

Reporting Armistice: A diachronic, functional perspective

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Abstract

This thesis presents an investigation of diachronic consistency and variation in the register of newspaper reports. The data are instances of the register from *The Sydney Morning Herald*, reporting the conclusions of seven major wars in Australia's history from 1902 to 2003: the Boer War, World War I, World War II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, the Gulf War, and the Iraq War. The study has two primary motivations: an interest in texts that construe the social contexts of the past and what they indicate about contemporary language and culture; and an interest in exploring changes in social context and how these can be managed using current linguistic tools based on the concept of 'register'.

The research is interdisciplinary in that, as well as being a primarily linguistic enquiry, it is also an investigation of culture in history, insofar as the linguistic investigation can illuminate historical context. It is a study of the patterns of interaction between the *Herald* as an institution and the people of Sydney as its readers, and the cultural history of how Sydneysiders have experienced war and armistice through the media. Thus, as far as culture is a major part of the context of a text, this investigation addresses the problem of describing, and ascribing relevance to, contextual variables in a diachronic set of texts.

The eight chapters of the thesis present a multistratal, functional analysis of the texts as instances of register, using the framework of systemic functional linguistics (SFL). Through the analysis of context, semantics, and lexicogrammar, the thesis identifies both consistency and variation among the texts. It is argued, following Hasan (2004), that the lexicogrammatical and semantic consistency through which the texts can be identified as instances of a register is motivated by consistency in the context at a primary degree of delicacy, while variation among the texts is motivated by contextual shifts captured at greater degrees of delicacy across the strata. In particular, the analysis shows that different ways of orienting to time, space, and news information in the texts construe diachronically different contextual calibrations, particularly in relation to (1) the content and function of the news, (2) the role of the journalist, and (3) the role of technology in news production. The thesis highlights the need for further elaboration of registerial concepts and tools in order that more delicate distinctions between texts from different diachronic states might be inferred.

Statement of Candidate

I certify that the work in this thesis entitled “Reporting Armistice: A diachronic, functional perspective” has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree to any other university or institution other than Macquarie University.

I also certify that the thesis is an original piece of research and it has been written by me. Any help and assistance that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself have been appropriately acknowledged.

In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature are indicated in the thesis.

Claire Emily SCOTT

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*Dedicated to my mother,
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(14/10/1951 – 19/03/2004),
who was my first teacher.*