (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004) argues,

expressing something in a different way changes its meaning. Nevertheless, my interest lies primarily in the occurrence and use of linguistic features. Secondly, the extraction, compression and regrouping involved in content or thematic analysis entails decontextualisation. As I outline in Section 3.3.2, p83, such counting and grouping is a starting point for much of my commentary on linguistic features, and I consider it has a crucial supporting role to play, but it offers only part of the information I will need. It is where the analysis starts rather than constituting the analysis.

However content analysis, as all qualitative analysis, starts with 'total immersion' in the data. My first task is to read the texts repeatedly, questioning the data for significant features and patterns. In carrying out this process, I aim to be self-reflexive. Antaki et al (2003) assemble and describe six common shortcomings in discourse analysis, and their work provides a useful warning against superficiality in the analysis process. In particular, 'analysis that consists in simply spotting features', 'under-analysis through summary' and 'under-analysis through over-quotation or through isolated quotation' are potential pitfalls for the type of broad data interrogation I am carrying out.

### 3.5.2 Identifying features for analysis

In this section I exemplify the process I described above. A close reading of the texts should suggest specific questions that lead to analyses for patterns. I set out below three texts, to show how this process can be used to identify language features that are potentially of interest. To avoid 'cherry picking' significant texts, I will show the first text in each data set of 20, as returned by Nexis UK. These texts will not necessarily exemplify all nine of my final features for analysis, rather I will model here the process used in all 60 texts, which resulted in the selection of the nine relevant features.

#### *3.5.2.1 2010, Text 1/20*

*Text 1/20* from 2010 is extremely short, at only ten words, including the attribution. It is from an online weblog (as classified by Nexis UK) under the title 'Media Digest 4/27/2010 Reuters, WSJ, NYTimes, FT, Bloomberg'. The full original text contained 28 entries, of which only one, shown below, related to the BP oil spill. This single entry constitutes my data item for analysis, in line with the principles outlined in Section 3.2.4, p78. As the title of the blog suggests, this is a quick way to alert interested audiences to what the authors deem to be the main stories

from respected news sources. Readers can follow up items they wish to learn about in more detail. In the item below, WSJ stands for Wall Street Journal.

WSJ[1]: The[2] BP oil spill[3] could[4] reach land within days[5].

1. General question: writer/audience, who and why? What does this short online piece have in common with longer print news reports, and where does it differ?
2. 'The' signals presupposition. What forms does presupposition take?
3. 'BP oil spill' indicates a particular naming choice. What naming choices are made and what do they suggest?
4. 'Could' is an epistemic modal form. Whose opinion, whose uncertainty? How is modality used?
5. 'Within days' is one use of 'facts and figures'. Where are these specific and where (as here) indefinite and why?

This briefest of texts at the beginning of the first data set suggests a number of questions of potential interest to the research, and provides a point of reference for questions of the subsequent texts. I will use the five questions generated above to illustrate how this initial reading and data interrogation can ultimately be translated into a framework for analysis.

1. General questions. Questions relating to the purpose and structure of the text and comparison with other similar and dissimilar texts relate to the study of genre. Consideration of the genre of texts is critical, as genre entails and explains many features of style and structure I am likely to encounter: genre will therefore be adopted as a feature for study.
2. Presupposition in media texts is a potential topic for study. However, it entails the study of a large number of sub-categories (Zare et al. (2012) identify eight categories) and I judge that space will not allow for this level of detail as well as commentary on a wider range of features.
3. Naming choices are potentially interesting in the construction of representations: these will be adopted as a feature for study.
4. Modality is likely to be a fruitful area for enquiry, both from the perspective of (un)certainty and (in)ability, and as a way of looking at the extent of writer involvement in or distancing from the text: this will be adopted as a feature for study.
5. The presentation of 'empirical facts' is a feature of this and other texts. It can be conceptualised as a signal of an 'objective' style of writing, that in turn is characteristic

of the news reporting genre: for this reason 'facts and figures' may be subsumed into the analysis of genres.

I have taken advantage of the brevity of the 2010 text to illustrate in some detail the steps between initial reading and drawing up a final analysis plan. The following texts, for 2011 and 2012, are analysed in less detail, and used mainly to show how the patterns that emerged from the language can suggest a final line of enquiry.

### *3.5.2.2 2011, Text 1/20*

*Text 1/*20, 2011 below is a transcript of an interview between a representative of the IACSP (the International Association of Counterterrorism and Security Professionals) and Michael Greenberger, Director of the Center for Health and Homeland Security. Again, the original full text is longer, but has been reduced for analysis in line with the principles outlined earlier.

IACSP: Looking back at Katrina, the BP oil spill and other events[1], it does not appear that[2] we[3] are prepared to respond effectively or to recover from natural disasters[4], let alone a major terrorist attack. In your view, is America prepared to withstand a chemical, nuclear or another 9/11 style terrorist attack?

Greenberger: Well, in all candor[5], I don't think we're prepared to withstand a nuclear attack[6]. It would be such a devastating thing that our resources would be overrun. I'm very worried about our ability to[7] withstand a chemical attack. Next to a nuclear attack, chlorine or some other dangerous stored chemical that's released would be very devastating. As you get into emergencies that are not as huge as a large weapon of mass destruction attack, I think the country is much better prepared. If you are talking about 9/11 or a repeat of the anthrax scare, I really think that the infrastructure has gotten better. The public health infrastructure is better. People know what to do. I would say also for a dirty bomb we're better prepared. But anything that involves large parts of the population, I worry about our ability to respond. I don't rule out a weapon of mass destruction, but most of the things we are facing are conventional weapons.[8]

1. This is an interesting list of events. What do Katrina and BP have in common, and what might 'other', presumably similar events be? What other lists and groups does BP appear in, and does this change?
2. Epistemic modality – why is this used here and what does it tell us about the speaker?
3. 'We'? US or the global population?
4. Is the BP oil spill a 'natural disaster'? In what way? How do others perceive it?
5. This is a conversational discourse marker. Is this simply a feature of spoken text, or is the speaker doing other interpersonal work here?
6. Nuclear attack is set up in *contrast* to the BP oil spill (signalled linguistically by 'let alone' in the first paragraph). However, does the general discussion of disasters invite *comparison* rather than contrast?
7. Dynamic modality – the role of modality in general, and different types of modality in particular.
8. Greenberger's turn makes use of considerable *repetition*. Again, is this a feature of conversation, or are the repeated parts linked with Greenberger's area of professional interest? What does this passage tell us about the US view of future crises like BP? What is the dominant discourse here?

*Text 1/20,* 2011 differs from text *1/20*, 2010 in that it is no longer describing events but discussing and evaluating them. The BP oil spill is not the only, but one of many topics of conversation. This text generates a set of questions that are rather more complex than the largely grammatical questions generated by the 2010 text, and may be addressed at the semiotic level of myth and ideology as well as sign and code. Alongside this broadening of interest, comes an interrogation of *content* alongside language usage. My questions of this piece have taken on a critical rather than descriptive flavour, and I note that this is something I need to be reflexive about, particularly where I discuss discourses and ideology.

### *3.5.2.3 2012, Text 1/20*

The first text of the 2012 data set is from the trade journal 'Marketing Management'. Only part of the article is included for analysis, as only part relates to BP (see Section 3.2.4, p78). It is part of a multi-authored article on the subject of crisis management. The article is intended to be of general interest to its audience, but its topic is a particular service – a quantitative research product aimed at identifying, and hence more effectively dealing with, the onset of a business crisis. In this sense, the article is also serving as sales promotion.

When Does a Crisis[1] Begin?

In the regular course of business, the increase of familiarity is a good thing. When marketing campaigns are working well, familiarity with the company will grow. We see a crisis begin when the firm's familiarity rises, but this kind of increase in familiarity is the result of the company being in the news. The starting point of a crisis is usually fairly easy to identify, because familiarity will suddenly spike and favorability will drastically[2] decline for reasons outside the normal marketing efforts.[3]

When the Gulf of Mexico platform of BP, the energy company, blew up[2] and the safety valves didn't work,[4] the situation was pretty much[5] guaranteed to become a crisis[6]. Familiarity went up because the burning platform was broadcast immediately around the world; favorability for BP went down when word began to spread that there was likely to be a catastrophic[2] oil leak (see Figure 1[7]).

However, many events that might be thought of as a crisis, such as the multiple Toyota recalls[6], do not actually meet the criteria of one.

1. The authors choose to use the word 'crisis' and identify the BP events in terms of business crises. How do writers in other genres name the crisis?
2. Highly affective language. How does this relate to genre, including the purposes of the authors?
3. This first paragraph is scene-setting rather than directly related to BP – there is a decision to be made here on text and co-text.
4. This appears to be a deliberate, almost dismissive over-simplification of the complex situation. What work is this doing, in relation to the article's purpose? Does it tell us anything about views of the events, two years afterwards?
5. 'Pretty much' is a modal item, and is also markedly conversational in tone. Is this a generic feature, or does it relate to my comment in note 4?
6. Listing and grouping: is 'business crisis' another group to which the events belong (like 'natural disasters' above)? BP meets the criterion of a 'crisis' by the authors' very specific definition, but Toyota (last paragraph) does not. As in 2011, both comparison and contrast are in play.
7. Reference to supporting text is a form of intertextuality. This instance is routine, but intertexts such as press releases are crucial to representation.

As in the 2011 text, the BP events are being used here to illustrate the phenomenon 'business crises', which in this article have a very specific definition. Once again, the use of a categorisation for different purposes is suggested by the data as an area for further exploration. The descriptor 'crisis' is surely significant here and gives further support for an analysis of the feature 'naming choices'. The use of modal items such as 'pretty much' is again of interest, in its interrelated functions of signalling degrees of 'truth' and confidence, and doing interpersonal work. Intensified lexical choices such as 'drastically' and 'catastrophic' indicate that looking at affect and appraisal in language as well as modality might be productive.

#### *3.5.2.4 Summary of features for analysis*

In the previous section, I represented my preliminary engagement with the data as a set of questions suggested to me by the language. The process modelled above was repeated in the case of all twenty texts in each data set. The questions generated were followed by preliminary analysis, some of which proved fruitful, and some less so, because some features appeared to be isolated, or an effective analysis of the feature would require more detail than this thesis would be able to support. Some of the features identified as significant are well-known, for example the grammatical analysis of modality. Some appear to be less standard, for example, my particular understanding of listing and categorisation in this data, and will require my own identification and description work. Through a process of identification and preliminary analysis, I have drawn up a list of nine features for particular investigation. This list is not exhaustive. Three data sets offering a total of sixty texts provide a rich source of linguistic data for analysis against a wide range of dimensions. Nevertheless, the final nine features are the ones that not only seem to me to be pertinent to an understanding of how the BP events were represented linguistically in the media but also show movement and development across the data. Some of the features not selected for study will nevertheless appear in my holistic study of texts.

I use the term 'features' as a convenient shorthand, in fact the linguistic areas suggested as important are disparate: including grammatical features such as modality; rhetorical usages such as metaphor; pragmatic and semantic processes such as naming and categorisation; and supra-textual concerns such as genre, discourses and intertextuality. These 'features' operate at different language levels, and are also situated at different levels in the semiotic framework as shown in Table 3 below, and previously described in Chapter 2. To reiterate, those features that operated at the level of a word or word group (such as the naming of events) will be

considered to be a single 'sign', in the sense of a building block for meaning. Those features that represented systems or codes, are considered to be at the level of 'code': for example the modality system is a set of choices expressing, with some regularity, the areas of (un)certainty and (in)ability, as well as the writer's engagement with his/her propositions. Other codes include genre (the set of features by which we identify a text written for a certain purpose and audience) and intertextuality (the interconnection between other texts of all kinds and the text under study). At the level of 'myth' are two rhetorical tropes – metonymy and metaphor – that serve to add additional connotative meaning to denotative representation. Finally an analysis of discourses seeks to uncover the ideological motivation of some of the language choices at the lower semiotic levels. In my analysis chapters, I do not use these semiotic categories to organise my findings. My purpose is to show here that the nine features for investigation operate at different language levels, offering together a picture of how individual language choices are part of a larger organisation of meaning.

| **Feature of language** | **Semiotic level (see Fig. 2.1, p37)** |
|---|---|
| **Naming of event** | Sign |
| **Naming of actors** | Sign |
| **Categorisation** | Sign |
| **Modality** | Code |
| **Genre** | Code |
| **Intertextuality** | Code |
| **Metonymy** | Myth |
| **Metaphor** | Myth |
| **Discourses** | Ideology |

Table 3.3: Summary of language features for analysis

The next stage in my research plan is to determine an analysis process for each of the nine features that would allow me to address my research questions. I aim to describe and understand patterns of language that would shed light on how the BP crisis is constructed through media language over the time span of my data sets. I seek to identify patterns 'within and across media texts', which can be achieved by looking at features in three ways: the feature in context in a particular text, patterns of the feature across three years, and commonalities across all nine features in a single year. In order to identify these patterns, my data analysis addresses the following questions:

- How frequent or significant is the language feature within the data sets?
- What form does it take, and what function is it performing in context?
- Does its *frequency*, *form* or *function* change across the data sets over time? How?

Section 3.6 below outlines my analysis approach for each of the nine features.

## 3.6 Depth analysis stage

In order to address the questions above, I will use two strategies for depth analysis. The first (where appropriate) is to use a semi-quantitative method, such as counting the occurrence of the feature, to determine frequency and movement. The second is qualitative analysis to investigate form and function in context.

### 3.6.1 Genre

In my discussion of the study of genre I characterised text genres as being identified through any or all of the following: common communicative purpose, structural regularities, stylistic regularities and similarities in content. Of these, an assessment of stylistic regularities is the most important to my study, as these will shed light on whether linguistic features in my analysis are typical of the genre or characteristic of the particular representation of BP events, and how any changes in writing style are reflective of changes in genre. My analysis needs to draw on my own data and previous work by genre scholars (Section 2.4.2.1, p45) in the following way:

- *Definition.* Which genres are represented in my data set?
- *Characterisation.* What are the characteristics of these genres, as established by genre scholars?
- *Characteristics of genre in my data.* Are these genre characteristics evident in my data and how are they realised?

I turn firstly to *definition,* or the identification of my data items as part of a text genre. Nexis UK provides a pre-set classification of its texts into 'publication types', and each data item is tagged for publication type. These are:

- Newspaper

- Magazines, journals, trade press
- Web blogs
- Newswires and press releases
- Newsletter
- News transcripts
- Web-based publications

This information is helpful in a general contextual sense, and some of the categories are potentially identifiable as genres, for example 'web blogs' (Herring & Wright, 2004). However, the categories do not generally meet the all the criteria of text genres mentioned above (common communicative purpose, structural regularities, stylistic regularities and similarities in content). Each of these publication types might have an identifiable audience, and be offered through a particular channel, yet they are unlikely to have commonalities across type in purpose, style, or structure. For example the publication type 'Newspaper' can provide items that have the purpose of either informing or entertaining (or both), where the structure is the inverted pyramid structure of a news report or a letter structure, and where the writer's style is constructed as detached or highly engaged. The same comments could be made about 'web-based publications', although these differ from newspapers in both channel and breadth of coverage.

I have yet to find a systematic taxonomy of media genres, and it is possible that none such is available. According to Chandler (1997:1), 'There are no undisputed "maps" of the system of genres within any medium', no one text displays all the features of a genre, and there is considerable overlap between genres. I propose to suggest a genre categorisation that is suitable for my purpose, and that is intended to be pragmatic and workmanlike, rather than groundbreaking. The two principles behind my proposal are firstly that, where possible, the genres should be recognised in scholarly literature, that is there is some existing work on their characteristics as genres, and secondly that they should be on the same level as each other in a notional taxonomy. By this I mean that they are (relatively) mutually exclusive, and one is never subsumed by the other. This notion of hierarchy in genre studies is well explored, and I describe Bhatia's (2004) concept of genre colony, genre and sub-genre in Chapter 2 (Section 2.4.2.1, p45).

Following my two guiding principles of previous recognition as a genre, and single hierarchical level, and using Bhatia's terminology, I propose the following categorisation:

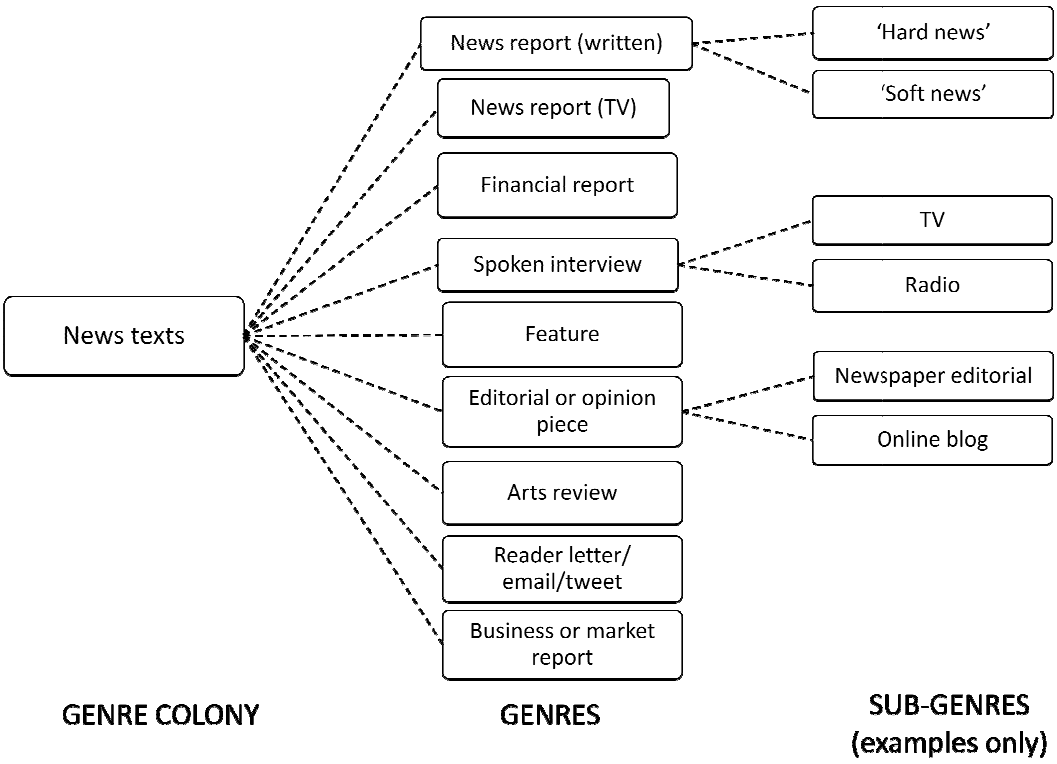


Fig. 3.1: A genre categorisation of news texts

The genres to which I will refer in my analysis section will be those in the central column of Fig. 3.1: news report (written), news report (TV) and so on. The third column shows illustrative examples of sub-genres within these genres. Of the genres in Fig. 3.1, most have been written about, some extensively, such as the news report, some in the context of other fields than business, for example the letter, and some hardly at all, for example the business or market report. Where there has been little scholarly attention, I made a judgement that the text type was sufficiently cohesive, and sufficiently *unlike* the other main genres in my data, to warrant it being proposed as a genre. The next stage of analysis, *characterisation of the genre*, links in with the principle of previous recognition in scholarly literature. I refer back to my literature review, Section 2.4.2.1, p45, for an overview of academic literature on media genres. From a methodological point of view, I used this work as a resource for information on those features of language and structure that I would expect to find in the texts now classified as being of a particular genre.

I finally turned to an examination of the *characteristics of genre in my data.* This involved recognising within my texts those characteristics of genre identified in previous research. As I

mentioned before, the notion of genre can embrace similarities in purpose, style, structure and/or content, but identifying these is not an exact science. Chandler (1997:2) cautions that 'An individual text within a genre rarely if ever has all of the characteristic features of the genre', referring to Wittgenstein's notion of 'family resemblances', rather than stark differences, as a helpful way of looking at genre identification. Further, genre-mixing is common in the mass media (Fairclough, 1995b) and is identifiable in several guises in my data set. My analysis aims to identify and discuss common stylistic and structural practices within each genre, pointing out where features of other genres are evident, and where the texts deviate in other ways from the norms thought to characterise genres. A sample analysis of generic features is included in Appendix 11.2.1, p258

### 3.6.2 Naming of events

While the identification and analysis of genre is rather complex, analysing the feature 'naming of events' is relatively straightforward. My concern with this linguistic feature is to identify and discuss the different ways in which writers refer to the events of the BP Deepwater Horizon explosion and oil spill. To achieve this, I will identify the expressions within the texts that refer to these events, and I show an example of this process in Appendix 11.2.2, p259. In some cases these are single nouns, in other cases a noun phrase including determiners, adjectives and prepositional phrases. This raises the question of how much of an expression to count as a naming choice. My procedure is to count the *whole noun group without the determiner* that is the noun head and any accompanying adjectives and prepositions. The following is an example of a naming choice:

> British energy giant BP said Tuesday that first-quarter profits rocketed on higher oil prices but admitted that the news was overshadowed by **last week's tragic accident at a rig in the Gulf of Mexico**. (2010, *Text 2/20,* my emphasis)

Here I would count the noun head 'accident', the adjective 'tragic' and prepositional phrases of time or place 'last week' and 'in the Gulf of Mexico'. I will not include relative clauses, even if they define the head, as I judge these may be too varied in nature to be considered a 'name', as illustrated in the following example:

> It was a **disaster** that many say was long in the making, was foreseeable, and almost inevitable. (2011, *Text 11/20,* my emphasis)

Here, the naming choice is counted in analysis as the word 'disaster' only, and not the rest of the defining relative clause (although this does not mean I ignored relative clauses as an

expression of a view on the events). Defining what counted as the naming choice is significant to my observations on length of names, which was defined as the average word length of the naming expressions within each data set. Once I have a set of naming choices for each year, I am further able to analyse them by whether they are generally neutral or generally negative in tone. In the first example above, while I would consider the term 'accident' to be a neutral choice on its own, the presence of the adjective 'tragic', would suggest a negative shading.

### 3.6.3 Naming of people

As in the case of naming of events, an analysis of the naming of people involves identifying mentions of human participants in the texts, counting them, and looking at the types of descriptor involved. Participants might be either individuals or groups of people. They could be either specifically named (for example 'Alison Reed') or referred to by an indefinite noun, a title or a group name (for example 'a young man', 'company officials', 'fishermen'). However I omit personal pronouns (e.g. 'she', 'they') from my analysis. Multiple descriptors are sometimes used, for example 'Committee chairman and TDC member Marty McDaniel'. Although the great majority of participants are real, I also include in my analysis people who are fictional, such as book characters. In the same spirit, I include in analysis people and groups who are hypothetical and representative rather than specific, for example 'your grandkids' in the expression 'What are you going to say to your grandkids when they say ...', or 'designated managers' who would be dealing with a hypothetical crisis. An example of this analysis is shown in Appendix 11.2.3, p260.

Having gathered all instances of human actors, I am able to look for logical groupings, for example 'BP employees' at both executive and staff levels, representatives of agencies and so on. From this analysis I will be able to investigate the salience of different groups to the story, and how this changes over time. I will be able to look at the proportion of named and unnamed participants, and what groups each belongs to: and for both named and unnamed people, I can see what descriptors are used to define them. I am able to look at whether participants are real, fictional or hypothetical and whether this changes over time. Finally I can identify movements in participants' proximity to the BP story, looking at how closely-related the people mentioned in the news texts are to the actual Deepwater Horizon events, and whether and how this changes over the three years.

### 3.6.4 Categorisation

The observation from my preliminary analysis which suggested categorisation as a feature for study was that the BP oil spill is included in groups and compared and contrasted with other entities both like and apparently unlike itself. As I discuss in the literature review, the processes of naming, defining and grouping are crucial to how human beings make meaning of their surroundings and communities. These processes are not neutral acts of organisation, but are socially agreed, and indicate how we choose to or are expected to respond to entities and phenomena. The process of naming or labelling has been addressed in Sections 3.6.2 and 3.6.3, and involves choices about how we refer to entities for our purposes. The process of grouping is slightly more complex, and involves how we choose to categorise entities; where we *locate* them in our understanding of the world. This location of a given entity alongside other entities says much about *which aspects of their being* we perceive to be important, and *in what context* we wish them to be understood. So an analysis of lists, groups or categories involves considering what aspects of our entity are foregrounded in the process of aligning it with other group members. My intention was to explore where the BP events were located in relation to pre-existing phenomena, and whether and how this changed over time.

Initial examination of the data indicated that this categorisation process appears in a number of interrelated forms:

1. *Comparisons*

   Events are referred to in constructions such as 'one of ...', 'the biggest ...' and so on. Comparing crisis events explicitly and implicitly with other similar events is one form of categorisation common in media representation, and is intended to help the reader make sense of the current situation. White (1997: 7) writes that this device frequently goes beyond neutral groupings to be part of the 'semantics of intensification': 'Comparisons which assert the great size, force, severity, significance etc of the action under consideration — thus, "one of the greatest shake-ups", "damage of biblical proportions" and "the worst losses since 1945".'

2. *Lists of entities*

   A number of entities are listed, for example 'Katrina, the BP oil spill and other events' (2011, *Text 1/20)*, and the BP crisis is on the list.

3. *Using the events as an index of something else*

   This indexical process can be recognised where the events are a 'shorthand' for something else. This analysis sits alongside naming choices for the events, where there begins to be a socially agreed interpretation of what names for the events *stand for.* In this way, the BP events and the indexed phenomenon thus create a category together. Sometimes this process is realised through one of the other practices mentioned here, such as comparison or listing, as is the case in this text extract:

   > Whether you are the leader of one of the Arab Spring countries, the ex-boss of BP, or a fashion designer prone to drunken, racist out-bursts - if you don't behave in the right way, people will remove you (2012, *Text 4/20*)

   This list refers to an element of the BP story as an exemplar of, or 'standing for', unacceptable behaviour.

4. *Contrasts and absences: What the events are <u>not</u>*

   Sometimes the events are categorised with an emphasis on what they are *unlike* rather than what they are *like.* In the 2010 data, the expression 'We've never seen anything like this magnitude' (2010, *Text 3/20*) does not imply that nothing as big as this has ever happened anywhere, but that this is an exceptional event amongst the group 'oil spills' or 'man-made environmental disasters'. Such exclusions, omissions and redefinition of categories were worthy of examination. In considering the groups and lists of which the BP events form part, I found that these can be either synchronic, or diachronic. That is that the events are either listed alongside a series of (largely) contemporaneous events, such as Hurricane Katrina or the financial crisis, or as the latest in a series of events through time, such as a list of BP safety failures.

A sample analysis of categorisation is found in Appendix 11.2.4, p261. The three processes of naming of events, naming of participants and categorisation are important indicators of how the BP crisis is constructed in news media language. In de Saussure's terms, analysis of these three features over time can show us one way in which changes in the *signifier* can alter our understanding of the *signified.*

### 3.6.5 Modality

In an overview of the modality system in Chapter 2, I noted three key types of modality (Palmer, 2001): epistemic modality, expressing degrees of certainty; deontic modality, expressing permission and obligation and dynamic modality, expressing ability and willingness. (A fourth type, evidential modality, which includes sensory and reporting items, is found in research (de Haan, 1999) and in my texts to be very rare and for this reason not included in my analysis.) I further noted that modal resources are very broad (Droga & Humphrey, 2003), comprising not only modal auxiliaries, but adverbials, adjectives, nouns, phrases and clauses. I described how modal expressions can vary in strength, with speakers taking strong, weak or medium positions (high, low or medium modality) in relation to their propositions. I finally discussed resources for conveying degrees of subjectivity and objectivity in the speaker. Investigating these different types of meaning potential for diverse modal resources will contribute to an understanding of how writers position themselves in relation to their construction of the crisis.

My initial approach to the analysis of modality will be a count of instances of modal expressions. In line with the observations above, this will comprise a frequency count of the diverse modal usages, which will be categorised according to whether they had epistemic, deontic or dynamic force. A sample is shown in Appendix 11.2.5, p262. I will then consider these usages in context, for example whether an expression of uncertainty represented the perspective of the writer, or a participant in the story. Additional depth can be added to the description by considering the strength of modal commitment and the relative subjectivity of the writer. Comparison of modal choices across time will indicate the extent to which this positioning alters with increasing familiarity with the material.

In reviewing work on the modal system, I also discussed Appraisal Theory (Section 2.4.2.3, p58), which represents an alternative, but related, method for analysing the interpersonal function of texts. Its relevance for my work is that it provides a means for the systematic description of evaluation, particularly in the case of lexical usages. I will refer to Appraisal Theory alongside my modality analysis where it adds to the understanding of the data. This will involve categorising whether evaluative lexis is being used to express affect, judgement, or appreciation. Appraisal Theory also considers processes of attribution, modality, proclaiming and disclaiming as part of assessing the degree of objectivity or subjectivity of the writer. These tools of Appraisal Theory will be relevant for investigating distinctions by genre, as well

as supplementing analysis of the journalist's commitment to both his/her own statements and those of intertexts such as reported speech, written reports and artistic works.

### 3.6.6 Metonymy

I presented an outline of the rhetorical trope metonymy in the context of the semiotic level of connotation or myth in Section 2.5.2.1, p62. My analysis strategy for metonymic expressions is firstly to identify all instances of metonymy (including synecdoche) within my data sets, as shown in Appendix 11.2.6, p263. In this process of identification, I use for support and terminology the summary lists and categorisations of metonyms found in, amongst others, Chandler (2007), Lakoff & Johnson (1980), Cornelissen (2007) and Radden et al. (2007), placing metonyms in groups such as ORGANISATION FOR MEMBER, CONTROLLER FOR CONTROLLED and so on. As well as using the guidelines offered in these works, I also follow the general principle outlined by Dirven (2002) that metonymic expressions can often be recognised by the use of an inanimate subject with a verb usually requiring an animate subject. Dirven (2002:80) gives as examples the verbs 'mean' or 'use', and there are many usages of this type in my own data, for example 'The U.S. Census Bureau recently declared ...' (2012, *Text 3/20*). I will observe the patterns and processes of metonymy through the data set, in order to comment on whether instances of metonymy increase or decrease over the years of the data sets, what types of metonymy are used, whether this changes, and what function metonyms fulfil in terms of meaning-making. In discussing the functions of metonyms, I will take into account that metonymic expressions *select* an aspect of the entity described for attention, and in doing this necessarily *disregard* other aspects of the entity that might have been selected.

### 3.6.7 Metaphor

Like metonymy, metaphor is a rhetorical trope, and one that is identified as a particular source of innovation in language (van Leeuwen, 2005). Section 2.5.2.2, p64, offers a broad overview of scholarly work on metaphor, and of Jakobson's (2002) critical distinction between the metaphoric and metonymic dimensions in representation. In the same way as for metonymy, my research process consists of identifying metaphors (Appendix 11.2.7, p264), grouping them by type (in this case, sense domains) and examining their frequency, the nature of source and target domains, and changes over the time period of the data set.

The first stage is to identify all metaphors, in order to gain an overview of the use of metaphorical language and how this changes over the three year period. This is an emergent approach to the data, where no assumptions have been made about type of domain of metaphors encountered, and this approach is aligned to the non-directive nature of my research questions. In other words, I do not seek to explore the frequency and usage of specific metaphorical domains, as is the case in for example Koller & Davidson (2008) who examine social exclusion; Koller (2003) on business and war/sport; Milne et al., (2006) writing about business as a journey and White (2003) on economics and growth. Rather I seek to identify metaphorical usages of any kind, and investigate themes that emerge, the recurrent domains that are used by journalists to conceptualise the BP crisis and its related outcomes.

The task of identifying all metaphorical usage is complex. In verbal language, metaphors span all word classes, although the conventional denotation X IS Y can imply that nominal metaphors are most typical (Cameron, 1999). Metaphors are usages where one entity or process is described in terms of another, and two sense domains can be identified. However, as I outlined earlier, for some metaphors ('dead' metaphors), the presence of two sense domains is weak or no longer discernible. Nevertheless, I will aim to include dead and dormant metaphors in my analysis, on the grounds that even these non-creative usages can contribute, albeit weakly, to a dominant view of the phenomenon in question. Lakoff & Johnson (1980) argue that metaphors we scarcely notice still structure our shared thinking in fundamental ways. In a business context, Koller (2003: 88-9) argues that weak or dead metaphors nevertheless contribute to or 'tie in with' with dominant themes. Further, the distinction between 'live', 'dead' and 'dormant' metaphors is not always easy to define. As is the case in much linguistic analysis (e.g. the identification of genres) prototypical examples are clear, but much other identification and categorisation can be a matter of judgement.

In summary, my analysis, will represent an overview of the extent of metaphoric usage in the BP texts. Metaphors will be shown to belong either to a recurrent group (for example the common group BUSINESS IS WAR) or to be 'one-off' usages. In the case of recurrent groups, I will include all three categories of live, dormant and dead metaphors, on the grounds that dead metaphors may still support a particular metaphorical line of thought in a congruent way. I will use the convention X IS Y to describe metaphors, where X is the target domain, and Y is the source domain.

### 3.6.8 Intertextuality

In my discussion of intertextuality, I described some different frameworks for considering types of intertextuality (e.g. Bazerman, 2004; Fairclough, 1992; Genette, 1997), and based on this work, I suggested that there were three broad types of intertextuality, namely:

- Intertextuality as retrievable texts.
- Intertextuality as identifiable style/register/genre.
- Intertextuality as irretrievable texts.

I will not address this *third* category above, as texts included here are not retrievable by analysis. The *second* category above concerns structural and stylistic characteristics of genres, and these will form part of my analysis of genre, covered as a discrete section for each data set. In the analysis section that deals with intertextuality, therefore, I will discuss only the *first* category – that is references within the analysed texts to other texts that have a more or less transparent provenance. In the case of my data, such texts are likely to include eyewitness statements, official reports, literary quotations and press releases, amongst others, and a sample analysis is shown in Appendix 11.2.8, p265. An analysis of how and why such texts are incorporated in news media reports will contribute to an understanding of how news writers use available linguistic resources as support in constructing a particular view of the BP crisis.

### 3.6.9 Discourses

So far in this section I have identified eight of the nine features of discourse that are of relevance to the analysis of my data set. These eight features have been situated at the semiotic levels of either 'sign', in the case of naming and categorisation choices, 'code', in the case of the explorations of modality, genre and intertextuality, or 'myth' in the case of the rhetorical tropes of metaphor and metonym. The ninth and final area for consideration is an analysis of discourses, as defined and discussed in Section 2.6, p66. I have suggested that discourses are the means by which ideologies are circulated, and they entail a different and broader level of interpretation from that proposed so far. An identification of discourses will draw on any or all of the eight language features mentioned earlier, as well as other language choices, in order to identify persistent patterns that point to the presence of ideological positions. A consideration of discourses will be one way of visualising what my disparate set of language features might 'add up to'.

In my earlier discussion, I suggested that the recognition and analysis of discourses was by no means a clear-cut process with a set of definable procedures. It is in the pervasive nature of discourses, or 'ways of thinking' (Foucault, 1972) that they can be woven into what we say, and how, where and to whom we say it, through myriad mechanisms. Discourses are not subject to general agreement, and I mentioned earlier Sunderland's (2006:166) characterisation of discourses as 'partial', 'non-finite' and 'non-ubiquitous', and thus subject to the perspective of the individual analyst. It is the task of the analyst to gather evidence about the mechanisms used to disseminate shared discourses, and put together a convincing case for their existence and ubiquity.

I remarked earlier that scholars who work in the analysis of discourses approach the task from a number of theoretical perspectives using diverse methodological tools, including grammatical frameworks, content analysis and Conversation Analysis. Sunderland (2006: 166) defines a number of linguistic features as relevant to discourse identification, including lexical choices, verb forms and moods, speech acts and collocations. She points out that the analyst should be alert to what may be omitted as well as what is present. Fairclough's (1989, 1992a, 1995) approach to identifying the presence of ideologies is strongly based on analyses within the framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004), where, again, linguistic choices concerning, for example, actor, mood and word order are held to be significant in positioning speakers and audience in certain desired relationships.

The crux of my research questions concerns news media *representations* of the BP events, and the ideologies that are important to my account are those that inform the ways in which the story of the Deepwater Horizon events is represented to the reading public. The question I will ask in the analysis of my data is: are there discernible patterns or characteristics of the representation of the BP events which suggest shared ways of thinking, and do these ways of thinking change over the time period of the data? Following the principle that choices across a range of linguistic features can separately or together construct a discourse, my analysis approach is to consider the analysis of the first eight language features as a resource for identifying discourses. I would expect to comment on lexical, grammatical and word order features, insofar as these suggest a direction for representation that can be held to be regular and repeated, and giving evidence of the motivated structuring of ideas. I will seek to demonstrate whether the function of these features at the levels of sign, code and myth can together be held to represent a wider significance at the level of ideology. I will be open to

the possibility that new discourses may emerge year by year, to reveal a continually shifting pattern, or discourses may overlap the data sets, or co-exist in a single year.

This chapter has outlined how I will approach my data in staged and iterative analysis steps. The following chapters show the findings from this analysis. Chapter 4 summarises the contextualising analysis based on all the texts in my data sets. Chapters 5 to 7 show the depth analysis based on the smaller data sets for, respectively, 2010, 2011 and 2012.

# 4 An overview of the full data set

This chapter has a scene-setting function for the three detailed analysis chapters to follow. In subsequent chapters I make use of the qualitative and semi-quantitative analysis of a restricted set of texts to explore language use over three time points. In this chapter I will review the *full* data set, using quantitative analysis supported by some qualitative illustration. My aim in this overview section is to set out some fundamental issues of context: to give not only an idea of how the BP-related data progresses and changes on a number of measures, but also an indication of some of the content, in preparation for the depth analysis of later chapters. The fact that this overview deals with the *complete* data set is important, in my view, from a research perspective. As I argue in Chapter 3, using a quantitative approach at this stage of the analysis is one way of warranting that the patterns I will claim are substantiated across a sample that is complete rather than restricted.

As outlined in the Methodology chapter, my data sets for analysis comprise a full set of all the items derived from the Nexis UK database for each of the three dates analysed, as well as a systematic random sampled twenty texts for each of the three dates. The larger set is intended to be more or less exhaustive for the dates in question – subject to the limitations outlined in section 3.2.3, p75 – while the smaller set allows for more detailed analysis. The larger set of items comprises 169 texts for April 27th 2010, 94 texts for April 27th 2011 and 31 texts for April 27th 2012, and it is these texts to which I now turn for an overview of my data. The analysis in this section covers the geographical origin of the texts, the Nexis publication types, a breakdown of the texts by news media genre and an analysis of the salience of the BP story within data items.

## 4.1 Number of texts

Table 4.1 shows the number of texts in English mentioning the BP events on the three researched dates, with close duplicates and irrelevant texts removed (full details of the selection process can be found in Section 3.2, p74).

| | Nexis UK texts containing 'BP' AND 'crisis' OR 'oil spill' OR 'disaster' | Sample for depth analysis | Average word length of the 20 analysed texts |
|---|---|---|---|
| **April 27th 2010** | 169 | 20 | 455 |
| **April 27th 2011** | 94 | 20 | 350 |
| **April 27th 2012** | 31 | 20 | 356 |

Table 4.1: Number of Nexis UK items mentioning BP events 2010-12

The number of texts in each year set reduces significantly as time progresses, from 169 texts in 2010 to 31 in 2012. As we would expect, the 'newsworthiness' of the events, as indicated by coverage, reduces over time. As the average analysed text lengths are different for each year, it will be appropriate for some of the analyses that follow, that findings are shown per 000 words, rather than as actual values across the data set. A fuller discussion of the implications of the analysed text lengths can be found in Section 3.2, p74, on data selection, and below in Section 4.5 on the salience of the BP story within texts.

## 4.2 Country of origin

Table 4.2 shows a broad breakdown of the country of origin of the full set of texts that mention the BP oil spill. Note that only texts in English were included in the sample.

| | 27th April 2010 | | 27th April 2011 | | 27th April 2012 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | No of texts | % | No of texts | % | No of texts | % |
| **UK** | 27 | 16 | 11 | 12 | 4 | 13 |
| **US** | 76 | 45 | 56 | 60 | 19 | 61 |
| **Rest of world** | 56 | 33 | 11 | 12 | 3 | 10 |
| **Unable to determine (www.)** | 10 | 6 | 16 | 17 | 5 | 16 |
| **Total** | **169** | **100** | **94** | **100** | **31** | **100*** |

Table 4.2: Geographical source of items mentioning BP events 2010-12

* note that low numbers make percentages indicative rather than firm findings

The site of the BP oil spill – the United States – begins and remains the main country of origin for English-speaking media coverage, and this reflects not just the direct interest in the events, but also the size of the US and the number of local and regional newspapers operating there. However, the fact that the events are perceived to be of global rather than just national interest is reflected in the fact that half the English-speaking coverage in 2010 is outside the US, primarily from the UK. The UK has a specific interest in events, given that BP, while a global company, is British in origin. At the time of the crisis, President Barack Obama positioned BP firmly as a British (rather than global) company (Burt, 2012) and by extension directed the blame and responsibility in the direction of the UK. By 2012, the US represents an even greater proportion of coverage at 61% than it did in the first days of the disaster, with both the UK (at 13% on a low base) and the rest of the world showing decreased coverage as a proportion in 2011 and 2012. This picture suggests that concerns with the physical effects of the spill in the US, both real and potential, are of greater ongoing interest than concerns with moral and financial culpability in the UK. That said, the other area of increase over the years by percentage is the geographically indeterminate category, which consists mainly of internet and blog coverage. This rises from 6% in 2010 to 16% in 2012, which implies a continuing interest in the story at a more general, societal level. This aspect of the data will be explored in later sections that discuss the implications of genre in the texts (5.1, 6.1 and 7.1).

The other issue of relevance to the geographical origin of texts is that linguistic analysis is situated temporally and culturally – that is, when country of origin changes, then style and social practice change. This principle is central to a social semiotic view of communication (Bignell, 2002; van Leeuwen, 2005) and is a critical component of the study of language choices – any story of linguistic representation is also the story of the situated style and social practice from which it arises. It will be important at times in the analysis to indicate that the writer is not just a journalist, but a British or US journalist; that the newspaper is national or local; and that it originates in one of the affected Gulf States, rather than an unaffected US state.

## 4.3 Nexis publication type

Table 4.3 shows the types of media in which the texts were found, using the Nexis-generated categories. The term 'publication' is one used by Nexis UK to include a number of channels, including print, web publications, and transcripts of interviews and news programmes. While

these categorisations are generally clear, there appears to be some overlap at the edges of categories, for example between newsletters and web-based publications.

| | 27th April 2010 | | 27th April 2011 | | 27th April 2012 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | No of texts | % | No of texts | % | No of texts | % |
| **Newswires** | 68 | 40 | 29 | 31 | 8 | 26 |
| **Newspapers** | 48 | 28 | 16 | 17 | 12 | 39 |
| **Web-based publications** | 24 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 0 | 0 |
| **Web blogs** | 16 | 9 | 14 | 15 | 7 | 23 |
| **News transcripts (from spoken)** | 10 | 6 | 4 | 4 | 1 | 3 |
| **Newsletters** | 2 | 1 | 10 | 11 | 1 | 3 |
| **Magazines, journals, trade press** | 1 | 1 | 6 | 6 | 2 | 6 |
| **Total** | **169** | **100** | **94** | **100** | **31** | **100*** |

Table 4.3: Media source of items mentioning BP events 2010-12

* note that low numbers make percentages indicative rather than firm findings

The coverage of the BP events is dominated in the Nexis database by newspapers and newswires. Although entirely duplicated texts have been removed from the data set, the practice of embedding newswire copy in the stories of other publications accounts for the repetition of certain direct quotations by contributors, as well as repeated words and phrases. For example, the quotation from 2010: 'We've never seen anything like this magnitude' by George Crozier, 'oceanographer and executive director at the Dauphin Island Sea Lab in Alabama', appears six times in the total dataset: twice in newswires, twice in web publications and twice in newspapers. The high proportion of coverage of the BP events by newswires reduces over time. News agencies are far more likely to focus on 'new news', as media outlets often need to supplement their own resources to achieve in-depth and rapid coverage of unfolding events. By contrast, editorials and opinion pieces are kept in-house because they reflect the stance of the individual newspaper; and features also tend to be kept in-house as they are less time-bound than news reports.

There appears to be no obvious reason why the proportion of newspaper items drops in 2011, but the point made above about in-house coverage is likely to explain the rise in newspaper

articles to nearly 40% of all texts in 2012. As the internet, alongside television and radio, is becoming the source for instantaneous news consumption, so newspapers try to fight for their niche with a deeper and more reflective news coverage (Burt, 2012). While newspapers are inclined to manage news stories to fit their daily news cycle (Fowler, 1991), they still appear from the findings to be more likely to address ongoing elements of the story than are newswires or internet publications – the presence of the latter dropping to zero in 2012. It is the role of the *inside* pages of newspapers that is relevant in 2012. News reports do appear – directly related in terms of a ruling on the compensation settlement (2012, *Text 13/31*), and indirectly in the context of an oil book in North Dakota (2012, *Text 4/31*) and a protest march at the Shakespeare Festival in Stratford-upon-Avon (2012, *Text 8/31*) – but otherwise it is the review pages (books, movies), the travel pages (New Orleans) and the letters pages that continue to refer to the BP oil spill story.

This move from news reports to other types of text is evident in two more categories. The first is magazines, journals and trade press. These are small in number (moving from 1% of texts in 2010 to 6% in 2011 and 2012) but start to develop the story as an illustration of crisis management or brand building through behaviour. One article in 2011 (*Text 94/94*) and one in 2012 (*Text 1/31*) use the BP oil spill story to sell consultancy products and services with the message that 'We live in an era of tremendous brand risk when a full-blown crisis can start with a tweet of 140 characters', and that preparation and prediction are the key to the swiftest return to business as usual.

The second category that increases in terms of proportion of texts is the web blog. 'Citizen journalism' (Burt, 2012:101) is an increasingly significant feature of how we make sense of social phenomena, and by 2012, web blogs are roughly as important a proportion of commentary on BP as newspapers and newswires. Twitter communication (usually gathered into a set of re-tweets of interest to the web page author) is counted as a sub-set of web blogging. BP is not the sole topic of these Twitter digests, but they serve to maintain the story and set it in the context of a world view, which is a subject of my later analysis and discussion. The web blog, alongside newspaper letters, is one of the main sources of 'voice' (Blommaert, 2005) for non-professionals and victims, and as such, is an important inclusion in my study of representation.

## 4.4 Media genre type

In Section 3.6.1, p95, I proposed a categorisation of news media writing genres, and I use this below to show the pattern of genres in my full data sets.

| | 27th April 2010 | | 27th April 2011 | | 27th April 2012 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | No of texts | % | No of texts | % | No of texts | % |
| **News report (written)** | 117 | 69 | 24 | 26 | 13 | 42 |
| **News report (TV and radio)** | 7 | 4 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 3 |
| **Financial report** | 34 | 20 | 38 | 40 | 2 | 6 |
| **Spoken interview (TV or radio)** | 3 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 0 | 0 |
| **Feature article** | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 6 |
| **Editorial or opinion piece (print/online)** | 6 | 4 | 13 | 14 | 3 | 10 |
| **Arts review** | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 5 | 16 |
| **Letters** | 0 | 0 | 3 | 3 | 1 | 3 |
| **Business or market report** | 2 | 1 | 11 | 12 | 4 | 13 |
| **Total** | **169** | **100** | **94** | **100** | **31** | **100*** |

Table 4.4: BP oil spill texts by genre 2010-12

* note that low numbers make percentages indicative rather than firm findings

Table 4.4 shows how the genres to which the selected texts belong change over the three years of the data. In 2010, 73% of the texts are either print or TV news reports, with the remaining 27% being largely financial reports (27th April was quarter 1 results day). By 2012, news reports have reduced to less than half of the texts (45%). There is an increase over the years, by proportion, in business and market reports, feature articles and in arts reviews of various kinds. Chapters 5 to 7 will show a full analysis of the genres as exemplified in my data. To establish a context I give below a few brief illustrations of how news media genres are represented in my full data sets.

*News reports*

In 2010, the news reports on the BP oil spill (73% of texts) are mainly progress reports that discuss announcements by BP concerning the victims and the work being carried out to stop the oil escape, which was still uncontrolled and unpredictable at this stage. As well as quotations from press releases and news conferences, other input from eyewitnesses and experts in the fields of oil drilling, the environment and food industries are evident. By 2011, only 27% of texts are news reports. Directly-related news stories deal mainly with the progress of compensation and legal action. However very many of the news reports cover stories that are *not* directly-related to the BP oil spill, but concern other events or companies, where the BP oil spill is mentioned in a minor capacity. For example *Text 46/94* (2011) deals largely with the new Chairman of commodities trader Glencore and his contentious remarks about women employees. It also mentions that Glencore had appointed Tony Hayward as a senior independent director, but notes that 'his reputation has been shredded by the Deepwater Horizon disaster.' *Text 14/31* (2012), reports that an oil spill in the Yellowstone River has created a need for fish testing. Laboratories, however, are still 'backed up processing specimens collected in the BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico'. As well as written news reports, the 2010 data set includes a number of television or radio news reports. Even more than reports in newspapers, television news focuses on 'breaking news'. It is therefore unsurprising that while seven of the texts in 2010 were transcripts of television interviews, this dropped to one in each of 2011 and 2012, as the story moves from the immediate explosion to longer-term issues such as compensation.

*Financial reports*

In 2010, financial reports account for 20% of texts, and in these, the news of BP's first quarter results competes with the ongoing news of the oil spill. April 27th 2011 is again results day, and the first quarter results become the main story in texts mentioning the BP events, accounting for 40% of items. The spill is mentioned (this is more or less the first anniversary) but in the context of Quarter 1 results. By 2012, only 13% of texts about the BP events fall into the financial reports pages.

*Spoken interviews*

Of the six spoken interviews in the full data sample, four are 'Fair Disclosure' interviews in which annual company earnings are discussed in conference calls and are presented in transcript by Nexis. These did not all concern BP solely, but BP was mentioned in all. The

other two, both in 2011, are an interview with Michael Greenberger (of the Center for Health and Homeland Security) and a transcript of a speech made by Assistant Attorney General Tony West at the University of Chicago Law School. Both make reference to BP only in passing, in the first case as an instance of a crisis to be dealt with at a national level, and in the second as an example of a large litigation case.

*Feature articles*

As described earlier, the feature article is unlike either the news report or the evaluative piece. Its defining 'rhetorical act' (Bhatia, 2004:59) is primarily descriptive, with some evaluative elements. This media genre appears only twice in the entire dataset, and this is in the form of travel features, both, coincidentally, dealing with New Orleans and both written in 2012 (*Text 18/31* and *Text 22/31*). Both use the theme of the city's 'renaissance' in the wake of a series of disasters (one shared with the rest of the US – the financial crisis, and two that were much more localised, that is Hurricane Katrina and the BP oil spill). One of the items goes even further back in time and scope:

> The nearly 300-year-old city has had to rebound from centuries of disasters including fires, plagues, hurricanes and most recently, the BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. (2012, *Text 18/31*)

One writer uses a personal narrative approach, comparing New Orleans with her home town of Sarasota, and the other uses an impersonal observer approach. In both cases, the tone is largely descriptive, with the 'point of closure' at the end, as is typical of the genre.

*Editorial or opinion pieces*

This genre includes opinion or comment pieces, which are argumentative and persuasive in rhetorical purpose. The texts in this category in the sample are of two main types – editorial/journalistic comment and blog comment. Over the three year span, the proportion of editorial or opinion pieces increases strongly to 2011 and remains at a similar level in 2012, indicating a shift in focus from reporting to commenting on and evaluating the events. Comment tends to be presented as more impersonal in quality papers, as more personal and emotional in the popular press, and often as highly-charged in internet blogs, as two example titles from 2012 exemplify: 'Should we kill the politicians before they kill us?' (*Text 20/31*) and '"Crucify them": the Obama way' (*Text 21/31*). How 'more impersonal' and 'more personal' commentary are variously constructed is a topic for attention in the detailed analysis chapters.

*Arts reviews*

The purpose of the arts review genre is to inform the reader about and comment upon particular items of art, fiction and non-fiction literature, and so on. This genre does not appear amongst the 2010 texts, and is represented by only one text in 2011, but by 2012 five of the 31 texts in the data set are of this kind. This is commensurate with the length of time many artworks (in the broadest sense) take to complete, but might also suggest that there is a length of elapsed time deemed 'appropriate' or 'decent' for works of this nature to appear, and also indicates that a process of assimilation may have taken place, that it takes an amount of time for the wider significance of events to be understood, and this is necessary for a work of art to have resonance. These texts imply a move of the representation of BP events from being part of the world of 'reality' to having an alternative existence in the world of artistic representation. Examples of works referred to in the data are films, books (both fiction and non-fiction) and documentaries.

*Business or market reports*

Business or market reports have in common that they represent events from the sole perspective of their effect on the business world. They can be argued as a genre, in Bhatia's terms, as they have purpose and audience in common, yet stylistically they can be rather different. They can range from somewhat resembling news reports to offering summaries, evaluation and commentary on diverse business-related events. Business reports account for only 1% of the texts in 2010 but increase to 12% and 13% in 2011 and 2012, as writers are able to gain better insight with time into the implications of the BP events for the oil and gas industry as well as for wider business practice. Examples in this data set are a web piece on petrol price rises (2011, *Text 18/94*), a report on offshore drilling (2012, *Text, 38/94*) and a report in Campaign on 'Building brands through behaviour' (2012, *Text 5/31*).

*Summary*

In Chapter 3 I suggest that an understanding of media genres is central to my thesis, which seeks to identify meaningful patterns across a widely varied data set. It will be important to understand which of the language features I examine are generally characteristic of the media genre under study, and which are characteristic of writing about crisis events, or indeed the BP crisis in particular. Yet in a sense distinguishing between three types of feature (characteristic of the genre, of business crises or of BP Deepwater Horizon) is an artificial exercise in the process of trying to understand crisis representation. If the BP events are described in a way

that is typical of a particular genre, then this is a crucial part of how meaning is made by journalists and received by readers. In this way, this thesis will be as much a study of the shift of the genres and sub-genres within which the story is located, as it is a study of the individual expressions or structures used to describe the BP events.

## 4.5 Salience of the BP story

One of the measures of how a story is being represented concerns not just how many media items are written (spoken) about it, but how much of a given item is directly connected to the story. A reduction in the *number* of stories is indicative of a loss of media interest, and there being less 'going on' in terms of the story. However, a reduction in how big the BP story is *within* a given piece is also of interest. In order to explore this idea in my data, I have analysed the proportion that the BP story represents of each full text in my data sets. This is analysed by determining what proportion of the words in the individual text relate to the BP Deepwater Horizon crisis. I present this in Table 4.5 in the following bands: up to 25%, 26-50%, 51-75% and 76-100%. So, for example, in 2010, there were 37 texts of the 169 total where the BP events accounted for one-quarter or less of the word count.

| | | **27th April 2010** | | **27th April 2011** | | **27th April 2012** | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | No of texts | % | No of texts | % | No of texts | % |
| **% of text** | **0-25%** | 37 | 22 | 52 | 55 | 22 | 71 |
| | **26-50%** | 12 | 7 | 9 | 10 | 3 | 10 |
| | **51-75%** | 4 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| | **76-100%** | 116 | 69 | 32 | 34 | 6 | 19 |
| **Total** | | **169** | **100** | **94** | **100** | **31** | **100*** |

Table 4.5: Proportion of media text dealing directly with BP oil spill 2010-12

* note that low numbers make percentages indicative rather than firm findings

In 2010, more than two-thirds of the media items in the sample dealt with the BP spill alone. The majority of the remaining texts are those deal with financial results, in which BP is only one of the organisations reported on, and TV news programmes, where BP is one story of several. By 2011 just one-third of texts are primarily about the disaster. By 2012, this figure is only about one-fifth, and BP is mentioned only minimally in nearly three-quarters of the texts.

As time goes on, stories that mention the BP disaster tend to mention it not as a story in itself but as an example that illuminates another phenomenon. Consider *Text 20/31* in 2012. In a 3,000 word blog, the following fragment appears:

> Some of the most profitable of all corrupt activities involve energy. Remember Dick Cheney's secret energy meetings? Those led directly to electricity deregulation scams, corporate welfare for energy producers, fracking, the **BP oil spill,** gas pipeline explosions, high gas prices, faulty nuclear reactors, and an unreliable grid. (My emphasis)

Here the BP oil spill is used as an illustration of the results of 'corrupt' activities involving energy. This is the only place the BP oil spill is mentioned in the entire piece, and in this way it represents a typical example of the pattern of coverage of the oil spill as time moves on. This pattern of a reducing proportion of coverage within stories may indicate something more than media loss of interest in the BP oil spill. This may be an assimilation of the concept of the BP oil spill into the way we look at the world, where the BP events have become a shorthand or an index of something else, which is jointly understood, and which casts light on yet other social phenomena in a process of unlimited semiosis. This idea will be further explored in the forthcoming analysis.

The overview analysis in this chapter indicates a picture of a news story that appears to have become increasingly a matter of US interest. The publication and genre breakdowns show that it has moved from newswires and TV coverage to newspapers, and from the front pages of newspapers to the features, comment and review pages. Meanwhile other forms of commentary on the events have become more important – particularly that in internet blogs and the business press. From being the major focus of news media items, the BP story has become largely a 'footnote', where it is drawn on as a supporting illustration for the main stories represented. The following three chapters continue to address the research aim of uncovering patterns in the sample, by investigating language usages within the texts in greater depth.

# 5 2010

My approach to investigating my texts is to engage in analysis in increasing levels of detail. In Chapter 4, I presented an overview of my full data sets to set the news texts into context. In this chapter I move to the next level of detail, presenting an analysis of the set of 20 texts for 2010. I will explore the nine linguistic features of interest I identified in Chapter 3: genre, naming the event, naming participants, categorisation, modality, metonymy, metaphor, intertextuality and discourses. Using both semi-quantitative and discourse analysis methods, I will investigate the occurrence and the function of each feature, and its role in representation of the BP Deepwater Horizon events. As the aim of my research questions is to look at my selected texts for broad patterns across a range of language features, the analysis in each case is necessarily selective, that is in less depth than would be the case if I were focusing on a single feature for this text. In the final section of this chapter (Section 5.10) I move to the last stage of analysis, carrying out a discourse analysis of a single text, with the aim of exploring the ways in which the features studied interact to construct a particular type of representation in the 2010 texts.

## 5.1 Genre

I begin with an analysis of the main genres of the 2010 texts. I have stated that a genre is a type of semiotic 'code' or system, from which the reader is directed to infer certain meanings, that is, the reader is given a framework within which s/he can interpret the text. Genres may be identified through commonalities of purpose, audience, content, structure and style (Bhatia, 1993). This entails that a set of linguistic features may be particularly characteristic of a certain genre, and for this reason, I will address the topic of genre before I turn to specific language features.

Table 4.4 in Section 4.4, p113, shows that the dominant genre in 2010 is the news report, representing about 70% of the larger 2010 dataset. The other substantial genre represented is the financial report, at 20% of texts. In this section, I will consider the significance of these two media genres – 'news report' and 'financial report'. Overall, both are a type of media writing whose primary purpose is to inform through factual representation or description. They are both frequently characterised as 'hard news' (Fowler, 1991; White, 1997), and set in

contradistinction to 'soft news', such as features or opinion pieces, whose primary aim is to entertain.

*News reports*

In Chapter 2 I drew upon Fulton et al.'s (2005: 233) characterisation of the genre news reports as exhibiting a number of language features, including a high proportion of empirical information, third-person narration where the narrative voice is externalised and elided, lack of modality, preponderance of declarative verbs indicating certainty and use of the 'pyramid structure'. These typical generic features are largely present in the 2010 BP 'news report' texts.

Firstly, there is a significant use of empirical information, including the detailed naming of people and clear specificity of time and place. At this point in the BP events, one week after the explosion, the news media is still aiming to answer the canonical questions of news reporting: 'who, what, when, where and why?'. *Text 5/20* (2010) is largely typical in respect of its focus on 'the facts' as the following extract shows.

> The oil is now about **20 miles (32 kilometres)** off the coast of **Venice, Louisiana**, the closest it's been to land. But it's still not expected to reach the coast **before Friday**, if at all.
>
> BP, which was leasing the Deepwater Horizon, said it will begin drilling **by Thursday** as part of a **$100 million** effort to take the pressure off the well, which is spewing **42,000 gallons (159,000 litres)** of crude oil **a day**.
>
> **Company spokesman Robert Wine** said it will take **up to three months** to drill a relief well from another rig **recently** brought to the site where the Deepwater Horizon sank after the blast. Most of the **126** workers on board escaped; **11** are missing and presumed dead. No cause has been determined. (my emphases)

This extract makes use of an accumulation of facts and figures including distances, volumes, temporal expressions, names and titles and employee numbers. In some respects, there is a high degree of specificity. The conversions of miles to kilometres and gallons to litres, connote an attention to detail, and signal an orientation towards both national (in this case, Canadian) and international readers. The source of information ('Company spokesman Robert Wine') is clearly named and titled, and the numbers of missing and surviving employees are given exactly. In support of this objective presentation, the future tense, declarative mood is mainly used, indicating firmness of intent. For example in indirect speech (paragraph 2) 'BP ... said **it will begin** drilling' and in paragraph 3, 'Robert Wine said **it will take** up to three months'.

Nevertheless, there is a degree of mitigation in the presentation of facts. Distances are approximate ('about' 20 miles in paragraph 1) and temporal expressions are vague ('before Friday, if at all', 'by Thursday', 'up to three months', 'recently'). This can be satisfactorily explained by the fact that at this stage in the development of the crisis, information was limited or absent, but I would also suggest that a degree of imprecision can support rather than undermine the representation of an objective reality. Not only does the reader not need to know the exact number of gallons of crude oil being lost by the well, but a figure of, say, 42,367 gallons would invite incredulity and challenge. In fact the figure of 42,000 gallons, presented with an unmitigated declarative ('**is** spewing'), was far from a generally agreed figure, being at the lowest end of BP's declared estimate and less than a tenth of BP's internal estimates (Bergin, 2011: 171).

Secondly, Fulton et al.'s reference to the elision of the authorial voice is manifest in a number of forms in the data. Attributed speech is one way of showing that any opinion and judgement within the piece are not the writer's own (Martin & White, 2005) and individuals and institutions quoted are usually presented as having a 'warrant' to speak (Potter et al., 1993). In this data set, the warrant is either 1) expert status, often technical or environmental, or 2) eyewitness status, as shown in the following data extracts:

1) "That system has been deployed in shallower water, but it has never been deployed at 5,000 feet of water, so we have to be careful," he [Doug Suttles, chief operating officer of BP Exploration and Production] said. (2010, *Text 4/20*)

1)2) "We can only hope that they can make that sucker stop very soon," said Wilton "Tony" Sturges, a retired Florida State University oceanographer. The winds that would push the spill toward Tampa Bay's beaches do not normally start until midsummer, he noted. (2010, *Text 15/20*)

Both illustrations are examples of personal opinion, in both cases using modal auxiliaries to signal uncertainty – 'we **have to be** careful', and 'we **can** only hope' – which in this genre is typically expressed through speakers other than the journalist, while the journalist usually uses declaratives, and is sparing with modal expressions.

The inverted pyramid in Western news reporting is a key marker of the 'objective' style, as it is seen to emphasise the factual nature of the story, rather than offering explanations, exploring cause and effect, or telling personal stories. This structure is recognisable where the key facts are presented in summary first, followed by detail later. In this way, the 'point of closure' comes at the beginning of the piece (Fulton et al., 2005), rather than at the end, as is generally the case in the narrative structure, often favoured for 'soft news' stories. This structure is

evident in many of the texts, the full text analysed in Section 5.10 (2010, *Text 2/20*) being a good example of this, with its opening sentence as follows:

> British energy giant BP said Tuesday that first-quarter profits rocketed on higher oil prices but admitted that the news was overshadowed by last week's tragic accident at a rig in the Gulf of Mexico.

A further example below covers similar ground.

> BP revealed a 135% rise in first-quarter profit to $5.6 billion (£3.64 billion) today as the oil giant announced it is accelerating its clean-up of the Gulf of Mexico oil spill. (2010, *Text 7/20*)

This introductory section flags up the two key topics to be explored in the subsequent article; firstly the BP first quarter results, with a dense summary of the key points (fact of increase, size of increase, size of profit) and secondly the oil spill (new news on the oil spill, acceleration of clean-up efforts). The juxtaposition of the two topics is made through a characteristic journalistic use of 'as', that signals that there is something significant about the co-occurrence of these two events, and gives a feel of 'ongoing' or 'here and now'.

This kind of summary-detail pattern (Winter, 1994) is also characteristic of the transcripts of TV news broadcasts in my data set:

> A crude oil [sic] is still pouring from the two leaks about a mile beneath the surface, off the coast of Louisiana, where this oil rig exploded and sank last week. The Coast Guard unfortunately admitting that it probably will not be able to stop that 1,800-mile slick from splashing onto shore by the weekend. (2010, *Text 6/20*)

The text follows the inverted pyramid structure, although there is more detail in this initial spoken summary than in the newspaper summaries above: the spoken item having fewer space/time constraints than the newspaper article.

There is an interesting exception to this typical inverted pyramid structure in the 2010 texts. In 2010, *Text 3/20*, there is an example of a *narrative* structure. It is possible that this strategy was used because the reporting organisation (Associated Press) had an exclusive interview with a direct participant in the events, a cook on the rig who was one of the survivors, and this was felt significant enough to warrant an atypical approach. Unlike the inverted pyramid structure, narratives are characterised by a sequential structure, and by choices in lexis, personal reference and evaluative elements that serve the purpose of engagement and entertainment rather than that of information and description. The following extract from a

news report (2010, *Text 3/20* ) can be shown to follow Labov's (Labov & Waletzky, 1967) narrative structure of abstract, orientation, complicating action, evaluation and resolution.

| | |
|---|---|
| **Cook on La. oil rig that exploded recalls escape** [headline] | ABSTRACT |
| Oleander Benton, a cook on an oil rig that exploded off the Louisiana coast, was sitting at a laundry room table with a friend when the lights went out. | ORIENTATION |
| Then, there was the blast.<br>The Deepwater Horizon platform shuddered, debris fell from the ceiling and Benton hit the floor, as she had been trained to do. She scrambled through hallways littered with rubble, following a man in a white T-shirt. | COMPLICATING ACTION |
| "I could not see anything but that man. He just kept on saying 'Come this way, come that way.' It was like he was coaching me to my lifeboat, because I couldn't see," she said. | EVALUATION |
| She made it across the sweltering, mud-caked deck to a lifeboat one of 115 people to safely escape the platform after the explosion a week ago. | RESOLUTION |

However, the personal story presented above in narrative structure forms only part of the report. After these paragraphs, the journalist reverts to a more typical news structure with the following statement:

> Benton, 52, recalled her tale as crews used a remote sub to try to shut off an underwater oil well that's gushing 42,000 gallons a day from the site of the wrecked drilling platform. (2010, *Text 3/20*)

This extract above marks the transition between the narrative section and the more typical 'news report' section, where, once again, the conjunction 'as' economically signals contemporaneous events, and facts and figures ('52', '42,000 gallons a day') work to portray an objective reality. Thus the narrative section is embedded within a more typical 'news report' structure and language features. Fulton et al. (2005: 146) suggest that the narrative style, when found within or alongside news reports, may have a specific function – that of showcasing the objective style as a contrast:

> A narrative model also allows more 'attitude' to be expressed: evaluations of behaviour and outcomes are coded into the narrative structure. Using the narrative model for some items therefore can have the effect of positioning the information model as objective and neutral by comparison.

In the same way as the tentativeness noted in the presentation of facts and figures, small shifts away from expected patterns of 'objective' style or structure can support rather than undermine the representation of objectivity.

*Financial reports*

Like news reports, financial reports have the function of presenting factual information in limited space. They typically draw on commentary from industry experts (those with a warrant to speak) although not from members of the public. They are unlike news reports in two main respects, firstly, that they tend to be addressed to a more specific and knowledgeable audience than general news reports, and this is the case in both quality and popular newspapers, as well as television news reports. In terms of language choice, the 'expert audience' allows for specialist and technical language to be used without supporting explanation. For example the following extract is from *Text 7/20* (2010):

> Still, BP's $5.6 billion replacement cost profit which trips out fluctuations in the value of oil inventories smashed City expectations of $44.8 billion.

As well as its use of technical lexis, this text from the London Evening Standard makes no concession to the reader by converting from dollars to pounds sterling. Further, the figures are very precise. This precision stands in contrast to the text cited earlier on p119, aimed at the general public, in which volume and distance were approximate yet converted to metric measures.

The second specific feature of financial reports is the significant use of spatial and physical metaphor, which is commonplace enough to count as 'dead' or 'dormant' metaphor in most cases, but which still gives a dynamic dimension to otherwise straightforward accounts. This issue will be explored in more detail in the section on metaphor in this chapter (Section 5.7), but is exemplified by the choice of 'trips out' and 'smashed' in the text above. The same text offers the metaphors 'soar', 'rise', 'depth', 'boost', 'flat' and 'lower'.

In both of the respects outlined above, the financial reports of the 2010 data set are typical of the genre. What is somewhat less typical is the amount of space given to the Deepwater Horizon events in this specialist type of report, and this is an indication of the seriousness of the events, and the size of the likely impact on the business (as yet unknown).

*Summary*

In summary, the 2010 texts belong to a restricted number of genres, predominantly written news and financial reports, with a handful of television news reports, all of which are primarily characterised by a concern to construct factuality or objectivity. The texts typically present a framework of specific empirical facts interspersed with attributed other voices conveying emotion and judgement, and personal stories. The mixing of impersonal and personal styles, and the occasional use of structures that are atypical for news writing, work to give an impression of an on-the-spot and ad hoc assemblage of relevant news sources, which enhances rather than undermines the impression of 'reality'. In this way the news report texts in the 2010 data set are typical of the genre. From a constructionist perspective, the 'factual' framework to which I refer above, consisting of information from BP press releases, Coast Guard press conferences, NASA photographs and so on, is no less derived from third party sources than the cook's personal story, and is no less a product of partial and selective knowledge.

## 5.2 Naming of events

I explained in Section 3.6.2, p98, how the terms 'crisis', 'oil spill' and 'disaster' used to describe the events are present in the texts by virtue of their status as search terms, but how alternative search terms generated a virtually identical set of texts. This suggests that the selected texts are likely to show a fair representation of how events are named in the news media.

A range of naming terms for the BP events is used in the 2010 texts, some of which seem to be used to describe the entirety of the events, such as 'disaster', and some of which are used more to refer to the specific physical entity of the oil in the ocean, such as 'spill'. As the borderline is unclear, all are included in my analysis. 89 terms are used in the texts: 'spill' (33 mentions); 'oil spill' (24 mentions); 'accident' (10 mentions); 'explosion' (8 mentions); 'disaster' (6 mentions); 'incident' (4 mentions); 'Deepwater Horizon' where used to stand for the events (3 mentions); 'tragedy' (1 mention). At this point, news writers have not yet settled on a shared formulation for the events.

The great majority of terms used are 'oil spill' and 'spill'. In very many instances, these are used in a specific sense to refer to the oil on the water, rather than a descriptor for the set of events. For example:

> The borders of the **spill** were uneven *(Text 5/20*, my emphasis)
>
> Rear Adm. Mary Landry, commander of the Coast Guard's district 8, said the **spill** – now estimated at 600 miles in circumference – had moved closer to shore. *(Text 12/20*, my emphasis)

The other terms mentioned above tend to be used more to encompass the entirety of the event to this point than the physical entity. There is some evidence that BP is attempting to direct the language used. The term 'incident' generally appears in quotations of Tony Hayward's words, or appears to have been suggested by BP press releases, in wording such as the following :

> We are also very focused on providing every possible assistance in the effort to deal with the consequences of the **incident**. (BP press release, 21 April, 2010, my emphasis)
>
> We owe a lot to everyone who works on offshore facilities around the world, and no words can express the sorrow and pain when such a tragic **incident** happens. (BP press release, 24 April, 2010, my emphasis)

It is likely that 'incident' was felt by BP to be less emotionally charged than 'explosion' or 'disaster'. It is a rather neutral expression, suggesting that the events have yet to be properly defined and described. An analysis of BP press releases from the date of the explosion on 20th April to the 27th April shows a limited set of terms used to describe the events, all similarly neutral. The full list is 'fire', 'incident', 'oil spill' and 'situation'. However, in the first example above, Hayward uses the word 'tragic' to modify 'incident', and the words 'tragedy' and 'tragic accident' duly appear in the 2010 data set. Two motivations are in tension here. BP will have wanted to acknowledge quickly and fully that the *outcomes* of the events (the loss of human life and subsequent oil spill) were tragic, without anticipating conclusions about *responsibility for* the events or estimating their eventual scale. Overall, the BP list of descriptors is brief, and likely to have been pre-agreed by the communications team. This restriction indicates an attempt by BP to control and mitigate the language used to describe the events. However, the word 'incident' has not been widely taken up by the media, representing only four of the 89 terms used.

The terms 'spill' and 'oil spill', are in most cases unaccompanied by any adjective qualifiers, but the remaining terms usually appear as the head of a noun phrase that also contains adjectives. Densely-packed noun phrases are typical of journalistic economy, particularly in news reports and newswires where language is made to work hard in limited space. In 2010 the average

length of the naming term (that is, the number of words in the noun phrase including noun head and qualifiers, but excluding determiners) was 2.2.

The instances of naming in the media texts of 2010 can be further analysed for strength of evaluation. For this analysis, the entire noun phrase is considered. Terms can be classified as follows:

- neutral: for example 'oil spill', 'incident' or 'thing'
- negative: for example 'oil rig tragedy'

Qualifiers can change a relatively neutral noun into one that is more negatively charged, as in the case of 'incident' and 'tragic incident'. An analysis of evaluation shows a great preponderance of neutral terms used to describe the BP events at this stage – with only about one-quarter being at all negative. This finding relates to my earlier observations about generic characteristics indicating 'factuality'. Neutral descriptors (such as my own frequent use of 'BP events') are characteristic of a style that wishes to be taken as 'realistic' or 'objective'. Even a word such as 'disaster' – always strongly negative, regardless of accompanying qualifiers – is mitigated in three of its six uses, for example as a 'potential environmental disaster'. At this point in the unfolding events, in the context of a news report, journalists are choosing to use largely non-evaluative expressions. They also appear to show only limited consensus about how to name the events. In their choices of neutral wording and a range of expressions, the news media appear to be withholding judgement in their choice of descriptors until the nature of the phenomenon is clarified. For now the events remain unfixed in the media lexicon.

## 5.3 Naming of people

In the same way as the naming of events, the naming of people by the writer is significant. Naming choices have both a sense-making and an evaluative purpose and effect. News writers characterise the actors in their stories for their readers, by describing them or placing them into groups:

> BP Chief Executive Tony Hayward (2010, *Text 2/20*)
>
> George Crozier, oceanographer and executive director at the Dauphin Island Sea Lab in Alabama (2010, *Text 3/20*)
>
> 11 workers missing (2010, *Text 2/20*)

These descriptions and groupings help the reader to understand what *role* the actor is playing in this particular story. So the following alternatives, for example, would make less sense to the reader in this context (the use of the asterisk * denotes that these are fabricated examples):

> * Tony Hayward, Aston University alumnus
>
> * George Crozier, father of three, who enjoys playing poker and cross-country skiing.
>
> * Jason Anderson, Aaron Dale Burkeen, Donald Clark, Stephen Curtis, Gordon Jones, Roy Wyatt Kemp, Karl Dale Kleppinger, Jr., Blair Manuel, Dewey Revette, Shane Roshto, Adam Weise

The way social actors are named and grouped also has an *evaluative* function. The descriptions above in their original format are not only descriptive and factually accurate, they also generate expectations in the reader. As CEO of BP, Tony Hayward would be expected to have the latest information, and he might also be expected to offer a perspective on responsibility for the accident. George Crozier's title gives him a warrant to speak (Potter et al., 1993) as an *expert* on ocean sciences and wildlife. '11 workers missing' leads us to expect that these workers are not well-known figures within BP, but 11 of many rig staff. We may conclude that 'missing' means there may still be hope for their survival, or that 'missing' is by April 27th a euphemism for 'lost' or 'dead'. In the list of invented examples, the final full list of the eleven victims of the explosion would be unexpected in a news report. However, this list *does* appear in the dedication page on the US National Commission's report of the events.

> Jason Anderson, Aaron Dale Burkeen, Donald Clark, Stephen Curtis, Gordon Jones, Roy Wyatt Kemp, Karl Dale Kleppinger, Jr., Blair Manuel, Dewey Revette, Shane Roshto, Adam Weise (National Commission on the BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill and Offshore Drilling, 2011: i)

Naming the victims in this way is doing a particular kind of interpersonal work. It conveys that we are to understand that the victims were individuals, and that by naming them in full where other texts have not – including media texts and BP's own accident investigation report – the Commission is saying something about its own perspective on the events.

In the 2010 texts, 153 individuals or groups are mentioned, of which almost exactly half are named and half are unnamed – that is, referred to by a generic descriptor, such as 'woman', 'employee', 'spokesman'. This figure of 153 includes repetitions of the same individuals or groups, both across and within texts. The participants in the 2010 texts are shown in Table 5.1 below.

| | Numbers | % |
|---|---|---|
| **BP staff** | 44 | 29 |
| **US agencies** | 37 | 24 |
| **Universities and private agencies** | 22 | 14 |
| **Workers, public, local businesspeople** | 17 | 11 |
| **BP management** | 14 | 9 |
| **Politics** | 9 | 6 |
| **Finance** | 3 | 2 |
| **Business and media – commentators (exc. byline references)** | 3 | 2 |
| **Lawyers** | 1 | 1 |
| **Others** | 3 | 2 |
| **Total including repeated mentions**<br>**Total per 000 words**<br>**Total excluding repeated mentions** | **153**<br>**(16.8)**<br>**61** | **100** |

Table 5.1: Social actors in 2010 BP texts

In this year, those mentioned from BP management are restricted to Tony Hayward, Operations Manager Doug Suttles, both of whom are named, and a few unnamed spokespersons. I mentioned in the previous section that BP is attempting to control the representation of the story (Bergin, 2011; Burt, 2012) and this would be typical of a crisis management plan (Arpan, 2002; Ober et al., 1999; Valackiene, 2010), which is likely to stipulate that the story should be consistently delivered from a limited number of speakers. In contrast, the largest group mentioned, BP staff, are generally unnamed. Over all three years, only two non-senior employees are mentioned by name at all. One of these has been already referred to above, singled out because she had a story to tell. Oleander Benton, a cook on the oil rig at the time of the explosion, was an interviewee with authority to speak, as an eyewitness and participant.

In 2010, it is a result of the nature of the emergency that a few specific individuals and groups are frequently mentioned. Federal agencies, such as the Coast Guard, and universities and private agencies, such as Florida State University and the environmental group Gulf Restoration Network, are recurrent sources for comment and description. The individuals representing these organisations are usually named and given highly detailed titles that

establish their credentials as experts with warrants to comment on the events, as in the following examples:

> Rear Adm. Mary Landry, commander of the Coast Guard's District 8 (2010, *Text 12/20*)
>
> Mark Kulp, a University of New Orleans geologist (2010, *Text 3/20*)

As mentioned earlier, specificity in naming choices is typically used to convey a sense of objectivity. This precision of description does not just apply to agencies and institutions, but also to political figures, and indeed members of the local community, if they have particular credentials to speak:

> The chairman of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, Democratic Rep. Henry Waxman, and the chairman of the committee's investigations subcommittee, Democratic Rep. Bart Stupak (2010, *Text 5/20*)
>
> John Tesvich, a fourth-generation oyster farmer with Port Sulphur Fisheries Co (2010, *Text 18/20*)

In the first example, the politicians hold energy briefs and are expected to take a close interest in the BP events. In the second, it is John Tesvich's job and his long connection with the oyster farming in the affected area that gives him a warrant to speak. However, members of the public are more likely to remain unnamed. In 2010, these include tourists, residents, fishermen and their families, and unnamed victims of previous oil spill disasters. This last group is referred to in phrases such as '11 died' (coincidentally the same number as in the Deepwater Horizon explosion), '20 were injured', 'killed 14 people'. Not only are individual members of the public unnamed, but they are often put together in generic groups, for example 'thousands of the fishermen, packers, processors', or 'their [the victims'] families'. It is in keeping with the presentation of objectivity discussed previously, that certain groups and individuals are omitted from the texts. The names of journalists covering the stories are conventionally restricted to byline attributions. There is little mention of commentators unless they are direct participants in the events.

The total of 153 individuals and groups in twenty texts includes repeated mentions, and represents 61 unique individuals or groups, or roughly three per text. Of these, very few are given a voice through direct quotation, and there is frequent repeated quotation of utterances across texts. I have already mentioned that Tony Hayward and Doug Suttles are by far the main attributed sources for the BP side of the story. The vast majority of the 61 social actors do not have a voice in the representation of the events.

## 5.4 Categorisation

I outlined in the Methodology Section 3.6.4, p100, a number of language forms that I characterised as 'categorisation'. These include forms where the BP events are used in lists, in comparative and contrasting structures, and as an index of other phenomena. Instances of what I call here 'categorisation' are rare in the 2010 data set, and only six were identified. In addition to these six there is a small number of references to previous oil spills, where the BP spill does not form part of the list or group, but is being compared indirectly by implication. The six main instances are listed in full below:

> We've never seen anything like this magnitude (2010, *Text 3/20*)
>
> We've never seen anything like this magnitude (2010, *Text 4/20*)
>
> We've never seen anything like this magnitude (2010, *Text 18/20*)
>
> If we don't secure this well, this could be one of the most significant oil spills in U.S. history (2010, *Text 5/20*)
>
> If the missing workers died, it would be the deadliest U.S. offshore rig explosion since 1968 (2010, *Text 16/20*)
>
> In 1990, a similar bid to change the rules failed, in part because it followed the Exxon Valdez spill. Now observers think the Gulf of Mexico accident could do much the same. (2010, *Text 8/20*)

Not only is categorisation rare in this data set, but three instances are identical, where the words of the same expert source have been quoted. It is noteworthy that the implication of 'never seen anything like this magnitude' is that the BP events at this point are so far not one of a group, and I mention in describing my analysis approach that referring to what phenomena *are not*, is one way of indicating what they *might be*. I have included the phrase ('we've never seen anything like this magnitude') because I felt this is an example of contrast with other oil spills or natural disasters that were smaller, but recognisably of the same type. In the fourth and fifth examples above, the use of the conditional ('If ... this could be'; 'If .... it would be') signals uncertainty and as yet unrealised potential. In the sixth example, the comparison with the Exxon Valdez spill is highly mitigated ('observers think ... much the same').

This list of examples seems to constitute a low level of categorisation. What exists is either expressed in negative terms, realised in the conditional, or highly mitigated. At this point,

writers are not attempting, or only cautiously attempting to 'pin down' what the events are, and where they 'fit' in to already processed understanding.

## 5.5 Modality

My modality analysis aims to collect modal items of all word classes, and classify these by the three types of modality: epistemic, deontic and dynamic. Table 5.2 sets out information on frequency and type for the 2010 data.

| | **2010** | |
|---|---|---|
| | **numbers** | **%** |
| **Epistemic modality** | 141 | 51 |
| **Dynamic modality** | 97 | 43 |
| **Deontic modality** | 14 | 6 |
| **Total** | **252** | **100** |
| **Total per 000 words** | **27.6** | |

Table 5.2: Instances of modality in the 2010 texts

An analysis of the frequency and type of modal items for 2010 acts as a benchmark for later data, but the expectation would be that the use of modality would be low in this year, given the predominance of news reports, that, as a genre, are intended to convey factual objectivity.

In 2010, epistemic and dynamic modality are both widely found within the texts, with epistemic modality occurring more frequently than dynamic modality. The expression of deontic modality (indicating permission and obligation) is extremely low at only 6% of all modality expressions. These findings are not considered to be surprising. *Epistemic modality* is the system through which certainty, uncertainty, likelihood and probability is conveyed, while *dynamic modality* concerns ability as well as willingness. In a set of texts that deal with an event of a magnitude that has never been experienced before and the attempts of participants to deal with it, expressions of uncertainty and (in)ability are likely to feature strongly. The examples below contain linguistic items showing epistemic modality:

> The BP oil spill **could** reach land within days. (2010:*1/20*, my emphasis)
>
> He also expressed "tremendous sorrow" when it became clear that the missing workers were **probably** dead. (2010, *Text 2/20*, my emphasis)

> Such a well **could** help redirect the oil, though it **could** also take weeks to complete, especially at that depth. (2010, *Text 3/20*, my emphasis)

The 2010 texts are deeply concerned with the ability of participants to manage the crisis situation, and with their intention and determination to do so. These are expressed through *dynamic modality*.

> "We are **going** to do everything we **can**" (2010, *Text 2/20*, my emphasis)
>
> Crews were **trying** to keep oil out of the Pass A Loutre wildlife area, a 115,000-acre preserve that is home to alligators, birds and fish near the mouth of the Mississippi River. (2010, *Text 4/20*, my emphasis)
>
> Efforts so far have **failed** to shut off the flow of oil nearly 5,000 feet (2010, *Text 5/20*, my emphasis)

(The expression 'going to' in the first example above could be analysed either as a simple future tense, or, as I have, as a modal expression conveying something like 'we intend to'.) Words such as trying, failing, hoping, intending, wanting, being committed to – and twenty other verbs expressing dynamic modality – are employed in the 2010 texts, and this conveys a picture from both the writer's and his/her reported speakers' perspective of effort and intent rather than achievement.

It is worth exploring here the potential *tension* between the uncertainty of the situation and the (in)ability of the actors to have an effect on it and the portrayal of objectivity – 'doing objectivity' – which is one key characteristic of the news report genre. White (1997:5) observes that in the typical 'hard news' report, the reporter 'avoids or at least minimises interpersonal meanings'. Without anticipating findings from future years, it is clear that the writers of the 2010 texts make significant use of modal resources, which would appear to run counter to the canonical expectation for news reports of low modality. This raises two important questions.

1. Are the BP reports unusual compared to other news reports for some reason?
2. Whose (un)certainties, and (in)abilities are being expressed?

To take the first question – the BP events in themselves may have been unusual, but they are by no means unique in terms of crises. Both natural and man-made crises are characterised by a degree of confusion or uncertainty in the early stages. In fact it is *disruption* of the social order in some way that makes an event considered newsworthy (Galtung & Ruge, 1973). The BP events of 2010 are extreme in certain respects, but I would suggest represent no more uncertainty than, for example, the Tsunami in South-East Asia of 2004 or the disaster at the

Fukushima nuclear plant in 2011 (Morimoto, 2012). So the degree of confusion about the events is not atypical, and other aspects, such as cause, responsibility and the unpredictable movements of the spill were the subject of intense speculation from the start.

What is a more likely explanation for the high levels of modality in the 2010 media coverage is that even where sources are not overtly indicated, the expressions of uncertainty and inability, are *not* the voice of the journalist him/herself, but of his/her sources. The 'objective' picture here is one of (un)certainty and (in)ability, and it is not an intrusion of the writer to depict this. The following short fragment from 2010, *Text 15/20* (my emphasis) shows an example.

> Paragraph 1 The marshes of southern Louisiana and Mississippi **appear to face** the most immediate risk from the spill because they are closest to it, said George Crozier, director of the Dauphin Island Sea Laboratory in Mobile, Ala.
>
> Paragraph 2 What happens after that depends on how quickly the owners of the rig can shut off the flow of oil. On Sunday they began using robot submarines to try to shut off a valve called a blowout preventer on a leaking pipe deep underwater. If that fails, then they will drill new wells on either side of the leak to relieve the pressure there - a process that could take months.
>
> Paragraph 3 "If it goes on for four months, then yeah, we've got a problem," Crozier said. "But if they're able to shut it down after a day or two, then the risk is minimal."

Here attribution is shown in two ways. The first paragraph, consists of free direct speech by George Crozier. Despite the lack of quotation marks within the piece, the reporting clause ('said George Crozier') makes it clear that these are either the actual words or a close paraphrase of Mr Crozier's interview with the journalist. Paragraph 3 is even clearer. We are intended to understand that these are the exact words of the interviewee. In fact the interpolation of the discourse marker 'yeah' in the middle of the words makes their proposed accuracy even more convincing – we feel as readers we are hearing unmediated speech. The use of modality within these attributed portions of the texts points to the views and perspectives of participants other than the journalists.

Paragraph 2 is slightly different. The use of epistemic modality in 'could' and dynamic modality in 'can' and 'try to' appear to be the interpolation, the 'intrusion' in Halliday's term, of the writer himself (in this case the writer is male). These expressions, and the use of conditional clauses, suggest a tentative view towards the propositions made in the paragraph. But my interpretation of this is that we are to understand this paragraph too as a report of

information, itself tentative, gained from external sources, *rather than* the opinion of the writer about the feasibility or otherwise of the actions undertaken.

The same motivation seems to be at work in the few cases of deontic modality in 2010. These again tend to occur where there is an implicit (first example below) or explicit (second example below) reporting of another's opinion, rather than the stance of the journalist.

> If crews cannot stop the leak quickly, they might **need** to drill another well to redirect the oil (2010, *Text 3/20*, my emphasis)
>
> "That system has been deployed in shallower water, but it has never been deployed at 5,000 feet of water, so we **have to** be careful," he said. (2010, *Text 4/20*, my emphasis)

The obligation and permission relates to external circumstances, deriving from the crisis itself – a set of uncontrollable forces obliging a course of human action. They are not the interpolation of the journalist's perspective on the propositions he sets out. My interpretation of these findings about the level of modality in my 2010 texts is that where news reports include a high level of directly or indirectly reported speech, the occurrence of modality will be high overall. I also refer to Droga & Humphrey's (2003: 63) point mentioned earlier, that certain modal expressions give an impression of a greater rather than lesser degree of objectivity. Finally, in the case of crisis representation, where (un)certainty and future intention are critical to a representation of the story, the level of modality is likely to be higher, even in the authorial voice, than it might be for other types of news report.

## 5.6 Metonymy

My definition of metonymy includes both the specific concept of metonymy (substitution according to contiguity) and synecdoche (whole for part and part for whole substitution) and these will be referred to together as metonymy (Lock, 1997). I will follow the convention of referring to metonyms in the format 'X FOR Y' and in capitals.

The pattern of metonymy in the 2010 data is relatively straightforward. Metonymic expressions (which can be words or phrases), occur nearly ten times for every 000 words, as Table 5.3 shows.

| | 2010 |
|---|---|
| **[BP] ORGANISATION FOR MEMBERS** | 36 |
| **[OTHER] ORGANISATION FOR MEMBERS** | 33 |
| **MACHINE FOR CREW** | 13 |
| **INSTRUMENT FOR PRODUCER** | 1 |
| **CONTROLLER FOR CONTROLLED** | 2 |
| **Other metonymic expressions** | 3 |
| **Total** | **88** |
| **Total per 000 words** | **9.7** |

Table 5.3: The occurrence of metonyms in the 2010 BP texts

By far the majority of metonymic expressions in 2010 are those that use an organisation name to indicate a member of the organisation, namely ORGANISATION FOR MEMBERS. These expressions will typically include a verb that would normally require a human subject (Dirven, 2002), for example in this data extract:

> British energy giant BP **said** Tuesday that first-quarter profits rocketed on higher oil prices but **admitted** that the news was overshadowed by last week's tragic accident at a rig in the Gulf of Mexico. (2010, *Text 2/20*, my emphasis)

Unsurprisingly, the most common organisation used in this way is BP, which is central to the story. Other organisations used metonymically are the Coast Guard and rig-owner Transocean. Using the metonymy ORGANISATION FOR MEMBERS can have different kinds of effect. Cornelisson (2008) makes the point that metonymy is used in this way primarily for convenience. However, he goes on to argue (2008: 90) that using the company name with a verb normally requiring an animate subject supports the widespread metaphor by which the company is seen as a *person*.

> While the initial motivation for the metonymy may have been primarily referential as shorthand for a relative clause, the use of this kind of metonymy also cues a metaphorical image of a company as a person or human being.

According to this thinking, by using metonymy in constructions such as '**BP said** it is **committed** to doing everything in its power' the company 'is imbued with a certain "corporate personality" or "corporate identity".' (2008: 90). Cornelisson presents this observation neutrally. However, I would argue that it is generally to a company's advantage to represent itself as a single entity. In particular in the case of a crisis situation, it is considered crucial that the company 'speaks with one voice' and is acting as one with a single aim and purpose (Burt,

2012). In this sense, the convenience of using 'BP said' rather than naming a person whose identity is not relevant, might serve the additional purpose of contributing towards a positive sense of a unified entity.

The corollary of this observation is to conceive the ORGANISATION FOR MEMBERS metonymy as obscuring agency. In the 2010 situation where the question of fault, blame and responsibility was at issue but as yet unexpressed, the use of the designation 'BP', with all the weight of its brand values and corporate identity has a different role in meaning-making than 'Doug Suttles, chief operating officer of BP Exploration and Production'. In this way, when 'BP' is used metonymically for actors within the company, it works both to *represent* an existing reality, by indexing all the pre-existing associations readers have with the organisation, and to *construct* reality, by representing the company as a human being. This applies also to the other organisations used metonymically within the data set.

In the case of BP, however, there was a departure from the typical public relations model. CEO Tony Hayward decided to step out from behind the metonym 'BP' and become the public face of the crisis. Many of the 2010 texts include quotations from Hayward personally, from press conferences, press releases and direct from the shores near the oil spill. As Bergin (2011: 166) writes:

> this constituted Hayward's third big PR mistake: he had decided to front the response effort himself. If not the most fatal, it was certainly the most public of his mistakes in handling the crisis. As the CEO of a rival would later tell him, "You stopped being the CEO and slipped into chief operating officer mode".

It is possible that the frequency of occurrence of BP as ORGANISATION FOR MEMBERS is lower than it might have been in a more 'typical' business crisis where key figures seek to present comments as emanating from the company as an organisation rather than as being the words of particular individuals.

The other main type of metonym used in the 2010 data set is MACHINE FOR CREW, which is related to, although not identical to, the more common metonym OBJECT FOR USER (Chandler, 2007). The following are examples:

> **Planes** that were dropping chemicals that break down the oil **were told to** steer clear of the whales. (2010, *Text 15/20*, my emphasis)

> Coast Guard Petty Officer Connie Terrell said **32 vessels are waiting for** conditions to improve to resume the cleanup. (2010, *Text 18/20*, my emphasis)

These usages again substitute an inanimate entity (planes, vessels, robot subs) for the crews who operate them. In the first example above, a person or people would be expected as the Goal of 'were told to'; in the second, a person is the expected subject of 'waiting for'. In these types of case, metonymy can probably best be seen as a convenient shorthand.

## 5.7 Metaphor

In Section 2.5.2.2, p64, I discussed the broad topic of metaphor, placing it at the semiotic level of myth and connotation in my interpretive framework. I discussed how metaphor is considered to be a source of innovation in language (van Leeuwen, 2005), although many metaphoric usages have become so commonplace in language use (particularly in media discourse), that they are no longer recognised as creative. In the particular genres of interest for 2010 – news reports and financial reports – I drew attention to different typical metaphorical profiles. News reports might be expected to employ a limited number of metaphors, in line with an objective construction of events that favours representative rather than figurative language. Despite this expectation, some quantitative research finds news reports are quite highly metaphorical (Krennemayr, 2011), and there is an expectation of differences in metaphorical use between tabloid and quality news discourse (the use of metaphor is expected to be higher in quality news). It is also suggested that metaphor can be used strategically to enliven otherwise impersonal prose. In financial reports, metaphors of spatial and physical movement (e.g. 'rise', 'fall', 'plummet', 'crash') are a specific feature of the genre, but are seen as entirely conventional rather than creative. These generic expectations will inform my analysis below.

My research approach focuses on limited aspects of the study of metaphor (Section 3.6.7, p103), namely the frequency of metaphorical expressions in the data sets and the nature of source and target domains, as well as changes in these aspects over the time period of the data sets. Table 5.4 below summarises the instances of metaphor found in the twenty 2010 texts. 'Instances of metaphor' may include any word class and any number of words. Metaphors are defined for this analysis as figurative usages where 'one field of reference is carried over or transferred to another' (Wales, 1989: 295).

| | 2010 |
|---|---|
| **OIL SPILL IS MALEVOLENT/WILD CREATURE** | 23 |
| **FINANCIAL ITEMS MOVE IN SPACE** | 20 |
| **WEATHER IS ANIMATE** | 9 |
| **Source metaphors in domain of MYTH AND LEGEND** | 1 |
| **BUSINESS IS SPORT** | 1 |
| **Other live metaphors** | 4 |
| **Other dormant metaphors** | 14 |
| **Other dead metaphors** | 14 |
| **Total** | **86** |
| **Total per 000 words** | **9.5** |

Table 5.4: The occurrence of metaphor in the 2010 BP texts

The twenty 2010 texts contain a total of 86 metaphorical usages, which equates to 9.5 per thousand words. Three metaphor clusters dominate the findings. One has already been mentioned in some detail, where the target domain is financial items (such as shares, profits, sales, production) and the source domain is spatial movement. This metaphor type is considered to be typical of the genre 'financial report', which figures substantially in the 2010 texts, both as a genre in its own right and mixed with the genre 'news reports'.

The other two metaphor clusters that occur frequently are more specific to the particular set of BP events, and are of particular interest here. These are metaphors relating to the weather and metaphors relating to the oil spill itself. Some descriptions of the weather conditions depict the weather as animate, as the following example shows:

> And the Coast Guard unfortunately admitting that no matter **how much cooperation they get** from the currents as well as the winds, it probably will not be able to stop that 1,800-mile slick from splashing onto shore by the weekend. (2010, *Text 6/20*, my emphasis)

It is not new that the weather is described in animate terms. In poetic and literary writing, as well as in some cultures, the weather is regularly personified, or presented as reflecting the human condition or mood. Those who are dependent on weather activity, such as sailors and farmers, are particularly (or are represented as) highly in tune with its rhythms and superstitious about what might affect them. At this early point in the Deepwater Horizon spill, figurative depictions of the weather might be thought appropriate given the scale and uncertainty of the relief operation, and the sense of struggle against uncontrollable forces.

Metaphors concerning the weather, such as the one above, have mainly to do with the idea of the weather's 'cooperation' with the operation to stop the oil spill.

Metaphors about the spill itself also frequently personify the oil escape, mainly in terms that suggest it is something malevolent or wild, as in the following examples (my emphases):

> Massive oil leak **threatens** Gulf coast (2010, *Text 4/20)*
>
> Louisiana-based BP spokesman Neil Chapman said 49 vessels – oil skimmers, tugboats, barges and special recovery boats that separate oil from water – are working to **round up** oil as the spill area continues to expand. (2010, *Text 5/20)*
>
> The sunken BP and Transocean oil rig **is spewing** 42,000 gallons of crude a day. (2010, *Text 13/20)*

The use of the word 'threaten' in the first example is one of seven instances in the 2010 text set, while 'spewing' in the third example is used 6 times. These could be cases where certain expressions that originate in newswires are repeated in final news reports, or they could be instances of familiar highly-charged lexis that is regularly used to heighten dramatic tension in crisis situations (White, 1997). The metaphor clusters that relate to both weather and oil spill serve to present events in terms of binary oppositions in a way that is characteristic of news reporting. Fowler (1991: 6) writes that stories are frequently framed in terms of 'conflictual oppositions'. Here the struggle is presented as being between humans and either natural forces (weather) or uncontrollable man-made forces (oil spill). This view of the struggle against the elemental forces of oil which is expressed in some metaphorical choices echoes a view of oil exploration, particularly in the US, that casts oilmen as risk-takers and heroes, in the mould of early pioneers. Representing the struggle to cap the oil leak in terms of a battle with the elements rather than the result of a number of basic safety failures can be seen as part of a larger story that casts oil companies as venturing into an unknown, elemental space in order to supply the inexhaustible needs of a modern world.

## 5.8 Intertextuality

In Section 3.6.8, p105, I suggested that the texts that act upon other texts can be very broadly grouped into three main types – those that are so distant or commonplace in the language as to be *irretrievable*, those that constitute the language usages that we recognise as characteristic of a particular *genre*, and those that are more directly *retrievable*, usually because they are directly or indirectly acknowledged by the writer. As the second category is

investigated in the section on genre (5.1), it is the latter category that will be the focus of this section on intertextuality. The main retrievable texts in my data sets are press releases, eyewitness and expert comment, official reports and literary quotations.

*Press releases*

Press releases are written with the primary aim of being repeated verbatim in news reports (Jacobs, 2000). They are intended by their originators to present a version of the 'truth' that is easily accessible and repeatable, and eventually becomes *the* version of the truth. Jacobs (1999) demonstrates how frequently sections of press releases are inserted in their entirety into a news report, and how the writers of press releases encourage this by their use of the third person ('BP' rather than 'we'), their formulaic structures, their submission of direct quotations and their deliberate mirroring of newspaper house styles. In this way, the originator's perspective on the story is far more likely to find its way into the media.

The direct use of press releases as copy is demonstrated in the case of inadvertent error:

> Chief executive Tony Hayward said better weather in the area around the rig disaster that is believed to have killed 11 men had increased confidence **we** can tackle this spill offshore. (2010, *Text 7/20*, my emphasis)

The failure to make the changes from direct to indirect quotation (one of which is change from first to third person (Leech & Short, 1981)) is unlikely to have arisen from the reporting of a face-to-face interview with Tony Hayward, and more likely to have been taken from the following press release:

> "Given the current conditions and the massive size of our response, we are confident in our ability to tackle this spill offshore," Hayward added. (BP, 2010, April 25th)

Press releases are also an efficient way of communicating complex information, such as technical information, or numerical data. The following press release is dated two days after the explosion (the list continues for a further four items):

> BP has mobilized a flotilla of vessels and resources that includes:
> - significant mechanical recovery capacity;
> - 32 spill response vessels including a large storage barge;
> - skimming capacity of more than 171,000 barrels per day, with more available if needed;
> - offshore storage capacity of 122,000 barrels and additional 175,000 barrels available and on standby; (BP, 2010, April 22nd)

The communication of 'facts and 'figures', from press releases, ostensibly an objective exercise, is however, subject to ideological influence. For example, many of the 2010 BP

reports make mention of a particular proposition, that, as at April 27th, oil may reach land in three days. This fact is positioned by reporters in various ways.

- 'as little as three days' (2010, *Text 18/20)*
- 'expected to reach land by Saturday' (2010, *Text 17/20)*
- 'within days' (2010, *Text 1/20)*
- 'It's still not expected to reach the coast before Friday, if at all' (2010, *Text 5/20)*
- 'may reach land in just days' (2010, *Text 6/20)*

These reformulations of the same basic information reveal a positioning that ranges from the (relatively) neutral 'expected to reach land by Saturday' to the more urgent '*as little as* three days', '*just* days' and '*within* days'. An alternative, and more reassuring, version is presented in '*not expected ... before* Friday, *if at all*'. The choice of either positive and negative formulations in 'expected' (2nd example in the list) and '*not* expected' (4th on list) again indicate differing modal positioning of identical original information.

*Direct and indirect quotation of speech*

Both direct and indirect quotation of speech are present extensively in the 2010 texts, primarily from senior BP staff, technical experts and interested members of the public. One survivor interview narrative has been mentioned in Section 5.1. Quotation of speech is also a feature of press releases, discussed above. The purposes of direct and indirect quotation in news reports are varied, including to add credibility, to personalise a story, to invite reader identification with the quoted individual or to distance the writer from the propositions made in the quotation. In most cases in the 2010 texts, quotation is used to present information from BP as a credible source, and to gain reactions to the oil spill from experts other than BP, such as the Coast Guard, environmental and ocean studies experts, and local fisherman. The following excerpt presents the BP perspective:

> BP plans to collect leaking oil on the ocean bottom by lowering a large dome to capture the oil and then pumping it through pipes and hoses into a vessel on the surface, said Doug Suttles, chief operating officer of BP Exploration and Production. It could take up to a month to get the equipment in place.
> "That system has been deployed in shallower water, but it has never been deployed at 5,000 feet of water, so we have to be careful," he said. (2010, *Text 4/20*)

This fragment is evidence of a range of reporting strategies. The first paragraph is shown in what Leech & Short (1981) call 'Free Direct Speech' – that is, no quotation marks, but a clear reporting clause ('said Doug Suttles'). The use of Doug Suttles' full name and title (see earlier

comments on naming actors in the events) connotes that this is someone with a warrant to speak, as both a BP representative and a technical expert. The third paragraph ("That system has been deployed...") is an example of Direct Speech with full use of quotation marks, reporting clause and specific attribution. However the second paragraph 'It could take up to a month ...' is neither in quotation marks nor attributed. The reader can make the assumption that this is still a version of Doug Suttles' words, particularly as the concluding 'he said' refers back *across* paragraph two to Suttles' full name in paragraph one, but there is no other linguistic evidence of quotation. The fragment 'It could take up to a month ...' takes on the colour and authority of Suttles' pronouncements through its placement (and may indeed be his words). However, it allows for economy (no need for reporting clauses or additional attributions if relevant), stylistic variation and a sense of 'journalist as expert'.

This mix of representation strategies is common within news reporting, and has already been noted in my discussion of modality, where I suggested that it is sometimes difficult to unravel whether markers of (un)certainty can be attributed to the writer or the quoted source. In news report writing, journalists seem to seek ways of varying the presentation between their own consolidated but unattributed understanding from a range of sources, direct quotation from experts and eyewitnesses, and something in between, as above.

*Other news sources*

Apart from the press releases and external sources mentioned above, there is evidence of use by writers of other sources close to the news-making process, including historical news stories, reports from news agencies and journalists other than the main writer. These are less likely to be attributed within the piece, but can be mentioned in paratext. Examples of voices acknowledged in this way are as follows:

> BYLINE: CRAIG PITTMAN, TIMES STAFF WRITER (2010, *Text 15/20*)
>
> Associated Press writer Cain Burdeau contributed to this story. (2010, *Text 4/20*)
>
> WSJ [Wall Street Journal]: The BP oil spill could reach land within days. (2010, *Text 1/20*)

The first example above is not an indicator of intertextuality but of primary authorship. The second implies a secondary authorship in which the words of Cain Burdeau are used as a contributory text. The third forms part of a Media Digest, with the acknowledged sources being 'Reuters, WSJ, NYTimes, FT, Bloomberg'.

There is some reference to previous relevant stories in the presentation of the current story, and these are most likely to have been sourced from previous newspaper reports but remain unacknowledged. For example:

> A similar burn off the coast of Newfoundland in 1993 eliminated 50 to 99 per cent of captured oil. (2010, *Text 5/20*)
>
> The worst oil spill in U.S. history was when the Exxon Valdez spilled 11 million gallons (41.6 million litres) in Alaska's Prince William Sound in 1989. (2010, *Text 5/20*)

Historical reference is used here to try to place the events in a context of previous and similar phenomena, in an attempt to make them accessible to readers. The descriptions of previous oil spills above are presented here as unquestioned fact.

*Other sources of information, such as websites, data reports*

The Nexis UK texts are rich in what Chandler (2007) calls 'hypertextuality', a category he proposes to take account of the ability of the Web to refer to other texts through hyperlinks. In the case of the Nexis texts, it is possible to gain additional information on companies with an attached hyperlink from, for example, the New York Stock Exchange. Apart from this facility, a number of other texts are referred to in 2010 as support sources, in addition to press releases, direct quotation and archive newspaper reports. These include 'an email to staff' from Tony Hayward, presumably passed on as newsworthy by an employee. This is discussed in some detail in section 5.10 below. The website of the SEC is referred to in *Text 12/20*: 'other filings with the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), which are available free of charge on the SEC's website at www.sec.gov.' There is a presumption of a previous text in the phrase 'in a recent strategy update' in *Text 10/20.* A further example of document usage is 'according to data from the Minerals Management Service' in *Text 16/20*. Some of the data items refer to visual texts, such as aerial photographs by NASA of the oil slick. Transcripts of TV reports make reference to accompanying film footage. Finally there is a reference to an *absent* text in *Text 14/20*: 'No word on when British Petroleum is expected to cap the leaking well.' Poststructuralist analysis suggests that absences as well as presences are significant (see for example Sunderland (2006), Wetherell (1998), Oliveira, (2004)). Here the absence of the text is flagged; the key piece of information awaited by journalists is unforthcoming. Reference by the writers of the 2010 texts to a rich background of source texts hint at a complex reality, from which the writer has pieced together a credible narrative on behalf of the reader, using his/her journalistic expertise.

*Co-text*

The co-text surrounding the BP story is of two kinds. One is the surrounding text in a published or online newspaper. Newspapers are what Hoey (2001) calls a 'colony' of texts, whereby otherwise unrelated stories and genres are loosely linked by placement, headings, and publication styles. In the colony, each of the items provides a context for the others that will affect to a certain extent the reading of any given piece. More important to my own investigation is the co-text *within* a particular story. As noted in my analysis in Section 4.5, p117, in 2010, the BP story accounts for virtually all of the news item in the majority of the cases. In other words, there is no co-text alongside the BP story in most of the texts. The exception is financial reports, where BP is one of the companies reported upon, and the co-text comprises financial information about other companies. In these cases, the presence of the co-text gives a different impression from that given by news reports that position the BP oil spill as a serious and unique news story. In the financial reports, placing the BP oil spill in the context of Quarter 1 results, and in the further context of general financial news, works to minimise its significance, suggesting that it is a business crisis disrupting the 'normal' flow of continuous production and profit progress.

*Summary*

Given the complexity of the Deepwater Horizon story, and the number of journalists working on it, there is perhaps a surprising degree of homogeneity in the intertexts referred to in the news reports. Primary sources appear to be press releases, interviews and press conferences. Press releases provide a source of factual information (as offered by BP), and some 'direct quotations', almost exclusively attributed to Tony Hayward. Interviews and press conferences also generate direct quotations, but these same quotations are repeated frequently from half a dozen actors in the story, chief amongst them Rear Admiral Mary Landry of the Coast Guard. In addition, a number of other texts are implicitly or explicitly drawn on, such as photographs, websites and TV footage. The impression is of a set of texts teeming with a cast of informed voices, but an analysis shows these to be relatively restricted and repeated. They are, with few exceptions (one being the voice of the survivor Oleander Benton), what Bignell (2002: 88) calls 'accessed voices', namely those with regular and unquestioned access to the news media.

## 5.9 Discourses

My research questions are oriented towards particular *types* of discourse, that is discourses of media representation, which are repeated patterns of representation in the news media that offer a version of reality that appears natural (Fowler, 1991). In 2010 the dominant text genres are the news report and the financial report, and I have shown in analysis that these have largely conformed to genre type in the ways they use language to give an impression of *objective factuality*, which I propose is the dominant discourse in this set of texts.

Several of my language analyses above indicate prototypical features of representation of objective reality: the prevalence of facts and figures, a use of modality attributed to reported voices, the marshalling (and repetition) of supporting statements from a limited number of sources perceived as credible, and metonymous usages that replace people with institutions as social actors. The typical structure of these reports is the inverted pyramid structure that is one of the conventional markers signalling objective reporting. Alongside these expected stylistic and structural language features are others that are less characteristic of the prototypical 'objective news report'. Some are explicable in the context that my selected news texts appeared very early in the course of events. There is evidence of uncertainty in naming choices for the events, and the categorisation of the oil spill amongst world events is as yet tentative. Facts and figures are sometimes unspecific. While modal expressions are generally a feature of quoted sources in the texts, other instances of modality can be seen in authorial voices, serving to qualify the unmodalised declarative mood which is typical of the news report genre, and indicating the level of uncertainty surrounding the events at this stage. The metaphors used to describe the spill and the weather represent these as uncontrollable forces. There is occasional use of a narrative or storytelling structure. While these features would be unusual in quantity for news report writing, in the frequency in which they occur I judge them to be further indicators of an objective-realistic presentation, in that they indicate an acknowledgement of a 'messy' and uncertain reality that accords with readers' experience. An excess of certainty and an entirely declarative style would be neither credible nor easily readable.

In describing the 'factuality' of news as a construct, I accept that representations of 'fact' are ideologically grounded. I have described the constraints and conventions of media practices relating to information collection, selection and text presentation. In aggregate, these result in versions of news stories that are aligned variously to the interests of media organisations, readers, other journalists and (sometimes) participants in the story. Where these interests are

in conflict, there can be a struggle for control over the information presented. In the 2010 texts there is direct evidence from my texts of BP's attempts to control both the content and expression of information via impersonal linguistic constructions in press releases, interspersed with personal (non-metonymic) communications from CEO Tony Hayward. Alternative voices, such as environmental and anti-globalisation interests have a limited or mitigated presence in 2010, as there is considerable uncertainty about the scale, reach and duration of the spill.

In sum, the representational discourse in the 2010 texts is one of 'objective factuality' through which readers are given to understand that they are being offered a view of the BP events that is a clear reflection of happenings 'on the ground' in the Gulf of Mexico. The fact that these are catastrophic (crisis) events calls for a representation that takes account of the uncertainty and chaos of the phenomenon, and that 'factual reality' of this particular phenomenon is marked by the small deviations described above from the typical genre 'news report'.

## 5.10 A linguistic map of 2010 in a text

The text below is *Text 2/20* from my 2010 dataset. It is shown largely as presented in Nexis UK, with a couple of small changes. These are that an error in transcription of an apostrophe has been corrected ('Iâ€[TM]m' appeared in Nexis instead of 'I'm'), the font has been changed to Calibri to fit with the rest of this paper, and the highlighting of search terms by using emboldened red type has been removed. As well as the complete news report, there is also paratextual information, such as the load date (28th April) as well as the original publication date (27th April), the logo and name of the source (in this case the news agency Agence France Presse [AFP]), the length of the piece (in this case 481 words), the language (English) and the publication type (here, a newswire).

Agence France Presse - English

April 27, 2010 Tuesday 10:45 AM GMT

# BP's soaring profits overshadowed by oil rig tragedy

LENGTH: 481 words

DATELINE: LONDON, April 27 2010

British energy giant BP said Tuesday that first-quarter profits rocketed on higher oil prices but admitted that the news was overshadowed by last week's tragic accident at a rig in the Gulf of Mexico.

Europe's biggest oil company said net profit soared 137 percent to 6.08 billion dollars (4.5 billion euros) in the three months to March compared with the same period in 2009.

Adjusted net profit on a replacement cost basis soared 135 percent to 5.6 billion dollars.

The replacement cost figure, which excludes the effect of changes in the value of oil and gas inventories, is closely watched by the market and compared with analyst expectations for profits of 4.81 billion dollars.

Production in the three month period was little changed at 4.01 million barrels of oil equivalent per day.

BP Chief Executive Tony Hayward, in an email to staff, acknowledged that the strong results were overshadowed by the "tragic accident" and continuing oil spill from a BP well in the Gulf of Mexico.

The Deepwater Horizon oil rig, operated by BP and owned by Transocean, sank last Thursday - two days after a massive explosion left 11 workers missing and presumed dead.

"We are going to do everything we can - firstly, to control the well; secondly, to ensure there is no serious environmental consequence; and thirdly, to understand how this has occurred and ensure that it never occurs again," Hayward said in the email, obtained by AFP.

He also expressed "tremendous sorrow" when it became clear that the missing workers were probably dead.

"I'm sure, like me, you have all experienced a whole range of emotions over the course of the last week," he told BP staff.

"Shock and, indeed, anger that the accident could happen. Tremendous sorrow when it became evident that the 11 people missing had probably died in the initial explosion.

"And great sorrow and sympathy for the families and friends of those who lost their lives."

Hayward, who has been in the United States since late last week because of the incident, added: "We have a great team in the Gulf of Mexico leading this response.

"I have every confidence that we are doing everything in our power to contain the environmental consequences of this incident."

BP deployed robotic underwater vehicles on Monday to try to cap the leaking well and prevent a growing oil slick from developing into an environmental disaster.

Satellite images showed the slick had spread by 50 percent in a day to cover an area of 600 square miles (1,550 square kilometers), although officials said some 97 percent of the pollution was just a thin veneer on the sea's surface.

The group has dispatched skimming vessels to mop up the oil.

Hayward said improved weather conditions were helping the recovery effort.

"This, combined with the light, thin oil we are dealing with, has further increased our confidence that we can tackle this spill offshore," he said.

LOAD-DATE: April 28, 2010

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

PUBLICATION-TYPE: Newswire

The fact that this is a newswire tells me that this piece was written for onward distribution to onward news outlets, such as newspapers or radio or TV news, who will pay organisations such as AFP for pre-written content that they can slot, often more or less intact, into their coverage. While the writer is uncredited, which is not always the case, particularly in newspapers, AFP goes on to assert its journalistic credentials. The report partly concerns an email, and the writer uses the phrase 'the email, obtained by AFP'. This implies that the information contained in the email, ostensibly at least, is not in the public domain like a press release, for example. In fact it is said to be an internal email to employees, that suggests that AFP have a source inside the company. As it happens, the quotations 'obtained by AFP' are similar to expressions of sorrow and sympathy expressed in publicly available press releases, and indeed the final quotation 'This, combined with the light thin oil ...' is taken directly from a BP press release of 26th April, 2010. Why then, use the employee email as a source rather than the press releases if it is not substantively different in content? It is possible that AFP wishes to 'add value' to its service by demonstrating that it does not simply 'lift' sections from press releases, but carries out original investigative journalism and seeks out new sources.

In terms of genre, this text is something of a hybrid. It combines a financial report with a news report – this is evident in the headline where the implication is that what is usually good news ('soaring profits') will be mitigated with other information. As noted earlier, these genres 'do' factuality in two slightly different ways. The earlier section on financial information is typical of the genre with substantial use of numbers presented in different ways (percentages, dollars, euros) and covering alternative key measures (net profit and replacement cost profit). There is use of expert technical lexis ('adjusted net profit', 'oil and gas inventories'). Despite the lack of evaluative markers, for example modality, affective or judgemental lexis, there is use of spatial metaphor ('soared', 'rocketed'), which is typical of financial reports.

The move to the second section of the text (beginning 'BP Chief Executive Tony Hayward ...') is a clear break. This is not a text that blends two genres, but rather exploits two genres held loosely together by the headline and the summarising first paragraph, which is a signal of the inverted pyramid structure. The second section of the text deals with the highly emotive subject of sympathy for the families and colleagues of the victims of the explosion, but presented in a way that communicates factuality and objectivity. All the emotive content is presented as direct quotation and explicitly attributed to a source, in this case Tony Hayward. This is characterised in Martin & White's work (2005) as low in evaluation, and typical of a certain type of news report. The writer is careful not to interpose her/his own perspective on what is being said, as shown in the following fragment, where readers are intended to understand that 'tremendous sorrow' is a direct quotation for which the writer of the piece takes no responsibility:

> He also expressed "tremendous sorrow" when it became clear that the missing workers were probably dead.

Otherwise the information presented directly by the journalist tends to be restricted to descriptive narrative of events in time and space, for example:

> Hayward, who has been in the United States since late last week because of the incident, added ...
>
> BP deployed robotic underwater vehicles on Monday to try to cap the leaking well and prevent a growing oil slick from developing into an environmental disaster.

As quotations are used selectively, the reader has no opportunity to piece together the full text of Hayward's internal email, but it is evident even from these sections that Hayward is doing interpersonal work with his own text. He prioritises the human aspect of the tragedy, with his expression of sorrow and sympathy and he aligns himself explicitly with his staff: 'I'm sure, like me, you have all experienced a whole range of emotions ...'. Yet he also needs to

demonstrate that he (as the face of BP – the 'we' in 'we are going to do everything we can') is in control of the situation. This is an interesting development from earlier in the week, where BP press releases positioned BP as supportive of Transocean, but *not* as leading the response:

> BP today offered its full support to drilling contractor Transocean Ltd. And its employees after fire caused Transocean's semisubmersible drilling rig Deepwater Horizon to be evacuated overnight, saying it stood ready to assist in any way in responding to the incident. (BP press release, 21st April 2010)

In this text of 27th April, Hayward appears to have assumed control, as he appends to his expressions of sorrow some strongly worded demonstrations of confidence. He inserts the phrase 'I have every confidence [that we are doing everything in our power]' to emphasise the positive impression of his message and he expresses optimism in being able to tackle the spill, with the weather now on their side. His use of 'light thin oil' is intended to address fears about the physical nature of the spill (compare here findings in Section 5.7, p138, where metaphors about the oil slick conversely emphasise its uncontrollable nature). Finally, Hayward's use of logical structural relations in his 'utterance' suggests a rational and coherent strategy for dealing with the events at hand. Specifically, he uses a preview-detail structure (Winter, 1994) in the following text quotation:

> "We are going to do everything we can - firstly, to control the well; secondly, to ensure there is no serious environmental consequence; and thirdly, to understand how this has occurred and ensure that it never occurs again"

So in *Text 2/20,* 2010, we have a mixed genre text that is typical of the texts of that year, in that news reports and financial reports between them account for 90% of the texts mentioning the BP events on April 27th. The text shows the different characteristics of its two parent genres, however both have in common that they are presented in such a way as to appear objective and factual. Although part two of the text (genre: news report) gives clear indications of the interpersonal work Tony Hayward is doing – namely expressing sorrow, and reassuring the reader that he is in control – this interpersonal work is distanced from the writer through the consistent use of attribution – using quotation marks and words such as 'said', 'told' and 'added'.

Features of the speech situation are noted overtly in the Nexis paratextual framing, and alluded to in the phrase 'obtained by AFP'. But otherwise the text is presented to the reader in such a way as to suggest it is authoritative, that it is 'the' reading of the events, within its limitations, rather than 'a' reading of events.

The findings outlined in this section and the preceding chapter show a particular type of representation of the BP events one week after the explosion. The analyses of language features will act as a benchmark for the findings in the next two chapters. Chapter 6 will show equivalent analyses for the same language features in order to investigate representations in 2011.

# 6 2011

This chapter continues the depth analysis of features based on the 20 texts in the 2011 subset. I will consider how each feature is realised in 2011, as well as comparing findings with the 2010 analyses.

## 6.1 Genre

My analysis of the main genres in 2010 focused on the two key genres of news report and financial report, which together accounted for 93% of the total texts in the full 2010 sample of 169. Table 6.1 below shows the genre profile of the full data sets of 2010 and 2011.

| | **27th April 2010** | | **27th April 2011** | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **No of texts** | **%** | **No of texts** | **%** |
| **News report (written)** | 117 | 69 | 24 | 26 |
| **News report (TV and radio)** | 7 | 4 | 1 | 1 |
| **Financial report** | 34 | 20 | 38 | 40 |
| **Spoken interview (TV or radio)** | 3 | 2 | 3 | 3 |
| **Feature article** | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| **Editorial or opinion piece (print/online)** | 6 | 4 | 13 | 14 |
| **Arts review** | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| **Letters** | 0 | 0 | 3 | 3 |
| **Business or market report** | 2 | 1 | 11 | 12 |
| **Total** | **169** | **100** | **94** | **100** |

Table 6.1: BP oil spill texts by genre 2010-11

By 2011, news reports constitute 27% of the texts, and financial reports a further 40% (with 27th April 2011 being quarter 1 results day for BP). Therefore genres other than these two

now account for more than 30% of texts. These other genres are mainly editorial or opinion pieces and business or market reports, the rest being a small number of letters, transcripts of spoken interviews and an arts review. I propose in this section to comment briefly on the genres 'news report' and 'financial report', indicating whether and how these texts differ from the 2010 texts in the same genre. I will then go on to discuss the emerging genres 'editorial/opinion piece' and 'business/market report', arguing that these have a primarily evaluative and interpretive purpose, in contrast with the informative purpose of news and financial reports.

*News reports*

While 27% of the texts in 2011 are news reports, they do not all primarily focus on the BP Deepwater Horizon events in the way that the 2010 news report texts did. Only 15% of the total texts in 2011 offer 'new news' of this kind on Deepwater Horizon and its aftermath. These 'BP-focused' stories are of diverse kinds, for example, 'BP expects to resume Gulf drilling this year' (*Text 11/94*), 'Long legal battle ahead over Macondo' (*Text 27/94*) and 'GRI research board announces request for proposals for BP's $500 million Gulf of Mexico research initiative' (*Text 28/94*). The rest of the news reports refer to the BP events in passing. 'Unemployment falls in 80 pct. of large cities' (*Text 12/94*) is a 'good news' story about the recovery of the economy, but points out that seven of the ten cities with the largest increases in unemployment are in the area most affected by the BP oil spill. Another text, 'Rubio: National debt can no longer be ignored' (*Text 78/94*), reports on a speech made by a Florida Senator that includes comments on compensation claims against BP for the effects of the oil spill. In these cases the proportion of each story relating to BP is small, and these texts show how the BP story relates to phenomena that are outside the events themselves.

*Financial reports*

The financial report genre is still significant within the 2011 texts. I mentioned in my 2010 analysis that financial reports in that year gave quite detailed descriptions of the BP events alongside their likely business effects. In 2011, the BP oil spill is still a major part of its financial picture, but the account is more likely to be shortened, summarised and 'taken as read', as shown in 2011, *Text 2/20*:

> In London, BP shares gained 1.43 percent to 470.85 pence after the energy group posted a 17-percent jump in first-quarter net profits.
> Earnings after taxation leapt to $7.124 billion (4.9 billion euros) on the back of surging oil prices, **one year after being hit by the US oil disaster**.

> However, BP also upgraded the cost of **last year's devastating Gulf of Mexico spill** to $41.3 billion. That compared with previous guidance of $40.9 billion. (my emphasis)

The BP events constitute only part of the BP financial picture and the BP financial report itself is placed in the wider context of a report that also comments on other companies' financial results. In this respect, the 2011 financial reports continue a process begun in 2010, in that they characterise the Deepwater Horizon explosion as an explanatory factor for BP financial and business performance. This process is similar to that mentioned above for those news reports that have started to marginalise the story.

*Editorial or opinion piece*

In terms of rhetorical acts, the 2010 texts were primarily 'descriptive'. By 2011, there is an increase in texts that are to some degree 'evaluative'. The proportional increase in texts in the editorial or opinion piece genre in 2011 suggests that writers have begun to consider that they are now able to put the 2010 events into context, with the purpose of making judgements about them (and the first anniversary is a motive to do so). The opinion piece genre is characterised in genre literature by the use of lexis that is rich in emotion and judgement, modal expressions that interpose the writer's view on the propositions made, and rhetorical persuasive features.

The editorial and opinion pieces in the 2011 data set are typical of the genre in that they exhibit judgement on the part of the writer. In these pieces it becomes more common that the *writer* takes responsibility for the proposition, rather than attributing it to another source, as is characteristic of news texts. The following extracts offer examples of opinion pieces (my emphases):

> **If** the BP oil spill hadnt happened¦ | Deep Sea News #dsn #ocean
> RT : One year after the BP disaster, **tell the President** no new drilling: #B
> (2011, *Text 15/20*)

> **Ironically**, while American oil companies are banned from drilling in the Gulf of Mexico, other countries are not. (2011, *Text 5/20*)

> OPA [Oil Pollution Act] requires our state - like any other party harmed by the oil spill - to present a claim to BP before resorting to a lawsuit. Although Florida has at least three years from the date of the oil spill to assert its legal rights under OPA, we intend to file a claim with BP this summer. If BP does not do **the right thing** and pay that claim, I will not hesitate to take BP and any other responsible party to court. (2011, *Text 17/20*)

The first example is from an item that gathers together tweets and 'retweets' them. I show the two that relate to the BP oil spill. The second is a blog, and the third is a fragment of a letter to a newspaper. These three pieces are interesting in that they convey judgement and evaluation through diverse strategies. The first tweet of the first example makes use of the modal clause 'If (only) ... then' (Droga & Humphrey, 2003: 63), but uses only the 'If' to indicate modal intent, perhaps reflecting the necessary economy of Twitter communication. The second retweet uses an imperative with no specific addressee – 'tell the President' – to convey the writer's view. In the blog, the comment adjunct 'ironically' conveys the writer's view, while the rest of the proposition is an unmitigated declarative. The letter from the Florida Attorney General, takes a much less conversational but no less direct tone. The lexis is formal and legal ('OPA', 'party', 'assert its legal rights', 'file a claim') but the text is unequivocal in its expression of judgement through social sanction (Martin & White, 2005) in the phrase 'If BP does not do the right thing'. In the three pieces the authorial position is being conveyed partly through the resources of modality, as might be expected, and partly through other linguistic resources – here choice of mood and the appraisal system (lexis). In fact modality plays a limited part in a number of the evaluative texts. A more detailed analysis of modality appears later in Section 6.5.

Earlier, I mentioned argumentation and persuasion strategies as characteristic of evaluative genres, and these are also found in the 2011 editorial/opinion texts. The following piece is an online newsletter reflection on the rising price of oil:

> Looking for reasons why benchmark Brent crude is trading around $120 per barrel? There are plenty. Rapid economic recovery in emerging economies in Asia, political turmoil in the Middle East and North Africa and constrained supplies from the deepwater Gulf of Mexico are a few. (2011, *Text 6/20*)

A number of persuasive rhetorical strategies are exhibited in this short extract. The piece exhibits a Preview-Detail structure (Hoey, 2001; Winter, 1994) where the topic of reasons for high oil prices is raised, and reasons are enumerated. The fact that three reasons are chosen, gives a balanced tricolon pattern to the final sentence. It is typical of persuasive argument (Cockcroft & Cockcroft, 2005) that the writer asks a question ('Looking for reasons ...?') that his subsequent argument will answer.

These three examples of opinion pieces exhibit extreme variation in both channel and tone, but all share the generic aim of expressing opinion and evaluating phenomena. To achieve this, writers use *not only modal expressions*, but also lexis of affect and judgement and rhetorical strategies.

*Business or market report*

The genre of business/market report was not included in my review of genres in Chapter 2, because academic literature on the topic is rare. I therefore set out here some observations based on the 2011 texts themselves. Business or market reports can be of rather different kinds, ranging from those texts that are similar to news reports but aimed specifically at the business community and characterised by markers of objectivity, to texts that serve to synthesise information and arrive at an evaluative conclusion, to other texts that serve a more argumentative or persuasive purpose (for example business journal articles that may partially serve a selling function). Because of this, the genre 'business or market reports' may be better viewed as a collection of texts with a unified audience, but which have stylistic features of other news genres. *Text 14/20* below resembles a news report, although it appears specifically on the business pages:

> MIAMI -- Carnival Corp., operator of Carnival Cruise Lines, is seeking compensation for damages and losses it incurred as a result of last April's Deepwater Horizon oil rig explosion that caused a major oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico, according to The Miami Herald. The Miami-based cruise line filed suit against BP Plc. and several other companies related to the oil rig's operations. (2011, *Text 14/20*)

Although the term 'major oil spill' is somewhat negatively evaluative, the lexis is generally neutral, and some of the terms ('compensation', 'damages and losses', 'filed suit') are drawn from a legal technical register. There are no modal items, and statements are expressed as unmitigated declaratives. These are all features that, as in news reports, convey an impression of factual objectivity. The following text is rather different in terms of grammatical choices, and belongs to the second type of business report I mentioned above, of synthesis-evaluation. (As none of the 20 texts in my 2011 subset are of this type, I have drawn on the larger 94 text data set of 2011 for an example):

> The situation may be further complicated by the approaching election in Russia, since a huge payment to the AAR billionaires for what used to be state assets is not something the incumbent administration will want to defend as it works to win support and secure another term in office. A more modest settlement would suit BP, too, given its commitments in the wake of the Gulf of Mexico disaster. (2011, *Text 30/94*)

This text is rich in modal expressions ('may be', 'will want to', 'would suit'), where importantly, the *writer* is taking modal responsibility. The lexis in this texts is more evaluative ('complicated', 'huge', 'disaster'), as the writer interprets, evaluates and directs the reader. The piece resembles an opinion piece. The final example below is of the third type, that seeks ostensibly to inform, but also contains elements of persuasive language.

> Whatever the reason, responsible companies and thoughtful boards must realize that no business, no matter how well-managed or low-profile, is immune from a crisis. When it comes, it might not be as damaging and public as BP's or Toyota's, but that does not mean it can't cause damage. (2011, *Text 20/20*)

A number of features, such as the deontic expression 'must realize' and lexis with high affect such as 'damaging and public', indicate an overt involvement by the writer that tends to be avoided in 'hard' news reports. Familiar or conversational language is shown in the contraction 'can't', and rhetorical (persuasive) constructions appear in the repetition in 'no business, no matter how well-managed or low-profile', and the argument structure of 'it might not be ... but that does not mean'.

In sum, while some of the 12% of business or market reports in 2011 do the work of a news report in updating the business community on the latest events in the BP story from a business perspective, the majority are doing the work of evaluative or opinion pieces, that serve to place the events into other business contexts, such as the BP-Rosneft share swap deal in the second example above, and the BP events as signifier of a business crisis in the third example.

## 6.2 Naming of events

By 2011, four movements related to the naming of the BP events are observable in the 20 text subset, in comparison with 2010.

The first is a decrease in the *number* of times a naming term is used, from 87 to 65. This difference in numbers can be entirely accounted for by the reduction in the use of the word 'spill' from 33 to 10 instances. I commented in the 2010 analysis that the word 'spill' was used both as a summary term for the events, and also in a more specific sense in descriptions of the physical entity of the oil on the ocean. This latter sense is absent in the 2011 texts, and the word 'spill' is used to describe the overall phenomenon – often as a shortened version of 'oil spill', once the context of the Deepwater Horizon events has been established.

Secondly, there is a certain reduction in the *range* of descriptors used in relation to the events. Leaving aside the descriptor 'spill' which plays multiple roles in naming, as mentioned above, the three most frequent descriptors in 2010 ('oil spill', 'accident' and 'explosion') account for 47% of the names used for the events. In 2011, the three most frequent descriptors ('oil spill', 'disaster' and 'explosion') account for 65% of the names used for the events. This indicates

that journalists are increasingly likely to choose from a smaller pool of terms to describe events.

Thirdly, the average length of the descriptive phrase increases from 2.2 to 3.2 words. It is typical of news writing that dense nominal phrases are used to refer to past events, to provide an economical synopsis of known events. Biber et al. (1999) note that the proportion of complex phrases is much higher in news reportage and academic prose than it is in conversation or fiction. However, while naming phrases have become longer, they are generally acting as a *substitute* for what in 2010 was a fuller, more detailed description of events. In this way, they are carrying out a selecting, rather than an expanding role.

Finally there is a change in the balance of descriptors in terms of how *neutral or negative* they are. There is an increase in the proportion of negatively shaded terms, and a corresponding decrease in neutral terms. The neutral term 'accident' is mentioned only twice in the 2011 data, compared with ten times in 2010. The word 'incident', which I suggested derived from BP's own press releases, is again used four times, but it is noteworthy that two of these instances appear in a report on a BP-funded research project into effects of the oil spill on the Gulf of Mexico, which is directly attributed to a BP press release ('According to a release', 2011, *Text 19/20*). There is a strong increase in the use of the term 'disaster', from 6 to 15 mentions, the word 'catastrophe' is used for the first time twice in 2011, and the word 'crisis' is used once, also for the first time, in 2011. Negatively-shaded terms (including both head nouns and accompanying descriptors) increase from 18% to 40%.

The 2011 results suggest a greater degree of confidence and consensus by journalists in not only *naming* the events, but in expressing an *evaluation* of the impact they have had as communal experience. The increased richness of naming terms is instead of, not as well as, the explanatory detail in the 2010 texts.

## 6.3 Naming of people

For the 2010 texts, I analysed the number of social actors appearing in the 20-text subset and the types of individuals and groups mentioned. The same analysis for the 2011 texts is shown in Table 6.2 below.

| | 2010 | | 2011 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **Numbers** | **%** | **Numbers** | **%** |
| **Business and media – comment (exc. byline references)** | 3 | 2 | 32 | 27 |
| **BP management** | 14 | 9 | 23 | 20 |
| **Workers, public, local businesspeople** | 17 | 11 | 13 | 11 |
| **BP staff** | 44 | 29 | 12 | 10 |
| **US agencies** | 37 | 24 | 10 | 9 |
| **Politics** | 9 | 6 | 8 | 7 |
| **Finance** | 3 | 2 | 7 | 6 |
| **Universities and private agencies** | 22 | 14 | 4 | 3 |
| **Art etc** | 0 | 0 | 3 | 3 |
| **Lawyers** | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2 |
| **Others** | 3 | 2 | 3 | 3 |
| **Total including repeated mentions**<br>**Total per 000 words**<br>**Total excluding repeated mentions** | **153**<br>**(16.8)**<br>**61** | **100** | **117**<br>**(16.7)**<br>**59** | **100** |

Table 6.2: Social actors in 2010-11 BP texts

In 2011, the number of actors mentioned over the texts (measured per 000 words) remains virtually the same as in 2010. The proportion of named and unnamed individuals and groups also remains roughly the same, at 53% named actors in 2011 compared to 50% in 2010. However, the type of actor has changed, as well as roles within types, as I shall explain.

The number of mentions of members of the BP management team has increased, while that of BP staff has decreased considerably. On April 27th 2011, BP is in the news for quarter one results, so both its head of finance and head of investor relations are mentioned by name several times. By the time of the 2011 data, BP has a new CEO, Bob Dudley, who is also named in a number of texts. As mentioned in the earlier section on genre for this year, 2011 sees a rise in overviews and evaluative pieces that put the events into context. In one of these evaluative texts, ex-Chairman of BP John Browne is mentioned several times, alongside Tony Hayward and Bob Dudley. This is indicative of a process in which ripples spread out from the central event to encompass a far wider cast of characters with a less direct involvement in the events, in a progression towards sense-making.

Representatives of US and private agencies and universities feature to a much smaller extent in 2011, as their role in 2010 was to handle and comment on the progress of the spill. These now appear in two items only. One is a report of a meeting of the Tourist Development

Council in Panama City, Florida, that is meeting to discuss, in part, how some BP compensation money will be spent on tourist advertising for the town. The other is a report on the activities of Research Board, also funded by BP, and set up to investigate the effects of accidental spills in ocean environments. It is noteworthy that both of these texts deal with money spent on reparation by BP, and as such belong to the 'recovery', 'resolution' or 'postcrisis' stage of the crisis (as discussed in, for example, Hale et al, 2005; Regester & Larkin, 2005; Stephens et al, 2005). Secondly, they again represent a set of actors who are *involved in* the aftermath of the events, but *less directly* than the 2010 groups.

A major increase is seen in those people mentioned who are commenting on the events. While in 2010, journalists and writers did not tend to be referenced at all within the news items, in 2011, commentators feature strongly, including journalists whose work about the events is now in its turn being reviewed, and businesspeople who are commentating on how crises can be effectively handled (and in two cases, selling services to do so). Included for convenience in this group is the notional set of businesspeople who might need to work on crises in the future, such as 'the crisis response team' or 'designated managers'. The fact that this group of participants is generalised, unnamed and hypothetical stands in contrast with the careful naming and titling of individuals such as 'Coastguard Petty Officer Connie Terrell' from the 2010 texts – people who are not only recognised as real, but as having a background and something to say about unfolding events. The emergence of a notional group of participants is indicative of a move from the concrete and definable to the hypothetical and fictional.

The picture of actors in 2011 is one of increasing fragmentation and a widening of the nature of participants' connection with the events. If we conceive of the actors as stakeholders in the BP Deepwater Horizon events, then we see more types of people having a stake in the outcome, but that stake becoming less immediate. Commentators are increasing, participants decreasing, and we see the first sign of fictional and hypothetical actors, rather than specific, living persons.

## 6.4 Categorisation

In 2010, the number of instances of categorisation, as I have defined it, stood at six in the 20 texts of the subset. This number increases to 17 instances in the 20 texts of 2011, which indicates a significant presence for this language feature. Categorising expressions in 2011 locate the Deepwater Horizon events within a number of different groups. These include the

perhaps surprising group of *natural disasters* (given that the explosion and oil spill were not naturally-occurring events):

> Looking back at Katrina, the BP oil spill and other events, it does not appear that we are prepared to respond effectively or to recover from natural disasters, let alone a major terrorist attack. (2011, *Text 1/20*)

Secondly, other texts place the events alongside *business crises*, that is events that disrupt the normal run of business, and are to be dealt with and normalised:

> Recently companies such as Toyota, BP, Johnson & Johnson and Hewlett Packard have experienced crises that distracted management, cost millions of dollars in time and resources, reduced shareholder value and resulted in lawsuits that will take years to resolve. (2011, *Text 20/20*)

Thirdly, the 2010 oil spill is positioned as just one of a number of *BP problems* – news, finance and business reports in the 2011 data indicate that the oil spill is not the only area of BP concern. As April 27th 2011 is another financial results day, there is media interest in the *part Deepwater Horizon is playing* in the general business performance of the company. The following is an example of a synchronic list, where a set of events contribute to a state at a point in time:

> A still-rising bill for the Gulf of Mexico disaster, lower production after selling off assets to help pay for it and a hit from the Budget's tax grab on North Sea oil profits saw BP's profits fall 2% in the first three months of the year. (2011, *Text 7/20*)

An example of diachronic categorisation is the listing of BP accidents and disasters, of which Deepwater Horizon is the most recent:

> In 2005, fifteen workers were killed when BP's Texas City Refinery exploded. In 2006, corroded pipes owned by BP led to an oil spill in Alaska. Now, in 2010, eleven men drilling for BP were killed in the blowout of the Macondo well in the Gulf of Mexico. (2011, *Text 11/20*)

Categorisation through comparative and superlative expressions is also evident in this dataset. As with the naming of events, media writers are now more certain of the outcome of the events, and can write with confidence about 'the largest oil spill in U.S. history' (2011, *Text 16/20*).

The majority of the lists and groups unsurprisingly set the events into categories of negative experience, but there is one quite interesting exception. This is taken from a press release by BP of April 25th, acknowledged openly in the text 'According to a release' (2011, *Text 19/20*). The writing positions the BP events more neutrally than is typical for this year's data set:

> ... scientific understanding of oil spill and dispersant impacts on ocean and coastal systems in the Gulf region, as well as other ocean and coastal systems, and how these systems respond to oil and gas inputs, especially accidental inputs. (2011, *Text 19/20*)

The language is rather opaque – in fact it is difficult to see that the research referred to is a direct result of the 2010 Deepwater Horizon events, although these are referred to indirectly twice as 'oil spill and dispersant impacts' and 'oil and gas inputs, especially accidental inputs'. Oblique forms of reference recur throughout the full text. The phrase 'scientific understanding' serves to position the research as academic and objective, and the listing of the Gulf region alongside *other* ocean and coastal systems implies that the research is being carried out for the benefit of the global community. Similarly 'oil and gas inputs' generalises the object of the research. The reference to 'accidental' inputs (unspecified) again has a role in distancing blame and responsibility. (In making this observation, I do not imply that the 2010 blowout was in any way deliberate, rather that the word 'accident' implies unavoidable chance rather than failures of responsibility.)

The bulk of categorisation in 2011, then, positions the BP events alongside other business crises, natural crises, BP's 2011 difficulties, and opportunities to gain scientific knowledge for the future. These are expected and conventional groupings, given the topic. This process has started to construct the events as an *exemplar* of something, often something outside itself, for example something to be dealt with by the IACSP [International Association of Counterterrorism and Security Professionals]. Thus categorisation works in a metonymic way, with the part that is the reference to BP serving to represent a whole that is more graspable type of phenomenon. We begin to see the process described by Barthes (1972) in action – that the signified has become in turn a signifier of something else. These events are no longer unique, no longer distinctive – media confidence in representation has moved on from the 2010 phrasing 'We've never seen anything like this magnitude' to positioning the events alongside other phenomena that it *is* suggested to resemble. The detail about the events that characterised the 2010 reports is no longer a feature; the events are referred to in a shorthand through selected naming practices (analysed in the previous section), and in lists, comparisons and groupings that indicate to the reader how he/she is expected to understand and locate this particular phenomenon.

## 6.5 Modality

The 2010 analysis of modality examined the frequency of modal expressions, as well as categorising expressions by the three types that appear in the data: epistemic, dynamic and deontic modality. Table 6.3 summarises the 2010 and 2011 findings.

| | 2010 | | 2011 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **Numbers** | **%** | **Numbers** | **%** |
| **Epistemic modality** | 141 | 51 | 52 | 50 |
| **Dynamic modality** | 97 | 43 | 36 | 34 |
| **Deontic modality** | 14 | 6 | 17 | 16 |
| **Total** | **252** | **100** | **105** | **100** |
| **Total per 000 words** | **27.6** | | **15.0** | |

Table 6.3: Instances of modality in the 2010-11 texts

The overview of the frequency of modal markers appearing in the 2011 texts indicates a marked decrease, from 27.6 instances per 000 words in 2010, to 15.0 per 000 words in 2011. The complex relationship between journalistic genres and the use of modal expressions has been discussed earlier. While low modality is a feature of the objective news report style when it relates to the intrusion of the text by the journalist, it is nevertheless highly relevant to crisis writing, where the expressions of (un)certainty and (in)ability by *other* story participants are crucial. In the particular case of BP, where causes and outcomes were even less clear at the beginning than in some other crises or disasters, a significant use of modality by participants is to be expected. By 2011, there was a greater degree of confidence by both journalists and other participants in discussing causes and outcomes, together with a lower occurrence of reported speech (a significant source of modality in 2010). In my analysis of genre earlier in this chapter, I also drew attention to the presentation of opinion and evaluation in language that was markedly *low* in modal expressions – that is, opinion presented as 'fact' – and noted that this is sometimes accompanied by highly-evaluative lexis. I suggest that these three processes together – increased confidence, reduction in reported speech and 'opinion as fact' – account for the decrease in modal items in the data.

Alongside this marked drop, there is a shift in the types of modal item (as a proportion of all modal expressions). Both epistemic and dynamic modality represent a lower proportion of instances of modality than was the case in 2010, while deontic modality appears more

frequently. As indicated above, by 2011 there is a reduced need to express levels of (un)certainty and (in)ability (through *epistemic* and *dynamic* modality) in relation to the events themselves. The oil spill itself has long since been contained, and media attention has turned to investigation, compensation, subsequent business performance and evaluation. The instances of *epistemic modality* halve from 2010 to 2011 (normalised for the size of corpus). Where epistemic modality was used in 2010 to convey uncertainty about the outcome of the ongoing events, by 2011, it is more likely to indicate uncertainty about BP's business future, for example the scale of compensation and Deepwater Horizon-related costs :

> But the court cases **are likely** to take years and BP **could** face tens of billions of dollars more in fines and penalties if it is prosecuted. (2011, *Text 3/20*, my emphasis)

However, the majority of uses of epistemic modality do not deal directly with the BP events themselves, but rather with issues arising from them:

> Meanwhile, deepwater costs **are expected to** rise significantly worldwide as governments enhance safety requirements after last year's Macondo disaster in the US Gulf (2011, *Text 6/20*, my emphasis)

> Committee chairman and TDC member Marty McDaniel said a fall roster of events, which **could** include a Zac Brown Band concert if a deal **can** be reached, would be in place by Memorial Day. (2011, *Text 13/20*, my emphasis)

The cases above demonstrate again the shift of the BP events from the central focus of events to a less direct role in news stories.

Changes can also be seen in the function and use of *dynamic modality* in the 2011 texts. This kind of modality indicates aims, targets and intent (Roberts et al., 2008) but whereas in 2010 these related to dealing with the spill and its effects, in 2011 they are related to moving forward *away* from the crisis events and *towards* a more optimistic and more stable future:

> "BP is in the midst of major change as we **work to** reset focus for the company and begin the task of rebuilding long-term sustainable value for our shareholders," Chief Financial Officer Byron Grote said on a conference call to analysts. (2011, *Text 3/20*, my emphasis)

> The company courted further controversy by **attempting to** hire Hayward s [*sic*] predecessor, Lord Browne, as chairman. (2011, *Text 10/20*, my emphasis)

> Although Florida has at least three years from the date of the oil spill to assert its legal rights under OPA, we **intend** to file a claim with BP this summer. (2011, *Text 17/20*, my emphasis)

The implication of the first example above is of optimism and a positive movement. Even in the third example the intent is resolution and closure, although the import is negative from BP's perspective.

Unlike the first two modal types, the role for *deontic modality*, which is the system for expressing obligation and permission, appears to have increased, both in number and proportion of occurrences, although it remains the least used of the three types. Deontic modality is being used by writers to express views about what BP or other similar companies *should* do in terms of handling the crisis, or how readers *should* understand the argument in the news item. Deontic modality is oriented to *external* forces (Section 2.4.2.3, p58): here those forces are convention, established practice, and the opinion and evaluation of the writer. The following extracts show examples of deontic modal expressions:

> To find out when the country will get relief from these high gas prices, **it is first necessary** to understand why they are rising in the first place. (2011, *Text 5/20*, my emphasis)
>
> capital outlays, like F&D costs, **must** be evaluated over longer spans than one year to account for "lumpy" investments in major projects. (2011, *Text 6/20*, my emphasis)
>
> The April 20th blowout of 2010 was only the latest of a series of BP accidents that **should** have served as warning signs to company executives and regulators. (2011, *Text 11/20*, my emphasis)

The movement towards statements of obligation and necessity can be related to the shifts in text genre and the purpose of the texts analysed. The 2010 texts primarily have the function of conveying facts and *reporting* the opinions of others. By 2011, texts of an evaluative nature have a greater presence, and the opinions and evaluation of the authors are frequently articulated as suggestions or instructions (Thompson, 2004: 73).

## 6.6 Metonymy

Table 6.4 below sets out a comparison between the occurrence of metonym (words or phrases) in the 2010 texts, and that in the 2011 texts.

| | **2010** | **2011** |
|---|---|---|
| **[BP] ORGANISATION FOR MEMBERS** | 36 | 23 |
| **[OTHER] ORGANISATION FOR MEMBERS** | 33 | 15 |
| **INSTRUMENT FOR PRODUCER** | 1 | 7 |
| **PLACE FOR PERSON/PEOPLE** | 0 | 3 |
| **OTHER METONYMIC EXPRESSIONS** | 3 | 3 |
| **ORGANISATION FOR INDEX** | 0 | 1 |
| **MACHINE FOR CREW** | 13 | 0 |
| **CONTROLLER FOR CONTROLLED** | 2 | 0 |
| **Totals** | **88** | **52** |
| **Totals per 000 words** | **9.7** | **7.4** |

Table 6.4: The occurrence of metonyms in the 2010-11 BP texts

The use of metonymic expressions drops from 9.7 per 000 words in 2010, to 7.4 in 2011, with some marked shifts in type of metonym. The fall in absolute numbers of metonyms is due to the fact that the metonym type ORGANISATION FOR MEMBERS drops by more than half: the 2011 texts do not feature as many quotations from BP or other organisations as was the case in 2010, meaning that it is less common that the organisation stands in whole-for-part relation for the spokesperson. Where this type of usage does occur, it is more likely to be in relation to the 2011 quarter 1 results, than the Deepwater Horizon events themselves, as in the following example:

> After **BP PLC reported** Wednesday that net profits rose 16 percent in the first quarter, company officials acknowledged the company has applied for permits to restart drilling in the Gulf. (2011, *Text 3/20*, my emphasis)

The category ORGANISATION FOR MEMBERS covered a limited number of organisations in 2010, focusing on direct participants Transocean and the Coast Guard in addition to BP. In 2011, this group of metonyms refers to a wider spread of organisations, including the US Government, the Obama administration, Research and Markets (a publisher) and Shell. This observation accords with the fragmentation of types of actor in the data (Section 6.3, p159). Similarly, metonymic usages of the type PLACE FOR PERSON appear to show a movement of

interest from the core location of the events in the Gulf to further afield, referring in 2011 to Florida, the White House, and 'sister states'.

The category INSTRUMENT FOR PRODUCER appears more significantly in 2011 than 2010, and relates largely to reports and legal documents, in constructions such as the following:

> **Coast Guard report slams** Transocean over Deepwater Horizon (2011, *Text 16/20*, my emphasis)
>
> **The Times editorial seems to ignore** the applicable legal background. (2011, *Text 16/20,* my emphasis)
>
> **The legal remedy that promises** to give Florida the maximum recovery in the shortest time is the federal Oil Pollution Act, which makes BP and any other responsible party strictly and fully liable for such harm. (2011, *Text 17/20*, my emphasis)

These are typical examples of inanimate entities associated with verbs that call for an animate subject, but there are two further comments to be made about these usages. One is a further reflection on the use of metonymy to disguise agency. Originally, the Coast Guard report, the Times editorial and the federal Oil Pollution Act will have had a specific author or authors. These individuals are not called to account or cited as support by name, but are subsumed as representatives of their respective organisations. The second comment relates to a process of representation becoming evident by 2011, by which reports and documentation of various kinds, instead of direct participants, are called upon to witness and make meaning of the events. Reports and documentation serve to reify certain versions of events, clarifying areas of confusion or disagreement, and excluding alternative versions.

## 6.7 Metaphor

As in 2010, the analysis of metaphor in Table 6.5 shows the number of metaphoric expressions (words or phrases), and the source and target domains to which the main metaphor clusters belong.

| | 2010 | 2011 |
|---|---|---|
| **FINANCIAL ITEMS MOVE IN SPACE** | 20 | 39 |
| **BUSINESS IS WAR** | 0 | 12 |
| **BUSINESS IS SPORT** | 1 | 10 |
| **BUSINESS GROWTH IS LIKE BUILDING** | 0 | 6 |
| **COMPANY IS HUMAN** | 0 | 4 |
| **Source metaphors in domain of MYTH AND LEGEND** | 1 | 4 |
| **Source metaphors in domain of THEATRE AND ART** | 0 | 2 |
| **BUSINESS GROWTH IS ORGANIC** | 0 | 1 |
| **BUSINESS IS A JOURNEY** | 0 | 1 |
| **OIL SPILL IS MALEVOLENT/WILD CREATURE** | 23 | 0 |
| **WEATHER IS ANIMATE** | 9 | 0 |
| **Other live metaphors** | 4 | 8 |
| **Other dormant metaphors** | 14 | 37 |
| **Other dead metaphors** | 14 | 26 |
| **Total** | **86** | **150** |
| **Total per 000 words** | **9.5** | **21.4** |

Table 6.5: The occurrence of metaphors in the 2010-11 BP texts

By 2011, the use of metaphor within the texts has increased strongly from 9.5 to 21.4 instances per 000 words. There are two key movements of note behind this shift in frequency. One is that the increase in the length and importance of financial reports accounts for the strong increase in spatial metaphors, discussed in the 2010 data. In 2011, reports on Quarter 1 results are no longer secondary to reports on the oil spill, but rather dominate the coverage, and the oil spill is positioned as explanatory factor even more clearly than was the case in 2010. Thus financial jargon, including spatial metaphors such as 'rose', 'jump' and 'leapt', is dominant in these reports.

> In London, BP shares gained 1.43 percent to 470.85 pence after the energy group posted a 17-percent **jump** in first-quarter net profits.
> Earnings after taxation **leapt** to $7.124 billion (4.9 billion euros) on the back of **surging** oil prices, one year after being hit by the **US oil disaster**. (2011, *Text 2/20*, my emphasis)

Secondly, the generic shift towards evaluative texts, particularly about business, brings with it an increase in language with greater affect. By 2011 the language has a persuasive and synthetic, rather than descriptive, purpose, and this seems to entail here an increase in the use of metaphor in a role of explaining and positioning the events. In particular, metaphors related to business (as sport, as war, and business growth as organic or as built) are part of this process. News report writing, particularly that of quality newspapers, is generally found to be high in metaphor (with the popular press favouring puns over metaphorical expressions) (Section 2.1.2, p23). My own texts in 2011 run counter to this expectation, as a move away from news report texts is accompanied by an increase in all types of metaphor, except those relating directly to the oil spill. Much of the increase (in my judgement) is in the area of dormant and dead metaphors, for example the following usages (my emphases):

> The U.S. government **lifted** a moratorium on deepwater drilling in the Gulf earlier this year (2011, *Text 3/20*)
>
> an **open and transparent** peer-review process (2011, *Text 19/20*)
>
> The company **courted** further controversy (2011, *Text 19/20*)

These are conventional usages, and are not analysable into any regular clusters by domain.

However, one area of increase in metaphor clusters is that of business metaphors, and this increase can be attributed to the trends of absorbing discussion of the Deepwater Horizon events into the general business activities of BP and the impression of looking forward to the future of the business. A frequently occurring metaphor cluster in the 2011 data is that of BUSINESS IS WAR. Once a very prevalent conceptualisation of business practices, this metaphor can now be seen as rather dated. The business environment has become considerably more fragmented, and businesses are far more likely to operate via a web of networks than as one monolithic company battling against another. Nevertheless, writers still make use of this metaphor in certain contexts, as the following example illustrates:

> "The group's **future strategy is in disarray**, with Russian partners **feuding**, while rivals such as Shell continue to **steal ground**," said Keith Bowman, equity analyst at Hargreaves Lansdown Stockbrokers. (2011, *Text 3/20*, my emphasis)

The BUSINESS IS WAR metaphor is realised in the BP text by relatively conventional usages of war and battle expressions, and given this, I do not propose that it is presenting an innovative view of the BP business. However where this metaphor is used, as above, it casts BP as struggling to regain business equilibrium. Here BP tends to be the victim or object of the action of the battle action, rather than the victor or aggressor. Another metaphor type – BUSINESS IS SPORT – similarly presents business as competitive and oppositional rather than cooperative, and this is also quite well-represented in the 2011 data. Many of the metaphors of this type relate to sports more popular in the US than in other English-speaking countries, in line with the geographical profile of the texts, as we see in the following examples:

> **TRIPLE WHAMMY** SEES BP PROFITS FALL (2011, *Text 7/20*, my emphasis)
>
> BP and the Drilling Race That **Took it Down** - The Truth behind the Greatest Environmental Disaster in U.S. History (2011, *Text 11/20*, my emphasis)
>
> New American chief executive Bob Dudley saw his **maiden** first-quarter results and recovery plan overshadowed by the impact of the Macondo blowout a year ago. (2011, *Text 7/20*, my emphasis)
>
> The Research Board was created by BP and the Gulf of Mexico Alliance to develop an independent, merit-based process to identify and fund the best possible research into the fate and effects of oil and oil dispersants on the Gulf of Mexico. This request for proposals is a major step toward that **goal**. (2011, *Text 19/20*, my emphasis)

As with the BUSINESS IS WAR metaphor, the accumulation of sport metaphors in the first two examples portray BP as a loser in the notional 'game'. Many of the sports metaphors are again very conventional (for example 'goal'), and only work in a limited way to characterise the BP business in 2011. However, both metaphor groups also tend to reinforce the construction of the oil business as pioneering and heroic, as well as highly masculinised (Koller, 2003).

## 6.8 Intertextuality

I commented on the texts and voices interwoven into the 2010 data under the categories of press releases, direct and indirect quotation of speech, news sources, other sources of information and co-text. I suggested that the intertexts used supported the construction of a picture of a recognisably 'messy' and therefore credible reality, pieced together by the journalist from a number of privileged sources. The same categories are used to discuss intertextuality in 2011, with the addition of the category 'artistic and literary texts', which in the 2011 texts are relevant to my analysis.

*Press releases*

Press releases are one type of intertext that is more or less retrievable from the items in which they appear, and they are interesting for my analysis because they are one means by which participants other than journalists play a part in shaping the media representation of events. The part press releases play appears to be considerably reduced in 2011, with the number of press releases published by BP in April 2011 being much smaller than that in April 2010. Whereas BP issued one release per day from the explosion on April 20th to April 27th 2010, only six releases were issued in the month of April to 27th in 2011. Most of these are not related to the Deepwater Horizon events, although three are indirectly related. The first concerns sales of assets, and this issue is referred to in several of the financial report texts of 2011 in connection with the need to fund compensation. The second refers to environmental projects along the Gulf Coast. The third concerns the Gulf of Mexico Research Institute (GRI), and is reported in great detail in *Text 19/20*, with much of the original text from the press release unchanged. *Text 19/20* has already been noted as of interest in the analysis of categorisation (Section 6.4, p161), because it positions the Deepwater Horizon events (unnamed) as only one of many similar events, and as backgrounded to the global benefits of the work of the GRI.

*Direct and indirect quotation of speech*

Quotation of sources, in the form of direct and indirect reported speech, is still a feature of the 2011 texts, although quotations are fewer in number. Direct quotations are more likely to appear in connection with BP financial results than in news report items: journalists are no longer using quotations as a channel to express uncertainty and inability in relation to the Deepwater Horizon events. I have noted that direct and indirect quotation is one strategy by which journalists distance themselves from reported propositions. This process is observable in the 2011 texts, where certain voices are quoted directly (e.g. Michael Greenberger in an interview, the views of the Florida Attorney General in a letters page, the Research Institute Board from a BP press release and the voices of a community marketing committee) but such quotations are considerably rarer than in the 2010 data.

*Other news sources*

News agencies, such as Reuters, and similar information sources such as Bloomberg and Oppenheimer & Co are mentioned as sources, in the same way as in 2010, reflecting typical reporting practices of using agency newswires to provide facts for inclusion in print and online reports. Historical news sources are also referred to implicitly, for example in the review of a

non-fiction book (*Text 11/20*), where the authors are said to have based the information on the book on 'more than ten years reporting in the company [BP]'. This particular example can be used to show how a range of texts interconnect in news reporting, and how news items can become progressively distant from the original events on which they are based.

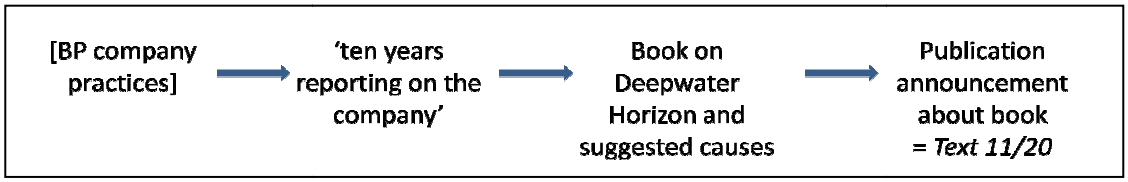


Fig. 6.1: Texts embedded intertextually in *Text 11/20,* 2011

Fig. 6.1 above shows how one type of text, 'news reporting', is nested into another, 'non-fiction writing', which is nested into another, 'publication announcement'. This is an example of overt intertextuality. In many cases, the texts and voices that inform the researched texts remain invisible and unacknowledged. I discussed in my 2010 analysis of discourses how a version of the 'reality' of the BP crisis 'on the ground' was constructed through an immediacy of language, multiple voices, strategic expression of uncertainty and so on. In 2011, along with the temporal distance from events comes a distancing through the use of intertexts, where reports are based increasingly on other written accounts, rather than the events themselves. Not only does this practice tend to mitigate the intensity of accounts, but it also functions to create *shared* accounts that draw on each other, rather than presenting multiple individual perspectives.

*Other sources of information, such as websites, data reports*

My discussion of metonymy (Section 6.6, p167) has already covered the move from news items in 2010 that report on the BP events to news items in 2011 that report on the *documentation* of the events. Various documents related to the events are mentioned and commented upon in the 2011 texts:

- *Documents related to legal processes:* 'legal red tape'; 'lawsuits'; 'filing'
- *Political agreements:* 'moratorium on deepwater drilling in the Gulf'
- *Financial reports and statements:* 'a new report from Oppenheimer & Co'; 'reported Bloomberg'; 'Income statements'; 'conference call to analysts'; 'BP plc reported Wednesday that profits rose'
- *Reports on the explosion and its aftermath:* 'Coast Guard report', 'Research Initiatives report'

In 2011 there is an increasing focus on the ways in which the BP events are reported, analysed and codified into documents or other written texts. These other texts include those related to the legal process to determine responsibility and compensation, the drilling moratorium and official reports on the explosion and oil spill, amongst others. As mentioned above, the researched texts are dealing less with *events* and increasingly with other *texts*.

*Artistic and literary texts*

The 2011 texts contain, for the first time, reference to a number of contributing texts from the world of art and literature. For example, the non-fiction book 'In too deep', by a journalist with a long relationship with BP, has been mentioned above (*Text 11/20)*. Arts texts also appear in several guises in *Text 13/20* which, in common with many others from 2011, is only indirectly concerned with the BP events. This text deals with a meeting of the local tourist council in Panama City Beach, Florida, discussing their Autumn marketing plans. These plans (partially funded by a grant from BP) comprise such current and proposed texts including TV and print advertising, and a potential booking of the Zac Brown band and their song 'Knee Deep'. References such as these are an indication that the BP events are being placed within social contexts that are increasingly less related to the events themselves, although they are still connected to the outcomes of events. In 2011 these social contexts are beginning to include references to the arts.

*Co-text*

A discussion of co-text within news stories was of limited value for the 2010 texts, in which the BP oil spill story tended to constitute the entire text. However, the proportion of each text relating specifically to the BP events becomes smaller in 2011, which entails an increase in associated co-text. Even when unrelated sections of texts are removed in the process of creating the 20 text subset (see Methodology Section 3.2, p74, for a description of how these decisions were made) the Deepwater Horizon events often only form a part of what is covered. To return to two examples discussed above, the 'In too deep' text (*Text 11/20*) mentions the history of BP, other serious accidents and the management style of its CEOs, in addition to the events of 2010. The 'Panama City Beach' text (*Text 13/*20) discusses marketing plans in general, the composition of the committee, and the reaction of local residents, as well as the BP contribution. These two examples represent indirectly-related co-text. The amount and nature of this co-text in the 2011 indicates both the decreasing importance of the BP story in terms of newsworthiness, and the absorption of the story into a bigger social picture. The

co-text positions the events within a wider social context: for 'In too deep' as an example of the unwelcome effects of particular management cultures and for 'Panama City Beach' in the context of the effect of the oil spill on the daily lives of the residents and local businesspeople in a particular community.

*Summary*

The intertexts that inform and support the 2011 researched texts are markedly different from those of 2010. Press releases and witness voices are drawn upon to a much smaller extent, but documented accounts of the events and the ensuing legal processes are far more evident, leading to the impression in a number of cases, of texts reporting upon texts rather than events. For the first time in the overall data set, artistic texts of different kinds are mentioned as significant.

## 6.9 Discourses

I defined the primary discourse of the 2010 texts as that of objective factuality and typical markers of the discourse of objectivity continue to be discernible in many of the 2011 texts, including the presentation of empirical facts, neutral lexis and some distancing of journalists from commentary on their material through the use of reported speech. At the same time, other 2011 texts show a greater degree of engagement by journalists, who have started to express their own opinions overtly, and to summarise, synthesise and interpret information about the oil spill. As a crucial part of this process, journalists place and locate the unknown (the BP events) within the known, in other words, positioning it as a certain entity. While the discourse of *objective factuality* continues to be a feature of the 2011 texts, I propose that a discourse of *positioning* is the characteristic feature in this year.

The positioning of the events is recognisable particularly in the linguistic process of categorisation (Section 6.4, p161), which has increased significantly in 2011 over 2010. Through groups, lists and comparisons, , BP is positioned, unsurprisingly, as a 'disaster' (to use one of the key terms from the 2011 texts) and journalists define the events by analogy with other events, which in their turn have been previously defined and categorised. I have commented that the 2011 lists and groups are what we might term 'expected'. So by 2011, journalists follow a relatively proscribed pattern of writing about disasters. Amongst other strands, the following topics are typically of interest (Arpan, 2002; Stephens et al., 2005):

1. The cost: for restoration and compensation.
2. Blame and responsibility: for the origination of the disaster (not applicable to natural disasters, but applicable to BP) and the subsequent handling (applicable to both natural and man-made disasters).
3. The future: when the immediate effects of the disaster (for example oil on the beaches) will have been tackled. Any changes arising from the disaster (for example in oil drilling policy).

These are only three of a number of regularly rehearsed ideas about disasters of this kind. These shared ideas raise a series of expectations about media coverage (that the questions inherent in them will be answered), and the texts in my data set show evidence that this is the case. In 2011, the texts increasingly address the questions of cause, blame and responsibility (e.g. *Text 5/20*, *Text 11/20*, *Text 15/20*), as well as compensation (e.g. *Text 7/20*, *Text 13/20*, *Text 14/20*). They address issues of recovery, such as the form this is taking, and how long it will be before 'normality' is resumed (e.g. *Text 1/20*, *Text 3/20*, *Text 7/20*, *Text 19/20*). Addressing the questions that arise from generally-held assumptions is part of a longer-term process towards a sense that we now understand what the events 'mean'. The 2011 texts fulfil a critical role before this can happen, and this role is one of definition and location. Here, the relevant information is 'bigger/smaller than what?', 'like/unlike what?', 'as expensive/not as expensive as what'?

Categorising, listing and grouping are the key features of a discourse of positioning, but three other processes are also relevant. Firstly, the analysis of the news report genre in 2011 shows that the BP story increasingly forms part of *other* news stories. 27% of the texts are news stories, but only 15% relate directly to the BP events. The rest mention BP as part of another story. Secondly, represented events are positioned by means of intertexts. That is, it becomes more common that the researched texts comment on other *texts about the events* rather than the *events themselves*. In this way, an agreement about the meaning is being fixed and shared, through the use and spread of common, legitimised sources. The third point is one about *temporal* positioning –texts start to place the BP events within a diachronic context. Four broad time bands are visible as strands throughout these texts: DISTANT PAST→RECENT PAST (2010 EVENTS) → CURRENT EVENTS (2011)→FUTURE. Current events, as covered in the 2011 texts, are more or less directly related to the 2010 events of a year ago – these are the touchpoint for 2011 commentary. The more distant past is evoked in phrases such as 'the biggest oil spill in US history', which is used several times in the 2011 data set (*Text 3/20, Text*

*11/20, Text 16/20)*, serving to place the oil spill in the context of events further back than 2010. The book 'In too deep' *Text 11/20)* has the same end, as does the interview with Michael Greenberger, of the Center for Health and Homeland Security *(Text 1/20)*. At the other end of the time spectrum, a number of the texts refer to planning for the future. These include the Michael Greenberger text *(Text 1/20)*, the Panama City Beach text (marketing planning) *(Text 13/20)*, an item on predicting future oil prices *(Text 5/20)*, the text headlined 'BP expects to resume Gulf drilling this year' *(Text 3/20)*, and another whose headline is 'Prepare in Advance for the Inevitable Crisis' *(Text 20/20)*.

The 2011 texts also show evidence of another discursive feature: a high tolerance for non-neutral and critical voices, for example a blog and an editorial about the high price of oil (*Text 5/20, Text 6/20)*, a book about BP's alleged management failings *(Text 11/20)* and Twitter criticism one year after the oil spill *(Text 15/20).* In the same way as many 2011 texts are still part of the 2010 discourse of objective factuality, I suggest that these alternative or resistant voices belong to a discourse other than the *positioning* discourse – that of *redeployment* – which becomes more evident in the 2012 texts, and will be discussed later in Section 7.9.

In 2011, then, it is largely discourses of *positioning* that place the BP events alongside other events, within other news stories and in a proposed historical context. An understanding of events begins to be fixed within diverse texts, that themselves become the object of media reports.

## 6.10 A linguistic map of 2011 in a text

The text below is *Text 7/20* in my 2011 dataset. As in 2010, the text is reproduced largely as it appears in Nexis, with the font changed and the emboldening of my search terms removed. This is a newspaper report from the London Evening Standard which covers news of both BP Quarter 1 results, and provides an update on the aftermath of the spill. Despite the increase in texts which are more evaluative than descriptive, news and financial reports are still dominant in 2011, and the text below is an example of a report on the news pages which has a financial focus.

The Evening Standard (London)

April 27, 2011 Wednesday

TRIPLE WHAMMY SEES BP PROFITS FALL

LENGTH: 233 words

LUCY TOBIN

A still-rising bill for the Gulf of Mexico disaster, lower production after selling off assets to help pay for it and a hit from the Budget's tax grab on North Sea oil profits saw BP's profits fall 2% in the first three months of the year.

New American chief executive Bob Dudley saw his maiden first-quarter results and recovery plan overshadowed by the impact of the Macondo blowout a year ago.

Today BP admitted it had put aside another $400 million (£243 million) for clean-up costs related to the United States' worst oil spill, bringing its total estimated bill to $41.3 billion.

But BP, which last week launched lawsuits against three companies involved with the Deepwater Horizon drilling rig in the Gulf, pointed out its costs bill for the catastrophe was considerably lower than in previous quarters.

The oil major said restrictions on drilling in the Gulf, as well as the impact of selling $24 billion-worth of oilfields in the US, Vietnam and elsewhere over the past year, meant that despite the soaring oil price the firm's replacement cost profit came in at $5.5 billion, down $100 million on the same three months last year.

BP said its output levels had fallen by 11% to 3578 million barrels of oil equivalent a day, compared with the same quarter a year before. It added it was setting aside $683 million to pay for Chancellor George Osborne's windfall tax on North Sea profits.

LOAD-DATE: April 27, 2011

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

PUBLICATION-TYPE: Newspaper

I have chosen this particular text for full analysis, because it illustrates a number of features that are typical of the 2011 data subset. It comprises both financial news about BP and some new news about the oil spill, which, as I remark in my genre analysis, is a frequent pattern in the texts of this year. Instances of categorisation are found in both headline and subsequent text. The 'Triple Whammy' of the headline does not specify the Deepwater Horizon events, but the first line clarifies that these are one of three main reasons for the fall in BP profits. Placing the Deepwater Horizon events in a category that might be named 'BP business

problems', is part of a meaning-making process that is evident in 2011, as the events are moved from being unknown to being sorted, compared and placed with the known. This 'triple whammy' also provides the structure for the piece. The report is written according to a typical inverted pyramid structure, with all key information in paragraph 1 ('A still-rising bill ... first three months of the year'), and further clarification of the three problem areas in the rest of the piece. The writing draws attention to the multi-faceted nature of the financial problems specifically related to the oil spill, with clean-up and compensation costs forcing a sale of assets which in turn reduces production capabilities and limits a source of income to pay for the oil spill costs.

Paragraphs 3 and 4 cover BP comment on the results: 'Today BP admitted ... in previous quarters'. This is divided into a bad-news/good-news contrast. The word 'admitted' is a signal for the negative news (for shareholders) that more money had to be put aside for clean-up costs. The word 'But' is a signal for the contrasting better news (for shareholders) that other organisations may be challenged to share the costs, and that costs are reducing compared to previous quarters. Tracing the news report to its source shows that it appeared on the business pages rather than the general news pages, so viewing matters from the shareholder perspective is unsurprising in context. (In contrast, a New Orleans local newspaper might report BP's additional clean-up provision as a *good* news story).

As well as the typical news report structure, the piece exemplifies some of the metaphors of movement in space that are characteristic of financial reports, with repeated uses of 'rise' and 'fall'. Other forceful expressions such as 'hit' and 'grab' are also frequent in financial news writing. Sports metaphors in connection with business are present, including 'triple whammy' and 'maiden ... results'.

As is typical in both 2010 and 2011, there is a frequent metonymic use of BP as ORGANISATION FOR MEMBERS in such expressions as 'BP admitted', 'BP ... pointed out' and 'BP said'. However, there is specific named mention of new CEO Bob Dudley where his personal stake in the company is the point of interest. Thus we are told that these are his first results as CEO and he has inherited a difficult situation, but that he has a recovery plan.

Overall, this is a piece written in objective style, and objectivity is constructed through a series of linguistic devices. These include the use of specific facts and figures; presenting both sides of a picture (for example in the BP comment and Bob Dudley sections); and the use of generic norms of structure, here the inverted pyramid structure of news reports. While the language

is rich in metaphor and sometimes high in affect, this is also typical of the genre news report. Typical of the 2011 BP texts in particular is the process of meaning-making through categorisation, where the BP events are beginning to be located alongside other known phenomena, in this case 'reasons for BP financial weakness'.

The findings set out in this chapter suggest that the 2011 texts belong to genres where the rhetorical intent is more reflective and evaluative than the largely descriptive texts of 2010. Key changes have been the move to position the BP events within wider social contexts, the increase in certain types of evaluative language, and the distancing of the accounts from their 'factual' origins. The next chapter sets out a comparable analysis of language features in 2012.

# 7 2012

In this final chapter of data analysis, the sections below that cover the analysed features will present a cumulative picture of the changes in the feature over the three years of the data sets.

## 7.1 Genre

Table 7.1 below, shows how the distribution of genres in the total sample changes in the full data sets from 2010 to 2012.

| | **27th April 2010** | | **27th April 2011** | | **27th April 2012** | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | No of texts | % | No of texts | % | No of texts | % |
| **News report (written)** | 117 | 69 | 24 | 26 | 13 | 42 |
| **News report (TV and radio)** | 7 | 4 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 3 |
| **Financial report** | 34 | 20 | 38 | 40 | 2 | 6 |
| **Spoken interview (TV or radio)** | 3 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 0 | 0 |
| **Feature article** | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 6 |
| **Editorial or opinion piece (print/online)** | 6 | 4 | 13 | 14 | 3 | 10 |
| **Arts review** | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 5 | 16 |
| **Letters** | 0 | 0 | 3 | 3 | 1 | 3 |
| **Business or market report** | 2 | 1 | 11 | 12 | 4 | 13 |
| **Total** | **169** | **100** | **94** | **100** | **31** | **100*** |

Table 7.1: BP oil spill texts by genre 2010-12

* Note that the total number of texts at 31 is rather low to make robust assumptions about percentages.

Taken together, the proportion of news and financial reports drops once more to 51%, although the balance between them shifts. There is a considerable reduction in the number of

financial reports to 6%, as April 27th 2012 was not financial results day for BP. However, news reports increase to 42% of texts (from 26% in 2011), and this movement is discussed below. Business or market reports stay at a similar level to 2011, at 13% of texts. There are three opinion pieces, two feature articles and one letter. The main type of item to emerge in this data set is the arts review which constitutes 5 of the 31 texts of the full set. In this section, I will comment briefly on news reports, and then focus on the two genres that show an increase in 2012 – the feature article and the arts review.

*News reports*

14 of the 31 texts are news reports (written or transcribed), and, as was the case in the 2011 data, the BP story is not the focus for the majority of these. For example, an oil spill in Yellowstone (*Text 14/31*) has given rise to a need for fish testing, however specialist laboratories for this work are still backed up with work from the Deepwater Horizon oil spill. In two reports (*Text 24/31 and Text 27/31*), Congressman Frank Pallone makes a statement on seismic testing in the Atlantic Ocean, which makes reference to the BP oil spill, and in *Text 10/31*, Interior Secretary Ken Salazar defends the Obama administration's record on energy. However, two years on from the spill, there are two new stories that directly relate to the BP spill, and these account for the increase in the appearance of the story on the news pages. One is the arrest of a BP engineer in connection with the spill, and the other concerns challenges to the administration of the compensation payments made by BP to individuals and organisations after the spill.

*Feature articles*

Generic characteristics of feature articles are that they present their stories as universal rather than time-bound, they often include human interest elements, their structure tends to be narrative rather than the inverted pyramid, which means that the 'point of closure' is towards the end of feature articles rather than the beginning, and they present a subjective rather than objective point of view. The two feature articles in the 2012 data set are typical of the genre. Both, coincidentally, report on New Orleans, and its 'renaissance' since Hurricane Katrina and the BP oil spill. As only *Text 15/20* features in the smaller 20 text data set, I will focus on this text for comment. It contains a typical example of categorisation.

> After the storms, New Orleans endured the 2008 economic crash and the BP oil spill. (*Text 15/20*)

The text is presented from a first person perspective: the journalist intrudes upon the story, making her visit and her family part of the commentary ('As my sister and brother-in-law and I drove there from the airport') and structuring the report around a comparison between New Orleans and her home town of Saratoga. The article closes with its key argument.

> There it is: the sense of place that sets a city apart from all the rest. Maybe we, too, will get there someday. (*Text 15/20*)

The article is illustrative of two related shifts from the initial reports in 2010: in the type of reporting from impersonal and objective news reports to more evaluative and personal reports of various kinds such as editorials, reviews and feature articles; and in the absorption of the BP story into other stories, where it both illustrates and forms part of particular phenomena – in this case, the tribulations undergone by New Orleans that form the backdrop to a good news 'recovery' story.

*Arts reviews*

At various points in the analysis of the 2011 data, I noted the shift from items that reported directly on events, to those that reported on texts about events. The genre of the arts review offers a particularly clear illustration of this phenomenon. The five texts of this genre comment on works of varying kinds that are related to the BP oil spill, and their relationship with the events can be conceptualised as shown in Fig. 7.1 below.

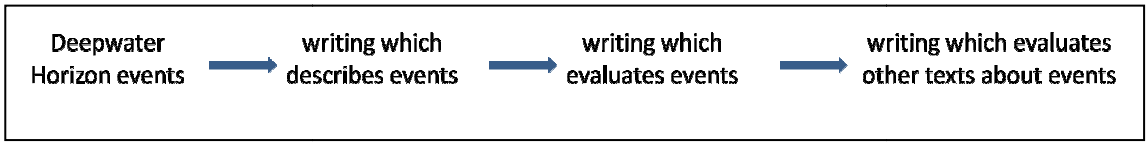


Fig. 7.1: Conceptualised distance of genres from Deepwater Horizon events

The BP story is referenced in a part-fictionalised documentary film, and two non-fiction accounts of oil companies, as well as an unrelated film about events whose PR handling is compared with that of the BP oil spill (BP events as exemplar of a 'disastrous' PR campaign). In addition, in a different item in the news report genre, a protest at the Royal Shakespeare Company features a song written about the BP oil spill events. The genre 'reviews' is rarely explored in genre research, although it is noted that arts, movie and book reviews are used place creative works to recognised genres *for* their audience (Fulton et al., 2005: 3).

Once again the BP events are set alongside other events in the creative or non-fiction works reviewed. In a process of categorisation (Section 7.4, p189), an analysis of lists and groupings indicates how the BP crisis is located alongside other phenomena as an exemplar:

> Mr. Coll's vast narrative is bookended by accounts of man-made disasters. ''Private Empire'' opens with the Exxon Valdez oil spill in Alaska in 1989 (the captain had been drinking), and closes with the BP Deepwater Horizon nightmare in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010. (2012, *Text 11/20*)

> The BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico and a blood feud in Albania don't seem to have much in common, but both play key roles in the documentary "Payback''. (2012, *Text 12/20*)

In the examples in the 2012 data set, the arts review genre exhibits many of the characteristics of evaluative writing: the writer is strongly present in the texts, and the lexis shows high levels of affect, judgement and appreciation (Martin & White, 2005).

> Based on Margaret Atwood's book of the same name, writer-director Jennifer Baichwal's film explores the complex issue of debt, both moral and financial. This includes **BP's failure to deal with its environmental transgressions**, and the years-long dispute between two poor rural clans that keeps the members of one family virtual prisoners in their own home. (2012, *Text 12/20*, my emphasis)

> In this book's more than 600 pages you may sometimes be tempted to utter, as did BP's **hapless** chief executive Tony Hayward, **disastrously**, during the Deepwater Horizon **disaster**, ''I'd like my life back''. (2012, *Text 11/20*, my emphasis)

In both of these fragments the journalists are not only exhibiting judgement about the works they are reviewing (in Martin & White's (2005) term, 'Appreciation') but *about the crisis events themselves* (what Martin & White would classify as 'Judgement: social sanction'). Reviewers choose whether to endorse or distance themselves from the viewpoints expressed in the works they review, which may or may not be in line with the political perspective of their publication. Both dominant and resistant views are given voice in review pages, but clearly positioned as 'non-factual' and 'non-news' by being placed outside the news pages. This is also the case with letters pages, where readers' views are positioned as 'other' (Cook et al., 2006).

Review pieces are often densely metaphorical, and demonstrate a high level of affective lexis. In this they are often rather close to a literary style themselves:

> Mr. Coll is a staff writer for The New Yorker, a two-time Pulitzer Prize winner and the author of books that include ''The Bin Ladens'' (2008) and ''Ghost Wars'' (2004). His new book, like his previous ones, is a big dig. Mountains of facts are mined, crushed and consumed as narrative fuel. If Mr. Coll were a corporation, you would want to impose a carbon tax on him. (2012, *Text 11/20*)

In this example, a particular metaphor (INFORMATION GATHERING IS MINING) sits well with the book topic, which is energy companies. The metaphor is repeated and expanded 'dig', 'fuel', 'mountains', 'mined', 'crushed', and finally driven home in a creative analogy 'If Mr. Coll were a corporation ...'. In its use of dense and creative language, this piece is reminiscent of the personal blog from the opinion piece genre.

In 2012, while the news report genre remains significant, emerging genres such as features and arts reviews place the BP events – now thought to be at least partially understood – within a range of different contexts.

## 7.2 Naming of events

In this final year of the data, the number of times the events are named drops to 41 in 20 texts (from 65 in 2011). The BP story has become part of a bigger picture, and is often mentioned only once per news item. The three most mentioned descriptors (excluding 'spill') remain the same as in 2011 – 'oil spill', 'disaster' and 'explosion'. These now account for 71% of the terms used, suggesting an even closer alignment within the media concerning how the events should be named. The naming terms are still usually qualified, the average length of the nominal group remaining at 3.2 words. This type of 'density' in noun groups is rather typical of journalistic prose (van Dijk, 1985), as it provides an economical shorthand for events, referring to them in a way that the writer supposes will be instantly accessible to readers. What is important about these dense nominal groups is that they are *selective*: they organise and categorise the events in a particular way, which includes certain features or evaluations and excludes others.

Some examples of these nominal groups in 2012 are:

'the BP Deepwater Horizon nightmare in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010'
'the US Gulf of Mexico oil spill disaster in 2010'
'the 2010 BP Macondo rig disaster'
'the BP Deepwater Horizon oil disaster'

The qualifying adjectives and adjuncts alongside the noun head are commonly *temporal* and *spatial*, but the nouns are highly *evaluative*. The set of naming terms used in 2012 are even more likely to be negative than they were in 2011, and this follows a pattern from 2010, as shown in Table 7.2. 'Disaster' is now as commonly used as 'oil spill, increasing the number of negative references that together now account for 44% of mentions.

| | 2010 | | 2011 | | 2012 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Number (per 000 words) | % | Number (per 000 words) | % | Number (per 000 words) | % |
| **Neutral** | 73 (8.0) | 82 | 39 (5.6) | 60 | 23 (3.2) | 56 |
| **Negative** | 16 (1.8) | 18 | 26 (3.7) | 40 | 18 (2.5) | 44 |
| **Total** | **89 (9.8)** | **100** | **65 (9.3)** | **100** | **41 (5.8)** | **100** |

Table 7.2: Analysis of naming terms for the BP Deepwater Horizon events

In summary, over the three year period, naming terms:

- Have been drawn from a smaller pool of terms, with the consensus clustering around 'oil spill' and 'disaster'. (While these were both search terms used, a backcheck of alternative search terms generates a virtually identical set of texts. Another search term – 'crisis' – is much less used.)
- Are more likely to be negative in tone. This finding should be read in conjunction with the finding on modality in sections 5.5, 6.5 and 7.5, which suggests an increasing level of certainty about the nature of events and how we are to understand them.
- Increase in terms of number of words used in the descriptor. This is judged to be largely due to journalistic convention (the greater the distance from the events in time, the greater the need for specific identification).

This clustering around negative descriptors is unsurprising in itself, given the serious nature of the explosion and oil spill, and the media here acknowledge rather than in any sense downplay that seriousness. The question remains of how this negative naming of the events by the media is positioned: whether these negative shorthand terms are contextualised to suggest that events such as Deepwater Horizon are either regrettable but inevitable or aberrant and preventable. The regular use by the media of certain shared terms, however negatively shaded (White's (1997: 108) 'semantics of intensification') can serve to familiarise and compartmentalise deviant phenomena such as crises, as much as mark them out as shocking.

I have said I will deal critically with my own use of the term 'crisis' in my title and elsewhere, particularly as (bullet 1 above) the term is less used in the media than either 'oil spill' or 'disaster'. I regard 'crisis' as an overarching term of which 'oil spill' and 'disaster' are subsets. 'Crisis' has the benefit of encompassing the initial events *and* all their outcomes –

environmental, financial and business-related – which comprise the referent of the meaning-making in my data. I use the term 'crisis' in this comprehensive sense in this thesis.

## 7.3 Naming of people

In 2012 there is an increase in numbers of actors mentioned from nearly 17 per 000 words in 2010 and 2011, to about 21 per 000 words. Put simply, more people are being drawn into the BP story, or rather the BP story is being widened to include more people. The proportions of types of social actor are also considerably changed. However, the proportions of named and unnamed people remain roughly the same at about half of the instances each, across all three years.

| | 2010 | % | 2011 | % | 2012 | % |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Art etc** | 0 | 0 | 3 | 3 | 42 | 24 |
| **Politics** | 9 | 6 | 8 | 7 | 33 | 19 |
| **Workers, public, local businesspeople** | 17 | 11 | 13 | 11 | 32 | 34 |
| **Business and media - comment** | 3 | 2 | 32 | 27 | 19 | 11 |
| **US agencies** | 37 | 24 | 10 | 9 | 10 | 6 |
| **BP staff** | 44 | 29 | 12 | 10 | 4 | 2 |
| **BP management** | 14 | 9 | 23 | 20 | 2 | 1 |
| **Universities and private agencies** | 22 | 14 | 4 | 3 | 1 | 1 |
| **Finance** | 3 | 2 | 7 | 6 | 1 | 1 |
| **Lawyers** | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 1 |
| **Others** | 3 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 2 |
| **Total including repeated mentions** | **153** | **100** | **117** | **100** | **148** | **100** |
| **Total per 000 words** | **16.8** | | **16.7** | | **20.8** | |
| **Total excluding repeated mentions** | **61** | | **59** | | **89** | |

Table 7.3: Social actors in 2010-12 BP texts

The three largest groups of people mentioned in 2012, accounting for three-quarters of actors, are 1) writers, other artists and fictional characters 2) those in politics and 3) members of the public and the community. This represents a considerable shift in the cast of 'stakeholders' from both 2010 and 2011. Members of the public now tend either to be mentioned in broad groups – for example 'thousands of people', 'Americans', 'the public', 'consumers', or are even further away from the events than was the case in 2011, for example people who live in a

town (not near the Gulf) whose work situation has been affected by the Gulf oil spill, or the brother- and sister-in-law of the journalist visiting New Orleans to report on the state of the town after recent disasters. Similarly, politicians, who have an increased presence in the 2012 texts, are less closely connected to events than was the case in 2010. At that time, key figures included, for example, the Chair of the Energy committee, and Governors of the Gulf States. By 2012, they include figures much further away from events, for example George W Bush, UK Chancellor George Osborne, and President Vladimir Putin. This is another indication of the shift of the representation of the crisis from being something highly-situated and local, to something representative and global (even though the coverage is located increasingly in the US). The considerable proliferation of people mentioned is shown in the analysis of which excludes repeated mentions. This shows that 89 unique people or groups are mentioned out of 148 total mentions – a higher proportion than in previous years, where the same people tended to be mentioned frequently.

As mentioned earlier in comments on the genre of the 20 texts from 2012, the most significant change in genre is the emergence of the connection with fiction and non-fiction writing, art and music. This brings with it a new cast of characters whose part in the BP story is extremely varied, as shown in examples below:

> [Protest at BP's sponsorship of the RSC after the oil spill and activities in the Arctic and Canada] The ditty by the **two singers** included the lines: "When I hear that BP story, Green and yellow melancholy, Deepwater despair." (2012, *Text 6/20*, my emphasis)

> [Review of a film based on a **Margaret Atwood** book] Also thrown into the mix are **Conrad Black**, the disgraced media mogul who went to prison for mail fraud, **a tattooed Canadian man** serving time for robbery and **abused migrant tomato pickers in Florida**. All are subjects worthy of discussion, but tackling them in one film disrupts the movie's momentum and shortchanges **viewers**. **Baichwal** could have devoted a single film to just BP's disgraceful behavior. (2012, *Text 12/20*, my emphasis)

> [New Orleans' recovery from Hurricane Katrina, the financial crisis and the BP oil spill] Fast-forward to April 14, 2012. There were no **musicians** enlivening the concourse as I arrived this time, but there would be **hundreds of them** down along the sunny riverfront, where an estimated **half-million people** make a pilgrimage each year to the French Quarter Festival. (2012, *Text 15/20*, my emphasis)

The references to written and performed art generally refer to the BP events being placed within a wider context, with no restriction on participants. By 2012, readers and viewers are expected to understand what the events might represent, or what social meaning they have, even as further light is shed upon them through their juxtaposition with other social phenomena. A number of the people included in the 'Art' category are not real but fictional.

Mentions of BP management and staff are now almost completely absent. Where the name of Tony Hayward does appear, it is either as the neutral but familiar 'ex-boss of BP' or the evaluative 'BP's hapless chief executive, Tony Hayward'. The one named BP employee (Kurt Mix) is mentioned in the context of his arrest for deleting electronic evidence in relation to the disaster. Those mentioned in the areas of business and media comment are still evident, but these are now secondary to those mentioned in an artistic context.

## 7.4 Categorisation

In 2012, categorisation remains a significant feature of media writing, with 18 instances appearing across the 20 texts (compared with 16 in 2011). The categories into which the BP events are placed include some that are similar to those in 2011 – what I have called 'expected groupings' such as *BP business problems*:

> BP has had a torrid time of late dealing with the costly repercussions of the Deepwater Horizon disaster and the failure of its Russian Arctic venture. (2012, *Text 5/20*)

Another expected group is the oil spill as the representation of the category 'disaster'. In the fragment below, these are disasters that have affected the city of New Orleans:

> After the storms, New Orleans endured the 2008 economic crash and the BP oil spill (2012, *Text 15/20*)

However, there are two other emerging characteristics of categorisation in the 2012 data. One is an increasing unexpectedness and creativity of the groupings and listings. In 2012, the BP crisis is being made an exemplar of an increasingly *disparate* set of social phenomena. The following examples are illustrative:

> Whether you are the leader of one of the Arab Spring countries, the ex-boss of BP, or a fashion designer prone to drunken, racist outbursts – if you don't behave in the right way, people will remove you, and the weapon they will use is social media. (2012, *Text 4/20*)

> This [the complex issue of debt, both moral and financial] includes BP's failure to deal with its environmental transgressions, and the years-long dispute between two poor rural clans that keeps the members of one family virtual prisoners in their own home. (2012, *Text 12/20*)

> Those [Dick Cheney's secret energy meetings] led directly to electricity deregulation scams, corporate welfare for energy producers, fracking, the BP oil spill, gas pipeline explosions, high gas prices, faulty nuclear reactors, and an unreliable grid. (2012, *Text 14/20*)

The first example in particular is illustrative of the changes in some of the instances of categorisation in 2012. The category in this case is individuals who 'don't behave in the right way', and so is broad and only indirectly related to the BP oil spill. To understand the point being made by the writer, in this case a businessperson writing in the advertising trade journal 'Campaign', the reader needs to have knowledge of a range of unconnected events in the news. To relate to the thought, the reader needs to share a perspective that recognises these three examples as instances of bad behaviour. So the social and cultural resources the reader needs to bring to an understanding of the first example above are far greater than those needed in previous years at an earlier stage of the representation process. This later type of categorisation demonstrates a form of meaning-making that depends less on ostensibly objective, factual representation than on construction within a wider, culturally-agreed and evaluative context.

Part of the reason for a new creativity in categorisation is that the events are being categorised within the context of evaluative or persuasive rather than descriptive texts. Texts such as editorial and opinion pieces use language that is high in affect, with the result that the process of categorisation appears to be less a listing of phenomena, as in 2011, and more an accumulation of evidence within an (often impassioned) argument. Taking the examples above, in the first fragment the phrases 'drunken racist outbursts', 'behave in the right way', 'weapon they will use', all express judgement, as does 'failure' in the second text and 'scams' in the third. Even those texts that place the BP events in more conventional categories, tend to use more highly charged language in 2012 than was the case in 2011.

> BP has had a **torrid** time of late dealing with the **costly** repercussions of the Deepwater Horizon disaster and the **failure** of its Russian Arctic venture. (2012, *Text 5/20*, my emphasis)

> **Look what he's done** for drilling on federal land. **Look what he's done** to keep the Gulf Coast off-line, drilling like we were before the B.P. **disaster**. (2012, *Text 8/20*, my emphasis)

So while categorisation is still a strong feature of the discourse of *positioning* (Section 6.9, p175), the positioning can now be either expected or unexpected, and the BP events can serve as exemplar for a number of phenomena, in diverse arguments. The movement from 2010-2011-2012 is that from a low level of tentative, provisional categorisation, through a relation with oil spills, crises and BP problems to finally a positioning with 'unrelated' events, the world's ills and general political issues.

## 7.5 Modality

Table 7.4 below shows the final findings for modal usages in 2012, compared with the two previous data sets.

| | 2010 | | 2011 | | 2012 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **numbers** | **%** | **numbers** | **%** | **numbers** | **%** |
| Epistemic modality | 141 | 56 | 52 | 50 | 43 | 51 |
| Dynamic modality | 97 | 38 | 36 | 34 | 17 | 20 |
| Deontic modality | 14 | 6 | 17 | 16 | 25 | 29 |
| **Totals** | **252** | **100** | **105** | **100** | **85** | **100** |
| **Total per 000 words** | **27.6** | | **15.0** | | **11.9** | |

Table 7.4: Instances of modality in the 2010-12 texts

An analysis of modality markers shows a further drop from 15.0 per 000 in 2011 to 11.9 per 000 in 2012, meaning that in 2012, occurrences of modal expressions are approximately two-fifths of the level in 2010. Instances of epistemic modality continue to fall, and dynamic modality also becomes less important, but deontic modality continues to become more important, in terms of both absolute numbers and proportion.

As we can see, by 2012, *epistemic modality* indicators are at about one-third of the 2010 level. The mood used in the journalistic writing of 2012 is more likely to be declarative – 'this is how it is' – rather than modalised – 'this is how it might be' (modalisation relates to epistemic modality). There are very few reinforcing modal adjuncts such as 'totally' or 'absolutely'. Yet evaluative language is certainly present, as the following examples show:

> In the regular course of business, the increase of familiarity is **a good thing**. (2012, *Text 1/20,* my emphasis)
>
> The company's fortunes were **ravaged** in 2010 by an explosion on the BP-leased Deepwater Horizon rig that killed 11 workers, sent millions of barrels of oil **spewing** into the sea and left it with **huge** compensation costs. (2012, *Text 2/20,* my emphasis)
>
> They sang an acapella protest **blasting** BP sponsorship of the World Shakespeare Festival. (2012, *Text 6/20,* my emphasis)

The examples above contain *no* instances of modality. However, the words 'good', 'ravaged', 'spewing', 'huge', 'blasting' are all highly evaluative. The interplay between modality and appraisal is discussed further below.

In 2012, *dynamic modality* has reduced in number of occurrences, but in some texts has taken on a more absolute character, that is there are fewer expressions such as 'trying to', 'an effort to' and 'working to' from 2010. In fact dynamic terms such as 'could/could not', 'try to', and 'in hopes of', all of which appear frequently in the 2010 set, are entirely absent in 2012. The following examples illustrate where dynamic modal expressions are still present, but have a more definite tone:

> Without ongoing brand benchmarking prior to a crisis, **it is impossible** to chart how the crisis has influenced the brand's decline, how long the crisis is lasting, when the crisis has past [*sic*] and what steps are needed to restore corporate brand equity. (2012, *Text 1/20*, my emphasis)
>
> People understand that business needs to make a profit, but they **want** to know what the business stands for. (2012, *Text 4/20*, my emphasis)
>
> "These days **it's hard to** connect to the horror of what's being done - possibly in our name - by oil companies." (2012, *Text 6/20*, my emphasis)

(Note in the first example that 'impossibility' can fall under the category of epistemic modality, but here it is taken to refer to ability and futurity). If we accept Halliday and Matthiesen's categories of high, median and low modality values (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004: 620), we can generally categorise the 2012 expressions of dynamic modality as high in value, with 68% of dynamic modal expressions being of high modality compared to 42% of expressions in 2010. While the earlier texts related to the difficulties inherent in making an impact on a physical entity, the later expressions of dynamic modality take on the characteristics of definiteness and conviction.

*Deontic modality* increases in 2012 in both numerical and proportional significance, with the increase in evaluative and argumentation texts. These frequently take a didactic or instructional tone.

> For any company, taking the decision to act and transform itself is a critical step, but the key challenge, once this decision is made, is to identify and define what it **should** do, how it **should** act and where. (2012, *Text 4/20*, my emphasis)
>
> "... but I do think there is some low-hanging fruit that **should** and could be passed even this year." They are:
> 1. Congress **should** move immediately to codify the reforms implemented since the Deepwater Horizon disaster. (2012, *Text 7/20*, my emphasis)

In this last extract, the instances of deontic modality are offered in both direct and indirect representations of the voice of Interior Secretary Ken Salazar. The reversal of the more canonical 'could and should' to 'should and could' throws particular emphasis on the deontic

rather than the epistemic modal item. The findings concerning the shift in modal types recall Thompson's (2004: 73) observation that texts such as leader articles can show a progression from epistemic to deontic modality as the writer moves from describing a situation to advising how to address it. In a sense a similar progression is reflected across my entire data sets.

A substantial use of modality, such as that found in the 2010 texts does not necessarily translate directly into an expression of considerable uncertainty. Recurrent use of epistemic modality can give this impression, but the frequent use of expressions such as 'definitely', or 'certain', for example, would be analysed as high frequency of epistemic modality, without giving the impression of tentativeness. Nevertheless, by 2012, there appears to be a decrease in the mitigation and hedging that were characteristic of the reporting in previous years, primarily in the direct and indirect reporting of other people's (not the writers') views. At the same time, the increase in deontic modality appears largely in the authorial voice, in suggestions of what participants in (or readers of) the texts should do. So while there is an increase in one form of modal resources (deontic modality) to indicate the more overt intrusion of the speaker, this is the only area of increase. The overall decrease in both frequency and strength of modality does appear to indicate *an increase in linguistic certainty*.

This observation requires interrogation. Genre analysis might suggest that because the texts are moving from more 'factual' towards more 'evaluative', they would move from a state of certainty (this is what is happening) to a state of uncertainty (but what does it all mean?). We might have expected that an aim for objectivity would give way to a more subjective view of events, and thus a greater intrusion by the writer. In fact the movements go in the opposite direction. This move to certainty in fact could rather be seen as a move from a state of 'newness' to a state of 'givenness' (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). With the passage of time, writers are presenting their observations in such a way that they are incontrovertible. A statement without modality is the most unobtrusive way, grammatically, to signal unequivocal information.

However, the analysis also suggests an increase in evaluative language, and here a distinction between the processes at work in the modality system and those at work in the appraisal system (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004; Martin & White, 2005) are worth making. Following the work of Hunston & Thompson, Martin & White (2005:38) comment that:

> Opinions about entities are canonically attitudinal and involve positive and negative feelings; opinions about propositions on the other hand are canonically epistemic and involve degrees of certainty.

From this perspective, we see a discernible move from a highly modalised means of expression towards one that is high in force in terms of the appraisal system. This could indicate that the crisis moves from a set of disparate propositions about the relevant events – presented using the resources of the modal system, towards being a single entity with a recognisable set of characteristics – presented using resources that are more relevant to attitude and judgement.

Table 7.5 below summarises these findings on Modality and Appraisal across my texts, as they move from more descriptive genres to more evaluative genres.

| | **Descriptive genres** | **Evaluative genres** |
|---|---|---|
| **Expectation from literature** (Section 2.4.2.1, p45) | Low modality | High modality |
| **Findings** | High<br>• mainly attributed to other writers<br>• some authorial modality | Lower<br>• opinion presented as fact<br>• use of other evaluative strategies |
| **Type of modality found** | Epistemic<br>*'It might be'* | Deontic<br>*'You should'* |
| **Appraisal items** | Present<br>• 'semantics of intensification' | High<br>• Judgement: social sanction |

Table 7.5: Summary of findings – modality and appraisal

The findings indicate that news media writers have become increasingly clear, certain and evaluative in their approach to the topic of the BP Deepwater Horizon events. In effect, they are asserting by this stage: 'we know what this is'.

## 7.6 Metonymy

Table 7.6 below shows the fall of the occurrence of metonyms to one-third of the 2010 level at 3.2 instances per 000 words.

| | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 |
|---|---|---|---|
| **[BP] ORGANISATION FOR MEMBERS** | 36 | 23 | 4 |
| **[OTHER] ORGANISATION FOR MEMBERS** | 33 | 15 | 9 |
| **MACHINE FOR CREW** | 13 | 0 | 0 |
| **INSTRUMENT FOR PRODUCER** | 1 | 7 | 2 |
| **CONTROLLER FOR CONTROLLED** | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| **ORGANISATION FOR INDEX** | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| **PLACE FOR PERSON/PEOPLE** | 0 | 3 | 3 |
| **Other metonymic expressions** | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| **Extended metonyms** | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| **Total** | **88** | **52** | **23** |
| **Total per 000 words** | **9.7** | **7.4** | **3.2** |

Table 7.6: The occurrence of metonyms in the 2010-12 BP texts

By 2012, very few metonymic expressions are used. It is understandable that 'BP' would feature far less frequently in the construction ORGANISATION FOR MEMBERS than it did in 2010. What is interesting is that it has not been replaced by the use of any other organisations used in this 'whole-for-part' way, and this reflects the limited role that organisational statements of any kind are now playing in the BP story.

PLACE FOR PERSON has stayed at about the same level, albeit low. The instances featured in the 2012 data set are 'the State [estimates]', 'the city [is catching up]' and 'the City [expects]', reflecting the longer-term implications of the effects of the spill not on directly affected areas but those affected indirectly. Here the metonymic references are to North Dakota (State) and Willington (city), affected by implications of the Deepwater Horizon events on other oil towns, and the City [of London]. The category INSTRUMENT FOR PRODUCER is lower in 2012 than 2011, but, as in the previous year, helps demonstrate the increasing role of reporting texts mentioned in 2011 in the phrases 'social media [has taken corporate responsibility]' and 'the report [guides people]'.

## 7.7 Metaphor

The 2011 texts exhibited an increase in the use of metaphor from 2010, and 2012 sees a continued, if shallower, rise. Instances of metaphor now stand at 26 per 000 words, so roughly 2.5 times the rate of the 2010 level, as shown in Table 7.7.

| | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 |
|---|---|---|---|
| **BUSINESS IS A JOURNEY** | 0 | 1 | 15 |
| **Metaphors in source domain of MYTHS AND LEGENDS** | 1 | 4 | 8 |
| **BUSINESS IS SPORT** | 1 | 10 | 8 |
| **BUSINESS IS WAR** | 0 | 12 | 7 |
| **OIL IS WATER** | 0 | 0 | 6 |
| **Metaphors in source domain of THEATRE AND ART** | 0 | 2 | 5 |
| **Metaphors in source domain of CRIME** | 0 | 0 | 5 |
| **BUSINESS GROWTH IS LIKE BUILDING** | 0 | 6 | 4 |
| **FINANCIAL ITEMS MOVE IN SPACE** | 20 | 39 | 4 |
| **OIL SPILL IS MALEVOLENT/WILD CREATURE** | 23 | 0 | 3 |
| **BUSINESS GROWTH IS ORGANIC** | 0 | 1 | 2 |
| **COMPANY IS HUMAN** | 0 | 4 | 2 |
| **WEATHER IS ANIMATE** | 9 | 0 | 0 |
| **Other live metaphors** | 4 | 8 | 23 |
| **Other dormant metaphors** | 14 | 37 | 50 |
| **Other dead metaphors** | 14 | 26 | 41 |
| **Totals** | **86** | **150** | **183** |
| **Totals per 000 words** | **9.5** | **21.4** | **25.8** |

Table 7.7: The occurrence of metaphors in the 2010-12 BP texts

This rise in frequency of metaphorical usage may have a number of drivers. Studies indicate (e.g. Krennemayr, 2011) that news writing is quite metaphorical, and that, if anything, 'hard news' writing uses more metaphor than 'soft news'. These findings relating to occurrence of metaphor run counter to my own analysis of the BP texts, where the pattern of text type shifts from primarily news and financial reports (Krennemayr's 'hard news'), towards evaluative writing such as editorials, travel pages, reviews, letters, business articles and personal blogs, which are more aligned to her definition of 'soft news'. The shift is not wholesale, but Krennemayr's findings would predict a drop, rather than a rise in metaphor. Since I find that

genre is an important explanatory factor for linguistic movement in this BP corpus over the three year period, and since Krennemayr's work is relevant, providing a specific review of how metaphor works in news within a substantial corpus, it is worth taking this apparent discrepancy seriously. It would seem that both the higher incidence of metaphor in Krennemayr's texts, and the higher incidence of metaphor in 'hard news' compared with soft news, can largely be explained by a single categorisation difference. Krennemayr takes the formulation ORGANISATION FOR MEMBERS to be a metaphor, which she labels *personification*. Indeed she cites this as being a key explanation for the 'unexpected result' (2011:123) of the relative overuse of verbs in their metaphorical sense in news.

I classify such usages as metonymy, with the justification that they signify a whole-part relation, and in doing this I follow Chandler (2007) and Cornelisson (2008). As discussed in sections 5.6, 6.6 and 7.6, the metonymy ORGANISATION FOR MEMBERS is indeed highly significant in the early texts, dropping to a much lower level in 2012. If this category were added into the analysis of metaphor, it would certainly change the pattern to be more in line with Krennemayr's expected behaviour for the genre. Her overall point remains very pertinent to this work, namely that news writing is highly metaphorical, and that metaphor has a number of functions that are specific to the genre – including making complex or abstract concepts more accessible to the reader, a cohesive function to create a satisfying whole, a rhetorical persuasive function, and a way of creating humorous effects (Krennemayr, 2011).

There is noticeable change in the clusters of metaphors that appear regularly. Target domains in 2010 are the oil spill itself, the weather and financial items such as shares and profits. By 2011, targets remain financial items, given the first quarter results, but metaphors relating to business become more predominant, particularly those that offer a combative view of business, using the source domains WAR and SPORT. This was found in context to relate mainly to BP's business struggles one year after Deepwater Horizon, which concern not only the oil spill, but also other difficulties, for example BP's business dealings in Russia. By 2012, as April 27$^{th}$ does not fall on results day, financial texts have dropped in number and proportion, and related metaphors are greatly reduced. Business is still a target for metaphorical expressions, and those relating to WAR and SPORT are still in evidence, although there are fewer, and in the area of business some *alternative* metaphorical constructions have emerged in the areas of business growth and business conceived as a JOURNEY, and these I discuss below.

Various metaphors for business growth have been identified in literature, including parenting (Dodd, 2002), building (Dodd, 2002; White, 2003) and organic growth. Within the 2012 data set, examples of the BUILDING metaphor appear, in phrases such as the following.

> **Building** brands through behaviour. (2012, *Text 4/20*, my emphasis)
>
> Shell turned a profit of $7.7bn (nearly £5bn) in the first three months of this year and the trading performance will **buttress** already good market sentiment around its recommended acquisition of Cove. (2012, *Text 16/20*, my emphasis)

The examples above are rather conventional usages, and only indirectly related to the BP events: in the first case the metaphor refers to a theoretical or hypothetical brand (advice for building a brand: don't do what BP did!), and in the second, to BP rival Shell.

This widening of application is true of the other cluster of business metaphors that are more conspicuous in 2012, namely BUSINESS IS A JOURNEY. Of the 15 instances of the metaphor identified in 2012, only one refers to BP itself, and this is the third shown below.

> Brands that embrace this new honest and responsible world have an exciting future. And agencies that can help their clients understand, **navigate** and deliver in this new world will be more important than ever. (2012, *Text 4/20*, my emphasis)
>
> **The next step** is to find the idea that can be used as a **strategic compass** not only to communicate this externally but also to galvanise the organisation itself. An idea that **lies between** the two biggest trends impacting business today: social responsibility and social media. (2012, *Text 4/20*, my emphasis)
>
> The troubled energy major, which is seeking to **move on** from the US Gulf of Mexico oil spill disaster in 2010, had returned to profit last year with net annual earnings of $23.9 billion. (2012, *Text 2/20*, my emphasis)

Once again these metaphors are conventional, but following Koller (2003), I suggest that choice of conventional metaphors can still be telling. The JOURNEY metaphor appears in a number of separate texts in 2012, but repeatedly in two – one an article on handling business crises (*Text 4/20*, see above) and the other a review on a non-fiction book about oil companies. This raises the issue that the use of metaphor can have various implications: it can be a marker of a particular idiolect, a generic marker (Krennemayr, 2011) and/or an indication of widely-shared ways of looking at things at a societal level (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). In the case of *Text 4/20* above, the conceptualisation of BUSINESS IS A JOURNEY is a conventional one (Dodd, 2002; Milne et al., 2006; White, 2003), and it is likely that the writer is exploiting a shared view of business for the sub-genre 'business articles', as s/he discusses ways of recovering from a crisis and 'moving forward'. The second piece that is rich in this metaphor is a review piece that is high in evaluative language throughout. The JOURNEY metaphor is only

one of many metaphors the reviewer uses to discuss both business and novel-writing, and this frequency of use can be seen as a feature of his own highly-charged writing style.

The third extract above refers specifically to BP, 'the troubled energy major', and reflects a similar impulse to the generic piece – that businesses need to 'move on' from crisis situations. It would be reasonable to assume that BP, and other oil companies mentioned, could still be portrayed as 'battling', 'manoeuvring' and 'using weapons', but there is a more 'questing', 'building', 'pathfinding' tone to the metaphors used by 2012. Milne et al. (2006) explore the JOURNEY metaphor in the context of business writing on sustainability, finding that in that context, the metaphor depicts a journey without a destination, and hypothesising that the journey metaphor is a useful device for avoiding commitment to a definite end-goal. It is possible that a similar ambiguity is relevant in speculation on the future of BP post-Deepwater Horizon.

Similarly interesting is the emergence of MYTH AND LEGEND as a source domain in the 2012 texts. The concept of myth and legend is realised in the following examples:

> Attendees of the United States Energy Association's (USEA's) membership meeting, taking place simultaneously at the Washington D.C.-based club, were invited to listen in as the Secretary blasted unnamed Washington insiders for perpetrating **"fairy tales"** about imagined obstacles to oil and gas drilling and expansion on U.S. offshore and onshore federal properties. (*Text 7/20*, my emphasis)

> ''Like presidents of both parties before him, however,'' Mr. Coll writes, ''he lacked the depth of conviction, the political coalitions and the scientific vision to do more than toss relative **pennies into a wishing fountain**.'' (*Text 11/20*, my emphasis)

These metaphors are not about BP's progress itself, but appear in co-text. It would be overburdening the findings to suggest that the metaphors of journey, myth and art somehow recontextualise our perception of the BP events. However these metaphor clusters, emerging as they do in 2012, may be a small part of a general pattern that places the BP into a less concrete and more abstract context.

## 7.8 Intertextuality

The 2010 texts made very frequent use of the voices, reported directly and indirectly, of direct participants in the BP events. About the 2011 texts I noted the increased reference to external texts documenting the events, and voices that were not directly involved commenting on the events. Also in the 2011 picture were a small number of texts referring to art and literature

works. The 2012 texts continue the 2011 pattern, with a few items referring to events through the lens of legal texts and reports and a continued theme of artistic texts. The effect is one of an accumulation of layers of texts upon the original events.

*Direct and indirect quotation*

Direct quotation is certainly present in the 2012 texts, but used in a different way from the 2010 texts. In 2010, it was a way of representing the crisis as an immediate, recently-witnessed occurrence, of inviting the reader to feel somehow present at an unfolding event. By 2012, direct and indirect quotations fulfil a number of different functions.

- Referencing the event, in order to place it in a context, as here in a business article about crises that quotes the originator of a spoof BP Twitter account: "The best way to get the public to respect your brand? Have a respectable brand." 2012, *Text 4/20*
- Direct quotation from members of the public, but indirectly related to the oil spill (here in the context of a feature about an oil town in Dakota.) '"After the spill in the Gulf, it was really getting hard to know if you have a job or not."' 2012, *Text 3/20*
- Reports of political speeches, dealing with energy matters
    - 'Hood says as many as 200,000 individuals and businesses who signed the deals should qualify to receive payments for future damages and any increased damage payments.' 2012, *Text 9/20* [indirect quotation]
    - 'He [Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar] blasted the Republican-controlled House of Representatives for not acting to codify offshore-drilling regulations adopted since the 2010 BP Deepwater Horizon oil spill, failing to quickly approve a U.S.-Mexico agreement on offshore development, not making tax credits of renewable energy permanent, and not adopting new clean energy standards.' 2012, *Text 7/20* [indirect quotation]
- Literary quotations

Direct/indirect quotations above tend to fall into two categories: either person-on-the-ground reports, typical of news reports, but where BP is a footnote rather than the reported event, or quotations that support meaning-making and serve to interpret events, such as political speeches.

One reference of interest is to what was possibly the best-known quotation of the Deepwater Horizon crisis, that of Tony Hayward in May 2010 mentioned earlier:

> In this book's more than 600 pages you may sometimes be tempted to utter, as did BP's hapless chief executive Tony Hayward, disastrously, during the Deepwater Horizon disaster, ''I'd like my life back.'' 2010, *Text 11/20*

The quotation was clearly suggested to the writer by his topic matter, in this case a book on oil companies, primarily Exxon Mobil and BP. But it also shows how recognisable texts from the events (Tony Hayward's words) are appropriated into the public domain for general-purpose use, in this case to make a humorous observation.

*Press releases*

The number of press releases made by BP in April 2012 is again much lower than the daily updates of 2010, being only six in the month to 27th. Three of these are unrelated to the Deepwater Horizon crisis (one of these concerns BP's involvement in the 2012 London Olympic Games). The other three are connected to ongoing legal issues, and these are reflected in the data set texts in legal texts and references in *Text 9/20, Text 17/20* and *Text 18/20. Text 19/20* is a press release in its entirety, but from a Department of Education report that dolphin deaths have been strongly linked with the BP oil spill, rather than a BP source. From a BP perspective, press releases are concerned partly to continue to control the accuracy of the Deepwater Horizon story, and partly to show how the company is moving on away from Deepwater Horizon through undertakings such as the Olympic sponsorship.

*Artistic and literary texts*

As noted in the quantitative overview, the number of texts with a direct artistic connection – such as reviews or reports on artistic events, increases considerably in 2012. Even in texts that do not themselves deal directly with artistic works, literary reference is present.

> "The first thing we do, let's kill all the lawyers." William Shakespeare, Henry the Sixth 2012, *Text 14/20* [Blog dealing with a range of, in the writer's view, political shortcomings]

> Truman Capote once wrote of the "gilded baritone" of its hourly bells, drifting over Jackson Square and joining the "solitary grieving howl of a far-off shiphorn." 2012, *Text 15/20* [travel feature on New Orleans]

In those texts dealing specifically with artistic and literary works, the level of intertextuality is high. *Text 12/20* (analysed more fully in Section 7.10) is a review of a documentary that is itself based on a book. In a different way *Text 6/20* is also highly intertextual. From a headline based on a well-worn pun 'BP or not BP? That is the question' that forms the headline, the story goes on to report the actions of a campaign group objecting to BP's sponsorship of the

Royal Shakespeare Company's World Shakespeare Festival. Their protest takes the form of a song, performed (as an 'unexpected musical prologue') on the stage at the start of the opening night of the play *Twelfth Night*. The article also refers to a letter from the group to a national newspaper. These densely intertextual items set the BP events in sometimes unexpected contexts, providing new perspectives from which to understand their meaning.

*Co-text*

The BP story was reduced to a much lower prominence within the 2011 texts than it was in 2010, and this continues to be the case in 2012, as measured in the proportion of each text devoted entirely to the BP events. As proposed in Section 6.8, p171, co-text continues to serve the dual functions of constraining the size and significance of the BP events, and positioning them in various contexts in which they are presented as meaningful.

In summary, the final year of data draws from a number of intertext types, including for the first time in this data, direct literary quotations. These are used to evoke particular social worlds, to which the reader needs to bring a degree of shared cultural understanding. This is particularly the case where well-known quotations are modified ('BP or not BP?') or used out of context to make a humorous point ('let's kill all the lawyers'). This kind of reference does not use the words of those with a warrant to speak about the topic, but rather draws on shared experience and cultural knowledge to present events as understood, as having a degree of collective meaning.

## 7.9 Discourses

I proposed that in 2010, discourses of representation were primarily concerned with 'objective representation' of the 'facts' of the oil spill through mainly descriptive news media genres. In 2011, several features of the language worked to 'position' the events within known frameworks of meaning. In 2012, I suggest that two types of representational discourse are evident – one of which, rather than continuing the process of 'positioning' in a further linear direction of fixing meaning, serves instead to question fixed meanings and offer different meaning potentials. I shall call this a discourse of 'redeployment'. The second tendency is that of fixing and normalising meaning by presenting interpretations of the crisis as 'given'. This discourse is aligned with Barthes' concept of the naturalisation of representation, and can be

seen as a progression of the discourse of 'positioning', whereby once events are located within known frameworks, they are presented as naturally understood in certain ways.

*Redeployment*

Once a meaning for the BP events has been agreed, or partially agreed, it can be regarded as 'known' and redeployed as a resource with a (temporarily) fixed meaning. This is, I propose, what can be observed in three significant features of the 2012 texts – firstly the increase in the exploration of the meaning of BP events through creative works, secondly the tolerance for alternative voices (resistant discourses) and thirdly the use of a creative form of categorisation to 'play' with meaning. I will consider each of these below.

I showed in my analysis how creative works about the BP events became part of the media representation of the phenomenon. These creative works use the new signified, or the positioned concept of the events, as a starting point for exploration of meaning at a societal level. It is only once there is a shared concept of the BP oil spill, that it becomes available for interpretation in this way. In reporting and commenting *on* these creative treatments, the media texts mark them as 'other', and are able to position these texts for the reader, through selection, approval and disapproval, in ways they choose. However these challenging artistic representations – if widely seen and adopted – can serve to shift the positioning of the events described above, in an iterative development of meaning.

The challenge presented in creative works is often through the articulation of alternative or resistant discourses. Artistic interpretations often represent resistant discourses, frequently challenging how the mass media has positioned the phenomenon – through humour, by adding layers of complexity, or by setting it alongside other phenomena in a productive interplay of comparison and contrast intended to yield new insights. So, for example, the Margaret Atwood book (*Text 12/*20) takes the idea of the BP events and their subsequent outcomes as moral failure, rather than, say, the inevitable consequence of the risky but heroic venture of delivering oil to allow global progress. Blogs, letters and reports of political speeches also show evidence of resistant discourses: issues of compensation, financial impacts and future drilling agendas in the Gulf and elsewhere are exposed and aired in print and online texts in the data set. I have mentioned in my introduction to this thesis that control by traditional media institutions has been increasingly broken down by mass access to the Internet, and one of the outcomes is a considerable increase in 'voice' (Blommaert, 2005) for minority and alternative views. Within the 2012 (and some 2011) texts, critical voices stand in

contrast to, for example, financial reporting, in which the oil spill tends to be mentioned as an explanatory footnote to quarter one results. However, my analysis shows that while critical voices, or resistant discourses are given a place in the texts, particularly if they belong to politicians or others with access to a voice, they are frequently 'bracketed'. By this I mean that they are placed in non-news pages (so are not endorsed as 'factual'), or they are quoted directly whereby the journalist does not take responsibility for them, or they are positioned as non-mainstream (for example they are part of artworks) or they are backgrounded through rhetorical choices. So while 'institutional' and 'non-institutional' voices contribute to this conversation, non-institutional voices can be positioned as to one side of the discussion. As Conboy (2007: 97) notes:

> Hierarchies of news value can be varied to allow unfamiliar and even contentious voices to be heard as long as they do not destabilize longer term patterns of meaning.

Thirdly, the concept of creative categorisation refers to the observation that the linguistic feature of categorisation is employed in a rather different way by the 2012 texts than it was in 2011. Where in 2011, the events were placed in *expected* categories for the purpose of positioning, by 2012 they are mentioned in contexts that can be quite distant from oil spills, and placed alongside quite other social phenomena in a way that suggests an exploration of the boundaries of the partially-agreed meaning of the concept 'BP oil spill'.

The discourses of *objective factuality* and *positioning* are still evident, but are constantly modified. Factual representations continue to appear within the text, but in later data sets, the news reports use an agreed, *already positioned* and *shorthand* version of the BP events, through agreed naming practices for example. And as mentioned above, this positioning is still available for negotiation, and can be incrementally altered by the kind of creative play described above, where the partially-positioned concept is redeployed to be tested, stretched and potentially repositioned.

*Naturalisation*

Throughout the three data sets, but particularly by 2012, and alongside the redeployment of the concept 'BP oil spill' in 2012, sit discourses that are concerned to normalise the catastrophic events, and absorb them into the general consciousness. These discourses are part of a longer-term naturalisation of the understanding of events (Barthes, 1972), by which the meaning of the BP oil spill is seen as presumed and unarguable. They are evident in a number of linguistic patterns, analysed in earlier sections. There is a continued decrease in modal expressions of uncertainty, suggesting that propositions are not open for question or

challenge. The range of naming terms for the events is smaller, and the terms are longer, incorporating shorthand descriptions of the events that propose brief and selective ways of understanding them. The BP story is increasingly reduced to an explanatory footnote or an illustrative example within a different story. For the BP oil spill to have any resonance as explanatory footnote or illustrative example, suggests that a process of *naturalisation* is under way.

Strategies by writers to present the events as naturalised can be seen to serve both business and socio-cultural interests. With time, events are positioned as no longer new and unique, but past and 'other'. From a specifically business perspective, a return to 'business as usual' is the key aim for business management (De Cock et al., 2010; Stephens et al., 2005; *Text 20/20, 2011*; *Text 1/20, 2012*), for whom crises are seen as part of the nature of business development. Coverage in my set of texts draws upon a number of entrenched assumptions about business in general, and the oil business in particular.

1. That business needs to continue to grow, whether or not this is logical from the point of view of sustainability (Western, 2010).
2. That business involves inevitable risks and setbacks. These need to be 'dealt with', 'beaten' and 'recovered from'. Indeed the business crisis can be construed as an opportunity to expedite desired change or renegotiate leadership practices (Mitroff, 2005; O'Reilly, Lamprou, Leitch, & Harrison, 2013).
3. Business in general, and the oil business in particular, is regarded as adventurous, exciting and pioneering. Seen in this way, risk (although not its negative outcomes) is potentially both exciting and admirable.

So texts such as the business and market genre, for example, present the events from the perspective that crises such as oil spills are inevitable, but that measures have been taken to mitigate their likely future occurrence. In two of the researched texts (2011, *Text 20/20* and 2012, *Text 1/20*), consultancy services advice on crisis management and restoring business reputations.

Outside the business context, media coverage refers to the BP events within the context of known social phenomena. The events are no longer the exclusive province of business and the environment, but part of a shared history, and aligned with quite disparate concepts through the processes of *redeployment*. One difference between business and socio-cultural media coverage is that outside the area of business, there is less concern to naturalise the events by

treating them as part of the 'rough and tumble' of business. Rather they are a resource to be drawn on as a representative token of a certain type of human experience, be it an environmental issue, a huge lawsuit, or an example of complacency about safety. This is a more complex reading of the representation than the business reading. By 2012, resistant discourses are still evident (environmental protest being the most obvious example) and at that time it was still clear that discourses of *naturalisation* are by no means complete and meanings are still being argued, and their boundaries contested.

## 7.10 A linguistic map of 2012 in a text

The text below is *Text 12/20* in my 2012 dataset. As before, the font has been changed, and news terms unemboldened, but otherwise it appears, with all paratextual information, as in the Nexis UK database. The text is from a newspaper, the New York Post, and is from the arts review pages, in this case a film review.

The New York Post

April 27, 2012 Friday

**MOVIE REVIEW**

**BYLINE:** Musetto

**SECTION:** All Editions; Pg. 44

**LENGTH:** 180 words

THE BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico and a blood feud in Albania don't seem to have much in common, but both play key roles in the documentary "Payback.'' Based on Margaret Atwood's book of the same name, writer-director Jennifer Baichwal's film explores the complex issue of debt, both moral and financial. This includes BP's failure to deal with its environmental transgressions, and the years-long dispute between two poor rural clans that keeps the members of one family virtual prisoners in their own home.

Also thrown into the mix are Conrad Black, the disgraced media mogul who went to prison for mail fraud, a tattooed Canadian man serving time for robbery and abused migrant tomato pickers in Florida. All are subjects worthy of discussion, but tackling them in one film disrupts the movie's momentum and shortchanges viewers. Baichwal could have devoted a single film to just BP's disgraceful behavior.

In English, Spanish and Albanian, with English subtitles. Running time: 85 minutes. Not rated (mature themes). At Film Forum, 209 W. Houston St. Through May 8.

**LOAD-DATE:** April 27, 2012

**LANGUAGE:** ENGLISH

**GRAPHIC:**

**PUBLICATION-TYPE:** Newspaper

I selected this short text as representative of 2012 because it highlights a number of characteristic features of the final year of texts, including the appearance of art texts,

'creative' categorisation, evaluative language, the move of representation of the BP events from a news story into wider spheres, and the introduction of new and unrelated characters.

The item starts with an instance of unusual categorisation, namely the collocation of the BP oil spill and a blood feud in Albania. The connection in the documentary is that they both illustrate issues of debt, which is the central focus of the book upon which the documentary is based. BP's inclusion is warranted because of the environmental implications of the Deepwater Horizon crisis. The particular categorisation here removes the BP events from expected groups such as 'oil spills' or 'BP business problems' and sets them in the much wider context of moral and financial debt of all kinds. In this way, the potential scope of the 'meaning' of the Deepwater Horizon events is significantly broadened. The geographical scope of the BP story is widened from the Gulf of Mexico to parallel stories in Florida and Europe. A varied cast of characters, some real, some imagined, is introduced, including Conrad Black, a Canadian man and migrant tomato pickers. In effect we see here the process whereby the representation of the BP crisis is widening and fragmenting, and in that process accruing connotations far beyond the immediate events and outcomes. The signifier 'the BP oil spill' generates a web of signifieds, one of which, moral debt, is shown here.

In the concluding sentence, the writer suggests 'Baichwal could have devoted a single film to just BP's disgraceful behavior.' Here, as in other examples of reviews, judgement is not only being expressed about the quality and characteristics of the text under review (the documentary), but the topic of the documentary, BP's behaviour. In using the word 'disgraceful', the author introduces a personal and evaluative note, typical of the review genre, as well as editorial and blog texts.

The analyses of the final year of data shown in Chapter 7 indicate processes of representation that are still in flux. On the one hand, there is a movement towards an apparent reification of the meaning of the BP Deepwater Horizon events. On the other, there is evidence of a kind of experimentation with the concept of the events, where they are placed and replaced in a number of contexts, and are used to illustrate different aspects of experience. I would argue that this kind of experimental play ('redeployment') would not be possible without some shared concept of what the BP crisis 'means', but that this concept is by no means yet fixed. In the following chapter, I aim to draw together the different processes realised in the linguistic features described here. I will argue that they represent a move from an ostensibly concrete to an ostensibly abstract representation of the BP crisis.

# 8 Discussion

## 8.1 Introduction

This discussion chapter aims to bring together the findings from the previous four analysis chapters, in order to explore my overarching research question of how the BP Deepwater Horizon crisis has been constructed in the media. Section 8.2 below addresses my first detailed research question by considering what patterns and characteristics of language have emerged from a close textual analysis of the three data sets, and how these reveal processes of crisis representation. I propose five distinct patterns or characteristics of language features that increase, decrease, merge and conflict over the period of the research. I refer to these patterns as: Shorthand, Spread, Categorisation, Art and Discursive Shifts, and each is defined and discussed below in terms of its role in the process of meaning-making over time in the case of the BP events.

Section 8.3 addresses my second detailed research question by introducing an argument that conceptualises each of the three different temporal phases of media representation as a 'sign'. I will argue that the relationship of the mass-media representation (the *Sign*) to the events themselves (the *Object*) is broadly different in each year: in 2010 the relationship is one of resemblance, in 2011 it is one of association, whereas in 2012 it depends to a far greater extent on cultural knowledge and agreement. It is this observation that leads me to suggest that these three phases of semiotic representation might be conceptualised respectively in terms of Peirce's sign modes, as Iconic, Indexical and Symbolic, and I explore the robustness and implication of this analogy in this section. I continue by hypothesising a fourth phase (not yet reached) which is a phase of naturalisation or re-iconisation. It is this way of understanding meaning-making in the case of BP that gives this thesis its title: 'From Icon to Naturalised Icon'.

## 8.2 Patterns and characteristics of the language of the media texts

This section considers the first of my detailed research questions: 'What patterns and characteristics of language can be identified within and across media texts about Deepwater Horizon? What do these patterns reveal about the process of crisis representation, and how we come to make meaning of crises over time?' To examine patterns over time, I will offer a diachronic reading of the data, drawing together and reviewing the linguistic features that I

identified in chapters 5-7, and identifying patterns that are significant over the three years of the data sets. These patterns can be perceived in the shifting behaviours of a number of linguistic features – both singly and in aggregate.

These five patterns are:

1. *Shorthand*. There is an increase in linguistic devices that enable both writer and reader to access the BP events in ways that simplify their multifarious nature.
2. *Spread*. This is discernible in the type of text in which the events are mentioned, the intertextual environment and the social actors and contexts introduced in the texts.
3. *Categorisation*. This pattern concerns the placing of the BP events in lists and groups, and shows the events placed in increasingly disparate contexts.
4. *Art*. Texts reveal that BP events are increasingly captured, explored or fixed in artworks.
5. *Discursive shifts*. Discourses of representation appear to move from the ostensibly factual towards discourses of naturalisation. (Discursive change can be identified through processes 1-4 above).

### 8.2.1 Shorthand

In using the term 'Shorthand' I wish to convey both a *restriction* on meaning conveyed by linguistic terms, and the idea of *presupposition* (Fowler, 1991, Zare et al., 2012), or 'taken-for-grantedness' (Martin & White, 2005). A number of the linguistic strategies analysed have the effect of limiting and directing perspectives, whether consciously or unconsciously on the part of the writer. For example, both of the tropes metonym and metaphor *select* certain aspects of the entity described for attention, and *disregard* other aspects (Tsoukas, 1991), encouraging readers to see the entities from the perspective indicated by the writer. Processes of naming both people and events presuppose some agreement about how we should define, view and ultimately behave towards them (Fowler, 1991). Similarly, the groups and categories in which we place people and events help us to make sense of them in a context proposed by the writer, and later to attach meaning through processes of collocation and association. This latter phenomenon is discussed in a separate section in 8.2.3 below, and is one of the ways in which we collectively attribute shared meaning through a 'shorthanding' process. We are encouraged to locate new concepts and ideas within existing known dominant and resistant discourses, which notion is explored in more detail in Section 8.2.5 below. Ideas can be

presented as either 'given' or 'available for discussion' through modal resources, particularly those relating to certainty and those relating to obligation or instruction, constituting further ways in which potential meaning is restricted.

I do not intend to repeat my analysis findings in detail here, but I will draw on them to illustrate below how shorthand entails presupposition in the case of the BP data.

*Metonymy*

The use of metonym decreases over the life of the data, and its shorthand role is more evident at the start of the data period than the end. At the start, metonyms that position BP as animate (BP 'says', 'confirms', 'tries' and so on) were noted in my analysis to have two effects that are potentially in tension. On the one hand, metonyms work to humanise the company by suggesting that it can speak and act as though it were a human being, on the other, they remove agency and responsibility from individuals, by suggesting that it is the corporation, rather than people, performing actions. The positioning conveyed by the frequent metonymic use of 'BP' seems to be that BP as a corporation is closely involved in all aspects of the salvage and clean-up operation, having an active and above all *consistent* role in the financial, technological and environmental spheres affected by the spill. This would fit with the guidelines on crisis management outlined in business communications literature (such as Cornelissen & Harris, 2010; Massey, 2001; Muralidharan et al, 2011) and reinforced in data set texts 2011, *Text 20/20* and 2012, *Text 1/20*, both of which offer crisis consultancy advice. Later metonymic usages show a focus on reports and other written materials as actor (such as 'the Coast Guard report slams', 2011, *Text 16/20*), positioning official and written texts as agreed and definitive versions of the story.

*Metaphor*

Metaphors are used throughout the data sets to position the events in different ways. A number of metaphors in the early data (2010) present the events – that is, the explosion, oil spill and the weather conditions that affected operations – in ways that foreground that these phenomena were out of control, or difficult to control. Metaphors used in the later data sets position events and their subsequent business outcomes as part of a journey (BUSINESS IS A JOURNEY), a process, or a story (MYTHS AND LEGENDS). This is a feature of the process of symbol-creation, as the events move towards a somewhat-agreed meaning, perhaps that events are 'part of life's/business's rich pattern', but it also serves to background those

elements of the events that are troubling or fragmented, and were early on metaphorised as being unmanageable.

*Naming of events*

My analysis of the naming of the events showed that qualifying terms of time and place increased in number and complexity, the range of head terms reduced, and that 'oil spill' and 'disaster' became the most commonly used over time. This reduction in the number of terms suggests a degree of convergence on the part of the media, while still indicating two slightly different evaluative stances. The word 'disaster' already encodes negative shading, and the term 'oil spill', in itself arguably neutral, is generally accompanied by qualifying terms that evaluate the events negatively.

Of note is the use of the terms 'accident' and 'incident' in the 2010 texts, which appear to have been the preferred labels in the early BP press releases. 'Accident' implies no, or unclear cause, and 'incident' implies a neutral stance towards events. Both are absent in later texts, suggesting that the widespread practice will be either a negative head (disaster) or a neutral head (oil spill) + negative qualifiers. These naming practices do not at all attempt to downplay the seriousness of the explosion and oil spill, although there is a reduction in richness of signification, whereby a complex noun phrase serves to replace a longer retelling of the story, and in this way selects and restricts available meanings. The conventional use by news media of certain negative formulations can serve to make these terms familiar yet 'other', and in that way 'safe'.

*Modality and certainty*

In considering how aspects of modality relating to (un)certainty would progress through the data sets, I hypothesised that there would be a move from certainty to uncertainty, characterised by an increase in modal items. I imagined an analysis of the early data would show a limited use of modal expressions, as the genre 'news reports' are dominant in 2010, offering an account of observable facts, and constructing an impression of objective reality rather than personal opinion. By 2012, I hypothesised, an increase in evaluation and speculation as to the meaning of the events, would suggest an increase in modal expressions, with journalists increasingly 'intruding' into their writing. Instead I uncovered the reverse trend, namely that modal indicators reduced substantially between 2010 and 2012. My analysis shows this change to have a number of causes. The first is the initially high level of uncertainty about the 'reality' of the situation. Crises of all kinds can be characterised at the

outset by chaos and communication failures. The Deepwater Horizon explosion in particular took place in uniquely difficult circumstances (depth of water, previously untried drilling techniques) and the 'facts' given to journalists were unclear and often unsubstantiated. This uncertainty is reflected in the 2010 texts in the high levels of epistemic and dynamic modality occurring particularly in reported speech. This is not a feature of later texts where a move away from uncertainty towards apparent certainty is realised by a reduction in modality (although journalists and other writers still make some use of modal resources, particularly deontic modality, through which they suggest what should be done, or how the reader should understand their assessment of the BP situation). The resources of modality are one mechanism through which propositions are presented as either 'given' or 'available for discussion', and the later texts are increasingly characterised by bare assertions of 'opinion as fact'. Martin & White (2005:100) argue that monoglossic formulations (bare assertions) demonstrate 'taken-for-grantedness' in that they 'make no reference to other voices and viewpoints'. When modal items are absent, as is increasingly the case over time in the BP data, it is strongly indicative that the possibilities for 'other voices and viewpoints' are being closed down. Martin & White also observe that opinions about propositions are typically expressed through epistemic modality, while opinions about events are attitudinal and expressed through Appraisal resources. As the concept of Deepwater Horizon is reified, it may become more of an 'event' and therefore the object of the lexis of judgement rather than the resources of modality.

### 8.2.2 Spread

Spread, or diffusion, relates to the observation that accounts of the events appear in increasingly disparate text genres, comprise an increasing range of contexts, and mention an increasingly wide circle of social actors. These first two overall themes, shorthand and spread, may appear to be in some tension, as the first is concerned with reduction, simplification and selection, while the second is concerned with expansion, diffusion and heterogeneity (as I shall explain below). I argue here for a distinction between the events and their context. It appears to be the case that the events themselves – in de Saussure's terms, the *signified*, in Peirce's terms, the Interpretant – are undergoing changes in representation that in some ways make them simpler and more taken-for-granted. On the other hand the contexts in which they appear and the entities with which they are associated are multiplied and dispersed. Simply

put, the events have a more singular sense in a far greater range of applications. Spread is noted across a range of language features, but primarily genre, intertexts, and social actors.

*Genre and intertextuality*

As shown in analysis, the early texts in my dataset belong more firmly to the genre 'news report' whereas the later texts are attached to a greater range of genres, including commentary, features, reviews and business journal articles. This process alone accounts for much of the linguistic variation noted in my analysis, as different genres are characterised by different purpose, structure and content (Beghtol, 2001; Bhatia, 1993; Reynolds, 1997). The genre news report tends to draw on a particular type of external text, for example the eyewitness report, the interview, or the photograph, whereas the multiple later genres draw on a wider range of external texts, for example previous news reports on BP, associated but not directly related news stories, artistic texts and evaluative articles, as well as more generalised beliefs, issues and statements that remain unattributed (Allen, 2011; Bazerman, 2004). As the original 'observable' story is absorbed, naturalised, tamed, consumed, through a range of linguistic strategies, so the web of unseen texts with influence on my texts can be imagined to become ever more extensive, and ever less tangible.

*Social actors*

At a more detailed level, I observed the range of social actors to become increasingly wide and less directly connected to the source events. From a relatively restricted pool of experts, local people, company employees and agencies in 2010, the metaphorical 'cast of characters' associated with the events becomes larger, more distant and widespread, ranging from previous Chairpersons of BP and their associates to politicians outside the US and unconnected individuals who have gone through quite different crises. More notable still is the introduction of fictional and hypothetical 'characters', including those appearing in books that cover the events, and imagined future businesspeople dealing with as yet unrealised crises.

### 8.2.3 Categorisation

Both naming and grouping (which are separate phenomena) are acts with consequences in terms of how entities are perceived and thus treated (Fowler, 1991). Categorisation, as I define it in this thesis, comprises processes of listing and grouping by which an entity (here

the BP events) is characterised through its contiguous relationship with other entities. This kind of grouping is fluid over time: the entity, by being placed adjacent to other entities, both absorbs something of their character, and represents something of its own within the group. There is something in the process resembling metaphor, whereby a particular feature of one entity (but not all) is selected as resembling a feature of another entity (but not all). The process is also one of a metonymical nature, where an aspect of the entity comes to represent or point to a wider phenomenon, just as the OED word of 2013 'selfie' might come to index a society with an obsession with individual self-representation, at the expense of unrecorded activity, or group activity. Cook (2004: 109) construes this process as ultimately one of a metaphorical nature.

> The physical nature of a new phenomenon, in other words, does not constitute the entirety of its role in contemporaneous discourse. It is appropriated and amplified, but also further understood, as a metaphor. It then both draws upon, and contributes to, understanding of other arenas.

I see the concept of categorisation as representing the fluid process of representation where an entity is not part of a stable category, but moves between groups, absorbing and leaving behind traces, such that its own nature becomes more and more a product of social and cultural agreement. This concept is a commonplace in semiotic theory, but what I am suggesting here is that we can see it happening through linguistic analysis. In 2010, this feature of categorisation is barely present, indicating an entity, or signified, that is represented as being itself, singular, with unique characteristics. By 2011, the entity is represented as being part of known groups, such as business crises, or environmental catastrophes. By 2012, in a further process of 'symbolisation', it is sometimes located in very different groupings that have no direct connection with business crises or environmental disasters, for instance to represent anti-social behaviour, or as one of several themes in a literary work.

### 8.2.4 Art

The role of artistic representation has been treated so far in this thesis under a discussion of genre, but I want to identify it here as an important feature in itself. Like categorisation, this feature was virtually absent in the first year of data, presumably for the understandable reason that at a time of immediate crisis, writers have neither the time for reflection nor yet the insight with which to create art, nor might it seem an appropriate first reaction. Examples of texts I include under the broad heading of artistic representation are:

1. Reviews of books/films/documentaries about the events.
2. Reviews of books/films/documentaries that touch on the events, but that are not primarily 'about' them.
3. Reports of commentary about the events in artistic form (e.g. specially-written protest song).

Outside my own data sets, treatment of the events in artistic form has been quite widespread. Many non-fiction books have been written solely or partly about the BP oil spill (e.g. Bergin, 2011; Burt, 2012), oblique comic reference was made in the sketch show Harry and Paul (BBC, 2012) and US animation South Park satirised Tony Hayward's apology to victims (Youtube, 2010). These treatments serve to fix or pin down versions of the events: in the case of comic treatments, usually a version that is subversive or resistant. On the one hand, the increase in references to such texts within my data set is surely significant – journalists are acknowledging that these texts and treatments are now an intrinsic part of how the crisis is understood. On the other hand, the nature of my primary texts – news reports, reviews and so on – means that 'artistic' constructions of the crisis appear to sit outside mainstream representation. As I argue in my analysis, these potentially resistant versions tend to be 'bracketed' – they are reported *on* but do not form the substance of the report. This is a natural consequence of choosing mass-media journalism as an object of study (rather than, say, artistic representations themselves). However my analysis shows that in some instances other, dominant, representations of the crisis are presented as given, while artistic representation is clearly presented as 'other'. I develop this argument further in relation to the ideological implications of the discourses I identify below.

### 8.2.5 Discursive shifts

My discussion of discourses in this section is of a somewhat different order from the linguistic patterns and characteristics above, although it draws upon all of them. My interest in this thesis lies in discourses of *representation*, although there is much evidence in my data set that points to discourses about oil exploration, the environment, US nationalism, risk and reward and others. I have offered definitions of the discourse in Section 2.6.1, p68, and discussed the identification of discourses in Section 3.6.9, p105. To recap: I understand a discourse as a set of shared ideas, that appear natural to a particular time and place, but that are nonetheless a product of, and specific to, that time and place, and are in that sense conventional. Discourses

are sets of ideas that are taken for granted although not permanently fixed: dominant discourses are challenged, and regularly deposed, by alternative resistant discourses. However, it is through 'taken-for-granted' ideas that power interests are served. Individuals and institutions with power (including the media) are able to influence what counts as knowledge, what reaches the public domain, and how it is positioned. In this way certain ideologies are embedded in texts and practices and their ubiquity and appearance of 'common sense' allows them to go unremarked. Partly because of this, identifying discourses is not a straightforward process. Discourses can be identified through both what is said (content) and how it is said (form). The significance of an analysis of discourses to this thesis is that it situates the micro-analysis of text carried out in Chapters 5-7 within an account of broader social beliefs and practices. This thesis does not concern itself primarily with 'what happened' after the BP explosion, but rather with how 'what happened' was represented and how that representation evolved over time. This is better understood within the context of the discourses of mass media representation.

From the earliest stages of the analysis, the representations in the three data sets seemed to me to be of rather different kinds, with different aims and outcomes; and fuller, more detailed analysis confirmed this view. Put very broadly indeed, it seemed that the language of the texts at the point of crisis in 2010 had the aim primarily to 'describe' the events, that language usages in 2011 seemed to be concerned to 'place' the incident, while by 2012, I was observing processes of two kinds – one by which the events were explored through creative expression (see Section 8.2.4, p215, 'Art' above), and the other by which events were presented as understood or normalised. I took the presence of these two processes in 2012 as indicating that one phase (creative expression) was in flow and the other (normalisation) was emerging. In making these observations, I do not wish to imply either that the sets of texts were entirely discrete, nor that these 'aims' were necessarily concerted or conscious. They were partly an outcome of journalistic practices by which developing news stories move from the front pages to the middle pages of newspapers (or from the home page to sub-pages of the website) and eventually become source material for editorials and features.

In identifying discourses of representation, however, I was continually challenged by the apparent co-existence and conflict between the 'opening up' and the 'closing down' of meaning. Processes that seemed to allow for the 'opening up' of meaning – that is those that allowed for discussion, challenge, alternatives and uncertainty – included the modality of uncertainty, the use and reporting of voices that contested the status quo and the depiction of

the events through art. These processes were evident, in different forms, through all three years of data. 'Closing down' processes, that served to restrict and fix meaning included the modality of certainty, the bracketing or 'othering' of contesting voices and the location of the events within the known. These were more present in the second two years of data, but importantly were observable *alongside* 'opening up' processes, and even *preceded* them. The challenge for interpretation is not that both sets of processes are observable, but more that they did not follow a consistent pattern, for example an opening up followed by a closing down of meaning. One interpretation of this mixed picture is that there is a continued contestation of meaning, a back-and-forth or opening up and closing down between questioning and reassertion of meaning, which ends up ultimately with some form of social agreement. For another, I return to an observation I made earlier which is the distinction between the reification of the Object (the BP events) through 'shorthanding' and the fragmentation of its deployment as a concept through 'spread'. What is 'closed down' is our understanding of the Object, what is 'opened up' are the situations in which it has resonance. In other words, it is only when we feel we have a grasp of what the Object *is*, that we can deploy it as a *resource* in a number of social practices, including artistic representation, and other symbolic activities.

Following this line of argument, and taking into account that there is constant interplay between these 'opening up' and 'closing down' strategies, I do not propose that any one discourse correlates precisely to any one data set, but rather that there are four discourses at play at various times through the data sets, and hypothetically beyond, that can and do co-exist (see my later comments on the blurring of boundaries in Section 8.3.2), but that demonstrate a certain progression towards a naturalised meaning for the BP events.

1. A discourse of *objective factuality*, in which events are described and presented as 'news', and as a set of complex, but factual phenomena.
2. A discourse of *positioning* of the events, in which the events themselves are located, associated and categorised with other events. At this stage, they can also themselves become an exemplar of a category (oil spills, business disasters, major lawsuits and so on). Their meaning becomes placed within the known.
3. A discourse of *redeployment* in which this (partly) agreed version of events becomes a resource for exploration and creative expression.
4. A discourse of *naturalisation* in which exploration is concluded, and meaning is more or less fixed, less complex and more routine.

These four discourses are discussed and illustrated in the remainder of this section.

*Objective factuality*

The characteristics of the first set of discourses, those of *objective factuality*, are well-documented in the literature of media representation (Fairclough, 1995b; Fulton et al., 2005; Jacobs, 1999; van Dijk, 1985, 1988; P. White, 1997), and concern the construction of an apparently objective reality when dealing with serious and newsworthy events. As White writes (1997: 101) 'the "hard news" report acts to construct and to naturalise a model of social stability, morality and normalcy'. In the case of BP, a collection of linguistic strategies are used (outlined in detail in the analysis sections) that aim to present a diffuse and messy reality 'on the ground' in a way that both informs and engages the reader. As I have observed, the messiness of accounts is *not* subsumed to the need for a clear account. Rather a degree of chaos is preserved, in the form of, for example, the reproduction of disfluency, conversational features or lack of insight in eyewitness accounts or a preponderance of modal expressions of uncertainty in the description of events. This type of device signals that events are ongoing, in flux and uncertain, and contributes to a sense that this is a representation of events as they unfold, as if you were there. Meanwhile, a framework of linguistic conventions indicating *accuracy* and *objectivity* is set in place to make sense of the apparent disorder. These conventions include references of high specification (facts and figures, reference to photographs, precise names and titles of interviewees). Structural conventions of this discourse of objectivity include the more traditional 'inverted pyramid structure', which is directly associated with news reporting, and newer structural forms such as the tweet (2010, *Text 1/20* is a series of retweeted news summaries) which recall the traditional news headline in their brevity and apparent authority.

I present this as a discourse of representation in the broadest sense (discourses can be very broad or quite specific (Wooffitt, 2005)). News reporting fulfils the requirement to know 'what is going on', and we rely on designated mediators (journalists, broadcasters, news organisations) to present what we cannot possibly observe as individuals. The 2010 texts present multi-faceted representation of a reality – from the bite-sized retweet, to the aerial photograph, to the disfluent story of the shocked victim. This richness and variety of news offering makes us more willing to accept the story versions as real: we are offered so many perspectives, from the highly-researched to the seemingly spontaneous. I have noted that decisions about what is reported and how it is framed emerge from ideological positions and that only certain individuals or groups are in a position to make these decisions. The 2010

texts show evidence of BP's effort to present its own version of reality through press releases and interviews. My term 'discourse of objective factuality' is not intended to assert tha the texts are a description of an objective reality, but rather that they use linguistic strategies to construct a claimed likeness to reality.

While a discourse of objective factuality is particularly dominant in 2010, it does not entirely disappear in later years. In 2011 and 2012, news texts about the BP events still occur, albeit at lower levels, dealing primarily with BP financial results, and with legal proceedings for compensation. These stories are presented in conventional news report format, dealing with 'facts' in the same way as discussed above. What is different about the later reports is the way that BP events are positioned within them, and it is this that I go on to discuss in my next section.

*Positioning*

This second discourse – observable particularly in the 2011 and 2012 texts – serves to *position* the BP crisis as a certain entity by locating it as a known phenomenon amongst other similar phenomena. Journalists no longer take an ostensibly neutral stance in describing the BP events as they unfold, but start to write about them as known entities, and in that sense, a process of reification begins, as the events acquire their own recognisable 'thingness'. I have commented at some length on the linguistic realisation of this discourse and the emergence of lists, comparative constructions and groups as a significant feature in the 2011 texts. Through the use of categorisation, the events are regularly placed with other 'similar' events, all of which have been managed and are seen as terminated.

As well as these lists and groups, other positioning processes emerge in 2011. The BP story is increasingly absorbed into other news stories: an analysis of the proportion of individual texts which directly concerns Deepwater Horizon shows a reduction in the salience of the story. Rather than being the key point of a news story, it is now sometimes used as an example to illustrate a point about a different organisation, or another crisis. A further positioning process can be seen in the increasing use of texts about the events as a journalistic source, rather than the events themselves. This reliance on documentation to tell the story allows for a shared perception of what the story 'is', privileging certain accounts over others. Finally there is evidence of historical positioning, with the 2011 texts referring back in time (e.g. to previous crises), to the recent past (notably to the 2010 oil spill), to current events and to the future (e.g. in the form of marketing and operational plans).

I propose then that the overarching discourse of representation in 2011 is that of *positioning* the events as known rather than unknown, or rather graspable and manageable, rather than elusive and unmanageable. I will argue later in this chapter that at this stage, the events are also used as an 'index' or exemplar of other meanings such as the subsuming of regard for safety to production demands. The discourse of positioning is primarily related to long-term patterns of meaning: other discourses with which the reading audience is familiar (Conboy, 2007). In this process of choosing a set of groups and relationships within which the events can be understood, certain, largely conventional, meanings are established.

*Redeployment*

I have proposed that the initial discourse of representation for this crisis is that of factual objectivity, where the crisis is described through language that constructs an impression of a reality 'on the ground'. This is followed by the positioning of the crisis, where the unknown is aligned with the known, in a sense-making process. I suggest that once this partial reification of the events has taken place, then there is a period of what I will call 'redeployment' of the signified, where the meaning of the events is explored, 'shaken up' and repositioned. This process has three main realisations through language. The most evident is the increased importance of creative and art works that seek to synthesise social learning from the crisis, but also to experiment with meaning by integrating and comparing the events with other phenomena. This creative interplay is a way of adding layers of signification to the 'objective description' of the events. Secondly, as part of this process, alternative voices and opinions can be taken into account, not only creative, but also protests (e.g. *Text 6/20*) and the voices of victims. The final key feature noted is that of creative categorisation, where the BP events are placed not only alongside other crises, or BP problems but in more heterogenous groups, where its significance is less self-evident, and owes more to a social agreement about what the BP crisis has come to mean for readers. At this stage, the BP events become a resource with resonances that, in 2012, are still current.

*Naturalisation*

I have discussed the importance of naturalisation at length during my analysis, and suggested that it an inevitable and ubiquitous process for all major events. In the case of business crises in particular, language that normalises and backgrounds reference to the crisis serves a specific purpose of enabling affected organisations to return to business-as-usual, which is the crucial aim for crisis management. The discourse of naturalisation starts early in the data

sets, with financial reports just a week after the explosion, already presenting the events in terms of an explanatory factor for future business performance, rather than a unique phenomenon in themselves. I suggest that two years later in the 2012 data (and even now in 2014), processes of naturalisation are still incomplete, as 'new news' on the topic occasionally features in news publications.

In my data set, linguistic processes that naturalise conventional representation include a decrease in modal expressions, in favour of unmitigated declaratives. The choice of names to describe the events narrows, and economical 'shorthand' descriptors – what Cotter (2010) calls 'boilerplate' descriptions – serve to repeat and conventionalise shared understandings. The BP story loses detail, being absorbed into other, newer stories, as an illustration of a 'given' phenomenon. As noted earlier, this illustrative function only has meaning when there is a degree of shared understanding of a signifier.

## 8.3 The crisis as a semiotic sign

The second of my detailed research questions asks whether there is a useful way to conceptualise the patterns and characteristics outlined in the previous section, based on semiotic principles: 'If we understand the representation of the crisis as a semiotic 'sign', what elements of a sign come to the fore with the passage of time? Does this way of looking at the linguistic representation of phenomena shed light on how shared cultural understanding is constructed?'. I present below an argument for considering the media representation of the BP crisis as moving from a sign of ostensible likeness (an Iconic sign), to a Symbolic sign, which has a more arbitrary connection with the crisis as Peircean Object.

### 8.3.1 An Icon-Index-Symbol analogy

My question asks whether it is justified and productive to understand the representation of the BP crisis as a semiotic sign, with different orders of the sign (Icon, Index or Symbol) being more significant at different times as the representation progresses. In my discussion of discursive shifts I have already raised some of the points that will contribute to this argument – issues concerning media representation of events ostensibly 'as they are', and ultimately as what they have come to represent as a result of cultural agreement.

I would like to reconfigure this argument by conceptualising the representations in the three data sets as three meaningful Signs, in the Peircean sense discussed in Section 2.2.3, p34. In the particular trichotomy Icon-Index-Symbol, the critical relationship is that of the *Sign* (in this case the mass media reprentation to the *Object* (in this case the BP oil spill). I have observed that this is broadly different in each year: in 2010 the relationship is one of resemblance, in 2011 it is one of association, whereas in 2012 it depends to a far greater extent on cultural knowledge and agreement. It is this observation that leads me to suggest that these three phases of semiotic representation might be conceptualised respectively as Iconic, Indexical and Symbolic.

Before I set out my argument, I need to define more closely what *is* the Object of the representations in this case. It should be clear already that I do not claim that there is an objective reality of the events that the media reports are managing to describe more or less 'accurately', although this is not to deny the material consequences of loss of life, injury and destruction of the environment caused by the explosion. Apart from the question of objective reality, there is the question of scale and scope – what are the parameters of the phenomenon I wish to investigate? Buchart (2011: 291) alludes to the complexity of defining 'events'.

> In what does a happening consist in order for it to obtain the status of an object of knowledge? Is there a difference between a set of related occurrences and the identity of their concept? Is what happens distinct from what comes before it and everything else that codetermines it?

In the case of my research, a broad definition of the hidden Object is an aggregate of the Deepwater Horizon explosion and oil spill, the reactions of participants to it and the crisis that BP found itself dealing with for many years. More specifically, it is the object[s] of discussion by the media that I find when I consider the terms 'BP', 'disaster', 'crisis' and 'oil spill'. This discussion surrounding the Object changes substantially, and this both describes and constitutes the changing 'meaning' of the Object. In the way of Barthes' 'floating chain of signifieds' (Barthes, 1977: 39) and Peirce's unlimited semiosis (1931-58) it will become impossible to discuss the BP oil spill without reference to the web of discussions that have invested it with additional meaning, just as it is impossible to discuss, say, Nelson Mandela as 'a man' without reference to the vast range of images, films and writings that constitute our concept of him. Later in this discussion chapter, I will hypothesise how the representation of events will develop beyond the time of my data sets, drawing on the ideas of Baudrillard (1994). In Baudrillard's terms, representations at the present historical moment have come to have no relation to any reality whatsoever, but are pure simulacra. In my argument, I

conceive that there is, in fact, an Object, albeit hidden and unknowable, and we move away from this Object and towards a simulacrum. It is the linguistic evidence of this movement that I have aimed to trace in this thesis.

I further need to establish that my argument depends on regarding Peirce's modes of sign: Icon, Index and Symbol, as progressively distant *in this order* from the Object that they represent. In other words an Iconic sign would be most 'motivated' by the Object, an Indexical sign next and a Symbolic sign least 'motivated' by the Object. I discuss in Section 8.3.2 the further complexity that all signs can properly be seen to have elements of each of these modes (Peirce, 1931-58: 2.295) but focus for the moment on archetypal signs. The order outlined above is not one endorsed by all scholars. For example Chandler (2007: 35) suggests that Indexical signs are closer to the Object than Iconic signs, citing Peirce as support, because they 'direct the attention to their objects by blind compulsion' (Peirce, 1931-58: 2.306). However, elsewhere, Peirce seems to imply that the Icon is more closely related to the Object than the Index, not least because he orders them in this way in his discussions of the qualities of phenomena in general Firstness (quality), Secondness (brute facts) and Thirdness (law) (Cobley & Jansz, 1999). The view that a cline from Icon to Index to Symbol represents an increasingly arbitrary relationship with the Object is certainly one held by a number of other semiotics scholars. Hodge & Kress (1988: 26-7) suggest that Iconic signs are closer to the Object as they involve 'direct perception', whereas Indexical signs are 'based on an act of judgement or inference' and are therefore lower in modality, that is, they have a lesser claim to realism or truthfulness. Writers in the field of metaphor also endorse this ordering, and these include Sørenson (2010), Ponzio (2010) and Haley (1995).

#### *8.3.1.1 Argument for an 'Iconic phase'*

In Peircean terms, the Iconic sign is one that is connected to its Object via a relationship of *likeness*. I am suggesting that this relationship is evident in my data in the sense that the drive for linguistic choice is towards producing a representation that 'looks like' the Object of the BP events. All the markers of 'objectivity' and 'factuality' that we have noted in the analysis chapters, and that I have referred to in my discussion of a discourse of *objective factuality*, are pressed into service to express something like: 'this is what it would look like if you were there, on the ground, moment to moment, with all its uncertainties, emotions, facts, half-facts and unwitting players'. In this view, we see not only evidence of a form of 'scientific objectivity' through the devices of highly specific naming, expert witness and 'hard' facts and figures. We also see an acknowledgement of uncertainty and fragmentation in the use of

epistemic modality, the (reported) emotive language of non-expert witnesses and the instability of names, descriptors and categories. This uncertainty is, however, mediated by the writer or journalist, through devices such as direct and indirect quotation, and the presentation of contrasting views. In this way he/she is selecting and combining information to make meaning, but the meaning made is not intended to be a social understanding of the implications of the events, but rather a marshalling of the available information to create the most credible picture for the reader of *what is actually happening*, in other words a picture that *looks most like* the Object. The picture is not the Object, but one selective version of it. As van Leeuwen points out (2005: 160, emphasis in original), 'Linguists and semioticians therefore do not ask "How true is this?" but "*As how true* is it represented?".' Fowler (1991: 170) makes a similar point about the apparent representation of likeness by news reports:

> As a working principle in discourse analysis or critical linguistics, we assume that the ostensible subject of representation in discourse is not what it is 'really about': in semiotic terms, the signified is in turn the signifier of another, implicit but culturally recognizable meaning.

By using the term 'culturally recognizable', Fowler indicates that news reports (and other texts) are Symbolic artefacts, being only understandable within the time and place that produced them. When I suggest that certain types of news writing are Iconic in nature, I do not lose sight of the fact that they are constructed to be so. There is a potential tension in arguing that news reports propose a direct 'likeness' but acknowledging that any likeness is highly modified according to situated practice and stakeholder interests. If this version of reality is a construct, then why is it not a Symbol, like other culturally-agreed-upon signs? I suggest that the argument for Iconicity holds from two perspectives. Firstly, Peirce never argued that an Iconic sign *was* in any way the Object, only that its connection to the Object was one of apparent resemblance. And, as illustrated in Chandler's analogy of the Object hidden in the box, the Object remains unknowable. Yet, crucially, and this is my second point, the texts in 2010 *are presented as resembling reality* – this is their explicit and implicit purpose. The texts are concerned to assemble data of very different kinds into a multifaceted facsimile of an event that the reader is meant to recognise as reality. In short, the writer has created an Iconic sign.

#### *8.3.1.2 Argument for an 'Indexical phase'*

Early in my analysis it seemed clear to me that the language of the first phase of data intended to represent a reproduction of reality, while the language of the final phase of data was evaluative, highly intertextualised and connected to artistic representation, as I shall go on to

discuss in the next section. It seemed appropriate to characterise these beginning and end states as displaying features of Iconic and Symbolic signs, while the middle phase could quite well have been simply transitional: a point in the process of movement from one state to the other, rather than a 'phase' in its own right. 2011 is, in regard to most of the features studied, a linguistic mid-point for increasing or decreasing movements from the first to the last data sets. This might indeed be the sole source of interest in the 2011 data, were it not for the importance of the particular researched phenomenon, categorisation, which I propose as evidence for an Indexical phase of representation.

Peirce's Indexical signs are those based in relationship of *contiguity* rather than a relationship of *resemblance*. This association can take the form of cause-and-effect relations, part-for-whole and whole-for part relations and a pointing or indicating function. Fowler (1991: 170) discusses media representations as entire indexical signs, in the sense that I am arguing here, where references to events become 'a shorthand, a metonymy, for an underlying 'it' of a more abstract kind'. Fowler's point here coincides with my own observations from analysis of shorthanding processes as well as the gradual move to use the BP events as an illustration of wider phenomena.

Two questions of interest for the BP data arise from these definitions of Indexicality. Firstly, since *metonym* is a linguistic realisation of Indexicality, is there evidence from the BP data of a particular pattern in the use of metonym in the 2011 texts? Secondly, are metonymic (Indexical) relations expressed in any other way? In other words is there evidence that the BP events are somehow *connected to, represent,* or *stand for* other events or phenomena? In the first case, an investigation of metonymy as a purely linguistic phenomenon did not reveal 2011 to be a special case. Instances of metonymy in 2010 were predominantly of the kind mentioned above: ORGANISATION FOR MEMBERS, by which BP and other organisation names were used to stand for particular spokespersons. This type of usage decreased steadily over the years with the reduction in the prevalence of company statements, and the trend in 2011 was part of that pattern. (The role of metonymy in *selecting features of interest* of the crisis remained crucial and is explored in Section 8.2.1). However there did prove to be an important connection with Indexicality in respect of the second question above.

*Categorisation*

2011 showed a marked increase in a particular type of categorisation. This was the practice of placing BP within a particular category either explicitly, by including it in an enumerated list, or

implicitly, through expressions such as 'the biggest', 'the worst' and so on. The instances of this type of usage increased substantially from six tentative examples in 2010, to sixteen (in only twenty texts) in 2011. The groups or categories in which it was placed were generally predictable, including natural disasters, man-made disasters, business crises, and specific BP problems. Nevertheless it was clear that the BP events were no longer being represented as isolated, unique or irretrievably 'messy'. Rather they were being used in a process of interactive meaning-making that aligned them with other pre-existing or newly-made groups. In this way, the events either took on some of the qualities of group members, or other group members took on some of their qualities. If group members are subsequently placed in different categories, they bring with them some of the associations of their previous group-membership. I will pursue this line of thinking in my discussion of the Symbolic phase of 2012, when the BP groups proved to be far more creative and disparate than in 2011.

*BP events as Index*

The BP events are introduced as an *Index* of a number of other concepts in 2011. The data set includes texts from professionals offering crisis advice services, whose interest was to hold up BP as a salient warning to those who did not have crisis management protocols in place (BP events as cautionary exemplar of a very serious business crisis). Other texts were written from the perspective of the effect on other deep-water prospects (BP events as obstacle). Others focussed on BP's safety practices (Deepwater Horizon as Index of deep-rooted weaknesses in the BP culture). In these and other texts, the BP events either *stand for* or *point towards* something outside themselves. This can be seen as part of a process of meaning-making whereby the phenomenon moves from a situation where it can be described but not yet understood, to one (the Indexical phase) where it is starting to be 'located' within the known.

#### *8.3.1.2 Argument for a 'Symbolic phase'*

Peirce's concept of the Symbolic sign is one that is related to its Object only arbitrarily and by convention. Put another way, it is not, or only minimally, motivated by its Object. I argue in this section that the way the BP events are represented in the 2012 data set is increasingly a construct of convention and agreement. Description of the events has given way to evaluation, and the crisis is increasingly positioned as having meaning within a number of social fields, including business and finance, the environment, politics and the arts. By this I mean that the events are now a meaningful concept, or *signified* with a largely agreed social meaning, that depends decreasingly on the material events of April 20th 2010. Butchart (2011)

would argue that that the enterprise of describing crisis events is bound to fail, and for this reason we turn to symbolising them. In contrast to the Indexical phase, indications of the Symbolic nature of the 2012 representation can be found across a range of linguistic dimensions, and these are set out below.

*Symbolic genres*

In Section 7.1, p181, I note an increase in news text genres that sit outside the sphere of traditional news reports. These include feature articles and online blogs, as well as text types such as reviews that provide a link to art, music, film and documentary. I would argue that this generic shift is one of the mechanisms by which representations of the BP events move from reporting and describing to evaluating and appraising. By 2012 the BP events are being drawn upon as a *cultural resource* for making meaning. The genres that appear in the 2012 data set are decreasingly those that purport to describe and increasingly those that purport to comment and interpret. Such commentary and interpretation is set in a context that arguably requires increasingly sophisticated world knowledge and cultural agreement. This idea of cultural resource is interestingly supported by an increased number of literary and shared cultural allusions (for example to quotations from Shakespeare) that are a feature of the 2012 texts.

*Layering of intertexts*

Alongside this generic shift is a significant change in the type of source text that is drawn upon as resources for the researched texts. I have already noted a process of layering of intertexts which is evident by 2012, for example a) a review *of* b) a documentary *based on* c) news reports that in turn *draw upon* d) press releases or eyewitness statements. From this observed process of the layering of textual resources, we can postulate that social and conventional meanings and understandings are constantly being added to, amending, and potentially obscuring the original Iconic representation until it becomes a product of agreement and convention.

*Symbolic actors*

Individuals and groups mentioned in the 2010 reporting of BP events in are closely attached to the events, from BP executives, (over-)specifically named experts, and public participants. Journalists take care to connect these actors closely with the events: their importance lies in their capacity to illustrate and validate the story. Their value lies precisely in the fact that they

are 'real'. By 2012, the actors mentioned are considerably more loosely attached to the story. Interestingly, an increasing number are 'not real'. These include the fictional characters in related artworks, and hypothetical characters in scenario-building exercises such as those described in crisis-management 'manuals'. An examination of actors reveals one way in which the story is increasingly less anchored in the real world and increasingly inhabits a Symbolic world.

*Changing metaphors*

I outlined in the literature review chapter that Peirce (1931-58: 2.277) regards metaphor as an instance of an Iconic sign, relying as it does on a relationship of *likeness* to its Object. Writers on metaphor from a Peircean perspective (Abrams, 2002; Hiraga, 1994; Lattmann, 2012; Ponzio, 2010; Sørensen, 2010) have problematised this view on the grounds of a greatly reduced 'immediacy of sign-object link' (Hiraga, 1994: 7). In my own work for this thesis, I did not find that instances of metaphor decreased over time, which might have neatly supported my hypothesis of a movement away from Iconic representation. Instead, I observed an increase, and I make two observations in this respect, one relating to the frequency of metaphor and the other to the type of metaphor. With regard to frequency, I would like to draw upon a different model of metaphor than that of Peirce, namely that of Jakobson (2002). Jakobson proposes that the 'metaphoric order' relies on choices that are paradigmatic, that is they are concerned with substitution and selection. In contrast, the 'metonymic order' is syntagmatic, relying on combination and contiguity. Each 'order' or 'pole' is closely connected with different types of writing. Jakobson connects the 'metonymic order' with journalism, montage, and ordered narratives such as epic works. He suggests the 'metaphoric order' is related to poetry, romanticism, filmic metaphor and surrealism. I suggest that the observed increase in metaphor relates to the move outlined above from a journalistic to an artistic sensibility.

My second observation concerns the shift in both types of target and types of source in the metaphor in my data sets (for definitions of these terms, see Section 2.5.2.2, p64). In 2010, the target for metaphor is the material entities such as weather and the oil spill itself. This tends to run counter to the pattern that the *abstract* is conceptualised in terms of the *concrete* (Koller & Davidson, 2008; Koller, 2003; Ng & Koller, 2013). By 2012, the target domain is more abstract, and source domains also remain relatively abstract. By this stage, source domains for metaphor have shifted to include those of theatre, stories, myth and journeys. I wish only to touch lightly on this observation, as not all metaphorical usages are

directly related to the BP events, some being a feature of co-text. I do, however, suggest that there is a symbolic process of myth and story creation relating to the BP events, which is realised at a number of linguistic levels, of which metaphor is just one.

*Categorisation*

While categorisation was a key feature of the Indexical phase outlined above, and occurs just as frequently in 2012 as 2011, there is an important change in the nature of the groups in which the BP events were placed. I have characterised 2011 lists and groups as 'expected', comprising events associated with business, finance and the environment. In 2012, 'group members' are much less closely related to the oil spill itself, and I see this as an indication that the concept 'BP oil spill' has meanings that are increasingly less dependent on the material events and more related to our social construction of their meaning.

In fact the linguistic choices described above all have in common that they rely upon a shared understanding of what the BP events 'mean' at this stage of representation. The construction of meaning that has taken place at the Iconic (descriptive) and Indexical (positioning) phases have now reached a stage of relative arbitrariness, where full understanding of the sign is only possible if we know the socio-cultural 'code'. If we accept this argument, the relevant order of the sign at this stage, following Peirce, is the Symbol.

### 8.3.2 Process, state and the blurring of boundaries

The argument outlined above describes discrete and subsequent phases of crisis representation, each with its own set of characteristics, which I propose align it with one of Peirce's orders of the sign. This can only be a convenience: the multifarious nature of my data resists such neat categorisation. Not only does one proposed phase seem to move into the next gradually, but elements of each phase are recognisable in each of the others. I noted similarly that discourses co-existed and blended across the data sets. I cannot even forcefully argue (to use a term from cognitive semantics, see Singleton, 2000: 77-80) that each set of data is *prototypically representative* of the phases I propose, in other words that each is an archetypal example of Iconic, Indexical or Symbolic representation. The selection of yearly-spaced data sets was a device to allow me to explore the process of representation and how it changed. It would be more than a coincidence if I managed to alight on the day when, say, Iconicity, or Indexicality was most prototypically represented in the texts. To take the Indexical phase as an example, there may have been many more distinctive features of what I

call Indexicality on November 4th 2010 or September 14th 2011, than there were on April 27th 2011.

Apart from the issue of prototypical representation, there is the issue of overlap between the different phases. The data show that there are elements that I later describe as evidence of Symbolic representation in both Iconic and Indexical phases, just as there are elements of both Iconicity and Indexicality in the Symbolic phase. Those texts in 2012 that are of the genre 'news report' and cover the progress of the compensation cases (e.g. 2012, *Text 9/20*) or speculate on BP's upcoming financial results (e.g. 2012, *Text 13/20*) include many of the features that I have suggested are typical of making an Iconic representation, or descriptive likeness (although I argue that the Iconic 'news report' changes to accommodate Indexical and Symbolic features). To take an example outside my data set, on October 27th 2010 the animated television programme 'South Park' aired an episode in which 'Tony Hayward' apologised to the victims of the spill in a series of increasingly bizarre settings. This text is definitively representative of what I term the Symbolic stage of representation, being artistic, evaluative and culturally-situated, but comes to wide public consciousness just six months after the explosion, well before the date of my 'Indexical' data set of 2011 and eighteen months before my proposed 'Symbolic' data set.

I do not present these variations as fatal flaws or even as serious problems for my argument: any synchronic linguistic description is partial and imperfect, representing as it does a single, arbitrary point in a flow of continual change. However the discussion above does expose an interesting challenge to conceptualising these representational phases. My first view was that the three representational phases followed a linear progression from one point to another in time, represented by the diagram in Fig. 8.1, albeit not entirely discrete as shown. In this view, once a representation has reached the Indexical phase, it has left the Iconic stage behind and so on.

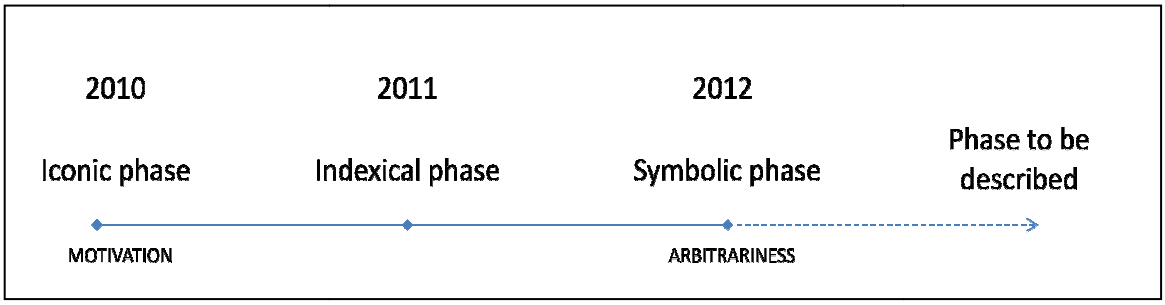


Fig. 8.1: A linear view of Iconic, Indexical and Symbolic phases

This thinking is unsatisfactory in two ways. One is that, as suggested above, not all texts in the primarily Symbolic phase have purely Symbolic features. Indeed, I argue that the Iconic phase is not one that *is* descriptive likeness, but *represents itself as* descriptive likeness, and is in this way Symbolic itself. Because of this, I find it difficult to argue for a complete 'moving on' from one phase to another. Secondly, the linear view implies that the representation moves forward metaphorically to a greater and greater distance from the Object (which is, according to this conceptualisation, somewhere to the left of the diagram). While this is to some extent what I wish to convey, I will go on to reason in the following section that beyond the Symbolic phase lies something that presents itself as a *different kind of likeness* and so is in some sense closer to Icon.

### 8.3.3 Beyond Symbol to simulacrum – the naturalised Iconic phase

In Section 8.2 I summarised the main linguistic patterns and characteristics, suggesting that there were a number of diachronic, overarching processes that could be identified. By using the word 'process', I do not wish to imply that this was consciously directed, or had a likely endpoint that would be the subject of this current section. On the contrary, two of the patterns I identified are in potential tension – one consists of reductionist processes, by which representations of the events are 'shorthanded' and simplified, and the other of processes of spread and fragmentation, by which representations are multiplied and made more complex.

In Section 8.3, I proposed a set of three synchronic readings, suggesting that there are identifiable phases in the mass media representation of the BP Deepwater Horizon events (so far) that share characteristics with Peirce's three modes of sign – Icon, Index and Symbol. I suggested that these are not discrete phases, but have blurred boundaries. Despite the 'messy' nature of the representations, I identified a tendency for Deepwater Horizon accounts to move from Iconic in nature to Symbolic in a diachronic process, and noted that this process is realised through changes in the features of language used over the period of the data. However, I raised again as a problem the simple linear view of Icon^Index^Symbol^something else, on several grounds. These included the blurred time boundaries between the phases and the closely-bound nature of the sign modes – acknowledged by Peirce and subsequent Peircean scholars, and evident in the data, where signs can contain any or all of Iconic, Indexical and Symbolic relations with the Object. But my primary concern with a linear conceptualisation is that it implies a vector with a direction, and I suspect that any direction

will become less and less definable. This current section of my discussion explores the issue of 'what next', and to address this question, I turn to Baudrillard's view of the 'image' or representation. As described in Section 2.2.2, p32, Baudrillard identifies four successive phases of the image (1994: 6) from signs that offer a close reflection of reality to signs that refer only to other signs and have no relation to reality at all.

It would be convenient to suggest that my arguments map progressively on to Baudrillard's phases of the image, and I have certainly explored how representations start by aiming for a resemblance to reality and move towards an arbitrary relationship with reality. However, to draw this parallel would be to misrepresent Baudrillard's argument. In fact all three of the stages I outline, as well as my putative fourth stage, belong to Baudrillard's fourth order of the image. The fact that I have argued strongly that my Iconic stage involves, not factuality or objectivity, but what we might call 'doing objectivity', coupled with Baudrillard's argument that we belong to an age where it is no longer possible to attach signs to a reality but only to other signs, can only mean that all three representations are pure simulacra in Baudrillard's terms, however I choose to sub-divide or classify them. A further divergence from Baudrillard's reasoning is one I have raised earlier in this chapter. My vision is one of an increasingly elusive and distorted Object, but Baudrillard's is one of no Object at all.

Baudrillard's proposed four stages of the image imply a linear progression through cultural stages where representations become increasingly distant from what they purport to represent, such that the territory rots away and the map of the territory is all that remains. His argument that 'theme park America' is somehow more 'real' than the America outside the theme park, seems to refer to the fact that the less a representation is *transparently* a representation, the further it is from the Object. This raises an interesting question for my own data. Is there a sense in which, according to Baudrillardian logic, my Iconic data phase, by constructing what it intends to be understood as a 'reflection of profound reality' (Baudrillard, 1994: 6) is somehow further from the Object than my Symbolic phase, that perhaps aims at a more fundamental authenticity through art, critique and transparently-expressed opinion – all of which are openly acknowledged as being at some remove from reality?

How cultural representations progress has been a topic for academic speculation. Chandler (2007) suggests that the move from Iconic to Symbolic is typical. Parmentier (2009: 145), in a discussion of Peirce's trichotomies sets out the case that although socio-cultural phenomena are frequently held to develop in a way that exhibits increasing abstraction (he cites the

example of money, whose form has evolved from direct barter, through gold coins and paper money to financial derivatives), there exists an argument in the opposite direction. Sociolinguists Irvine and Gal (2000) describe a process that they call 'iconization', by which linguistic features that are actually indexes of a culture become seen as natural (iconic) rather than culturally derived. This recalls Barthes' discussion of 'naturalisation', as discussed in Section 2.5.1, p61, which process is at its most complete when it is least noticeable. As Parmentier sums up (2009: 145):

> There are even situations where it seems that conventionalizers and naturalizers engage in a direct semiotic confrontation – the bottom line perhaps being that anyone who manipulates or regiments the flow of interpretants thereby indexes social power or cultural capital.

Using the terms 'conventionalizers' and 'naturalizers', Parmentier illustrates the two arguments – one that social phenomena progress to levels of greater and greater abstraction, and the other that they become so taken for granted that they are perceived as real and are unrecognisable as social constructs. I do not see these two arguments as mutually exclusive, or even contradictory, if one takes the view that naturalised social phenomena are the most arbitrary signs of all. However, the argument expressed by the 'naturalizers' does introduce the possibility that Fig. 8.1, p231, could be reconceptualised in the following way.

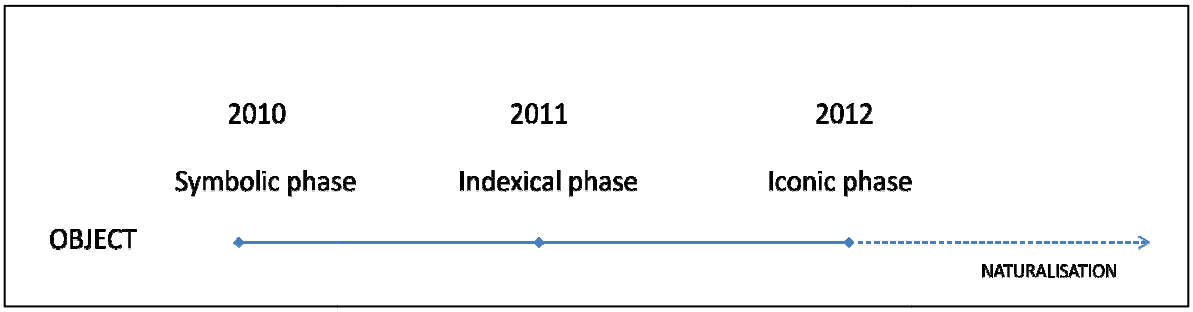


Fig. 8.2: An alternative conceptualisation of the relationship of sign modes to the Object

My preferred resolution of this tension is to conceive of these two potential understandings of the term Icon as differing from each other, as follows. The Peircean Iconic representation would be understood as being at the early stage of high motivation by the Object and intended to resemble the Object – however, flawed, culturally-regulated and politically-motivated that representation might be. What we might call the 'naturalised Icon' is a representation that has been through the phases of Icon, Index and Symbol to reach a different form of Iconicity that is now so taken for granted that it is unrecognisable as a

construct. It is this concept that I wish to propose as my final stage – this is my proposed answer to 'what next?'.

Pursuing this line of thought – we no longer have a linear progression to an endpoint, but what might be conceived as a spiral, where representation loops from Iconic back to Iconic status, but where the naturalised Icon is on a different plane. This thinking still locates the representations within Baudrillard's final stage of 'pure simulacrum', but suggests that we can identify different processes within that understanding, and these follow a loosely predictable pattern. This thinking is embedded in Barthes' concepts of the naturalisation of myths and ideologies (1972). By the end of the period of the data, there are signs that the 'BP disaster' or the 'BP oil spill' is part of the 'common' language, and it unites meanings from previous crises, meanings it acquired at the time of the spill, and an array of direct and indirect associations acquired since, in Peirce's infinite series of signs. Its represented meaning is now a 'given', at the same time both highly simplified, and infinitely fragmented. As the representation of oil spill reaches this stage, it becomes a resource for our understanding of other oil spills and disasters. A trawl of texts published on precisely the same day, April 27th, in 2013 (one year after the last data set), uncovers this text extract.

> His work has immersed him in events that read like a roster of recent catastrophes, from 9/11 to the Gulf oil spill. Now, Kenneth Feinberg is adding the Boston Marathon bombings to that list. Nexis, Associated Press, April 27th 2013

This reference to the BP events is some evidence that our future understanding of the signified 'catastrophe' in the first line, will be informed by the complex signified 'Gulf oil spill'. In this thesis, I accept, following Barthes, that the representation of the BP oil spill and its aftermath constructs versions of reality that are more or less compliant with current discourses of representation. However, I suggest that to reach a final state of naturalisation, the representation undergoes a shape-shifting process, in which the sign is variously constructed through language to resemble its Object, position its Object, then test the boundaries of that position, finally presenting the Object in a new kind of likeness. This evolving relation of the sign (media representation) to its Object (the BP events) is realised in a complex network of interrelated language choices.

# 9 Conclusions

## 9.1 Introduction

This study set out to investigate how a particular phenomenon – the BP Deepwater Horizon crisis – was constructed in the news media. This was a broad aim, which raised a methodological challenge: given the large number of media texts available for study, what approaches to data selection and analysis would allow for an investigation that was sensitive to small scale language usages that might be significant in meaning construction, and yet would be able to capture the sense of patterns connecting often very disparate sets of texts? By selecting all (then focussing on some) of the Nexis UK-sourced texts on a single date in three separate years, I intended to create a data set that was broadly representative of coverage at three points in time. My aim was then to observe what the writers of the texts were 'doing' through language at each time point, and whether this changed. The methods I developed for both selection and analysis were productive – I was able to perceive patterns at year-level and three-year level – but they constituted only one way of approaching the vast potential corpus. I reflect on the limitations of my approach in Section 9.2 below. Section 9.3 sets out how my findings, discussed in full in the previous chapter, offer a new perspective on the construction of crises through language in the news media over time.

## 9.2 Reflection on the limitations of this research

The broad scope of this project was the source of most of its challenges, and its primary limitation concerns the depth in which the language features could be covered. In particular, the subjects of genre, metaphor and modality are best served by a greater degree of focus and contextualisation than was possible in this study, and text examples were used in some cases more for illustration than depth analysis. My main concern was to identify overarching patterns, and in order to do this, I was forced to sacrifice detail in some cases. The linguistic 'features' selected were only nine of a much larger number of possible options, others of which may have added some additional evidence to my arguments. These included the study of presupposition, isolating headlines for particular attention, writer-distancing strategies and a study of sentences pivoting on the word 'as'. I was still, however, able to comment on specific points of interest in all of these cases, as three of my topics had broader scope than

the others: the coverage of genre could encompass certain journalistic usages not covered in other sections; the discussion of discourses sometimes drew in language features other than those specifically selected; and my individual text analyses gave further flexibility for coverage. Nevertheless, there is considerable scope for future study of the unexamined features I mention above, and others, in light of the web of patterns I have identified.

As I mentioned in Section 3.2, p74, the selection of the date April 27th was logical but arbitrary. The fact that in the first two years it fell on results day, had an influence on the texts that were published on that date, and with hindsight, an alternative date would have required less frequent explanatory comment. Yet I do not feel that the inclusion of a number of financial report texts affected my interpretation of the language patterns at all, because financial reports are generically distinctive and their particular language characteristics were readily explainable. Their early treatment of the BP story as a 'footnote' to the 'main story' was an interesting prefiguring of patterns to come later in news stories in general.

The BP Deepwater Horizon events of 2010 represent a single case study, and I can only suggest intuitively that the patterns of media representation I found in the case of BP are replicated in the case of any or all such events. It is possible, although unlikely, that BP is unique, or that representation of natural disasters differ from man-made crises, or that business crises differ from man-made crises of other kinds. In the introduction I commented that I chose to research the BP crisis because of its unusually broad range of effects and outcomes, only to discover that the thrust of the representation I studied was towards *absorbing* and *likening* the events, rather than *separating* and *distinguishing* them. Further research will show whether this is characteristic.

## 9.3 Contribution to literature and implications of the findings

Through my investigation of varied texts on the BP Deepwater Horizon crisis, I found that the news media made sense of events in different ways over the period of the three years of researched data. Initially they represented the BP events through constructing ostensibly factual descriptions, which assembled pictures for the reader of 'what was going on'. These pictures were intended to resemble an objective reality through the use of a number of linguistic strategies. By the next year, a process of meaning-making was evident whereby the events were positioned, or located, in ways that helped the reader to make sense of them. At the same time, restrictions and limitations were being set on how the events were presented

to the reader. In the final year of data the proposed understanding of events appeared to be a product of social agreement, from the 'shorthand' forms of reference, to the exploration of the crisis in artworks, in a way that would only be possible if readers had a shared understanding of what the events 'mean'. I proposed that each representational phase (overlapping and contradictory though they sometimes were) could be conceived as a type of sign, with a particular relationship with the Object (Peirce, 1931-58) that they were intended to represent, namely the BP Deepwater Horizon events. The first phase could be seen as an Iconic representation of the Object, the second as Indexical and the third as Symbolic. There is a putative fourth stage where the Symbolism ceases to be overt, and this I termed the Naturalised Icon.

This view of the representational process of events is, in my view, a fresh one, although it is firmly rooted in established thinking in a number of ways. I will review this debt first, before discussing how my research builds on these ideas to offer new thinking. Firstly, a great deal of existing literature asserts that ostensibly factual presentation of stories in the news is a highly-specific construct rather than a reflection of an external reality, and scholars have explored in detail the range of linguistic realisations that constitute the factual or objective style (Cotter, 2010; Fairclough, 1995a; Fowler, 1991; van Dijk, 1985, 1988). They have pointed out that the ultimate naturalisation of what is posited as 'facts' can lead to an unquestioning acceptance of ideologies underpinning how 'reality' is constructed, and this can work in the service of power interests. What this thesis adds to this thinking is the identification of additional processes that precede naturalisation, that is the proposition that, at least in the case of phenomena such as crises, meaning-making does not only consist of locating 'facts' within existing discourses, but of a series of shorter or longer processes whereby the phenomenon is shaped, placed, played with and repositioned until it becomes charged with meanings that are only understandable by social agreement. While this thinking is fully in line with both Barthes' and Peirce's concepts of 'unlimited semiosis', this thesis identifies in detail how such processes of representation are realised diachronically through a number of defined linguistic processes, in relation to a specific event. By pursuing the representation of a specific event over time, this thesis questions whether the naturalisation of a particular concept is achieved by locating a crisis immediately within a set of familiar frameworks that we recognise as 'news media construction of crisis', or whether, as news consumers, we need to work through both descriptive and evaluative versions of the crisis over time, eventually coming to an acceptance of a naturalised Signified.

It has been noted in various contexts that there may be a 'natural' movement from Iconic to Symbolic representation. In this argument, humans are a symbol-making species who take what they see in the world around them, and create different forms of meaning to suit their social and cultural needs. Lakoff & Johnson (1980) make this argument about metaphor-creation. Conversely, the concept of naturalisation suggests the reverse, that what is actually symbolic representation is made to look iconic, real or identical to nature, while being no such thing, and this assertion is at the root of Baudrillard's definition of a 'simulacrum'. This thesis argues for the concept of a spiral of representation that moves from supposed Iconic representation, through an Indexical to a Symbolic stage and back to a new 'naturalised' Icon. I suggest that these stages are all recognisable in news media texts through linguistic features, and the genres in which they occur. The three year time span used in this work correlated, to an extent, to the progress of the processes identified. However, as new technologies shorten the timescales of news coverage, and the expansion of news outlets increase the space, it is clear that the time spans of the stages I identify are almost infinitely variable. To take the riots of 2011 in London and elsewhere as an example, it was a matter of days, if not hours, before the events were set in the context of other events, and then evaluated in terms of both cause and likely effect. Symbolic (artistic) attention to the events will have taken longer. However Iconic, Indexical and Symbolic stages will all have been recognisable in the case of the London riots, I suggest, through the language used in the media.

This work is first and last a study of language rather than business representation, and it is not easily located in terms of business research. Business research on crisis communication tends to offer an understanding of what has been successful or otherwise in the handling of crises from a communications perspective, with the aim of improving business outcomes, and facilitating the ultimate return to 'business as usual'. Very little of the work in this area analyses texts in close detail, either from the companies involved, or communications partners such as PR agencies or the media. This thesis examines in detail what is said by the news media, and, importantly, how that changes, but without the ultimate aim of making suggestions to crisis managers about organisational or procedural improvement. An understanding of media language processes could be seen as useful at a broader level, for example, an awareness that the 'company you keep' in listings and groupings in news texts has an important role to play in the ultimate positioning of the crisis, but organisations have limited control over such language formulations once the first stage – monitoring the 'facts' – is over.

I have shown in this thesis how the media representation of the BP crisis constructed different modes of sign, with different relationships to their Object, in a relatively predictable order, in the process of establishing a shared, naturalised understanding of those events. If future research can confirm this is the case, regularly and repeatedly, then the conceptualisation of Iconic, Indexical, Symbolic and Naturalised Iconic representational phases can offer a useful framework for the identification, description and analysis of news media stories concerning business crises, and indeed catastrophic events of all kinds. In my introduction I cited Chandler's (2001: np) observation that semiotics offers a 'potentially unifying conceptual framework and a set of methods and terms for use across the full range of signifying practices'. While Applied Linguists fully accept language as a 'signifying practice', the deep analysis of language is often carried out separately from that of other semiotic modes. This thesis suggests a degree of integration for language into semiotic analysis from two perspectives. The semiotic heuristic of sign-code-mythic meaning-ideology has provided a 'unifying conceptual framework' which has allowed me systematically to explore meaning from micro-textual detail to broad language processes. More importantly, by appropriating the terms Icon, Index and Symbol, which are used more regularly in the description of visual than verbal signs, I intend to locate linguistic representation (here news media language) alongside other types of representation in terms of function and intent.

Beyond this relevance to Applied Linguistic analysis lies an insight into social meaning-making. Media coverage of this particular crisis exhibits a larger pattern of description, location, symbolisation and naturalisation, that may be widely applicable. As a society, we cannot keep revisiting the detail of all the events deemed newsworthy, and we choose not to. However, how we choose to describe, locate and symbolise our social phenomena, and from there, how we choose to naturalise (and re-iconise) them through language are ideological choices. If in considering ideology I am considering language in the service of power (discourses), then I should consider whose interests are served in the fashioning of these Naturalised Icons. In the particular case of BP, I suggest there are three areas of interest. Firstly I propose BP in particular. As I discussed earlier, business interests are best served by a swift return to business-as-usual. If the re-iconised Deepwater Horizon spill will never be seen as positive, it can still be seen as a learning opportunity (2011, *Text 20/20*; 2012, *Text 1/20*) and/or part of the high-risk/high-reward strategy of a global business. To take a broader view, the oil industry in particular has a political dimension beyond that of many business products and services (the financial services industry is comparably far-reaching). In the US, the oil supply is a matter for Homeland Security, and so regarded as critical for the future development of US

interests. It can be seen as in national interests to position major oil spills as something to be recovered from rather than something terminally damaging to the industry. Thirdly I turn to media interests. Aside from any political and business interests associated with individual publications, media practice is to move forward in a continuous cycle of news stories, locating stories within discourses that are familiar and comfortable to their readers, and using 'shorthanding' methods to evoke shared Signifieds.

The findings from this thesis suggest that there are a number of linguistic patterns in the diachronic development of crisis stories which realise a 'route' towards an ideologically useful naturalisation. These regularities are identifiable at the semiotic levels of sign, code and myth. On this 'route', essential meaning-making work is carried out through language, which is significant to final discourses of naturalisation. The work in this thesis sets out how one particular media story develops (and is still developing) from one kind of Iconic sign to another, which is the Naturalised Icon.

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# 11 Appendices

## 11.1 Ethical approval form

**PhD Student Research Ethics Approval Form (REC1)**

**PLEASE NOTE: You MUST gain approval for any research BEFORE any research takes place. Failure to do so could result in a ZERO mark**

**Name** **Jane Gravells**

**Student Number** **099068491**

**Proposed Thesis title:** **The language of companies in crisis: studies in how organisations construct a crisis narrative**

**Please type your answers to the following questions:**

### 1. What are the aim(s) of your research?

Based on a set of case studies:-

- How does the language of messages from companies to the wider public differ between times of crisis and times of relative stability? The focus to be on lexical choice, grammatical markers such as syntax and modality, and politeness features rather than content.
- (How) does this appear to vary by industry type, type of crisis, role of spokesperson or intended audience?
- If linguistic changes are observed during a crisis, do they disappear once stability is regained, or do traces of change remain in subsequent discourse?

### 2. What research methods do you intend to use?

This research will be based on the study of texts which are available in the public domain. This will be mainly (although not limited to) press releases, company annual reports and television interviews.

Primary research (personal interviews) will be conducted to provide background and support information on topics such as the progress of crises in general, stakeholder considerations, the role of different spokespersons, information on specific crises, and meta-linguistic awareness.

It is envisaged that only a small number (around five) interviews would be conducted.

**3. Please give details of the type of informant, the method of access and sampling, and the location(s) of your fieldwork. (see guidance notes).**

Interviews would be with business respondents working in the area of communications. Ideally these would be both those with general experience in the area, and those who worked in the specific organization at the time of the specific crisis serving as a case study.

Respondents would be approached by letter, email or telephone call. In each case, the scope, purpose and nature of the research would be made clear, as well as their right to withdraw, to decline to answer questions and to confidentiality and anonymity.

Interviews would take place at respondents' place of work, or a different location convenient to them.

**4. Please give full details of all ethical issues which arise from this research**

In terms of this specific research project, ethical issues are minimal, as respondents:-

- Are not drawn from the public, and in particular not from vulnerable groups
- Are likely to be managers in the field of business communications, and thus very familiar with the interview process

The key area for ethical consideration is business confidentiality. While there may be discussion in interview of both historical and current business activities, it will be made clear to respondents that no commercially sensitive information will be disclosed within the report.

More broadly, the issues applicable to all academic research, of confidentiality, anonymity, informed consent (particularly for vulnerable groups) and data storage and protection are considered, and addressed as indicated in section 5.

**5. What steps are you taking to address these ethical issues?**

Respondents will receive complete anonymity and confidentiality. Names and company names will not be used, and care will be taken that no other feature can serve to identify the respondent.

Respondents will in each case be asked to sign a consent form, which will explain the nature and purpose of the research, the fact that their contribution will remain confidential, and the option to withdraw from the interview at any point if they wish.

Data will be kept electronically on a secure computer, and any paper records will be kept in a locked cupboard in the researcher's home office.

Copies of both the project description to be given to respondents, and the consent form to be signed in each case, are attached at the end of this document.

**6. What issues for the personal safety of the researcher(s) arise from this research?**

None. I have carried out a very large number of commercial research projects, and am used to being aware of my own safety. In this case interviews are likely to be carried out in the daytime, and generally in public areas.

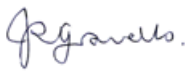
**7. What steps will be taken to minimise the risks of personal safety to the researchers?**

As above, none required, but I always make sure someone has details of my whereabouts.

**Statement by student investigator(s):**

I consider that the details given constitute a true summary of the project proposed

I have read, understood and will act in line with the LSS Student Research Ethics and Fieldwork Safety Guidance lines .

| Name | Signature | Date |
|---|---|---|
| Jane Gravells |  | 12th December 2011 |

**Statement by PhD supervisor**

I have read the above project proposal and believe that this project only involves minimum risk. I also believe that the student(s) understand the ethical and safety issues which arise from this project.

| Name | Signature | Date |
|---|---|---|
| Judith Baxter |  | 12th December 2011 |

This form must be signed and both staff and students need to keep copies.

**From:** Rowe, Carolyn [c.s.rowe@aston.ac.uk]
**Sent:** 12 January 2012 12:30
**To:** Gravells, Jane (Student)
**Subject:** RE: Jane Gravells - Ethical Approval form

Jane

Apologies for taking so long to get back to you on your proposal.

The committee has now read through your proposal in deatil and I'm delighted to report that there are no comments for amendments, and the committee is happy to support your research proposal.

Best wishes for your research.

Carolyn Rowe
Chair
LSS, Research Ethics Committee

## 11.2 Sample analyses of features

The following appendices show examples of how my analysis of features was carried out. I do not include the analysis of discourses in these examples, as this was drawn from the findings of the other eight features.

### 11.2.1 Genre

**Massive oil leak threatens Gulf coast**

| | |
|---|---|
| BP crews ***raced*** to protect the Gulf of Mexico coastline as a remote sub ***tried to*** shut off an underwater oil well gushing ***42,000 gallons*** a day from the site of a wrecked drilling platform. | Non-neutral wording<br>Facts and figures: specific |
| If crews ***cannot*** stop the leak quickly, they ***might have to*** drill another well to redirect the oil, a laborious process that ***could*** take about two months while oil washes up along a broad stretch of shore, from the white-sand beaches of Florida's Panhandle to the swamps of Louisiana. | Modal expressions – source: writer<br>Third person impersonal writing style |
| The oil, which could reach shore in ***as little as three days***, is escaping from two leaks in a drilling pipe ***about 5,000 feet*** below the surface. The spill has grown to ***more than 1,800 square miles***. | Facts and figures: vague |
| Winds and currents can change rapidly and drastically, so officials were hesitant to give any longer forecasts for where the spill would head. | |
| ***Hundreds of miles of coastline*** in four states are threatened, with waters that are home to dolphins and sea birds. The areas also hold prime fishing grounds and are popular with tourists. | Facts and figures: vague |
| The oil began ***spewing*** out of the sea bed after the BP-operated rig Deepwater Horizon exploded on April 20 and sank two days later ***about 40 miles*** off the Mississippi River delta. ***Eleven of the 126 workers*** aboard at the time are missing, presumed dead and the rest escaped. The cause of the explosion has not been determined. | Non-neutral wording<br>Facts and figures: specific |
| Last night an area ***48 miles long and 39 miles*** wide was covered by oil that leaked from the site of the rig, which was ***owned by Transocean and operated by BP***. | Facts and figures: specific |
| Crews used robot submarines to activate valves ***in the hope of*** stopping the leaks, but ***may not know*** until today if that strategy will work. | Modal expressions – source: writer |
| BP also mobilised two rigs to drill a relief well if needed. Such a well could help redirect the oil, though it ***could*** also take weeks to complete, especially at that depth. | Modal expressions – source: writer |
| BP ***plans to*** collect leaking oil on the ocean bottom by lowering a large dome to capture the oil and then pumping it through pipes and hoses into a vessel on the surface, said ***Doug Suttles, chief operating officer of BP Exploration and Production.*** | Highly specific title<br>Modal expressions – attributed (?) |
| It ***could*** take ***up to a month*** to get the equipment in place. | |

The above analysis of *Text 4/20*, 2010 shows some of the features which are typical of the news report genre: a predominance of facts and figures (some very specific), attributed modality and a third-person impersonal writing style. Non-neutral wording can be particularly typical of tabloid publications. At the same time, other features are less typical of news reports and will require further discussion. These include an apparently high level of unattributed modality, and unspecific empirical data.

### 11.2.2 Naming of events

## BP expects to resume Gulf drilling this year

BP expects to be back drilling in the Gulf of Mexico, where a rig explosion last year killed 11 men and caused the ***biggest offshore oil spill in U.S. history***, in the second half of this year.

...

Revenue rose 18 percent to $88.3 billion for the three months to March 31 after the company sold off more than $24 billion in assets to pay for the ***Gulf spill***.

...

The ***catastrophe in the Gulf*** caused BP to plunge to its first full-year loss in almost 20 years in 2010 and forced the resignation of chief executive Tony Hayward.

....

Ranged against that production decline was a fire sale of assets that has so far brought in some $24 billion to help pay for the ***Gulf spill***.

Extracts from *text 3/20,* 2011 above show that within the same text a range of descriptors are used for the BP events. In this particular text, naming terms are of differing lengths, and show differing evaluation – ranging from the neutral 'Gulf spill' to the negative 'catastrophe in the Gulf'.

### 11.2.3 Naming of people

## ***Cook*** **on La. oil rig that exploded recalls escape**

***Benton*** didn't want to discuss her injuries, other than to say that [she] was bruised. ***Her attorney, Stephen Rue***, said [she] was having trouble sleeping and is suffering symptoms of post traumatic stress syndrome. [She] has not yet filed a lawsuit in the case.
As of Tuesday morning, oil that leaked from the rig site was spread over an area about 48 miles long and 80 miles wide at its widest. The borders of the spill were uneven, making it difficult to calculate how many square miles are covered, ***Coast Guard Petty Officer Erik Swanson*** said.
"Right now, the weather's in our favor," ***Swanson*** said, explaining that the wind was blowing the oil away from shore Tuesday.
But ***Swanson*** said the winds could shift later in the week and there was concern about oil reaching the shore.
So far, skimming vessels had collected more than 48,000 gallons of oily water, ***Swanson*** said.
"Our goal is to fight this thing as far offshore as possible," [he] said.
The rig was owned by Transocean Ltd. and operated by BP PLC.
***Crews*** used robot submarines to activate valves in hopes of stopping the leaks, but [they] may not know until Tuesday if that strategy will work. BP also mobilized two rigs to drill a relief well if needed. Such a well could help redirect the oil, though it could also take weeks to complete, especially at that depth.
BP plans to collect leaking oil on the ocean bottom by lowering a large dome to capture the oil and then pumping it through pipes and hoses into a vessel on the surface, said ***Doug Suttles, chief operating officer of BP Exploration and Production.***
It could take up to a month to get the equipment in place.
"That system has been deployed in shallower water, but it has never been deployed at 5,000 feet of water, so we have to be careful," [he] said
...
***George Crozier, oceanographer and executive director at the Dauphin Island Sea Lab in Alabama,*** said [he] was studying wind and ocean currents driving the oil.

These extracts from *Text 3/20,* 2010 show a range of people and groups referred to. Whole titles are included, where relevant. Personal pronouns are excluded. Where the same person is mentioned several times (see for example the mention of Erik Swanson with a full title, followed by reference by surname only), these are all counted as instances of naming (tokens). However an additional analysis indicates for each year how many unique individuals or groups are mentioned (types).

#### 11.2.4 Categorisation

## BP expects to resume Gulf drilling this year

Chief Executive Bob Dudley has been targeting higher growth exploration to reverse a 30 percent drop in BP's share price since the Deepwater Horizon exploded on April 20, 2010.

"BP is in the midst of major change as we work to reset focus for the company and begin the task of rebuilding long-term sustainable value for our shareholders," Chief Financial Officer Byron Grote said on a conference call to analysts.

The stock was up 0.2 percent at 464 pence ($7.67) on Wednesday, but continues to underperform the broader oil and gas sector amid ***uncertainty about the final spill costs and dismay over a botched Russian deal that is key for renewed growth***.

"The group's future strategy is in disarray, with Russian partners feuding, while rivals such as Shell continue to steal ground," said Keith Bowman, equity analyst at Hargreaves Lansdown Stockbrokers.

Grote said the company was "keenly aware of the loss of value that has occurred over the past year."

"We are committed to recovering that lost value, both by delivering sustainable long-term performance and by addressing ***the uncertainties that we face in the U.S., Russia and elsewhere,***" he added.

Grote said BP has applied for permits to restart drilling in the Gulf of Mexico and "expects to be back and actively drilling in the second half of this year."

...

The company also announced Wednesday that it would pay a dividend of 7 cents per share in June, half the size of the dividend it paid out to shareholders for the same quarter in 2010. The company suspended its dividend for nine months following political and public pressure, reinstating a 7 cent per share payout for the final quarter of 2010.

Jonathan Jackson, head of equities at Killik & Co., was relatively positive.

"***Although the uncertainty in Russia and the U.S. is likely to overhang the shares***, we believe further divestments will continue to highlight the inherent value within BP's attractive portfolio of assets," Jackson said. "We remain buyers."

*Text 3/20*, 2011 above shows a number of instances of categorisation, in this case lists which place BP Deepwater Horizon into the category 'BP business difficulties'.

### 11.2.5 Modality

## Going it alone on oil damages

Florida will aggressively seek compensation for spill

As Florida's attorney general, I **am committed to** ensuring that our state is compensated for any economic harm resulting from the Deepwater Horizon oil spill. The legal remedy that promises to give Florida the maximum recovery in the shortest time is the federal Oil Pollution Act, which makes BP and any other responsible party strictly and fully liable for such harm.

OPA *requires* our state - like any other party harmed by the oil spill - to present a claim to BP before resorting to a lawsuit. Although Florida has at least three years from the date of the oil spill to assert its legal rights under OPA, we **intend to** file a claim with BP this summer. If BP does not do the right thing and pay that claim, I will not **hesitate to** take BP and any other responsible party to court.

The Times editorial seems to ignore the applicable legal background. It criticizes Florida's **decision** not to join an ongoing lawsuit against Transocean, the owner of the Deepwater Horizon oil rig, even though that lawsuit would do absolutely nothing to advance the economic interests of Florida's taxpayers. Indeed, in exchange for no material benefit, entering the lawsuit could have exposed Florida to tens of millions of dollars in attorneys' fees. And contrary to the impression created by your editorial, which refers to a "multistate lawsuit" against Transocean, three of Florida's four sister gulf states made the same **decision** not to enter the Transocean case at this time.

Florida continues to have a legal right to full compensation from BP and the other parties responsible for the oil spill, including Transocean. I [will] promptly and vigorously pursue our state's claim, *if necessary* through litigation, guided all the while by the goal of maximizing the benefit to our taxpayers.

Pam Bondi, Florida attorney general

*Text 17/20,* 2011 is an example of my modality analysis, showing epistemic modal expressions as underlined, dynamic modal expressions as bold and underlined, and deontic modal expressions as italicised and underlined. This text illustrates that modality can be expressed through a range of word types, including nouns, verbs and adjectives, as well as modal auxiliaries, and I follow Roberts et al.'s (2008) principle that an expression is modal if it can be satisfactorily paraphrased using a modal auxiliary verb. Because of this, the identification of modality is not always straightforward and I show in square brackets where I considered the phrase for modality but decided that the modal sense was not dominant.

### 11.2.6 Metonymy

## United States : ***BP Says*** 1000 Barrels of Oil Leaking Daily From Gulf Rig

***BP Plc*** and the ***U.S. Coast Guard said*** about 1,000 barrels of oil is leaking daily in the Gulf of Mexico, after a Transocean Ltd. drilling rig caught fire and sank this week.

It s 1,000 barrels emanating from 5,000 feet below the surface, said Coast Guard Rear Admiral Mary Landry, who is overseeing the rescue and cleanup efforts, at a press conference today. Absolutely, this is a very serious oil spill.

***The Coast Guard*** yesterday ***estimated*** that the rig leaked about 200 barrels and the well had been tapped. Landry said the well wasn t fully capped and she learned this morning that oil began surfacing two days ago.

The spill covers a 400-square-mile section in the shape of a rainbow, about 40 miles from the coast, Landry said. It s unknown when the well can be capped, she said.

The rig exploded on April 20, leading to a fire that caused it to sink two days later. Eleven of the 126 workers on board are missing and it s presumed they were in the area of the explosion, Landry said. A search for them has been suspended and their families have been notified, she said.

***BP, the oil producer which leased the Deepwater Horizon rig from Transocean, said*** it was found intact about 5,000 feet deep in the water and about 1,300 feet northwest of the well, according to Doug Suttles, chief operating officer of exploration and production for the oil company.

Nearby pipelines that were temporarily shut weren t affected by the rig s explosion and should soon be operating, Landry said.

The rig burned for more than 24 hours after the explosion that ***Geneva-based Transocean said*** may have been caused by a so- called blowout, an unexpected surge in pressure that ejected petroleum at the top of the well.

If the missing workers died, it would be the deadliest U.S. offshore rig explosion since 1968, when 11 died and 20 were injured at a platform owned by Gulf Oil Corp., according to data from the Minerals Management Service. A 1987 helicopter crash aboard a Forest Oil Corp. platform killed 14 people.

The instances of metonymy occurring in *Text 16/20, 2010* shown above are primarily of the type ORGANISATION FOR MEMBERS, where an inanimate object, such as an organisation, is made the subject of a verb normally requiring an animate subject.

### 11.2.7 Metaphor

**Research and Markets: In Too Deep: BP and the Drilling Race That Took it Down - The Truth behind the Greatest Environmental Disaster in U.S. History**

- Former CEO John Browne - whose father worked for BP's predecessor and who himself worked for BP his entire career - turned the company into a ***powerhouse*** by ***chasing*** oil in difficult places.

- Browne ***rose*** to the top of his industry, and the business world, by ***building*** BP into one the largest oil companies on earth. However, he resigned in disgrace after a personal scandal and his reputation is becoming further ***tainted*** by the massive gulf oil spill.

**-** BP's workers were so [pressed] to make their financial targets that they ***cut corners*** without regard to risk and they were aware of the ***tradeoffs*** they were making, according to internal corporate studies and documents.

- BP has been investigated, cited, fined and convicted by federal safety, environmental and criminal authorities more than any of its peers in the US over the last decade.

The story of how the Gulf disaster happened, and of the ***behind-the-scenes*** management of the company, is a fascinating ***object lesson*** that we will be learning from for decades. In July 2010, BP successfully plugged the company's damaged deepwater well. But the environmental ***fallout*** and public relations campaign to ***rebuild*** the brand are just beginning. IN TOO DEEP details why BP suffered this disaster, why now, and what's next for the oil [giant].

Metaphoric uses (as shown in this sample extract from *Text 11/20*, 2011) have been identified as those non-literal usages which describe an entity from one sense domain in terms from another sense domain. This extract shows generally quite conventional metaphors – some, such as 'rose' to the top and 'building' BP, are so commonplace as to be considered 'dead metaphors'. I have judged the usage 'oil giant' not to be metaphorical (in the sense of a 'fairy tale giant') as the adjective from which the noun derives is a literal descriptor. However, as I remarked in Chapter 3, decisions about metaphor are not always clear-cut.

### 11.2.8 Intertextuality

## BP Q1 profit down 4%

***British Petroleum's Plc. (BP) CEO, Robert Dudley, said that*** in the first quarter, the company's profit decreased four percent as the company sold more than USD24 billion of assets to pay for the Gulf of Mexico spill, ***reported Bloomberg***. ***Dudley added that*** production also declined eleven percent to reach 3.58 million barrels a day after the field disposal. ***Adding that*** the company's earnings decreased to USD5.37 billion compared with USD5.6 billion in 2010. ***He also said that*** in order to compensate a thirty percent decline in the company's share price since the Macondo well disaster, BP would target a higher growth exploration. In addition, the company ***signed agreements in India*** and would reclaim a threatened USD7.8 billion share and ***exploration pact*** with OAO Rosneft in Russia. It is worth noting that BP, Europe's second-biggest oil company, is the first of the world's biggest oil companies to ***report earnings***. Royal Dutch Shell is also due to release results as is Exxon Mobil Corp. (XOM), the world's largest company by market value.

*Text 8/20*, 2011, shown above in full, exhibits evidence of the impact upon it of a number of different texts. In particular the words of Bob Dudley, BP's CEO, are reported, mainly in the form of indirect speech. The frequency of reporting verbs ('said that', 'added that', 'adding that') distances the writer from responsibility for the utterances. Other intertexts include financial reports (Bloomberg, the text implicit in 'report earnings'), as well as business agreements (signed agreements in India, exploration pact).

Also evident, although explored in my section on genre rather than intertextuality, are those traces of intertextual generic features. For this financial report, these would include a frequency of specific figures (although some are rounded in the above text), technical lexis such as 'assets', 'disposal' (although again these are fewer than in some financial texts), and spatial metaphor such as 'higher' (also limited in this particular text).

## 11.3 Analysed texts

### 11.3.1 20 text data set for 2010

The following texts are shown as they appear in the Nexis UK database, apart from paratext after the texts (which specifies to the load date, language and publication type). Some have been reduced in length in line with the principles outlined in Section 3.2.4 , p78.