A MORPHOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF *FAG PACKET SUMS AND A CERTAIN STOICISM*

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Abstract: In order to assess the truthfulness of events as well as comments or information, journalists make use of various techniques employed to support the validity of their statements in the face of reality. The present paper attempts to prove that writers resort to several methods, among which, almost invariably, is the use of the involvement features specific to adverbs, especially epistemic, attitude, and style stance adverbs. A higher number as adverb occurrence is anticipated in newspaper articles meant to spectacularly or persuasively present information or events, as is the case of tabloids, whereas 'highbrow' broadsheets, which supposedly present information rather objectively, will exhibit a lower percentage of adverb employment.

Key-words: *adverb, persuasive techniques, epistemic and attitude adverbs, emotional colouring, adverb occurrence*

1. Introduction

One of the most frequently encountered sources of information is, still, the newspaper. Although it has plummeted spectacularly in terms of its existence in print format, the online editions are nevertheless running popular, facing, nonetheless, tremendous competition on the part of the large array of social media which are increasingly more fashionable even with older generations.

The impact the media have on readers is undisputedly significant and, unsurprisingly, writers assume all the necessary precautions to encompass the envisaged effect, namely to persuade the reader into adopting a particular point of view under the attentive guidance of the originator of the article. According to DeVito (1988:464), the main function of journalism is to take raw, crude information or events as they have originally occurred and, by means of various techniques of carefully, cautiously filtering and altering or editing them, to shape them into a form which is perceptibly different.

The present paper attempts to reveal that writers, in order to influence or convince the reader of the reliability of the presentation of

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events or observations, invariably make use of adverbs, be they epistemic, attitude, and style stance adverbs. They are an integral part of this practice, especially when writers employ diverse linguistic processes for the sole purpose of supporting the validity of their statements in the face of reality. The formulated hypothesis is that, when a spectacular effect or persuasive stance is projected, such as that specific to articles appearing in tabloids, adverb occurrence is anticipated to be specifically higher, both quantitatively and qualitatively.

In order to illustrate the proposed hypothesis, the present paper samples and analyses a selected newspaper article and attempts to exemplify the involvement of adverbs in the text, justifying them in term of frequency of distribution as well as their semantic implications. Emotional colouring as well as persuasive features specific to adverbs is expected to be encountered throughout the article when these effects are anticipated by the writer.

2. Article analysis

The article *Fag packet sums and a certain stoicism*[16] is taken from *The Independent*, a British national newspaper which originally started as a broadsheet, the largest of the newspaper formats, but underwent some changes in 2003 when it took up a tabloid format. Even though it was established as a nationally printed paper, nowadays it runs only as an online newspaper. The editors of this 'highbrow' newspaper (cf. Biber et al 1999: 31) do not seemingly favour a tabloid-like presentation of events, therefore, as stipulated above, the frequency of adverb occurrence is expected to be rather low.

The title itself, however, reveals the impact on the choice of linguistic acquisitions on the part of the readers as it employs an informal expression such as *fag packet*[17]. Even though it tends to assume a pro-market stance on economic issues, the presupposed sobriety is undermined right from the start. Were we to have a rough summary of the article, it would perhaps be rendered in simple tones, sequential to the ideas unfolding a topic of worldwide significance such as the Olympic Games, or rather, the amount of money necessitated for their organization as well as the turmoil it tends to generate.

16 https://www.independent.co.uk/incoming/roger-alton-fag-packet-sums-and-a-certain-stoicism-1060467.html

[17] The noun phrase'fag packet' is informally used for referring to a packet of cigarettes. It may designate a crude form of insult meant to belittle the victim, or, as in this situation, it refers to activities which are performed rather quickly without thorough research or in-depth analysis.

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The article exhibits a staggering 6.7 per cent[18] adverb realization per all other lexical items (see Table 1 below) when compared to the significantly lower score registered by Biber et al. (1999) when contrasting the occurrence of adverbs in relation to other parts of speech. In fact, the opening paragraph seems to suggest the propensity of adverbs in the body of the article:

> The Olympics *just* won't go *away* - *right now* there's the *permanently* rising costs, the media *probably* having to hang out in Nissen huts or some such …

	No. of Instances	**Percentage**
words	925	
adverbs	62	6.7
Frequency of adverbs according to semantic categories		
circumstance	42	68
stance	14	22.5
linking	6	9.5
Semantic realisation for Circumstance adverbs		
time	13	31
place	4	9.5
addition/restriction	5	12
manner	5	12
degree	15	35.5
Position		
initial	13	21
medial	21	34
end	28	45
Form		
simple and compound	40	64.5
-ly adverbs	20	32.5
other affixes	1	1.5
adv phrases	1	1.5

(Table 1: Adverb frequency in *Fag packet sums and a certain stoicism*)

The first person narrative is already evident in the same paragraph:

> It has all reminded me of a tiny episode in the early days of the bid.

[18] This paper's findings as well as percentages of adverbs employed in the newspaper article analysed are constantly compared with the figures Biber et al. (1999) presented when discussing adverb occurrence in the written register of news. The realizations specific to adverbs which they have forwarded record a 2.2 per cent in comparison to other parts of speech.

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Subjective implication is supposedly, as already formulated, made more evident by means of adverb frequency, especially disjuncts or stance adverbs. No less than 22.5 per cent of all adverbs represent adverbs denoting epistemic modality or the attitude of the writer, his way of qualifying what is being said. The percentage is almost three times the average (8 per cent), implying full involvement of the author in the text. Actually, even the reader finds himself included in what appears to be a reminder on his part, followed by an explanation:

> Don't forget this was *simply* the process of bidding for the Games we decided to support; not *yet* the Games itself.

The style disjunct *simply* emphasizes the truth of the sentence expressed, being concerned with the writer's value judgment. He anticipates the full implication of the text by indicating the slightly postponed main topic of the article. The signal is essentially achieved by the adverb *yet* denoting temporal implication.

The evidential adverb *clearly* refers to the observation or perception of a state of affairs and expresses the writer's high degree of conviction, suggested also by *actually* which affirms that what is said is a matter of fact, its validity in the face of reality being evident by itself.

> There was *clearly* a cost to the bid - several millions and this was in the days when several millions *actually* meant something. No bid could have gone ahead without the support of the Government and the Mayor of London. It was felt that Tony Blair, an eternal optimist, was *possibly* the only Cabinet member *fully* behind the bid.

The attitude of the writer does not always express conviction, but also doubt by means of *possibly*. Essentially, such epistemic adverbs denote that the writer or speaker 'does not accept responsibility for, or particularly believe in the propositional content' of what he is writing or saying (cf. Swan 1987:445). The epistemic implication of doubt is however projected on some suspended, impersonal subject experiencing a vaguely expressed feeling. Indecisiveness is conversely countered by the full implication of *fully*.

Other stance adverbs such as *virtually*, or the recurrence of *simply* and *clearly* (two more instances), highlight the subjective implication of the author. They are employed alongside degree adverbs which position the statements he makes on a range which can scale relatively high or low. In fact, degree adverbs make up the most consistent semantic realization in terms of circumstance adverbs, almost 36 per cent being adverbs expressing extent. Their vast employment and range of manifestation is suggested in

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the use of the particularizer *especially* employed in the text with a value akin to that of intensifiers:

> The assisted suicide debate is dominating pictures and headlines today, and I thought the Independent's front page was *especially* strong.

The stance adverbs *horribly* and *painfully* mark the transition to "the story within 'article'" frame.

> It made me think of a story told by a friend. His father was dying, *horribly* and *painfully*, of cancer and was being treated at home.

Rather than expressing the manner, the two adverbs express the perception of the author who projects his own feelings and sensitivity upon the event. His choices of the lexical realization are seemingly appropriate not only for the event in question but can also apply upon the whole part describing the attitude and interest of British public figures regarding their involvement in public life with a negative outcome.

The tone of the article appears to be upgraded in the last part of the closing paragraph by the employment of the formulaic adverb *please* (cf. Jacobson 1978:66, Quirk 1985:569).

> Oh by the way, if any of you are foolish *enough* to choose to listen to the Today programme rather than the sublime Chris Moyles show on Radio 1, *well please* mend your ways. It is laugh-out-loud funny, and Moyles is one of the cleverest people in the land. *Currently* they are running a brilliant Car Park Catchphrase segment, featuring Robert from Stoke, an *enchantingly* geeky football fan, who is getting coverage in the Stoke Sentinel, and Ross from south Wales, a businessman. It is the funniest thing I have heard for years. *Please* don't miss it tomorrow.

Oh has a conventional value in the discourse related to conjuncts, linking two sentences or stretches of text. It is highly informal and rather specific to spoken language, in the same manner as the adverbial *by the way* marking a transition in the discourse. The compromiser *enough* together with the post modified adjective *foolish* denoting negative traits is applied directly to the readers. The deprecation is softened down by the formulaic adverb *please*, denoting courtesy, politeness, preceded by the item *well*, having a well-established conjunctive role in mid-discourse while introducing a difference of some sort. The difference is not only in terms of a request for change of action and attitude, but can also be employed to protect face, the readers' public self image (cf. Yule 2006:61).

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The face saving act can be achieved, to some extent, by the recurrence of *please* in a following sentence. The contrast is highlighted not only by means of adjectives (*foolish* versus *clever*), but also by the subject adjunct *enchantingly* denoting, alongside manner, a faint intensifying value complementing one of the protagonists.

The style in which the article is written can be said to be reflected, to some extent, in the way the adverbs are employed in the text. There is a mixture of elegance with informal hues, with radical shifting in the following paragraph. Elegance does not characterize the article as a whole, but rather specific chunks of text, commonly accompanied by *–ly* adverbs to mark it (*permanently, grandly, relatively, currently, equally, enchantingly*, etc). Actually, almost 33 per cent of all adverb realizations are *–ly* adverbs, which is consistently higher when compared to the average norm of 25 per cent. The informal linker *so*, appearing in a question form in the middle of the paragraph, entails that elegance is not envisaged but only accidentally employed to underscore a contrastive approach to a sensitive issue involving public life.

> He was "overwhelmed with euphoria", he said. *So* what did he do? He *just* shook hands with his colleague in the front of the car, with little Shannon in the back.

Informal *so* appears again as a linker in the last sentence of the newspaper article, marking a resultive conclusion enclosing direct reference to the readers and a presupposition implying a recommended way of action to be adopted.

> It's at the end of the show, near 10.00 am, *so* you might have to slip away from your desk.

The direct style of the article is not only supported by the specific choices of pronouns and verbs, but equally by the preference for specific adverbs and their semantic realizations which, in several instances, render the text as rather elegant or just informative, formulaic or accusatory. Their high frequency also denotes an inclination towards spectacularly presenting facts or events with explicit effect on the readers.

It has to be noted, however, that the percentage of adverb occurrence in itself does not necessarily anticipate without any reservation nor does it very precisely predict the amount of subjectivity or objectivity of the statements or commentaries found in the text as well as the writer's involvement in the text. Nonetheless, the samples analysed broadly support the formulated premise that adverbs' occurrence, distribution, and semantic

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implication can render a text as exhibiting a relatively high or relatively low emotional colouring.

3. Conclusions

The hypothesis, namely that writers, in order to render their statements as accurate and maintain their validity in the face of reality, has been not only formulated but also supported by means of highlighting the fact that spectacular presentation of news or events will invariably attract a higher occurrence of adverbs, especially epistemic, attitude, and style stance, as well as extent or degree adverbs.

Whereas articles presenting facts objectively are generally expected to exhibit a lesser, more infrequent adverb usage, articles specific to tabloids focus more on persuasive techniques supported more by carefully chosen morphological samples specific to adverbs which seemingly assess the truthfulness of the statement by their mere presence in the text. Since discrepancies may occur occasionally, several explanations have been formulated in order to justify them in terms of semantic implications as well as frequency distribution.

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