Multimodal discourse
on online newspaper home pages:
A social-semiotic perspective

John S. Knox

A thesis submitted in fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Linguistics          University of Sydney
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Declaration

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person where due reference is not made in the text.

John S. Knox MAppLing, BA
Abstract

In a short space of time, online newspapers have emerged to play an important role in the institutional construction of ‘news’ and the mass mediation of information. The home pages of online newspapers feature short verbal texts, and communicate using language, image, layout, colour, and other semiotic resources: they communicate multimodally.

This thesis examines the multimodal discourse of three English-language online newspapers: the Bangkok Post (Thailand), the English-language edition (translated from Chinese) of the People’s Daily (China), and the Sydney Morning Herald (Australia). Between February, 2002 and April, 2006, three data collections were made (February-April, 2002; September-November, 2005; January-April, 2005) using a five-day ‘constructed week’ method. The main corpus was 15 home pages from each newspaper (five per collection per newspaper), but the total corpus (including other pages from each newspaper) was 603 web pages. Two senior editors (one each from the Bangkok Post and the Sydney Morning Herald) were interviewed.

The multimodal discourse of the home pages was analysed using tools from Systemic Functional Multimodal Discourse Analysis (SF-MDA), and a ‘visual grammar’ of home pages building on the work of Kress & van Leeuwen (1996) was developed. In addition, a rank scale for online newspapers was proposed, and limitations of applying the tool of rank scale to this corpus were identified. An emerging genre - the headline-plus-lead-plus-hyperlink newsbite - was identified, and the design of newsbites on the home page of the Sydney Morning Herald and the evolution of their design over time was analysed. The use of images on the home pages in the corpus was analysed, and the increasing use of thumbnail images in the
Sydney Morning Herald - particularly close-up thumbnails of faces - was investigated in further depth.

The visual design of online newspaper home pages and the news texts appearing on them are an evolution of print news genres and their design practices. Newsbites and headline-only newsbits are verbally short, so the authors of newspaper home pages are forced to rely increasingly on visual communication in order to position stories and readers, and to communicate the values of the news institution on the home page as mediated by the screen. Thumbnail images are evolving as a new form of punctuation on some home pages, and this may be a short-lived, or an emerging historical trend in the development of punctuation, at least in online environments.

Overall, online newspaper home pages are tending towards shorter texts, which communicate in novel ways. These short texts cannot communicate the values and ideology of news institutions in the way that extended verbal texts have done for centuries, yet this function of news texts remains important to the construction and maintenance of a readership, and therefore crucial to the home page of a newspaper. As a result, news institutions express values visually in their design of newspaper home pages. As readers become familiar with the meanings of online news design, they become adept at reading and understanding short stories within these multimodally-construed frames of reference. Ideology is increasingly fragmented on shorter timescales, but expressed over longer timescales in a hypermedia environment that affords and extends many of the pre-existing multimodal features of print newspaper discourse.
Preface

This preface discusses two issues in relation to the thesis: matters of research ethics, and matters of publication and plagiarism.

Firstly, research ethics. This thesis reports on a research project examining online newspaper home pages. The texts collected for the research were freely available texts in the public domain, and therefore no ethics approval was required to collect them. As part of the research, interviews were also conducted with senior editors at two newspapers. Ethics procedures for research on humans were followed, and these are detailed in Chapter 4.

Secondly, publication and plagiarism. Written texts in many social spheres are becoming shorter and more fragmented. In academic discourse, for example, traditional PhD theses are giving way to other gatekeeping texts, such as ‘thesis by publication’.

Thesis by publication is a reflection of the changing nature of the academy. It is in the interests of both the candidate and the institution for PhD candidates to publish their research as they study, and in some fields (for example, medicine) it is necessary to do so as knowledge moves at a rate much faster than it did when the traditional model of PhD research and thesis production emerged.

The University of Sydney has developed policy regarding thesis by publication. The policy allows for traditional PhD theses, theses by publication, and
theses which fall somewhere between the two. The information for candidates about this policy states, in part:

**How should the papers be incorporated in the thesis?**
Papers can be incorporated in the thesis in any or all of the following ways:

- Passages from published papers can be quoted verbatim (or in appropriately edited form and referenced) into one or more chapters of the thesis.
- A published paper or an accepted manuscript can form a single chapter (or several papers may form successive chapters) without any editing.
- An original reprint of the paper(s) can be directly bound into the thesis or inserted as a photocopy (where paper size of the reprint differs from that of the thesis).


The current thesis has, as it were, one foot on the platform of the traditional thesis, and one on the train of ‘publish as you go’. In the process of research and authoring, journal articles were developed and published, conference papers presented and published, and commissioned book chapters written and published. But each of these involved compromises in terms of the amount of data that could be presented, the extent to which analysis could be included, the extent to which the published paper conformed to the rhetorical focus of the thesis, and also the amount that could be written in individual papers (each of which was required to ‘start from scratch’ in terms of presenting the project and reviewing the relevant literature).

Presenting individual published papers as complete chapters (the second bullet point from the policy in the above quote) would be a compromise. At the same time, citing each published paper each time it was quoted or paraphrased (the first bullet point from the policy in the above quote) would be impractical for both writer and reader of this thesis, as the published papers from the current research project have
been broken up, adapted, spliced, edited, and used verbatim in differing degrees throughout the entire thesis.

Therefore, in order to avoid the cumbersome, inefficient and unproductive process of citing the papers published from this thesis at every point they are sourced, the submitted manuscript (prior to proof editing) of each paper is included as a separate appendix within the thesis.

In this way, the reader has access to the manuscripts of the published papers as well as the thesis, and as they form part of the same text, by the same author, produced as part of the same research project for the same degree, potential issues of self-plagiarism are avoided.

The references included in this thesis in this way are:

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Newspapers in context

Print newspapers have been with us since the 17th century (Baldwin, 2003; Smith, 1979). Their origins lie in the broadsides, pamphlets, and newsbooks of Europe, whose production (and more importantly, reproduction) was made possible by the development and spread of the European printing press from the 15th century (Briggs & Burke, 2002; Smith, 1979). Over the centuries, newspapers have gone through a variety of changes: textual, commercial, and technological (Chapman, 2005). But fundamentally, their production has remained bound to the printing press, their distribution to the movement of paper, their reading to the materiality of newsprint.

After three-and-a-half centuries, the change that broke these bonds was the emergence and development of the world wide web. In 1990, online newspapers did not exist. In 1995, only a handful of major newspapers published on the world wide web. In 2000, only a handful didn’t (cf. Arant & Anderson, 2001; Barnhurst, 2002; Boczkowski, 2004a; Deuze, 2001; Foo, Tham & Hao, 1999; Li, 2002). The speed with which newspapers took to the world wide web is illustrated in Figure 1.1, which takes newspapers published in the U.S. as an example.

From their beginnings as news room experiments, conducted for the most part by enthusiastic and tech-savvy staff (Boczkowski, 2004a), online newspapers developed into a supplementary means by which the news carried in print editions could be distributed, and later into a fundamental aspect of news production and
dissemination in individual newspapers, and a major element in the landscape of the mass media.

Figure 1.1: US newspapers on the world wide web (following Li, 2006a, p. 2)

As Rupert Murdoch observed in the 2008 Boyer lectures, online newspapers and their related products appear to represent the future of newspaper institutions (even despite the question of trust to which Murdoch refers), as the costs of paper, ink, and the distribution of material objects increase in relation to the revenue print newspapers generate.

It's true that in the coming decades, the printed versions of some newspapers will lose circulation. But if papers provide readers with news they can trust, we'll see gains in circulation—on our web pages, through our RSS feeds, in emails delivering customised news and advertising, to mobile phones.

In short, we are moving from newspapers to news brands. ... In this coming century, the form of delivery may change, but the potential
audience for our content will multiply many times over. (Murdoch, 2008)

The internet is only the latest in a series of technological challenges to the newspaper industry. “Other innovations have radically transformed the news media business before, creating wholly new markets or destroying existing markets for other technologies” (Paul, 2008, p. ix). However, unlike any previous technology, the world wide web has broken the bond between newspapers and the printing press. Paul continues:

the adoption of Internet technology as a new production, packaging, and distribution channel for news and information has fundamentally challenged every aspect of media organizations. New newsroom organizational structures and positions are being created to marshal the flow of copy to multiple distribution channels. New business models are being explored as Internet-based companies are competing with traditional media in the advertising market. New deadlines are being set. Even the very definition of what is “news” and who is a “journalist” is being reexamined. (Paul, 2008, p. ix)

It is in this context that this thesis examines the home pages of three online newspapers, and the way in which they mediate communication between news institutions and online newspaper readers visually over a four-year period (February, 2002 - April, 2006). These online newspapers are the Bangkok Post (BKP), an English-language newspaper published in Thailand; the English-language version of the People’s Daily (PD), a Chinese-language newspaper published in the People’s Republic of China and translated into English; and the Sydney Morning Herald (SMH), an English-language newspaper published in Australia. These three newspapers are among the many print newspapers that moved onto the world wide web in the last decade of the 20th century (see section 1.4 below).
The remainder of this chapter introduces the thesis. First, it looks at the development of online newspapers and the social, technological, and intellectual environment in which they have emerged and continue to develop (the remainder of this section). Then, section 1.2 briefly considers research into visual communication and online newspaper pages. Section 1.3 sets out the questions and context of the research project, and the last section of this chapter, section 1.4, previews the contents of the thesis.

1.1.1 Print and bytes: The mass mediation of meaning and the worldwide web

When newspapers first emerged, there were no media by which information could be accurately reproduced and distributed with a comparable speed, on a comparable scale. It was not until the early 20th century that wireless radio broadcasting and newsreels played in cinemas provided the first real competition to newspapers as a medium for the mass distribution of news. Television broadcasts also arrived in the late 1920s and early 1930s, adding to the new technologies broadening the media landscape.

These news media have ‘carved out’ their respective spaces based on their relative strengths and weaknesses. In this changed media landscape, newspapers have had to compete for the news audience:

throughout the developed world, newspaper circulation has been in decline for decades. France’s circulation crested in 1950, Australia in 1956, Great Britain in 1957, the United States in 1971, and Japan in 1981. (Gottlieb, 2003)
Yet newspapers have survived, attributable in part to their long history of exploring and employing new technologies in their own institutional and communicative practices (Chapman, 2005; Machin & Niblock, 2006, pp. 10-13; see also Caple, in press). Even as the internet was emerging in the late 20th century, newspapers were experimenting with a range of technologies, including videotex (primarily text-based news transmitted via phone lines to dedicated receivers, and later personal computers), teletext (primarily text-based news transmitted via television frequencies to televisions with decoders), audiotex (automated news provided over the telephone to callers), and fax papers (shortened or summary versions of newspapers transmitted by facsimile) (Boczkowski, 2004a). But as personal computers became more widespread and the world wide web accessible to many through the 1990s, it was the web that emerged as the technology of choice for newspapers wishing to publish electronically, and “the delivery of content and applications to personal computers connected to the web achieved a dominant status” (Boczkowski, 2004a, p. 42).

Golding & Murdock (2000, p. 79) observe that the rise of digital technologies mean that all forms of communication can be encoded, stored, and distributed “using the same basic digital array of zeroes and ones”. Coupled with the processes of globalisation and the move towards ‘free markets’, they argue, this results in an increase in the ability of large mass media organisations to transcend boundaries of time and space. They refer to this as “the era of convergence” (ibid.), or an era of social and technological developments which extend:

the power of ... those who own the key building blocks of new communications systems, the rights to the key pieces of technology and, even more importantly, the rights to the cultural materials - the films, books, images, sounds, writings - that will be used to put together the new services. (Golding & Murdock, 2000, pp. 80-81)
More recently though, as the power to control access to information has dispersed beyond the traditional gatekeepers (Bruns, 2008), the economic viability of newspaper institutions has come increasingly under question, and it is an open question as to whether existing news institutions will remain as the behemoths of the new media age, or become the dinosaurs. If they are to avoid the latter path, online newspapers will undoubtably play an important role in their survival.

In short, newspapers are caught in a fundamental social movement, in which the production, mediation, and distribution of information and knowledge is moving from the printing press, ink, and paper, to computer networks, bytes and screens.

1.1.2 The rise of the visual

At the same time that the printing press has gradually given way, first to personal computers, and then to networked computers, an intellectual and social shift has been taking place, with the primacy of the written word ceding ground to a growing interest in visual communication and culture.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, a plethora of books, journals, conferences, and university courses suddenly appeared, all of them dealing with what appeared to be a new topic, a new area of study: visual culture. But what, we might ask, is new about it? After all, human beings have always looked at and seen the world around them, and made sense of themselves and others through their understanding of what they see. (Schirato & Webb, 2004, p.1; cf. Barnard, 2005, pp. 1-5)

With the advent of photography and film in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, television in the mid-20th century, and computer screens in the late 20th century, it is not surprising that scholarly interest in visual communication should
increase, nor that professional practices of visual communication workers should become more institutionalised.

As a profession, graphic design has existed only since the middle of the twentieth century; until then, advertisers and their agents used the services provided by ‘commercial artists’. These specialists were visualizers (layout artists); typographers who did the detailed planning of the headline and text, and gave instructions for typesetting; illustrators of all kinds, producing anything from mechanical diagrams to fashion sketches; retouchers; lettering artists and others who prepared finished designs for reproduction. (Hollis, 2001, p. 8)

The ‘rise of the visual’ in intellectual circles is also attributable to a broadening of the focus of study in individual disciplines, and a move towards transdisciplinary work, where researchers from different disciplines with common interests are more willing to talk and listen to one another.

Interdisciplinary work is not unique to visual communication, but it is nevertheless particularly common in the field, perhaps in part because within many of the most relevant traditional academic disciplines (anthropology, sociology, education, linguistics, etc.) it has, at least until now, been a relatively marginal concern. (Jewitt et al., 2002)

Particularly relevant for this thesis is the increased interest in visual communication on pages (see Chapter 5). And in the case of pages, it is not simply that scholars have begun to notice that pages communicate visually (though there is an element of that, too). Rather, the nature of communication on pages has changed, particularly (but not exclusively) over the latter part of the 20th century. “What was essentially a linguistic unit 100 years ago has now become primarily a visual unit” (Baldry & Thibault, 2006, p. 58). The emergence of the internet, and the beginning of the decline of the power of the printing press are important factors which have accelerated this development (cf. Helfand, 2001; van Leeuwen, 2006).
In newspaper studies, interest in the way newspaper pages communicate visually has brought this aspect of newspaper discourse into focus, and while newspapers have always communicated visually (Barnhurst, 1994; Barnhurst & Nerone, 2001), the meaning of the visual design of news is emerging alongside studies of the language of news, news photography, newsroom ethnography, and political economy (among others) as a valid and important area of research in studies of the mass media (e.g. Barnhurst & Nerone, 2001; de Vries, 2008; Evans, 1976; Kress & van Leeuwen, 1998; Utt & Pasternack, 2003).

Journalism studies has yet to acquire a critical vocabulary with which to investigate the development of visual journalism. While there have been studies of news photography and meaning, which are predominantly from semiotic approaches to visual texts, there has been little if any prominent investigation on the impact of typography, layout and picture editing. (Machin & Niblock, 2006, p. 137)

It is in this area the current thesis seeks to make a contribution. A theoretically grounded, systematic account of the visual design of online home pages is proposed, which is intended to serve as a basis for further investigation, and for the development of approaches to the teaching of reading emerging genres such as online newspapers, and also approaches to the training of future media professionals (see Chapter 9).

1.1.3 Newspapers in context: Conclusion

With the emergence of the internet and the world wide web, newspapers have changed fundamentally. While the long-term impact of these changes is still unknown, for now the online newspaper has emerged as a central aspect in the practices of news institutions.
Similarly, the ‘rise of the visual’ has led to new textual practices in many genres. It has also led to increased academic interest in describing and theorising visual communication. Visual communication on newspaper pages has attracted increasing interest as part of this movement.

These historical trajectories make online newspapers an important area for study, and draw focus to the question of how online newspaper pages communicate visually. In response, researchers in a number of fields have taken up the challenge of investigating visual communication in online newspapers from a range of perspectives, and some of these are discussed in the following section.

1.2 Researching the visual in online newspapers

Online newspapers have, in less than a decade, become an important feature of the landscape of the mass media, and may represent the future viability of the social institution commonly known as the newspaper. Similarly, visual communication is now recognised as a central element of the ways that newspaper pages communicate, and therefore the ways in which these texts achieve the commercial and ideological objectives of the news organisations which publish them. Unsurprisingly, a number of methodological approaches have been taken to studying visual communication on online newspaper pages, including grounded theory (e.g. Cooke, 2003), content analysis (e.g. Barnhurst, 2002; Greer & Mensing, 2004), interviews and surveys (e.g. Lowrey, 1999; Utt & Pasternack, 2003), and eyetracking research (e.g. Holmqvist et al., 2003; Stark Adam, Quinn & Edmonds, 2007).
These studies (which are reviewed in more detail in Chapter 2) have made important contributions to our understanding of visual communication on online newspaper pages, contributing to knowledge of the design choices in online newspapers comparative to the websites of other media organisations; the extent to which pages dedicate space to (for instance) images, text, and advertisements; the implications of online publishing for the status and role of photojournalism; and the reading practices of online newspaper readers as measured by questionnaires and eye fixations on the screen.

This thesis provides a complementary but distinct analytical perspective, based on social-semiotic theory. Social semiotics (also known as systemic-functional or SF theory) is an approach to analysing texts which has the basic tenets that texts make meaning in relation to context, and that text and context are systematically related.

*Figure 1.2: Newsbite from SMH home page, September 15, 2005*

From the perspective of social semiotics, texts make meaning on a number of levels simultaneously. Take the text in Figure 1.2 for example. On the broadest level, this text makes meaning in relation to other texts. That is, we can identify it as some kind of news story: it is not a lecture, it is not a wedding ceremony, it is not a
scientific report, it is not a fairy tale. At the same time on another level, the author of this text has chosen to present it in a relatively dramatic fashion by using the headline *Obesity Crisis*. This represents a discursive choice on the part of the writer, designed to orient the reader to the text in a given way. Compare, for example, how the text would read if the headline read: *Obesity Study Findings*. So not only is the text structured as a news story (with headline and lead), but the meaning of the text depends on discursive choices, such as how the reader is oriented to the story by the headline.

The lead of this news story uses the lexical item *ballooning* to construe the increase in average weight. The image depicts the bottoms of two obese people set against a sky-blue background, drawing on the visual and cultural stereotype which associates obesity with ‘roundness’. This combination of choices creates a visual-verbal pun. (Different versions of this particular story appeared in two other places in the same online edition of the *SMH* on the same day, and also once in the print edition. This image did not appear in any of the other versions of this story, nor did the word *balloon* or any of its derivatives.)

Thus, we can see that choices in overall text structure, discursive elements of verbal texts which operate at a ‘lower’ level, individual lexical items (at yet another level), and images are all meaningful. This is a feature of all texts, and the different levels of text structure, discourse, and lexis, their relations to one another, and their relations to context are all theorised in social semiotics. The different levels that operate in semiotic systems such as language are discussed in Chapter 3 and

---

1 In fact, it is a *newsbite*, a particular kind of news story commonly found on online newspaper home pages, consisting minimally of a headline, a lead, and a hyperlink (see Chapter 7).
operationalised in relation to the design of online newspaper home pages in Chapters 5-8.

The theoretical approach taken in this thesis (sketched at this point in the briefest and most general terms) is comprehensive in its scope (from culture to graphology) and degree of detail, and has been applied to a range of semiotic systems, including language (e.g. Halliday & Mathiessen, 2004; Martin, 1992), image (e.g. Caple, 2009; Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996; O’Toole, 1994), music (e.g. Caldwell, 2008; van Leeuwen, 1999), mathematical symbolism (e.g. O’Halloran, 2005), three-dimensional space (e.g. Stenglin, 2004, 2009), and web design (e.g. Djonov, 2005, 2007, 2008). This thesis uses this theoretical approach in order to complement existing research into visual communication in online newspapers. It is not the only approach that could be taken in the larger social project of understanding how online newspapers function in society. Rather, it is an empirical, theoretically consistent approach that complements other approaches, and which, to date, has not figured prominently in the research into online newspapers (though see Bateman, Delin & Henschel, 2006; see also Appendices E-K).

1.3 Questions and Context

The research reported in this thesis studies the visual design of news on the home pages of three online newspapers, from a social-semiotic perspective, over a four-year period (February, 2002 - April, 2006). As stated above, the theoretical approach is explained in detail in Chapter 3. In this section, the framing questions for the research
are provided, and information regarding the institutional context of each of the three
online newspapers is provided.

1.3.1 Framing questions

The research reported in this thesis is guided by a number of framing questions. The
overarching question is as follows:

How is meaning communicated by the visual design of online
newspaper home pages?

This question is addressed by a number of subordinate questions as follows:

1. What can the analytical tool of rank scale tell us about relations between
   home pages and their elements, and other elements of the online
   newspaper? What are the limitations of rank scale in describing the
   structure of online newspapers?
2. How do home pages, as unified visual signs in their own right:
   a. represent the human experience of events which are deemed
      newsworthy enough to appear on the page?
   b. construe a relationship between the readers of the newspaper, the
      institution of the newspaper, and the actors and events reported?
   c. construct coherent and cohesive messages?
3. How do newsbites (the short headline-plus-lead-plus-hyperlink stories
   common on online newspaper home pages) communicate visually? How
   important is visual design in such verbally short texts?
4. How are news images used on online newspaper home pages? What role
do thumbnail images play on online newspaper home pages?

Each of these subordinate framing questions is addressed by a single analytical
chapter, each chapter addressing a separate ‘layer’ of analysis:

- question 1 by Chapter 5
- question 2 by Chapter 6
- question 3 by Chapter 7
- question 4 by Chapter 8.
1.3.2 Institutional contexts

As already stated, this thesis reports research into three online newspapers. These newspapers come from different linguistic, institutional, and national contexts, as outlined below.

1.3.2.1 The Bangkok Post (BKP)

The Bangkok Post (BKP) was established in the immediate aftermath of World War II. A former American naval officer, who had come to Bangkok at the end of the war with the United States OSS (the forerunner of the CIA), formed the Post Publishing Company Ltd with five Thais, and published the first edition of the newspaper on August 1, 1946 (MacDonald, 1990). It was the only English-language newspaper in Thailand at the time, and has remained the most well-known internationally since. (Others include the Bangkok World which was bought and later closed down by the Bangkok Post, and The Nation which remains as the major competitor to the BKP, both in print and online.)

Throughout the 20th and 21st centuries, the mass-media in Thailand have faced challenges from various governments (military and civilian), the BKP included. Censorship has been a common occurrence, and other forms of intimidation and violence are not unknown. But in contrast to the broadcast media (much of which has been owned and run by the government and the military), newspapers in Thailand have demonstrated a surprising degree of independence and criticism of governments throughout their history (Lewis, 2006; McCargo & Pathmanand, 2005; Phongpaichit & Baker, 2002; Sulistiyanto, 2002).
The *BKP* was first published online on April 1, 1996 (Ekachai, 2000, p. 448). Like many other newspapers, its online beginnings were small and peripheral to the main business of the newsroom (cf. Boczkowski, 2004a). I asked a senior editor at the newspaper about the online edition:

**JK:** Do you know how the online newsroom began here at the *Post*?

**Ed:** No, I really don’t remember, sorry. I don’t remember how it all started. ... I think originally it was handled by the IT department - the information technology department: Khun E... and then a woman named D... . She created the website for us ...

(interview with author, January 2007 - see Appendix B)

Over time, though, the online edition of the *BKP* has become more important to the newspaper. The Post Publishing Public Company Limited’s Annual Report of 2002 reported that, in comparison to 2001, it’s web publications (including the *BKP*, and its related websites such as *Student Weekly*) had a 25% increase in advertising revenue, and a 25% increase in page views to an average of 4,000,000 per month.

And at the end of 2005, Post Digital was formed as a separate entity within the Post Publishing Company, with major re-designs of the site at the beginning of 2006, and in 2008.

In the time period covered in this study (from February, 2002 to April, 2006), the copy in the *BKP* online was basically ‘shovelware’, or text from the print edition ‘shovelled’ onto the website. As an employee of the web edition told me:

...basically what you see on the website is a mirror of the daily *Post* paper. We are not creating news, simply putting the news from the daily paper on to the site.

(personal communication with author, January 19, 2007)
This situation was reflected in the geography of the news building in January, 2007 (something which may have been different before and/or since). To get from the large newsroom at the BKP to the offices of Post Digital, it was necessary to walk a few minutes to a different part of the building. The few workers transferring the print edition to online sat at workstations in a small office, removed physically and professionally from the journalists and editors whose work they were reconstruing. This is illustrated in what the same senior editor at the BKP told me at the time:

JK: ... And what about the relationship between, say, [your section of the Post] and the online newspaper. So with the content from [your section] - do you just send that to them?

Ed: I don’t know how they download all the stories but you can read every section online.

JK: So do they liaise with you at all?

Ed: No. I think they have a channel somewhere. All the stories are channelled directly to the website. I don’t know how they do it, but it’s not my work to move the stories to the website.

JK: So the ... section that you edit, you edit the hard copy, and then the online version of [your section] happens completely separate from you.

Ed: right

(interview with author, January, 2007 - see Appendix B)

So, while the online edition of the BKP has been important both for the international status and the income of the newspaper since before the current research began, it appears that this importance was not reflected in the institutional practices surrounding the production of the online version during the data collection period of this research.
1.3.2.2 The People’s Daily (PD)

The People’s Daily was first published in June, 1948. It has played an important role in China since then, influencing public opinion (Lee, 1981) or, more subtly, contributing to “the major stock of social knowledge” (Chang, Wang & Chen, 1994, p. 52). It has also acted as a forum by which local grievances can be raised with the Communist Party at a national level through the letters to the editor (Chu & Chu, 1981), and served as a channel for ‘command communication’ between rulers and the populace (Wu, 1994).

The People's Daily (Renmin ribao) is the mouthpiece of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), the top decision-making body in China, and is controlled by the Propaganda Department of the Central Committee. Editorials and commentaries in the People's Daily represent the viewpoints of the Chinese leadership. Thus the People's Daily is central to understanding the Chinese propaganda state, as well as elite politics. (Wu, 1994, p. 195)

Chang, Wang & Chen (1994) argue that as late as 1992 (just prior to the rise of online newspapers and other internet-based forms of new media), the People’s Daily and China Central Television were “the two most important national sources, which set the official news agenda for other media to follow” (p. 56). But as the mass media in China have expanded, it is likely that the People’s Daily has become less influential over public opinion in China (Wu, 1994, p. 211; cf. Lagerkvist, 2008).

The online edition of the People’s Daily was formally launched on January 1, 1997, and the English-language online edition was first published on January 14, 1998 (People’s Daily, n.d.). Historically, the newspaper has produced different editions for local and overseas audiences (Scollon, 2000), and at the time of writing the online version was available “in Simplified Chinese, Traditional Chinese, Tibetan, Korean, Mongolian, English, Japanese, French, Spanish, Russian and Arabic” (People’s Daily,
The English language edition carries translations from the Chinese-language edition, and it is reasonable to expect important differences in the way stories are construed in the different languages (Scollon, 2000; Scollon & Scollon, 1997). Additionally, there are differences in visual design between the different editions of the People’s Daily. Such differences, though, are beyond the scope of the current research, which treats the English-language edition of the People’s Daily as an online newspaper, available to English speakers with access to the world wide web, like the Bangkok Post and the Sydney Morning Herald.

1.3.2.3 The Sydney Morning Herald (SMH)

The Sydney Morning Herald was first published in 1831 as the Sydney Herald. It was a weekly newspaper, which became a daily in 1840, and changed to its current name in 1842 (Dick, Gibson & Lawson, 2005). It began its life, like most other Sydney newspapers of its time, with its front page dominated by advertisements (Iedema, Feez & White, 1994, pp. 23-5), and editorially “favoured the privileges of the ruling class” (p. 22).

Over time, the political and social roles of newspapers changed (Iedema, 1997; Iedema, Feez & White, 1994), and the SMH became a broadsheet, differentiated from a number of its competitors in the Sydney newspaper market such as the afternoon tabloids The Daily Mirror and The Sun (both now closed), and the only Sydney morning tabloid at the time of writing, The Daily Telegraph. Today it has a reputation as one of the most reputable and influential newspapers in Australia (though its print edition is not a national newspaper).
The *SMH* was first published online on April 25, 1995 (Monteiro, 2005). Since that time, it has grown from being an online version of the ‘computer’ section of the newspaper, to a central part of the newspaper’s business. Hartcher (2006) illustrates that the online edition is an important contributor to the financial viability of the newspaper: it earned AUD$24,000,000 in 2005. More fundamentally, perhaps, the online and print editions of the *SMH* are now integrated in a way that presents the *SMH* as a single ‘news brand’ (to use Murdoch’s term as quoted earlier). The print edition includes ‘links’ to the online edition, and the online edition draws on the name and status of the print edition for its authority. In 2007, over 20 staff were employed exclusively on the online edition, and staff on both the print and online editions work together in a physically and institutionally integrated newsroom. A senior editor at the *SMH* online told me about this.

Increasingly, we see ourselves as an integrated newsroom, and we’re making decisions about where’s the best place to put a story, and sometimes the best place to present that and to put that story first might be in the paper, perhaps the best place to present and put that story might be online. ... And I think that there are different ways of telling stories too which we haven’t really touched on, in that you might have a story that’s in the paper, but you can do something else. You can have other elements to that story online. And I suppose from that I mean you can have video, you can have audio, you have the ability to perhaps run many more pages of documents than what you perhaps would in the paper - that kind of thing. So it’s about finding ways of expanding the story-telling perhaps, rather than narrowly defining it as this is what we do in the paper and this is what we do with online. (Interview with author, July, 2007 - see Appendix C)

Thus, the online edition of the *SMH* has become an integral element of the commercial and communicative operations of this long-standing news institution.
1.3.2.4 Institutional contexts: Conclusion

Each newspaper in this study publishes on the world wide web, and therefore has the same potential audience, though clearly the traditional audiences of their print editions, and the actual audiences of their online editions, differ.

In terms of their linguistic context, there are clear differences between each newspaper. The *Bangkok Post* is an English-language newspaper in a country where English is not widely spoke, and therefore has a limited but powerful audience in its national context. The *People’s Daily* is a Chinese-language newspaper translated into English, and unlikely to be read in English by anyone locally, aside from people wishing to examine the messages the Communist Party is communicating internationally. The *Sydney Morning Herald*, in contrast, is written in English and has always been intended for a local audience who (for the most part) speak English as their first language.

The three newspapers also differ in their institutional and national contexts. The *Bangkok Post* is published by the Post Publishing Company Limited, a public company which has commercial and political alliances and conflicts typical of Thai media companies (cf. McCargo, 2000). The Thai media industry is diverse in terms of voices and ownership, but there are few Thai media voices publishing or broadcasting in English. The online edition of the *BKP* extends the newspaper’s audience reach to so-called ‘Thailand watchers’, and to international media consumers who prefer to turn to locally-published online newspapers to follow notable events. Additionally and importantly, it maintains (and may even extend) the international status of the newspaper and its local importance (McCargo, 2002).
The *People’s Daily* is run by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), and needs to maintain ideological consistency with the CCP and the Chinese government. Its institutional practices include overt control and censorship in a relatively regulated media environment (Scollon & Scollon, 1997; Wu, 1994). The online English-language edition is a way for the CCP to reach an international audience, and is unlikely to attract a local audience, most of whom are able to read the Chinese-language version.

The *Sydney Morning Herald* is published by Fairfax Media Limited, a publicly listed company. Unlike Thailand, media ownership in Australia is heavily concentrated, and most newspapers published in Australia are owned either by Fairfax or the Murdoch-owned News Limited. In 2006, Fairfax owned:

- 21 per cent of the capital city and national newspaper market;
- 22 per cent of the Sunday newspaper market;
- 17 per cent of the suburban newspaper market;
- 16 per cent of the regional newspaper market.

(Jackson, 2006)

In 2007, Fairfax increased this concentration by merging with Rural Press Limited, which in 2006 had owned “over 150 regional newspapers and magazines”, and had “14 per cent of the circulation of daily regional newspapers” (Jackson, 2006). To illustrate the degree of concentration in the Australian media, in 2006, Fairfax’s major competitor, the Murdoch-owned News Limited, owned:

- 68 per cent of the capital city and national newspaper market;
- 77 per cent of the Sunday newspaper market;
- 62 per cent of the suburban newspaper market;
- 18 per cent of the regional newspaper market.

(Jackson, 2006)

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2 Of course, the Western media has self-censorship and its own ideological practices, some of which may be becoming more relevant to China (see Lagerkvist, 2008; see also Chapter 2).
In this market, the online edition of the *SMH* is targeted as much or more at the local market as it is at international readers (cf. Thurman, 2007).

From a geopolitical perspective, Thailand is a relatively small power economically and militarily. It is nonetheless one of the key countries in SE Asia, a region which continues to grow in global importance. China is growing in economic and military power, and is among the most powerful nations globally. Australia is a small power like Thailand, but uniquely positioned in relation to Asia: geographically adjacent, politically engaged, but historically colonised and culturally Western.³

The choice of online newspapers from Thailand, China, and Australia betrays a world view which is positioned in the Asia-Pacific, and outside the trans-Atlantic focus common in studies of the mass media (Paterson, 2008; Paul, 2008).⁴ In this way, this thesis provides data and analysis outside the scope of focus of much of the published literature on online newspapers, which has to date tended to focus on the U.S. (See Chapter 2). In addition, the three newspapers studied here provide interesting counterpoints in terms of their historical, linguistic, institutional, and national contexts.

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³ This is an oversimplification for convenience: Australia is culturally diverse, with a population which includes a large proportion of indigenous and non-indigenous Australians of non-Western backgrounds.
⁴ An otherwise positive review of a published article from this thesis questioned whether the focus on the *SMH* in the article was as a result of ‘parochialism’. While that paper did admittedly refer only to one newspaper, it is nonetheless interesting to reflect on whether such a comment would have been made if the article had studied, for instance, the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *Guardian*, or *The Times*. 
1.4 Overview of Thesis

Chapter 2 reviews published literature relevant to newspapers and media discourse, providing foundational background to the current research.

Chapter 3 outlines the theoretical foundation for the research reported in this thesis: social semiotics and Systemic Functional (SF) theory as developed initially for language, and then later for other semiotic systems.

In Chapter 4, the methodology of the research is described, incorporating a description of the corpus, and explanations of the data collection and analysis.

Chapter 5 is the first of the analytical chapters (i.e. Chapters 5, 6, 7, and 8). It examines online newspapers from the theoretical perspective of constituency. The analytical tool of a rank scale is often employed in social-semiotic studies of multimodal discourse, and Chapter 5 examines the extent to which it can be applied to an analysis of online newspapers in a theoretically thorough manner, and the limitations of such an approach.

Chapter 6 examines visual communication on the home pages of the current corpus, applying the framework of Kress & van Leeuwen (1996) to the home pages of the three newspapers as they appeared between February 2002, and April 2006.

In Chapter 7, newsbites (the headline+lead+hyperlink stories common to home pages) are described, and their development over the four-year period of this
study on the home page of the SMH is examined in detail. The paradigmatic oppositions realised by the structure of these short texts, and their rapid evolution over the data collection period is documented.

The use of images on home pages is described in Chapter 8, with relatively large images (used in all three newspapers) considered first, and then the extensive use of thumbnail images on the SMH home page examined second.

Finally, Chapter 9 returns to the framing questions outlined above, considering how these are answered after considering the findings of the thesis. The limitations and implications are then considered, and final comments are presented.
Chapter Two: Foundations: Newspapers

2.1 Introduction

Newspapers are the oldest surviving form of the mass media, and remain as one of the most powerful social institutions of our time. Online newspapers communicate using a number of modalities (visual, aural) and are therefore multimodal, and also use a number of semiotic resources (language, image, page design, video, audio, animation) and are therefore multi-semiotic (see Chapter 3).

In this chapter, newspapers are defined, described, and re-read from a visual perspective, and research into visual communication in online newspapers is also considered.

2.2 Defining newspapers: A historical perspective

The previous chapter began by illustrating the rapid rise of online newspapers as the world wide web first spread in the 1990s. A remarkably similar social and technological contagion took place after the invention of the first European printing press in 1450.\(^5\)

By 1500, presses had been established in more than 250 places in Europe - 80 of them in Italy, 52 in Germany and 43 in France. Printers had reached Basel by 1466, Rome by 1467, Paris and Pilsen by 1468, Venice by 1469, Leuven, Valencia, Cracow and Buda by 1473, Westminster (distinct from the city of London) by 1467, and Prague by 1477. Between them, these presses produced about 27,000 editions by the year 1500, which means that - assuming an

\(^5\) This was, incidentally, well after printing presses had been invented in China, Japan and Korea (Briggs & Burke, 2002, p. 15; cf. Smith, 1979)
average print run of 500 copies per edition - about thirteen million books were circulating by that date in a Europe of 100 million people. (Briggs & Burke, 2002, pp. 15-6)

The rapid spread of print had ramifications for access to knowledge and therefore the (re-)distribution of power, a story similar again to that told in section 1.1.1 above.

As Briggs & Burke are careful to point out though, printing (of written text and images) did not replace existing oral traditions, and the rise of printing was related to other technological advances such as the improvement and development of transport and postal systems (see also Smith, 1979). Thus, at the same time printing presses were spreading across Europe, people and information were able to travel long distances relatively quickly. The rapid reproduction and dissemination of information had become technologically possible.

The continuation of the oral tradition, and the spread of the printing press combined in a multimodal genre:

which appears to have flourished most in England, and which we usually call broadsides. The Germans call them flegende Blätter, and the French feuilles volantes, both comparatively modern terms, and the last perhaps translated from the other. These broadsides became far more popular in England than in other countries, and during a long period they have been the usual mode of publishing popular ballads. ... [It is not until around the middle of the sixteenth century that we find examples] of what we now understand more especially by the name of ballad, - of that peculiar class of popular literature which belonged to the long period of transition in our country between medieval society and the society of our own times. We soon find the printed broadside employed in the various circumstances of temporary agitation, whether political or social. In fact, the press was defined very soon to become the most powerful agent in all social agitation. (Lilly, 1867, pp. vii-viii; cf. Baldwin, 2003).
Chapter Two: Newspapers

Table 2.1: Evolutionary pre-cursors to newspapers (following Smith, 1979)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Features</th>
<th>Approximate time of emergence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>relation or relacioun</td>
<td>• account of a single story published long after the event</td>
<td>1610s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>coranto</td>
<td>• publication of a series of relations on a weekly basis (with gaps)</td>
<td>1620s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• title would change to reflect the content</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>diurnall</td>
<td>• &quot;a weekly account of the occurrences of successive days&quot; (Smith, 1979, p. 11)</td>
<td>1640s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• &quot;most of them were described as A Perfect Diurnall of the Passages in Parliament, followed by the first and last dates on which the events described took place&quot; (ibid.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mercury</td>
<td>• &quot;a book of news published section by section; the pages were numbered consecutively throughout the series&quot; (ibid.)</td>
<td>1640s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>intelliencer</td>
<td>• contemporary to mecuries, but:</td>
<td>1640s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o more formal/official in tone</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o wider coverage of subject matter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Broadsides, along with pamphlets and other printed publications circulating in Europe at this time, reported news and views in various ways (Baldwin, 2003; Smith, 1979). Growing out of the public discourses embodied in broadsides and pamphlets, other forms of printed publication emerged, and Smith (1979) traces a number of stages through which printed news texts progressed before coming to what we might now recognise as a newspaper (Table 2.1).

This raises the question of what, exactly, is a newspaper.

Historians in the twentieth century seemed to have settled on a definition that was succinctly rendered in a 1930 Journalism Quarterly article by Eric W. Allen. Allen’s definition of a newspaper was actually adapted from Otto Groth’s Die Zeitung - Ein System des Zeitungskunde published in 1928. ... [A] true newspaper must be periodic, mechanically reproduced, and available to all who pay for it. In addition, the content must be varied, general, timely, and organized. (S. Martin, 2003, p. 2)
Smith (1979) identifies another, fundamental feature of the first newspapers which distinguishes them from their contemporary publications, and which is crucial to understanding this genre: in newspapers, “a continuing relationship is set up between reader, printer, and the originator of the information” (p.9; see Chapter 8 below).

The first English newspaper was the *Oxford Gazette*, which was first published in 1665, before it was moved to London and renamed as the *London Gazette* (Baldwin, 2003, p. 93; Smith, 1979, pp. 41-4). Smith characterises the paper as “an elegant and precise instrument of information. Even today its pages convey to the twentieth century reader its proud sense of its own modernity as it replaced the chaotic squabblings of the interregnum” (1979, p. 44). Baldwin also comments on the importance of the *Gazette*.

The paper is significant because it carried features that are common to newspapers today. Its pages were printed in two columns rather than in the familiar pamphlet form, and it included datelines and the place of origin at the beginning of each piece of news, a practice that modern newspaper readers are familiar with. The paper also began to be called a “newspaper”, a name that is still used today. (Baldwin, 2003, p. 93)

In Asia, print technology was available before the print revolution took place in Europe. Further, in China, a network for the collection and distribution of news to the governing groups of society had been in place since the Han dynasty (206 BC - AD 219), with an ‘official newspaper’ (*ti pao*) distributed to these groups (including some specialised versions for different groups) since at least the T’ang dynasty (AD 618 - 907) (Smith, 1979, p. 14).

However:

the public, printed and periodical distribution of news did not begin until European traders and missionaries started foreign-language
newspapers on the Chinese mainland, for their own purposes, in the nineteenth century. (Smith, 1979, p. 14)

The first foreign newspaper was established in China in 1815, and from 1840-1890 around 300 Chinese-language newspapers were established by foreigners, primarily in Shanghai (Yan, 2000). The first Chinese-run Chinese newspaper that meets the definition of newspaper given earlier was the *Zhaowen Xinbao*, first published in 1873 (Hamm, 2003, p. 50; Yan, 2000, p. 499). What this tells us is that the emergence of newspapers was primarily a social phenomenon, not simply an outcome of advances in technology. Smith again, this time on the evolution of newspapers in ‘the Far East’:

the newspaper developed interconnectedly throughout the world, as a form dependent on printing which emerged from the economic and political conditions of Europe and spread only as far as those conditions spread to other societies. (1979, p. 15)

The emergence of newspapers in Thailand tells a similar story. Thailand’s first newspaper, the *Bangkok Recorder*, was first published on July 4, 1844, about a decade after the first Thai printing press (the ‘Thai moveable-metal type’) was brought to Thailand by missionaries, and, as in China, was founded by a foreigner (McCargo, 2000, p. 7). Until the turn of the 20th century, there were relatively few newspapers in Thailand (probably less than twenty) most of which were short-lived and had a readership of probably a few hundred people (Ekachai, 2000). It wasn’t until the reign of King Chulalongkorn (1868-1910), when Thailand’s political and military engagement with the West increased, and postal, rail, and telegraph systems were developed, that newspapers became more widespread in Thailand (see Ekachai, 2000, p. 432).
In short, in both Europe and Asia, the technology of the printing press, together with the development of railways, roads, shipping, and postal systems, made possible the reproduction and distribution of information on a scale and with a speed formerly not possible. Equally important was the development of social conditions which generated demand for newspapers: interest in national and international politics, economy, and society; and an interest in public opinion and debate. The place where these technological possibilities and social conditions first met was 17th-century Europe, but in historical terms, newspapers quickly became an intercontinental phenomenon.

2.3 Describing Newspapers: A discourse perspective

From the emergence of print newspapers in the 17th century, to the emergence of online newspapers at the end of the 20th century, newspapers changed in many ways, including: their commercial environment and operations and their use of technology in production (Chapman, 2005); their visual form and their use of images (Barnhurst & Nerone, 2001; Bicket & Packer, 2004); and in their use of language (Barnhurst & Mutz, 1994; Iedema, 1997; Iedema, Feez & White, 1994). In this section, the language of newspapers is considered from a historical perspective, after which the notion of discourse is explored, and the institutional practices by which newspaper discourse is produced are considered.
2.3.1 Tracing newspaper discourse

The historical development of the hard-news story as a media genre in English-language newspapers has been discussed by Iedema, Feez & White (1994, pp. 90-106; see also Iedema, 1995, 1997) whose account is now summarised and supplemented.

The earliest newspaper discourse emerged in Europe from the political tracts published in pamphlets; the social and political ballads published in broadsides; and the accounts of speeches, wars, and political events published in relations and diurnalls (section 2.2.1). These written genres emerged as spoken genres continued, and the two co-existed in homes, coffee houses, and other private and public spaces (Briggs & Burke, 2002).

Barnhurst & Nerone (2001) describe the ‘stories’ found in colonial papers in the United States in the 18th century, which were often texts reproduced verbatim from elsewhere (e.g. newspapers abroad, letters, naval reports). Such stories were understandable, and of interest, only to those who were well informed of the background and surrounding events (Barnhurst & Nerone, 2001):

> their content was coded and elliptical, indicating their printers’ awareness that, although a newspaper might appear before anyone, even the most vulgar reader, the public prints should be intelligible only to truly public men, gentlemen, and sometimes their women. (p. 32)

In the early 19th century in Australia, news stories were presented as chronological accounts of relatively routine events. Throughout that century, news increasingly became a commodity, as printing became cheaper, newspapers more affordable and widely available, and publishers competed for readers and for profit (Iedema, Feez & White, 1994; see also Machin & Niblock, 2006, pp. 10-11).
Chapter Two: Newspapers

Barnhurst & Nerone (2001) have named newspapers of the period preceding this transformation in the United States the *editor’s paper*, and those after this transformation the *publisher’s paper*.

The editor’s newspaper was a partisan advocate in the courtroom of political opinion. The publisher’s newspaper was a commercial tool and a marketed good. In combination, the twin movements of political and commercial transformation produced a newspaper that was expansive in appeal to the public. (Barnhurst & Nerone, 2001, pp. 16-17)

As newspaper audiences grew, it became necessary to indicate the relevance of a given story to readers, whose values and interests were now more diverse. By the mid 19th century, news stories opened with a summary of the events, then gave a chronological account including explanations, and closed with a consideration of the consequences of the event (Iedema, Feez & White, 1994). By the turn of the 20th century, the opening summary had developed into a headline and lead, the function of which was to foreground the climax of the story in terms of its relevance as an event which may “destabilise or consolidate (‘stabilise’) the social order” (Iedema, Feez & White, 1994, p. 107; cf. Bell, 1991, pp. 172-3). Additionally, by this time, visual devices of font and layout were used to indicate this “Nucleus” of headline and lead (cf. Barnhurst & Nerone, 2001, pp. 196-200; Evans, 1976; Machin & Niblock, 2006, p. 11). The remaining paragraphs functioned as “Satellites” expanding on the Nucleus, but remaining textually independent of other Satellites (Figure 2.1). This text structure resulted in a news story which presents events in an order highlighting importance rather than chronological order (cf. Bell, 1991, 1996; van Dijk, 1988; White, 1997), and which reflected an increasing tendency to report stories that may not be resolved at the time of publication (or that may never

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6 Newspapers in the US were probably ahead of their British and Australian counterparts in this regard. See Barnhurst and Nerone (2001, Chapter 3), and Evans (1976, Chapter 2).
be resolved). Although there have been further developments over the 20th century, such as longer newspaper stories, and a focus on analysis, interpretation and abstract themes over events and actors (Barnhurst & Mutz, 1994), this Nucleus-Satellite structure (also known commonly as the ‘inverted pyramid’) has remained as the rhetorical mainstay of hard-news stories in English-language newspapers.

Iedema, Feez & White (1994) comment that the Nucleus tells a complete story on its own. It has achieved the text’s social function - describing an event in terms of its potential for ‘destabilisation/ stabilisation’ - even if the remaining sentences of the story were to be removed. (Iedema, Feez & White, 1994, p. 115, italics in original; cf. Bell, 1991, pp. 175ff., 1996, p. 10)

In the multimodal macro-genre of online-newspapers, this property of the Nucleus makes it possible for the institutional authors of the newspaper home page to present news stories without expanding on the ‘essential’ elements in the Nucleus. Longer news stories (Nucleus plus Satellites) are relegated to story pages (see Chapter 5).
The Nucleus-Satellite structure of hard-news stories is not the only rhetorical structure used in newspaper stories. Other media genres identified by Iedema, Feez & White (1994) have a headline and introductory paragraph which realise various functions, including:

- an Orientation (in *media exemplums*, *media anecdotes*, and sometimes in *media features*)
- a Thesis (in *media expositions*)
- a Position Challenged (in *media challenges*)
- a Statement of Issue (in *media discussions*)
- a Context (in *media reviews*).\(^7\)

These other genres are born of the same institutional history as the hard news story, and therefore have also evolved in such a way that the early elements of the text can stand alone (or stand out) from the remainder of the text. In print newspapers, this is sometimes done by means of typography, with an introductory paragraph and headline being featured on the page (cf. Economou, 2006), and it is from this history that terms such as ‘write-off’ and ‘stand-alone’ - used by journalists and editors to refer to newsbites (the short headline-plus-lead-plus-link news stories typical on online newspaper home pages) - have emerged.

In addition to the different genres of newspaper discourse, it is important to consider the extent to which the journalistic traditions of Thailand (for the *Bangkok Post*) and China (for the *People’s Daily*) are related to the verbal design of home page news in these newspapers.

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\(^7\) The ability of the same class element to realise a range of different functions in communication is the basis for the distinction between class and Function elements in SF theory (see Chapter 5).
The *Bangkok Post (BKP)* was founded by a former American newspaper journalist with a Bachelor of Journalism from Boston University (MacDonald, 1990; see Chapter 1). From the earliest days of the newspaper, the principles of the ‘inverted pyramid’ bore on the discourse of the paper. In discussing the production of the first edition of the *BKP*, MacDonald discusses the reporters working on the paper at the time.

The work of all three reporters obviously had to be rewritten, and this was largely Karl Melcher’s task. But even Karl would need time to learn the inverted style of American news writing which summarises the content of a story in the first paragraph or two, and then strings the rest of the details out as they decrease in importance. (MacDonald, 1990, pp. 117-8)

The editor took it upon himself to oversee this work, and for readers of the *BKP* today it is apparent that the influence of this Western approach to English-language newspaper discourse has remained central to the story-telling practices of the *BKP* (cf. Knox & Patpong’s, 2008 comparison of *The Nation* (the *BKP*’s current English-language competitor) and the Thai-language daily, the *Thairath*).

The situation at the *People’s Daily (PD)* is less straightforward. The *PD* online English-language edition is a translation, so Western conventions of English-language news discourse are not so easily attributed to this English-language newspaper.

Scollon & Scollon (1997) report on a study of fourteen Chinese and English versions of the same story in mainland Chinese and Hong Kong newspapers. On the basis of their review of relevant studies and their own research, they conclude that regardless of whether news stories in Chinese newspapers are published in English or Chinese, they may:
• follow the Western ‘inverted pyramid’ structure
• follow the classic Chinese qi-cheng-zhuan-he structure\(^8\)
• combine the two (by introducing a second topic near the middle of the story)
• use another structure (e.g. an inductive structure where the main topic of the story is delayed).

In another paper, Ron Scollon observes of the same study:

> the choice of different rhetorical structures in the case of these 14 stories was made as rhetorical choice; the writers or sub-editors were strategizing in the presentation of the same basic story to achieve different effects. (Scollon, 2000, p. 763)

As with the BKP and the SMH, there are examples in the corpus of the current study of newsbites on the home page of the PD having the same, slightly different, and very different wording from the headline and first paragraph of the story page in the same edition (see Chapter 7 for further discussion of this practice). What appears to be most relevant for the current study is that the English-language version of the PD began its life as an online newspaper in 1998, and has, from its beginning, competed in an international English-language market place for an audience (or perhaps more accurately, has presented itself as competing in such a marketplace). The PD home page (and the design of the stories appearing on it) have been largely consistent with the conventions of the home pages of other English-language online newspapers (see Chapter 6 below).

Editorial decisions about which stories need to be re-written for the home page and which headline+lead combinations ‘shovelled’ across have not been considered in this thesis; nor have the relations between these decisions and the genre and rhetorical

\(^8\) The ‘traditional’ four-part Chinese rhetorical structure of beginning - continuing - transition - summary (see Kirkpatrick, 1997).
structure of the ‘full-length’ stories. The impact of news story genre on the (re-)wording of newsbites on home pages is one obvious area for further study, as is an explicit comparison of the language of newsbites hyperlinked to texts instantiating different media genres.

Turning from the relations between genre and discourse, to the relations between news values and discourse, it is widely recognised that news institutions choose stories, and make decisions about how they will construct stories, based on news values: the institutional ideology that determines what is and is not newsworthy. There are different inventories of news values in the literature (e.g. Fowler, 1991; van Dijk, 1988). Bell (1991) groups news values into three superordinate categories: values in news actors and events (negativity, recency, proximity, consonance, unambiguity, unexpectedness, superlativeness, relevance, personalization, eliteness, attribution, facticity), values in the news process (continuity, competition, co-option, composition, predictability, prefabrication), and values in the news text (clarity, brevity, colour). According to different combinations of these values, certain events and actors may or may not appear in the news, and if they do appear they may be construed in different kinds of news stories.

It is generally accepted that newspaper institutions and their readers see a particular kind of news as the core of the newspaper’s business: what is commonly known as hard news.

Hard news is [newswriters’] staple product: reports of accidents, conflicts, crimes, announcements, discoveries and other events which have occurred or come to light since the previous issue of their paper or programme. (Bell, 1991, p. 14)
Bell (1991) identifies a number of different kinds of news, including hard (or spot) news, soft news (incorporating commentary, features, etc.), and special-topic news. Bell’s three primary categories include the “body copy” of stories, and his classification includes a fourth category (including headlines, subheads, bylines, and photo captions) which cuts across the other three. A simplified representation of Bell’s classification is presented visually in Figure 2.2.

![Figure 2.2: Classification of press news (following Bell, 1991, pp. 14-15)](image)

Bell’s categories “are generally the categories newswriters themselves use” (1991, p. 14). In contrast, Iedema, Feez & White (1994) present a different classification of print news based on linguistic analysis of news stories. Their basic classificatory division is based on the purpose of news articles: whether they chronicle, argue, interpret, or enable. These different purposes have ramifications for the linguistic choices made in stories (including the structure of stories, the kind of evaluation found in them, and choices in lexis and grammar). The classification scheme of Iedema, Feez & White is presented in Figure 2.3.
These different classification systems use different criteria to classify news: Bell relies on the categories used by media workers, Iedema, Feez & White on the linguistic realisations of media stories. While the two can be reconciled (e.g. ‘News Story’ is a hard news genre - see Iedema, Feez & White, 1994, p. 200), the point here is that classifications inevitably vary according to the criteria used.

Online newspaper home pages also classify news, and do so by means of page design. This classification is made by page-level devices such as positioning, white space, and borders; and by story-level devices such as headline size and colour, and the use or absence of explicit verbal hyperlinks to other stories (see Chapters 6 and 7). In these ways, the visual design of home pages forces the authors of the page to choose explicitly (by the positioning of stories and the design choices that positioning entails) how a story will be classified (cf. Barnhurst, 1991).

So what are the classification choices for online newspaper home pages? Commonly, online newspapers verbally classify the content on their home page (e.g.
Local, Political, Sport - see Bell’s (1991) ‘special-topic news’). However, unnamed and implicit categorisation is also a useful approach (the ‘design as map’ metaphor - e.g. Lowrey, 1999). In practice, both approaches are commonly used in online newspapers, and this is described in relation to the current corpus in Chapters 5 and 6 below.

In implicit categorisation, the common distinction between hard and soft news becomes important. It is possible to conceive of the hard/soft distinction from a topological perspective (i.e. as a cline) rather than from a typological perspective (i.e. as a clear-cut dichotomy), with hard news falling towards an end of a spectrum defined by chronicling of events where (de)stabilisation is at issue, and soft news falling towards an end defined by reflecting on events, where interpretation is at issue (cf. Iedema, Feez & White, 1994, p. 88).

Another distinction discussed by Iedema, Feez & White (1994, pp. 152-4) concerns ‘highbrow’ and ‘lowbrow’ news. Stories may be construed as belonging to the public sphere (and therefore highbrow), or to the private sphere (and therefore lowbrow), and it is this distinction which, historically, has set apart broadsheet and tabloid newspapers.

Certain papers and broadcasters position their audience as being purely interested in the ‘private’ sphere, and they portray both political events (‘sayings’) and material events (‘doings’ and ‘happenings’) in terms of what individual people think and feel. Other papers and broadcasters position their audience as being interested purely in the ‘public’ sphere, and so they construct events as if brought about not by individuals but by social forces whose impact far exceeds that of any individual. (Iedema, Feez & White, 1994, p. 152)
Combining these two perspectives, we can map a topology of news with two axes: the first opposing chronicling/(de)stabilisation with reflecting/interpretation, and the second opposing public with private. This topology is represented visually in Figure 2.4.

![Figure 2.4: A topological perspective on classifying news stories](image)

The boundaries between hard, soft, and lite news are permeable and overlap, and are traditionally grounded in language-based understandings of news content. Visual and verbal semiotic resources, however, do not construe meaning in the same way, and meanings can not be neatly mapped across from one to the other (Lemke, 2002). The visual design of the home pages in this corpus does not afford the construal of permeable, overlapping boundaries between hard, lite, and soft news, so the authors of the page are forced to classify each story visually according to their
placement. Exactly how they do so is considered briefly in Chapter 5, and explored in detail in Chapter 6.

In summary, the historical development of English newspaper discourse has led to the common practice of moving the most important part of a story to the front. For online newspapers, this has meant that this part of the story can be easily brought into service on online newspaper home pages in order to achieve the institutional goals of the newspaper. Online newspapers which have different discursive histories, but which are published in English (such as the PD), compete in the same marketplace, and must follow or choose to break the emerging conventions of this global macro-genre. The traditional distinction in hard and soft news is also evident in the visual discourse of home pages, and the ways in which home-page news is designed and presented.

To this point then, it is possible to see the following. With the social conditions of 17th-century Europe, the construction and communication of human experience as ‘news’ emerged in the budding macro-genre of the newspaper, a genre which also appeared elsewhere (e.g. Asia) under (at least partially) similar social conditions. Further, over time, the way that news was constructed in newspapers evolved in line with developments in the social and institutional contexts of production and reception. Thus, the ways in which ‘news’ has been expressed historically can be seen as closely related to social context.

Print newspaper genres have emerged and developed over three-and-a-half centuries. With the development of the internet and the world wide web, the social
conditions of news production and reception have changed rapidly. Later chapters demonstrate that rapid changes in social context have been matched by rapid changes in news genres. In Chapter 3 below, the theoretical approach taken in this thesis is described, a theory which posits an explicit and systematic relationship between discourse and context. But first, the question of what discourse is must be addressed.

2.3.2 Defining discourse

The previous section considered language from a discursive perspective - as more than items of vocabulary and sets of rules by which they are combined into sentences (cf. Martin & Rose, 2007). But discourse is not limited to language. For instance, discourse is defined by Fairclough (1992, p. 63) as “a mode of action, one form in which people may act upon the world and especially upon each other, as well as a mode of representation”. In online newspapers, the meanings constructed in the different semiotic systems - language, image, and others - are all part of the discourse.

The definition from Fairclough as given above provides two complementary perspectives. The first views discursive acts as social action. The second views discursive acts as construing experience. As is argued below, social action and representation are complementary perspectives on discourse. These two perspectives are now discussed in turn, following which the notions of text and orders of discourse are explored.

To begin with the discourse-as-social-action perspective:

A Discourse is a socially accepted association among ways of using language, of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing, and of acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful
Gee’s definition foregrounds language, but does not limit discourse to a linguistic concept. The other focus in Gee’s definition is social groups: discourse signifies group membership (cf. Swales, 1990).

With ways of speaking, and more broadly with ways of meaning, we signify not only membership of one or more particular groups, but also particular roles in those groups. Our discursive practices vary according to the social role(s) we are playing at any given location in time and space. We participate in different discourses, and simultaneously contribute to (and therefore collectively construct) these discourses and negotiate their conventions ongoingly.

The view of discourse as an essentially group-based concept is also expressed by Bhatia (2001), who argues that because discourse entails convergent ways of writing, speaking, reading, and listening, which conform to and/or challenge conventionally accepted and understood forms, discourses structure knowledge. Similarly, Pennycook (1994, p. 128) characterises discourses as “ways of organising meaning” and “systems of power and knowledge”. Thus, knowledge is viewed from a social perspective (cf. Berger & Luckmann, 1966) (for related cognitive perspectives, see van Dijk, 1998; Vygotsky, 1986).

The social construction of knowledge brings us to the second of the two perspectives on discourse, that of representation.

A discourse is the language used in representing a given social practice from a particular point of view. ... For instance, the social practice of politics is differently signified in liberal, socialist and
Marxist political discourses; or again illness and health are differently represented in conventional (‘allopathic’) and homoeopathic medical discourses. (Fairclough 1995, p. 56)

Our experience of the world is constructed differently according to the social roles we are playing at any given time: according to the social relationships we are enacting in discourse.

Social interaction is related to our discursive representation of the world through the context of situation (see Chapter 3). We make communicative choices according to the prevailing conventions of the social context, which we may choose to follow or flout. How we choose to communicate in context is central to what we communicate (both in terms of what we choose and choose not to communicate, and also what meanings are actually conveyed). So, as a member of certain social groups, playing particular social roles in a particular context, social actors choose to represent their social experience (or ‘reality’) in ways which conform to or flout the conventions typically expected. This essential relationship between context and discourse is one of the fundamental tenets of systemic functional (SF) theory (e.g. Halliday 1994; Halliday and Hasan 1989; Martin 1992; see Chapter 3).

The two perspectives on discourse outlined above - discourse as social action and as representation - are inseparable. Discourses are ways of meaning by which we act socially, by which we identify ourselves as members of particular groups and as playing particular social roles, and in these roles we construct and re-present (represent) our experience of the world in certain ways. In turn, by representing experience in certain ways, we identify ourselves as members of certain groups, and as playing particular social roles.
Discourses are negotiated in an ongoing manner: they are social processes. The artefacts of these processes are texts, which embody the exchange and creation of interpersonal (social action) and experiential (representational) meanings negotiated in discourse.

A text, then, is both an object in its own right ... and an instance - an instance of social meaning in a particular context of situation. It is a product of its environment, a product of a continuous process of choices ... . (Halliday & Hasan, 1989, p. 11)

Text and discourse are complementary perspectives on the same phenomenon - discourse is a process perspective, and this process is embodied in the product of discourse - text. From this perspective, texts embody social action, social roles and relationships, and the representation of social reality. Like discourses, they are not limited to language.

One final concept is worth discussing at this point. Orders of discourse refers to all the different ‘discourse types’ which are used in a particular social domain (such as a particular social institution). These networks of discourse types exist in relation to other such networks, and within them different discourse types also exist in relation to one another (Fairclough, 1995).

What is an educational system, after all, if not a ritualisation of the word; if not a qualification of some fixing of roles for speakers; if not the constitution of a (diffuse) doctrinal group; if not a distribution and an appropriation of discourse, with all its learning and its powers? What is “writing” (that of “writers”) if not a similar form of subjection, perhaps taking rather different forms, but whose main stresses are nonetheless analogous? May we not also say that the judicial system also, as well as institutionalised medicine, constitute similar systems for the subjection of discourse? (Foucault, 1971, pp. 19-20)
So within a social domain (such as the school), there is an order of discourse in which particular discourses and genres are more typical than others. More than this though, certain discourses (such as the discourse of mathematics) are typically articulated in certain genres (such as the genre of a lesson). Similarly, in the order of discourse of the mass media, the texts produced for public consumption see certain discourses (such as politics, and law and order) typically occurring in other genres (such as the ‘hard news story’).

The order of discourse of the media has been shaped by the tension between its contradictory public sources and private targets, which act as contrary poles of attraction for media discourse; it is constantly being reshaped through redefining its relationship to - redrawing its boundaries with - these public and private orders of discourse. (Fairclough, 1995, p. 63)

For the texts analysed here, the recent shift in medium (from print to pixels) and in potential audience (from local to international) means that the order of discourse within which online newspapers are produced is currently relatively unstable. New genres are evolving, and new configurations of genres and discourses are emerging.

**2.3.3 Producing discourse**

Throughout this thesis, the terms *institutional author(s)*, *collective authors*, and *author(s)* are used to describe those who produce the texts of online newspapers: news stories, images, and entire editions of newspapers as texts in their own right. This reflects the fact that the process of authoring news texts is complex, and typically involves many people. For example, McCargo (2000) describes the institutional processes involved in writing political news stories in the *Thairath*, a Thai-language daily, as summarised in the following quote from Knox & Patpong (2008, p. 177):

---

9 *Genre* is defined and discussed in Chapter 3 below.
up to twelve political reporters might be sending in dispatches, with a political rewriter compiling and integrating them (sometimes with other material) into a story. The front-page editor supervises the work of the political rewriters, and the editor-in-chief in turn supervises the decisions of the front-page editor, ensuring that the wishes of the newspaper’s owners are put into practice (McCargo 2000: 38-42).

News images go through a similar process, with institutional decisions at news meetings about what stories will be photographed; professional decisions about the subject and framing of images based on the conventions of the community of photojournalists; aesthetic decisions about ‘pushing’ / ‘pulling’, and other aspects of image production; and editorial decisions about the selection, cropping, and positioning of images to fit the discursive requirements of the newspaper (see Barthes, 1977; Huxford, 2001; Wardle, 2007; Schwartz, 2003).

Such complex processes have been theorised by Bell (1991, pp. 36-55), who, following Hymes and Goffman, outlines a model of producer roles in news which breaks the concept of speaker into four separate roles. These roles are principal, author, editor, and animator. All of these roles are potentially filled by one person, but typically they are filled by a large number of people (see Table 2.2). A brief discussion of each of the four roles follows (see also Nerone & Barnhurst, 2003).

Bell’s principal includes two groups: the proprietor(s) of the business, and the news executives. The former “set the editorial policies which affect news language. A proprietor’s definition of what will be treated as news and how it will be covered has linguistic repercussions”, and this may include “[d]ecisions on how certain individuals or groups should be labelled” (Bell, 1991, p. 40). News executives, as the title suggests, execute the editorial policies of the proprietor(s).
# Chapter Two: Newspapers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Roles</th>
<th>Subroles</th>
<th>Newsroom position</th>
<th>Language function</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>Commercial: business institution</td>
<td>Proprietor Managers</td>
<td>No direct, overt language input</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Professional: news institution</td>
<td>Editorial executives</td>
<td>General language prescription, rare specific prescription</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author</td>
<td>Author</td>
<td>Journalist</td>
<td>Generates news language, responsible for original syntax and discourse form</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Editor</td>
<td>Overseer</td>
<td>Chief reporter (press)</td>
<td>General and specific language prescription</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Chief subeditor (press)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>News editor (broadcast)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Copy editor</td>
<td>Subeditor</td>
<td>Modifies language, responsible for its intermediate and final form</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Copy editor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>News editor (press)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interpreter</td>
<td>News editor (press)</td>
<td>Responsible for prominence and presentation - order, headlines, links, visuals, graphological form, verbal interpretation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Subeditor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Duty editor (broadcast)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Newsreader/newscaster</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animator</td>
<td>Transmitter</td>
<td>Newsreader</td>
<td>Responsible for accurate phonological / graphological transmission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Typesetter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Proofreader</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Compositor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technician</td>
<td>Printer</td>
<td>Printer</td>
<td>No language input</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sound technician</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Camera operator</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.2: Roles in producing news (source: Bell, 1991, p. 39)

Specifically, they may prescribe the ideological framing of news and its linguistic expression, such as who will be referred to as a ‘terrorist’ and who as a ‘guerrilla’ (Schlesinger, 1987: 229). More generally, they also set guidelines for their journalists’ language use. (Bell, 1991, p. 40)

**Author** refers most simply and ideally to the journalist responsible for writing a news story. In practice though, embedding - the incorporation of one speech event
into another - plays an integral role in the author’s production of text: quoting, paraphrasing, and even cut-and-pasting the language of witnesses, previous stories, press releases, speech notes, and other verbal and written sources is standard practice in the production of news (Bell, 1991, p. 41). As stated above, while Bell’s concern in this model is the language of news organisations, photographers can also be considered as authors.

The role of editor is split into three subroles by Bell. Ultimately, though, editors in some way modify (or choose not to) the text of the author, whether that be by deleting, adding or changing the language of the text, or by presenting the text in a particular way (such as under a certain headline, or with a photograph, or as first story on the home page as opposed to the eight story on the ‘national’ page), or, in the case of images, embedding, cropping, selecting, and so on.

Animators “play the physical and technical roles necessary to communicate authors’ stories to their audience” (Bell, 1991, p. 43).

The distribution of these roles among individuals may (e.g. Cawley, 2008) or may not (e.g. Appendix C) be different in an online newsroom, but each edition of an online newspaper, and each news text within it is a product of the practices and structures of the institution in which it is published, not simply of an individual journalist, photographer, or sub-editor (see Herman & Chomsky, 1988; Reese, 1997; Zelizer, Park & Gudelunas, 2002).
2.3.4 Newspaper discourse: Conclusion

As Barnhurst & Mutz (1994) explain: “Shit happens, but that is not necessarily news”. What is news is the discursive output of large institutions, which have evolved historically to create texts of certain kinds, which make certain kinds of meaning. The discourse of newspapers is a social construction, which represents a chosen sub-set of the events of the world in institutionally valued ways to readers, thus creating a particular kind of social, discursive relationship between newspaper and audience.

2.4 Re-reading print newspapers: A visual perspective

The language of newspapers has been the subject of critical analysis from a range of perspectives for a long period of time (e.g. Barnhurst & Mutz, 1997; Bell, 1991; Bednarek, 2006; Bell & Garrett, 1998; Fairclough, 1995; Fowler, 1991; Iyengar & Reeves, 1997; Trew, 1979; van Dijk, 1988; White, 2003). However, as stated above, newspaper discourse is not limited to language.

Like newspaper language, news images have been critically studied from a range of perspectives, and the development of photojournalism and studies into this discursive practice are discussed in section 2.4.1. Following this, the visual discourse of newspaper design is discussed in section 2.4.2.

2.4.1 Print news images

The origins of images in newspapers have been traced to the illustrated broadsides of the late 16th century (Bicket & Packer, 2004), but it was the mid 19th century that saw a significant increase in the use of illustrations in newspapers. “Beginning in the
1830s, in Great Britain and the United States, newspaper and magazine publishers began to experiment with the use of various kinds of illustrations” (Barnhurst & Nerone, 2001, p. 113).

At this time, artists’ drawings were converted into metal ‘stereotypes’ for the printing press by the process of woodcutting, and by the last decade of the 19th century the use of images in newspapers was well established. While it is not clear whether the reference is a US or international figure, Time-Life Books states that “in 1891 there were 1,000 artists turning out more than 10,000 drawings a week for the press” (1971, p. 16). Eventually, on “January 21, 1897, the New York Tribune published the first halftone reproduction to appear in a mass circulation daily paper” (Time-Life Books, 1971, p. 15).

Hand drawn illustrations remained the dominant form of newspaper images, even as the technology necessary to take documentary photographs (e.g. smaller cameras, roll film, flash powder), and the technology necessary to mass produce photographs (e.g. the collodion, or wet-plate exposure process; the half-tone printing process) improved and became more widespread in the second half of the 19th, and early into the 20th century (Barnhurst & Nerone, 2001; Caple, in press).

Over time, the use of photographic images increased in the popular tabloids of the early 20th century, and innovations such as using one large image to dominate the front page, and using ‘composographs’ (literal ‘cut-and-paste’ photographic images to represent events where photographs were not available) became characteristic of English-language tabloids throughout the first half of the 20th century (Bicket &
Packer, 2004; Huxford, 2001; Schwartz, 2003; Wheeler, 2002). Yet, the use of photographs in newspapers grew slowly in the early decades of the 20th century, and was still resisted by some quarters in the newspaper industry even in the 1920s and 1930s (Bicket & Packer, 2004; Caple, in press).

The course of change cannot be summarized as the emergence of photography or the development of photographic realism - that is too neat and proleptic a narrative. The things represented and the modes of representation shifted over time in a complicated pattern. (Barnhurst & Nerone, 2001, p. 118)

Despite the slow, and in some quarters reluctant take-up of photography, the technological ‘autonomy’ of the camera gave the early 20th century newspapers that used them a claim to objectivity that hand-drawn illustrations and verbiage had been unable to impress upon audiences in quite the same way (Bicket & Packer, 2004; Schwartz, 2003).

Even the abundant use of photo fabrications such as the “composographs” that had appeared in the tabloid newspapers since the early twentieth century did not dislodge photojournalism’s credibility, and the privileged status of news photographs has endured intact until recently. (Schwartz, 2003, p. 29)

But photography did not ‘bring’ realism to illustrated news. Rather, the shift to realism in illustrated news which began in the US in the 1890s created the social conditions for the technological developments in photography to be taken up in newspapers (Barnhurst & Nerone, 2001).

The privileged status of ‘objectivity’ and ‘autonomy’ enjoyed by photography can be largely attributed to the ‘natural’ relationship between the signifier and the signified in photographic images. That is, a packet of pasta (for example) is signified in a photograph by a visual reproduction of a packet of pasta, and the reader of the
image understands what is denoted in the image by means of the similarity between their perception of the image and of similar objects in the ‘real world’:

> the viewer of the image receives *at one and the same time* the perceptual message and the cultural message, and ... this confusion in reading corresponds to the function of the mass image ... .

(Barthes, 1977, pp. 36-7, italics in original)

This popularly-held view of photography - i.e. that it is a direct representation of reality - has contributed significantly to its status as providing evidence for the verbal reports of hard-news events in newspapers: “purveyors of journalism have increasingly relied upon the camera to promote news presentations as unproblematic *reflections* of events occurring beyond viewers’ direct experience” (Griffin, 2004, p. 381; see also Hall, 1981; Hartley & Rennie, 2004; Schwartz, 2003; Trivundza, 2004; Wardle, 2007). Due to the conventions of press photography, and the way that news images interact with other images, captions, and the verbiage of news stories, this ‘evidential’ function of hard-news images persists even where photographs provide no visual documentation of the facts claimed in verbal news reports (Hall, 1981; Huxford, 2001; cf. Griffin, 2004, p. 384).

This status of the photograph was developing at the same time as the early-to-mid-20th century tabloids began competing with the ‘high-brow’ newspapers of the day for the same audience and ideological space. Partly as a result of this competition, the ‘high-brow’ newspapers of the early-mid twentieth century used photographs more and more (Bicket & Packer, 2004). Eventually, news photographs became an accepted part of newspaper discourse, due to factors such as the ‘evidential’ function of ‘objective’ news photographs (Barnhurst & Nerone, 2001; Schwartz, 2003; Sontag, 1979; Zelizer, 2005); the increasing acceptance of photojournalism as a practice of
‘highbrow’ newspapers (Bicket & Packer, 2004; Caple, in press); technological developments in film, lighting, processing, printing, and camera size and mechanics (Caple, in press; Sontag, 2003); and economic factors (Barnhurst & Nerone, 2001). The ‘high point’ of photographic news discourse can be seen in the capture (or construction) of “critical moments” (Caple, 2009) such as those seen in iconic news images of the 20th and 21st centuries, or “big pictures” in Perlmutter’s (2003) terms (see Table 2.3).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description of photograph</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Agency</th>
<th>Photographer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>the explosion of the Hindenburg airship</td>
<td>Lakehurst, New Jersey, U.S.A.</td>
<td>May 6, 1937</td>
<td>AP</td>
<td>Murray Becker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American soldiers raising the United States flag</td>
<td>Iwo Jima, Japan</td>
<td>Feb 23, 1945</td>
<td>AP</td>
<td>Joe Rosenthal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the point-blank shooting of a Vietnamese man</td>
<td>Saigon, Vietnam</td>
<td>Feb 1, 1968</td>
<td>AP</td>
<td>Eddie Adams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a solitary man holding a shopping bag and standing before a line of tanks</td>
<td>Tiananmen Square, Beijing, China</td>
<td>Jun 5, 1989</td>
<td>AP</td>
<td>Jeff Widener</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a jet airliner about to crash into the second of the World Trade twin towers</td>
<td>New York, U.S.A.</td>
<td>Sep 11, 2001</td>
<td>Reuters</td>
<td>Sean Adair</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.3: Examples of iconic hard-news images

Like the verbiage of news stories, news images are authored through the journalistic and editorial process of the news institution. This selection and production process is ideological (see Barthes, 1977; Hall, 1981; Fishman & Marvin, 2003; Wardle, 2007; cf. Bell 1991), and as part of the discourse of the newspaper, news images contribute to the discursive construction of the newspaper’s ideology over time - both individually and collectively (e.g. Darling-Wolf, 2004; Griffin, 2004; Hall, 1981; Trivundza, 2004).
One example of the photographic construal of ideology in newspaper discourse is the use of close-up shots of faces, or ‘mug shots’. In contrast to the ‘big pictures’ discussed above (and others like them), mug shots portray the social actors in news events and in doing so position them visually in the discourse of the newspaper, but tell the reader nothing of ‘what happened’.

Newspapers have a history of using mug shots (Barnhurst, 2002; Barnhurst & Nerone, 2001; Darling-Wolf, 2001; Gibbs & Warhover, 2002; Hall, 1981; Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996). In print and online newspapers, what mug shots do particularly well is to foreground the interpersonal aspect of a story. This is a function they share with many other news photographs (e.g. Hall, 1981). Also like other news photographs, they:

- have high impact and can be ‘read’ quickly (cf. Griffin, 2004)
- reduce complex events and issues to the persons involved with them (cf. Hall, 1981; Machin & Niblock, 2006)
- increase the salience of their associated verbal story on the page (cf. Griffin, 2004)
- provide readers with recognition of, and more importantly proximity to the social actors in the image, so a collective visual memory of ‘who’ (if not ‘what happened’) can develop (cf. Barnhurst & Nerone, 2001; Hall, 1981; Trivundza, 2004)
- provide a hook, or lead-in point to a story (cf. Bicket & Packer, 2004; Griffin, 2004)

• are selected and ‘authored’ in a process which is both institutional and ideological (cf. Barthes, 1977; Darling-Wolf, 2004; Hall, 1981; Wardle, 2007, p. 265).

In this way, while they contribute little to the reporting of news events, they contribute significantly to the commercial and ideological imperatives of the news institution which the discourse of newspapers serves. The use of mug shots in thumbnail images on home pages is discussed in Chapter 8.

Over time, the visual design of newspapers has changed (section 2.4.2 following), and so too have the roles of photographs in newspapers. Photojournalism has always been an interpretive practice, and in something of a return to the 19th and early 20th centuries, recent technological developments have made it easier to ‘author’ news images in ways which were not practical, even not possible before the advent of digital photography (Huxford, 2001; Schwartz, 2003; Zavoina & Davidson, 2002; cf. Bicket & Packer, 2004). More fundamentally though, as the distinction between information and entertainment in newspapers (and between broadsheet and tabloid) has become less of a dichotomy and more of a cline (Ursell, 2001; cf. Bicket & Packer, 2004), the visual discourse of photojournalism has reflected this shift. Some broadsheets have begun to use images in novel ways in reporting hard news (see Caple 2007, 2008), in addition to the more flexible practices in image construction and use already common in broadsheet feature stories (e.g. Economou,

Indeed, the boundaries between press photography and photography in other fields have been challenged by Hartley (2007), and by Hartley & Rennie (2004) who argue that the boundaries between photojournalism and fashion photography, both in terms of practices and the images these practices generate, are not necessarily as distinct as historically portrayed:

in the context of the practice and study of photojournalism, we argue against the habit of assigning photojournalism to the province of news and fashion photography to that of commercial consumption. Fashion and photojournalism should not be understood as distinct or opposing forms. Equally we want to blur the habitual boundaries that are drawn between ‘truth’ (science and journalism) and ‘beauty’ (art and entertainment); and between public (governmental and masculine) and private (commercial and female) domains. (Hartley & Rennie, 2004, p. 461; italics in original)

This questioning of the fundamental boundaries of photojournalism is particularly relevant to thumbnail images on online newspaper home pages, and this is taken up in Chapter 8.

In summary, newspapers have a long history of using images, with woodcut illustrations the dominant form up until the early 20th century, and the gradual rise of news photography in the decades after the introduction of the half-tone image the late 19th century. The move to the online medium has seen further changes to the ways in which news images are used, and this is investigated in Chapter 8.
2.4.2 Print newspaper design

As discussed in section 1.1.2 above, graphic design has only existed as a profession for a few decades. Despite this, the visual design of newspapers has been an expression of their social purpose and production practices since their emergence, and the ideology of newspapers has always been construed visually as well as verbally (see Barnhurst, 1994).

The importance of visual design was recognised by printers from early times. In the 18th century:

The newspaper’s appearance reflected its impartiality as a public print and open press. Its columns were broad, calm, and orderly; its text typography undifferentiated; its items unheadlined. Everything about its appearance announced that it was the reader’s job, not the newspaper’s, to make sense of the world. Its pages, flat and plain, set a stage for others to act upon.

The look of the newspaper also cued its readers as gentlemen. Printers congratulated each other on the neatness of the productions. They gravitated toward typefaces that looked bookish, and they put together newspapers meant to be read like books. (Barnhurst & Nerone, 2001, p. 39)

In the 20th century, visual design found a central place in the institutionalised practices of newspaper production (even if this space was ceded grudgingly - see below). In addition to recognition by newsworkers, the importance of visual communication in achieving the ideological and commercial objectives of newspapers has also been increasingly recognised in studies of the mass media.

One approach that has been taken to studying news design in newspapers is to examine design features such as headlines, images, graphics, column width, number of columns, number of stories on the front page, colour, font type, and the justification of type. Studies which focus on such features have documented changes in newspaper
design, such as the rise of the ‘modernist’ paper, with which the metaphor of ‘design as map’ has been associated. So-called ‘modernist’ newspaper design became:

nearly universal in the print industry of the past 20-30 years. The modernist layout is a road map in which the route markers are headline size, dominant imagery, story placement and story length. It is the designer’s job to make sure readers do not stray from the correct editorial route. (Lowrey, 1999, p. 14; see Barnhurst & Nerone, 2001)

Utt & Pasternack’s (2003) survey of 300 newspapers (130 of whom responded) follows on from their previous studies of front page design (published in 1984, 1989, and 1994). Their longitudinal study looks at the design practices of a large number of newspapers, and their 2003 findings are based on responses from “the newspaper’s staff member who was primarily responsible and/or most knowledgeable of the layout and design of both the print and the online editions” (p. 52). They find that approximately three in five of the responding newspapers had re-designed their front page in the five years prior to the survey; that almost 30% of responding newspapers had a front page designed by someone who did not have a journalism degree; that the use of a ‘modular’ front page design had increased significantly over the twenty years prior to the survey to become almost universal among their sample;10 that almost all newspapers use colour photos; and that print front pages of newspapers tend to vary from day to day, but that the dominant photo tends to be placed in the middle of the page regardless.

Coleman (2000) investigates whether the visual communication of news in public journalism differs from that in non-public journalism. Public journalism is defined as “an approach designed to address issues that readers say are important, rather than only those issues identified by experts” (p. 18). The study uses content

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10 See Barnhurst & Nerone (2001, pp. 213-6) who reject this use of the term modular.
analysis of six newspapers over one week. The rationale behind Coleman’s study is that the choice to ‘do’ (or not) public journalism drives content. Because content supposedly drives design, it would seem that the choice to do public journalism would lead to differences in design between public journalism and non-public journalism newspapers.

In Coleman’s study, the ways in which various visual devices were used are studied in terms of their content (e.g. stage-managed photographs versus genuine photographs of non-elite actors; the inclusion of boxes with summaries of key issues and areas of ‘common ground’), and differences are identified between public journalism newspapers and non-public journalism newspapers (some statistically significant). Overall though, “there is not enough significance [in the differences] to say that it represents a radical departure from non-public journalism” (Coleman, 2000, p. 34).

Studies such as those by Utt & Pasternack, and Coleman attempt to get at the importance of design by quantifying and comparing readily identifiable features of the visual communication of news. Another approach is to look at design from the perspective of news producers. Machin & Niblock (2006) include a case study of design changes of a British regional daily newspaper, the *Liverpool Daily Post*, including a semiotic analysis of the changes and interview data from the design editor involved.
The design editor of the Liverpool Daily Post came into the role as someone who had worked in newspapers as a sub-editor, reporter, and designer. In response to market research, he was to ‘retarget’ and ‘rebrand’ the newspaper.

Gary’s job was to redesign the look of the newspaper in order to change [the perceptions of the target audience as identified in the market research]. In other words, the newspaper had to visually communicate the kinds of values associated with a particular lifestyle. (Machin & Niblock, 2006, p. 150)

This led to a number of changes to the newspaper, including the use of supplements, changes to the masthead, changes in fonts, colour, paper, spacing, arrangement, and images, all intended to construe “a set of core values. These core values are part of the discourses of the new professional, self-conscious consumerist, city dweller ... . The formula is very successful and has boosted circulations” (Machin & Niblock, 2006, p. 158; cf. Machin & Thornborrow, 2006; Raeymaeckers, 2004).

De Vries, a newspaper designer, characterises newspaper design as cultural change (2008), and provides a first-hand account of the redesign of the South China Morning Post. He provides a technician’s perspective on aspects of design such as colour and font, combined with a professional’s perspective on the cultural and institutional processes of newspaper production and visual design. He identifies “three spheres of design discipline that [his company] use[s] in a typical design project.

“1. Technical Print and Typographic know-how and specialist, detailed knowledge and specification

“2. Editorial Understanding Content and the creation of devices and components to benefit the reader

“3. Systems Examining and rebuilding work processes and relationships” (de Vries, 2008, Figure 2, p. 7).
His paper demonstrates the centrality of design to communicating the news, and how the design of newspaper pages is fundamentally related to the practices and values of the news institution.

Another ‘insider’ account of visual design is given by Evans (1976). For Evans, a former editor of The Times, newspaper design is communication, and he provides a news editor’s perspective on the ways in which layout, typography, image, and the wording of stories should work together, looking at a number of newspapers and their development over time.

In his book, Evans stresses that the design of print newspapers is first and foremost functional. Decisions regarding the size of the page, the length of stories, the positioning of sections within the newspaper, and font type are related to the readers and their situation, and to the mission of the newspaper and its content (Evans, 1976, pp. 1-3). He also identifies a number of classificatory schemes which are useful background for the analysis which follows in later chapters.

For instance, Evans identifies two kinds of front pages. The first is the signal-and-text front page where a selection of the most important stories of the newspaper are placed on the front page with extended text from their story (i.e. ‘supporting text’). Their relative importance of these stories is signalled by design features such as headline size, story size, and positioning on the page (1976, p. 57). The second is the poster front page, which publishes as many important stories on the front page as
possible with headline, or headline and lead only (p. 58). Front pages can be a combination of the two, in which case they typically dedicate “a part of the front page every day to encapsulate the main news and features presented inside. The device is called a summary index in the United States” (p. 60, bold added).

In addition to front pages, Evans discusses page layout more generally, and identifies a range of devices by which relative importance of stories on the page can be signalled.

The reader needs signals to indicate priorities - but look at the signals that are available:

- Page - front or inside, etc.
- Position on page
- Length of text
- Style of text setting
- Size of headline
- Weight of headline
- Spread of headline
- ‘Colour’ elements, i.e. not in the chromatic sense but the contrast of blacks, greys and whites in type, reverse blocks, pictures.

It is wasteful and distracting for a designer to use all these signals. There should be economy and there should be consistency. (Evans, (1976, p. 66)

He also describes a range of layout options available to newspaper page designers:

- static (the same layout everyday) or dynamic (layout changes everyday)
- modular (consistent shapes - square or rectangular on the page) or irregular (story shapes are interlocking in a jigsaw manner)
- vertical layout (the oldest and most basic use of the page grid, with stories appearing in vertical columns)

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11 Ironically, front pages dominated by a single image with minimal verbiage of a single story are examples of signal-and-text front pages in this scheme.
• horizontal layout (stories span columns in an overall page design where stories are ‘stacked’ upon each other, rather than appearing in columns)

• quadrant / diagonal (pages are divided into four quarters, each of which has an attention-getting device such as a headline, image, or panel)

• frame layout (the right and left column on the page are solid text, and therefore work with the masthead to ‘frame’ the page visually)

• brace layout (headlines are visually supported by shorter headlines beneath them, like a brace supporting a shelf)

• circus layout (visually sensational, combining a variety of visually arresting devices).

These categories provide the kind of analysis semioticians can build on, as Evans sets out the meaningful choices in expression, with discussion of the day to day realities of news production and dissemination that impact on such choices.

Barnhurst & Nerone’s (2001) book-length treatment of the form of news is similarly grounded in the meaningful choices made in newspaper design over time. Their work spans the design of print newspapers in the US in the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries, and proceeds on the premise “that form embodies the imagined relationship of a medium to its society and polity” (p. 3). For them, the form of a newspaper is:

the persisting visible structure of the newspaper, the things that make the New York Times, for example, recognizable as the same newspaper day after day although its content changes. Form includes the things that are traditionally labelled layout and design and typography; but it also includes habits of illustration, genres of reportage, and schemes of departmentalization. Form is everything a newspaper does to present the look of the news. (Barnhurst & Nerone, 2001, p.3)
Barnhurst & Nerone (2001) relate the design of newspapers in different historical periods to social conditions. For instance, the consistent formatting and typography in colonial newspapers, the chronological structure of stories, and the overall ordering of stories reflected the printers’ expectation that everything in the newspaper would be read, and that the reader could make sense of the relative importance of stories without guidance from the form of the newspaper (pp. 39-40). Similarly, the political role taken on by newspapers during the American Revolution led to a change in format to a larger page to accommodate their new ideological functions alongside their existing commercial and cultural roles (pp. 44-5). Changes such as these, and others in the 20th century (see below) evolved together with changes in the practices of news workers, including the division of labour and the social and spatial geography of newsrooms (Nerone & Barnhurst, 2003).

While taking the role of technology, and advances in technology as given, Barnhurst & Nerone on the whole reject the idea that technology is the driver behind developments in the visual design of news. They identify two key motivations behind the changes in the visual design of newspapers in the 20th century. The first is the broad cultural shift to modernism, and the second is the move to professionalism in the newspaper industry.

New techniques, extrasocial and disembodied, did not simply invade and transform the newspaper. The introduction of technology occurred adventitiously. Newspaper publishers resisted the risks and costs of change, but by invoking technology editors and designers made change seem inevitable. Technology took the blame, removing the onus from those urging change and pressing those who resisted. The rationale itself was an artifact of the internal politics of newspaper publishing. Technology supplied an important element in the background, but was not the cause of newspaper change. (Barnhurst & Nerone, 2001, p. 214; cf. Cooke, 2003)
Studies such as those by Evans (1976), Barnhurst & Nerone (2001), Nerone & Barnhurst (2003), and the perspective of de Vries (2008) relate the social and institutional conditions of production and reception of newspaper texts to the technical details of visual news presentation such as those reported by Utt & Pasternack (2003) and Coleman (2000). That is, they provide an explanation of the relation between context and text, and in this way they resonate with the theoretical approach to analysing the visual communication of news that is pursued in this thesis.

Based on their grammar of visual design (see Chapter 3), Kress & van Leeuwen (1996, 1998) take a social semiotic approach to the design of newspaper pages and the meaning of composition. Newspaper pages may use a number of compositional techniques, including triptychs, or having a number of minor items around a visually central element, instantiating a Centre-Margin paradigm in Kress & van Leeuwen’s terms. Front pages which are relatively static, signal-and-text pages (typically with a modular layout) in Evans’ (1976) terms (see above) instantiate Given-New (left-right) and Ideal-Real (top bottom) paradigms in Kress & van Leeuwen’s analysis. Dynamic, poster front pages (which may have modular or irregular layout) do not draw on such paradigms, and the relative chaos in their composition means that the relative salience of items on the page takes on greater importance than composition (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, p. 229).

Drawing on the work of Kress & van Leeuwen and on the research reported in this thesis, Knox, Patpong & Piriyasilpa (2010) study the front pages of two Thai-language print newspapers, the Thairath and the Matichon, each of which occupies a different position on the broadsheet-tabloid spectrum. Both newspapers use poster
front pages with a seemingly random design of ‘visual blocks’ which contain headlines, images, leads, advertisements, and the newspaper masthead in a configuration which changes on a daily basis. At first glance, the ‘chaotic’ design principle underlying each newspaper’s front page is remarkably similar. But differences in the use of colour between the two newspapers are consistent with differences in content (both language and image), reflecting important differences in the choices each newspaper makes in the construing the news in spite of similarities in the layout of their respective front pages. The differences and similarities between the pages are related to the community of readers of each newspaper, and illustrate the fundamentally multi-semiotic nature of print newspaper discourse.

In conclusion to this section, the visual presentation of news on the page has traditionally been viewed as secondary to the ‘real’ business of writing the news.

Everybody agrees that we are living in an increasingly visualized world, yet few newspapers seem interested in understanding how to really harness modern visual communication. They are most likely to still think of the visual as a decorative afterthought to the content. (de Vries, 2008, p. 5)

And ‘staying out of the way’ of the words is still seen as the hallmark of good newspaper design (cf. Evans, 1976; Utt & Pasternack, 2003, pp. 49-50). As the design editor of the Liverpool Daily Post commented to Machin & Niblock (2006, p. 149): “Pages must project the stories in the best possible way. The best page design should be indiscernible to the reader”.

From the standpoint of the early 21st century, such traditional views of ‘visual journalism’ (see Machin & Niblock, 2006) may be surprising, especially when one considers the importance of the visual design of tabloids to their successful rise in the
early 20th century (section 2.4.1 above), and the centrality of visual design to the identity of all newspapers and to their construal of the news.

However, media professionals and media researchers are paying increasing attention to the design of newspapers. The importance of visual design is institutionalised in the changing role of sub-editors, the emergence of new institutional roles such as design editors, an increasing role for newspaper design consultants, and the widespread re-design or ‘re-branding’ of newspapers to ensure that their visual identity is consistent with the expectations of their target audience (Machin & Niblock, 2006, pp. 138-141; see also de Vries, 2008). As in other domains, it is becoming untenable to produce, critique, describe, or research newspaper discourse without taking account of the ways in which news is communicated visually; a situation which points to the need for theoretical accounts of such communication that can ultimately be applied by researchers, practitioners, and educators alike.

2.4.3 Visualising news in print: Conclusion

Historically, language is the institutionally dominant semiotic resource in the print newspaper world. In the early 20th century as tabloids increasingly used image and layout to distinguish themselves from the broadsheet press, the so-called ‘quality’ newspapers bemoaned the intrusion of image into the text-dominated world of journalism, even as they were forced to adopt it (Bicket & Packer, 2004). In newsrooms today, the visual aspects of news stories are often still the last thing to be considered, and staff responsible for design are often physically and institutionally
isolated from authoring and decision-making processes (de Vries, 2008). ‘Prestigious’ newspapers still pride themselves primarily on the written quality of their stories.

Yet the ‘rise of visual culture’ (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996; see also Bicket & Packer, 2004) has forced newspaper professionals and researchers to take explicit account of how news is communicated visually on the pages of newspapers, something which has always been central to newspaper discourse, whether explicitly acknowledged or not.

2.5 Re-making newspapers: A pixel perspective

In this section, research which investigates online newspapers, and particularly the visual design of news in online newspapers, is reviewed. Section 2.5.1 gives an overview of some areas of investigation into online newspapers. Section 2.5.2 focuses on research into the visual.

2.5.1 Researching online newspapers

As discussed in Chapter 1, online newspapers emerged on the world wide web in the early to mid-1990s, and have quickly grown to become a major feature of the mass media landscape. They have been researched from a number of perspectives, generating a number of monographs (e.g. Boczkowski, 2004; Allan, 2006) and edited volumes (e.g. Li, 2006b; Paterson & Domingo, 2006; Salwen, Garison & Driscoll, 2005a) in addition to numerous book chapters and journal articles.
Ethnographic studies of online newsrooms have shown that there are diverse practices in producing online newspapers, from integrated newsrooms where the online and print editions are considered complementary media for the same news production processes, to institutions where online and print newsrooms are physically separated and populated by different staff (e.g. Boczkowski, 2004a, 2004b; S. Martin, 1998; Paterson & Domingo, 2008; cf. Arant & Anderson, 2001; Nerone & Barnhurst, 2003; Ursell, 2001).

Closely related to considerations of newsrooms are examinations of the roles and practices of journalists in online newspapers (Deuze, 2004), which suggest that as online journalists change what they do, the nature of their profession is also changing (e.g. Deuze, Neuberger & Paulussen, 2004; Singer, 2003a). As the roles of online journalism are in flux, so too are the relationships between journalists and readers as journalists write in new fora (such as blogs), and as their work is immediately comparable with alternative reports and accounts of the same events, once inaccessible to the reading public (Allan, 2006; cf. Singer, 2005).

Smith Ekstrand (2002) looks at the relationship between online newspapers and their readers through the lens of the legalistic user agreements included on newspaper websites. “Online distribution changes the conditions under which news consumers may be informed about their world. Where previously readers bought their news, now they must access it - and in the process, agree to the provisions spelled out in user agreements” (Smith Ekstrand, 2002, p. 612). Changes in the legal relations between newspapers and readers are also found in online newspapers’ practices in the use of “cookies”, in information collection, and in the disclosure of privacy policies as
identified by Hong et al. (2005). A significant minority of online users in one survey reported by Salwen, Garrison & Driscoll (2005b) are concerned about such issues. Together, these changes in legal - and therefore social - status create a new relationship between newspaper and reader, and the potential ramifications - legal, commercial, and social - are far-reaching (cf. Driscoll, 2005).

Research into the readers of online newspapers uses a range of methods to explore a range of questions. Salwen, Garrison & Driscoll’s (2005b) ‘baseline surveys’ investigated who did and did not consume online news, how and why, using five national telephone surveys in the US in 2001 and 2002. Online news consumers tended to be younger and more educated than non-web users, and have a higher income; appeared not to be influenced to buy goods and services by online advertising; favoured online news because it is “easy and convenient”; and preferred national and international news over local news (though Singer’s (2001) content analysis of six Colorado newspapers found that their online editions are “much more” local in content than their print editions). Another telephone survey by Stempel & Hargrove’s (2004) found that people who use the internet do not necessarily use it as a news source, and that many internet users prefer print newspapers and television for news. Salwen, Garrison & Driscoll, (2005b) also found a preference for television over online news, though not for print over online. Wu & Bechtel (2002) followed the daily traffic on the New York Times website, and compared it against content analyses of the top stories broadcast on CNN and ABC each day for one year. The authors interpret the findings as suggesting that readers turn to particular online newspapers for particular kinds of stories (e.g. accessing the New York Times for international news, but not for crime stories).
Research has also examined the ways in which online newspapers use the affordances of the medium of the world wide web in news reporting. A number of studies have set out to investigate so-called non-linear stories, which are:

part of a larger news narrative made up of layers of related text and audio-visual content that are hyperlinked together. This format sets up an “interactive reading process” in which readers actively choose their own paths through the narrative by accessing its constituent parts nonlinearly, in any order that suits them. (Massey, 2004, p. 96)

Though many curricula for online journalism encourage non-linear stories (Lowrey, 2004; Massey, 2004), Massey found them to be used relatively little in a content analysis of 38 US newspapers, and Lowrey found little or no benefit to readers in a controlled experiment comparing readers’ responses to ‘linear’ and ‘non-linear’ stories (cf. Engebresten, 2000; Vargo et al., 2000).

Singer’s (2003b) survey of editors found that online newspapers covering the 2000 presidential election in the US took advantage of a number of affordances of the medium, including using discussion boards, including extra content (that simply could not be included in print due to limitations of space), and updating information rapidly in order to ‘beat television’. In contrast, Dimitrova et al.’s (2003) content analysis of the reporting of the 2001 execution of Timothy McVeigh in 15 US online newspapers “showed that online newspapers are not taking full advantage of the Internet in general and hypertext in particular” (p. 412).

The sample of studies of online newspapers discussed in this sub-section - and there are many others - gives an indication of the kinds of research questions and methodological approaches in the literature dedicated to this relatively recent social
phenomenon. A number of studies reviewed in this section touch on aspects of news design such as ‘interactivity’, the use of hyperlinks in story-design, and the use of multimedia. These factors are clearly related to the visual design of news, but this has not been their main focus.

2.5.2 Visual communication and online newspapers

Of more direct interest to the research reported in this thesis are studies examining the visual communication of news in online newspapers, which have also taken a variety of methodological approaches to addressing a variety of questions.

Eyetracking studies have been used to study the impact of visual design on reading online newspapers, by measuring the eye movements and eye fixations of readers on screens, sometimes supplemented with questionnaires, retrospection, and/or semiotic analysis. Together with eyetracking studies of print newspapers (e.g. Holsanova, Holmqvist & Rahm, 2006; Holmqvist & Wartenberg, 2005; Poynter’s 1990 EyeTrack study - see Stark Adam, Quinn & Edmonds, 2007), eyetracking studies of online newspapers provide empirical data which aims to document reading behaviour, and indicate which aspects of design attract readers’ attention first, and for longest, and also what ‘reading paths’ their eyes follow on the page.

Barthelson (2002) studied the reading behaviour of 12 subjects, using a survey, eyetracking measurement with two newspapers, retrospection from the subjects using video data of their eye-tracked reading behaviour, and interviews. The top-left of the page first attracted the subjects’ attention in both newspapers, and text attracted their attention before images, though layout affected order of reading the
The subjects scanned newsbites (the short headline+lead+hyperlink stories found on home pages) on the home page and read few stories, but those that they ‘followed’ to story pages were read in full. Subjects followed their own interests in choosing which stories to follow, but typical ‘hard news’ stories (accidents, disasters and the like) were commonly followed by all subjects (see Holmqvist et al., 2003 for the same finding).

Reading behaviours varied between the subjects, and for some individual subjects when interacting with different texts. But when asked about their purposes for reading online newspapers, the subjects “unanimously claimed that the purpose is to quickly find out if anything has happened. This results in a ruthless hunt for interesting headlines and briefs” (Barthelson, 2002, p. 19). Based on their reports, the subjects’ average time spent at reading online newspapers is six minutes, and is done when breaks arise in their computer-based work.

In order to investigate differences in the ways that readers read print and online newspapers, Holmqvist et al. (2003) used eyetracking measurements and post-experiment questionnaires. In their first experiment, 12 subjects read two online newspapers, 15 subjects read one print newspaper, and 14 subjects read a different print newspaper (a total of 41 subjects). The subjects reading online newspapers read them for a considerably shorter time than the subjects reading the print newspapers. The authors found that the subjects reading online newspapers read less and scanned more than those reading print newspapers.
Their second experiment, intended to explain the findings of the first, required 12 subjects to read two online newspapers for 5 minutes each, and also collected retrospection data from the subjects using video data of their eyetracked reading behaviour. They found that the subjects scanned home pages, and then read stories on story pages. They conclude in part that:

scanning a [print] newspaper is made in search of entry points. When no interesting entry points are found, the reader does not continue to scan the fold but turns the page. For the folds with the lowest reading rates (below 15%), this happens after 3–5 seconds.

The non-existent correlation with net papers shows that if you do not find an interesting entry point in a net paper, you cannot turn the page. You have to keep scanning. Net paper readers choose their own path through the paper, and the majority of net paper pages are never seen. (Holmqvist et al., 2003, p. 668)

Layout on story pages in online newspapers is far less important than page layout in print newspapers: the links and newsbites on home pages are the entry points for online newspaper readers (pp. 668-9).

Zambarbieri, Carniglia & Robino’s (2008) study required 14 subjects to read two pages (the home page and one story page) from two online newspapers. Due to the design of the experiment, the findings were limited, though subjects tended to scan the home page and read the story page in greater depth, as might be expected.

The most well-known and most often cited eyetracking studies of online newspapers are the Poynter studies: the Stanford-Poynter Project (Lewenstein et al., 2000), EyeTrack III (Outing & Ruel, 2004), and EyeTrack07 (Stark Adam, Quinn & Edmonds, 2007). The first of these studies involved 67 subjects in 2 US cities, who read their own bookmarked sites as they wanted, in real time, switching between sites as they wished. The second study used 46 participants who read five mock newspaper
websites (populated with real stories), completed tasks to test their comprehension and recall of stories using different visual designs, and completed a short demographic survey. The third study involved 605 participants from four US cities, who read one of two online newspapers, or one of two broadsheets, or one of two tabloids as published on the day of the research. A second task required subjects to read a mock story in order to measure comprehension and recall (there were three print and three online mocks of the same verbal story).

The different designs have led to some degree of variation in the findings across these three studies. However, there are important findings from these three studies which are consistent with the other eyetracking studies reviewed above. These include the findings that readers of online newspapers tend to:

- choose relatively few stories to read, but do read those stories that they follow beyond the home page in depth (Barthelson, 2002; Holmqvist et al., 2003; Stark Adam, Quinn & Edmonds, 2007; Zambarbieri, Carniglia & Robino, 2008)
- read in depth crime and disaster stories, and other stories specific to their personal interests (Barthelson, 2002; Holmqvist et al., 2003; Lewenstein et al., 2000)
- on the home page, start top-left and move down, at least initially (Barthelson, 2002; Outing & Ruel, 2004; Zambarbieri, Carniglia & Robino, 2008)
- look at text (including navigation menus) before images (Barthelson, 2002; Lewenstein et al., 2000; Stark Adam, Quinn & Edmonds, 2007; Outing & Ruel, 2004).
Eyetracking studies (particularly the Poynter studies) are often cited in the literature on online newspapers, and appear also to be well-known to media institutions (see Appendix C). While they obviously provide important information for researchers and practitioners alike, measuring eye fixations does not equate with measuring reading (cf. Alderson, 2000), nor does it describe the meanings in online newspapers and how these meanings are communicated (cf. Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001). The findings from eyetracking studies make an important contribution to our understanding of the emerging genres of online news and how readers interact with them, but there are other research perspectives on the design of online news that provide us with insights that eyetracking studies cannot.

Similar to eyetracking studies, an interest in ‘news retrieval efficiency’ drives Li’s (2002) content analysis of five US online newspapers. Efficiency was operationalised “by recording the options available for readers to select news items, steps to access a news story, time needed to retrieve the content of a story and the amount of information retrieved through certain steps and during a certain period of time” (Li, 2002, p. 42). Li uses the findings to compare the relative efficiency of each website. “The newspapers with a higher level of retrieval efficiency were more likely to offer readers more choices and a larger volume of information while demanding less time for information retrieval” (p. 46). As acknowledged by the author though, the approach taken in this study (which aligns well with web useability studies - see Chapter 5) makes assumptions about the relation between the methodology on one hand, and reader expectations and practices on the other which cannot be verified.

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12 It should be pointed out that the authors of the eyetracking studies reviewed here make no such claims for their research.
As with studies into the print medium, studies of online newspapers have used surveys of the news producers to investigate news design. Utt & Pasternack (2003) surveyed editors about their online editions (in addition to print editions - see section 2.5.1 above), and found that of the 130 respondents:

69.7 [percent] use a dominant photo; 66.9 percent use a different typeface from the text typeface for both cutlines and bylines; 58.9 percent use the same flag as is used in the print edition; 40.3 percent change the size of the typeface for all headlines; 32 percent set the type in columns; 31.3 percent justify the body text; ... 16.5 percent use a dominant info graphic [and] 82.1 percent use a left column navigator bar with links to major content areas within the site. (pp. 56-7)

On the whole, the editors seemed relatively dissatisfied with online newspapers in general, and their own online editions in particular.

In their content analysis of over 80 online newspapers in the US from 1997 to 2003, Greer & Mensing (2004) found:

online newspapers are offering more of everything - content, multimedia, interactivity and revenue-generating features. ... Second, size matters for online newspapers. While medium and large newspapers have become more similar, small papers lag behind. (p. 108)

Lin & Jeffres’ (2001) content analysis of the websites of newspapers, radio stations, and television stations (a total of 422 websites in all) examines content elements (e.g. news vs advertising), communication elements (e.g. email links and bulletin boards), and technical elements (e.g. hyperlinks, search engines, photos and photo galleries). They find that content does vary according to media type (newspaper vs. radio vs. television), but not according to market size.
In a study conducted in 1998 in the relatively early years of the world wide web and online newspapers, Lowrey (1999) held interviews with four newspaper creative directors. The focus of this study was on identifying issues rather than documenting textual practices (or reader behaviour). The issues in online newspaper design identified by the designers in Lowrey’s study are the importance of credibility, shorter texts, speed, and simplicity (the directors were very mindful of the issues of bandwidth, screen resolution, and CPU speeds, which were much more limiting in 1998 than they are in 2009). The designers believed that content should drive design, had differing views on the importance of interactivity (however conceived), but three of the four agreed that ‘control’ should be shared between the newspaper and reader (the other believed that the reader should have ultimate control).

Other research into online newspapers has used methods similar in some cases to the studies reviewed above, but has sought to account for the social significance of online newspapers and their emergence. In popular discourses, the emergence of online newspapers (and the internet more broadly) are understood in relation to the ‘rise of the visual’ (section 1.1.2). While these technological and social developments are obviously related, these relations are easily (and often) oversimplified and over-hyped (Barnhurst & Nerone, 2001, p. 295).

The possibilities for video, sound and animation that online newspapers offer, and the ability to include as many photographs as desired, have obviously contributed to the common perception that online newspapers are somehow ‘more visual’ than their print counterparts:
as one photo editor described it to me in citing the advantages of his newspaper’s Web site over the paper itself: “more pictures” and “all of them in colour.” (Perlmutter, 2003, p. 10)

And the use of visual story-telling media such as video, slide shows, and still photo galleries is undoubtedly of increasing importance to online newspapers. As a senior editor at the *Sydney Morning Herald* explained:

one of the most popular things on our site when we do them are our photo galleries where we gather together a whole range of pictures you can flick through and look at, and also slide shows, which are the ones which have pictures that move through automatically, and those slide shows sometimes have music, or they might have a voice-over to them. Those elements are very very popular on our site. So while they may not be displayed on our front page, ... those pictorial elements of the site and obviously videos are very popular. (interview with author, July 2007 - see Appendix C)

Overall though, impressions that online newspapers are more visually oriented than their print counterparts do not appear to be borne out by the evidence available to date. A number of studies have examined the use of images in online newspapers, and found, variously, that of the newspapers in their respective samples, the majority do use a dominant photograph on their home page (Utt & Pasternack, 2003); but more than half use exactly the same photos as in the print edition (Arant & Anderson, 2001); and there are in general few images (far fewer than in the same newspapers’ print editions), and those that are run are smaller (Barnhurst, 2002). Anecdotally, the situation appears to have changed since these research papers were published, and future research may find that the use of images in online newspapers has increased. Certainly, the findings presented in Chapter 8 indicate that at least in some online newspapers, the use of images has increased over time on home pages, and thumbnail images in particular are used extensively on some home pages. But visual design has always been central to print news (section 2.4 above), and there are arguments that the
flexibility in visual design afforded by print is actually restricted by the online medium (see below).

Arguing against simplified, popular accounts, Barnhurst & Nerone (2001) see the visual design of online newspapers as a historical development, best understood in relation to prevailing social and economic conditions. Though their focus is primarily on print newspapers (online newspapers only existed for around six of the three hundred years their work covers), they nonetheless argue that online newspapers are related to print newspapers as advertising is to journalism (in a promotional capacity), and also as VCRs are to film theatres (in a supplementary capacity): while not spelling the demise of print, online newspapers may be part of the demise of modernism in newspaper design.

Their description of the visual design of online newspapers, while not supported by the depth of analysis of other aspects of design dealt with in their monograph, still bears quoting at length:

newspaper sites on the Web align with pushy salesmanship of the supermarket tabloid and the new, emphatic broadsheet. ... They all adopt a promotional vocabulary to push events at consumers, selling their moral charge rather than the considered discourse of civic culture. Perhaps they point to a new, postmodern formation. In place of the coffeehouse metaphor, they propose the discotheque. Bright colours, many small items, a disorderly and disordered abundance, and howling diction reign. Consumers distractedly dance along with the pirouetting crowd or watch in stunned amazement. (Barnhurst & Nerone, 2001, pp. 296-7)

Other studies have had an explicit focus on the similarities and differences in print and online newspapers. Barnhurst’s (2002) content analysis of three US newspapers (one national, one regional, one local) looks at these online newspapers in relation to their respective print counterparts. His findings suggest that the
communicative potential of online newspapers is far from realised. Barnhurst argues that corporations are colonising the virtual space of the world wide web for their news institutions, constructing their online newspapers as the place for geographically distant readers to access information about a given place (e.g. the New York Times for the US), while at the same time building relatively ‘leaky vessels’ that encourage local readers to buy print editions. His analysis of factors such as placement of stories, source (e.g. newspaper staff or wire), typography, types of links, and images leads him to conclude that:

The patterns in online content reiterate the importance of economic concerns and corporate control in the structure and form of newspaper web editions. The printed newspaper is still the true home of daily journalism, with better imagery and user-friendliness, although journalists appear to be pushing for web editions that serve readers better and provide the journalists themselves with more control over the use of their work. (Barnhurst, 2002, p. 486)

Like Barnhurst, Bateman and colleagues (Bateman, 2008; Bateman, Delin & Henschel, 2007) compare the design of online newspaper home pages with the front pages of their print editions. Their methodology draws on genre theory and systemic functional semiotic theory (SFS - see Chapter 3), as well as the information design approach of Waller (e.g. 1982, 1985). Bateman, Delin & Henschel (2007) demonstrate that online newspaper home pages vary in the extent to which they are similar or different to the front pages of their print editions. While the conventions of newspaper design have been shared between authors and audiences over centuries, the conventions of online newspaper design are still emerging and in a state of relative flux.

Constraints set by production processes and the medium of the world wide web are related to limitations in the design of online newspaper pages, which
accord

ing to Bateman (2008) and Bateman, Delin & Henschel (2007), is less ‘multidimensional’ than the design of their print counterparts (see Chapter 7). Techniques historically employed to differentiate news in print (increasing the number of columns, using different headline sizes and fonts) are constrained by the size and resolution of screens, which restricts the possibilities available to the authors of online newspapers in designing the news (Bateman, Delin & Henschel, 2007). Online newspaper pages are also forced to dedicate a large portion of their space to navigation (and a much larger portion that print newspapers) given the nature of web pages (see Chapter 5).

Bateman and colleagues argue that “the properties of the online newspaper align with very different sets of co-generic texts than might have originally been thought on the basis of its informal classification as a ‘newspaper’” (Bateman, 2008, p. 181). Or, in other words: “Whatever else it is - a dictionary, an encyclopedia, a library, a card catalog, a data network - an electronic newspaper is not a map” (Barnhurst & Nerone, 2001, p. 297). This has fundamental implications for researchers in the way that genres are identified and classified, for readers in the kinds of ‘interpretive schemes’ they bring to reading such texts, but also broader social implications in terms of the social functions of online newspapers and how these functions are realised.

Like Bateman and colleagues, Paganoni (2008) draws on studies in SFS (see Chapter 3) in her study of the Al Jazeera website. Rather than comparing print versus online, Paganoni provides a descriptive analysis comparing the English and Arabic websites of Al Jazeera in order to consider the teaching of critical understanding of
new media in higher education. She concludes in part that “the entire site works as a metaphor for a transnational pan-Arab identity translated for a global market, an identity which is arguably more imagined than real” (p. 345). She argues for the importance of a multimodal perspective in analysing news discourse, and in teaching language learners how to read and use multimodal texts.

While not directly comparing print front pages with online home pages from the same newspapers, Cooke (2003) uses grounded theory methodology to identify historical developments in the visual presentation of news across media. She argues that print front pages, television news presentation, and news website home pages (including those of online newspapers) show a long-term trend towards more ‘modular’ designs, and a ‘visual convergence’ of different kinds of media.

On newspaper front pages and news website home pages, modules departmentalize information and increase the number of points of entry. On television, modules afford viewers simultaneous access to different types of information. This visual convergence, like the previous information design trends that emerged from a culture of information acceleration, reinforces the dynamic relationships that exist between media. (Cooke, 2003, p. 176)

Overall, it is apparent from the literature that the design of news in online newspapers draws on the history of news design from their print counterparts - hardly surprising given the consistency in institutional practices between print and online. At the same time, there are differences in the production processes and the medium of online newspapers when compared to print, and these are leading to differences in the practices of news workers, in the design of online newspapers when compared to print, and in the way readers use these texts. Online news - in its infancy and in a state of flux - is still developing a visual character independent of print news, something to
be expected given that newspaper institutions have been producing newsprint for centuries, and websites for barely 15 years.

2.5.3 Newspapers on screen: Conclusion

Online newspapers have been studied using a range of methodological approaches, in order to address a wide range of questions. Online newspapers are a development of print newspapers in a number of ways. They have grown out of the newsrooms and institutional practices of print newspapers, and the photographers, journalists, editors, and other news workers who produce them have taken their corresponding roles in the production of news print as their starting point. Newsrooms and news production practices are changing, and with them the complex relations between news authors, news audiences, and the texts that mediate these relations, including the visual design of these texts.

2.6 Newspapers: Conclusion

Newspapers are an important and powerful social institution, and have grown into this social role over three-and-a-half centuries. Social and technological developments associated with the emergence of the internet and the world wide web have led to a situation where the social function of print newspapers is in flux, and a new and suddenly ubiquitous kind of text - the online newspaper - has emerged.

Online newspapers are related socially, institutionally, and textually to their print counterparts, but as a relatively new genre in a relatively new medium, their
social functions and discursive practices are still emerging, and therefore relatively unstable at this point of their evolution.

Researchers have studied online newspapers from a range of perspectives, and studies examining their visual design have documented textual practices and reader behaviours, and explored the social significance of the emerging visual discourse of online newspapers.

The current study aims to contribute to this body of work by applying the theoretical tools of social semiotics to the analysis of online newspapers. This theoretical approach has been widely employed in the study of the language of newspapers, but its application to the visual discourse of newspapers has been more limited. Some studies of online newspapers have applied social semiotic theory, but have either drawn on this theory to inform the development of a related analytical framework (Bateman, 2008; Bateman, Delin & Henschel, 2007), or have been relatively limited in their scale, scope, and findings (Paganoni, 2008).

The strength of applying the analytical tools of social semiotics is that they require the researcher to ground their analysis (and therefore their interpretations and explanations) empirically, socially, and theoretically. For this reason, social semiotics - a theory which accounts for text, social context, and the systematic relations between them - can make an important contribution to the study of online newspapers, adding to the body of knowledge as developed from the research perspectives reviewed above. This theoretical and methodological approach, as applied to
researching the three online newspapers in this study, is outlined in the following sections.
Chapter 3: Foundations: Systemic Functional Multimodal Discourse Analysis (SF-MDA)

3.1 Introduction

Systemic Functional Multimodal Discourse Analysis (SF-MDA - Djonov, 2005; O’Halloran, 2007, 2008) is an approach to analysing discourse in the social semiotic tradition. Social semiotics is sometimes used in a broad sense to refer to the study of semiotics which is social (rather than, for example, structural) in orientation (Chandler, 2007; cf. Cranny-Francis et al., 1991). In this thesis, however, its meaning is more closely tied to the work of Halliday and those who have worked with his social-semiotic theory, a theory that is also known as systemic functional theory.

For Halliday, semiotics is not the study of signs, but “the study of sign systems - in other words, ... the study of meaning in its most general sense” (Halliday & Hasan, 1989, p. 4; bold in original). Halliday is a linguist, and the semiotic system with which he has most been concerned is obviously language, though he understands language as interacting with other semiotic systems, and communication as multimodal: “we all the time exchange meanings, and the exchange of meanings is a creative process in which language is one symbolic resource - perhaps the principal one we have, but still one among others” (Halliday, 1978, p. 4). In this light, Halliday’s definition of ‘social semiotic’ can be seen to apply also to semiotic systems other than language:

when I say ‘social-semiotic’, in the first instance, I am simply referring to the definition of a social system, or a culture, as a system of meanings. But I also intend a more specific interpretation of the word ‘social’, to indicate that we are concerned particularly
with the relationships between language and social structure, considering the social structure as one aspect of the social system. (Halliday & Hasan, 1989, p. 4; cf. Eco, 1979, pp. 26-8)

So, in taking a social semiotic approach, the systematic relations between context and text (whatever semiotic systems are at play in the text) is fundamental.

Van Leeuwen (2005a) describes how he and others who study semiotic systems other than language in this tradition have built on the work of Halliday:

who argued that the grammar of a language is not code, not a set of rules for producing correct sentences, but ‘a resource for making meanings’ (1978: 192). In this book, I extend this idea to the ‘grammar’ of other semiotic modes, and define semiotic resources as the actions and artefacts we use to communicate, whether they are produced physiologically - with our vocal apparatus; with the muscles we use to create facial expressions and gestures, etc. - or by means of technologies - with pen, ink and paper; with computer hardware and software; with fabrics, scissors and sewing machines, etc. ... So in social semiotics resources are signifiers, observable actions and objects that have been drawn into the domain of social communication ... . [Their] uses take place in a social context, and this context may either have rules or best practices that regulate how specific semiotic resources can be used, or leave the users relatively free in their use of the resource. (van Leeuwen, 2005a, pp. 3-4)

In this chapter, systemic functional (SF) theory as applied to Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) is described. To begin with, the development of SF-MDA as a field of study is discussed. Context-text relations in SF theory are then considered, followed by paradigmatic meaning and the system/structure axis. Other theoretical principles in SF-MDA are then discussed in turn: rank, metafunction, instantiation, and semogenesis. Finally, intersemiosis (relations between different semiotic systems in texts) is considered.
3.2 The development of SF-MDA

Systemic Functional Linguistics is a functional theory of language. Functional theories of language have been fundamentally challenged by the ‘rise of the visual’ (Chapter 1), and can no longer ignore other semiotic systems, nor the fact that humans draw on a range of semiotic resources when they communicate. In order to describe communication between humans, semiotic systems other than language must be accounted for, both in discourse analysis, and in theories informing such analysis.

Multimodal discourse has been studied from a range of perspectives, many grounded in other disciplines including semiotics (e.g. Barthes, 1977), graphic design (e.g. Barnard, 2005; Hollis, 2001), metaphor (e.g. Forceville, 1996; El Refaie, 2003), information design (e.g. Waller, 1982, 1985), cultural studies (e.g. Schirato & Webb, 2004), and communication studies (see Barnhurst, Vari & Rodriguez, 1994 for review). There is insufficient space to review work from these (and other) disciplines here, but the emergence of SF-MDA needs to be understood in this historical and intellectual context.

SF-MDA refers to research which uses the theoretical principles of SF theory (originally developed in SFL) to:

- model semiotic systems other than language
- analyse texts which instantiate semiotic systems other than language
- analyse texts which instantiate a number of semiotic systems
- theorise the interaction between different semiotic systems in texts.
Chapter Three: SF-MDA

The **systemic functional** (SF) aspect of SF-MDA is explained in subsequent sections.

**Multimodal discourse analysis** (MDA) conducted from a social-semiotic perspective obviously shares a great deal of the terminology and theory of SFL (see Iedema, 2003b, for historical overview). But, as a relatively new area of study, a number of the fundamental concepts of SF-MDA are still debated, including questions of whether (and if so to what extent) the broad social functions of language are the same as those of other semiotic systems, whether (and if so how) other semiotic systems are organised in similar ways to language, and how non-linguistic and multimodal texts can best be transcribed for analysis (Martinec, 2005).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>semiotic resource</td>
<td>resources of meaning such as language, visual images, mathematical symbolism, and architecture which are organised into sign systems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>semiotic system</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mode</td>
<td>the channel of communication: e.g. visual, aural, olfactory, tactile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>modality</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>medium</td>
<td>“the material resources used in the production of semiotic products and events, including both the tools and the materials used (e.g. the musical instrument and air; the chisel and block of wood). They are usually specifically produced for this purpose, not only in culture (ink, paint, cameras, computers), but also in nature (our vocal apparatus).” (Kress &amp; van Leeuwen, 2001, p. 22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>multisemiotic</td>
<td>combining different semiotic resources such as language, image, and music in a communicative act; multisemiotic texts may or may not be multimodal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>multimodal</td>
<td>combining different modes such as visual and aural in a communicative act</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 3.1: Key terms in SF-MDA (following O’Halloran, 2005, p. 20)*

Partly as a result of such questions, the terminology used in the SF-MDA literature is not always consistent. “For example, there is confusion over the use of the terms ‘mode’ versus ‘semiotic’ [as a noun], and, consequently, ‘multimodal’ versus
multisemiotic’” (O’Halloran, 2005, p. 20). Following O’Halloran, various key terms in the SF-MDA literature are given in Table 3.1, with their definitions for this thesis.

In the SF-MDA literature, the term multimodal (including its derivatives) is commonly used as a ‘cover-term’ to mean both multimodal and multisemiotic (see Table 3.1). Thus, the field of MDA includes research into both multimodal and multisemiotic meaning, and it is in this broader sense that the term multimodal and its derivatives are used in this thesis, unless specifically indicated otherwise.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Semiotic system</th>
<th>SF-informed studies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>film</td>
<td>Baldry (2004); Baldry &amp; Thibault (2006); O’Halloran (2004b); Pun (2008); Thibault (1990, 2000); Tseng (2008); van Leeuwen (1991)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>music</td>
<td>Caldwell (2008, 2010); Callaghan &amp; McDonald (2002); van Leeuwen (1999)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mathematics</td>
<td>Lemke (2003b); O’Halloran (1999a, 1999b, 2005)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-D objects</td>
<td>Kress &amp; van Leeuwen (1996); O’Toole (1994)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.2: Some SF-informed studies of different semiotic systems

SF theory has been applied to the study of a range of semiotic systems other than language. A number of these studies are listed in Table 3.2. The work listed in this table is theoretically relevant to the current study, but in this section and the sections that follow, the discussion is delimited to the development of SF theory for visual and graphic communication in two-dimensional, non-timed texts.

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13 This is similar to the term phonology in linguistics, which is commonly used as a cover-term for both phonology and phonetics.

14 The texts analysed for this thesis are multisemiotic, not multimodal in its delimited sense (i.e. they communicate visually, but not for example aurally).

15 In timed texts, like films and pieces of music, the timing (in addition to the sequence) of the unfolding of the text is meaningful, and the text must be ‘read’ in the timing of the author; unlike books
The seminal work in applying SF theory to the visual analysis of such texts was done by Kress & van Leeuwen (e.g. 1996), who describe visual communication in texts such as newspapers, magazines, text books, children’s drawings, and visual art; and also by O’Toole (1994), who describes visual communication in paintings. This work has been so influential in the SF community that Bateman refers to “a ‘post-Kress & van Leeuwen’ world of pervasive multimodality” (2008, p. xix). As a

or images which can be ‘read’ according to the timing of the reader. Timed texts (e.g. video news stories and advertisements) play an increasingly important role in online newspapers, but do not figure prominently in the corpus for this study.
result of such work, it is now common for scholars working in this area to take the view that:

you cannot make meaning that is construable through only one analytically distinguishable semiotic resource system. Even if for many purposes we analytically distinguish the linguistic semiotic system from that of depiction or visual-graphic presentations, and both from others such as the music-sound system or the behavioral-action system, the fact that all signifiers are material phenomena means that their signifying potential cannot be exhausted by any one system of contrasting features for making and analyzing meaning. (Lemke, 2002, p. 302)

This has led to the investigation and multimodal analysis of a wide range of 2-D texts (Table 3.3), the most immediately relevant of which have been discussed in Chapter 2.

Rather than reviewing the body of work in Table 3.3, the sub-sections that follow consider a number of the key theoretical principles of SF-MDA, and their relevance to the current study: context-text relations, paradigmatic meanings and the system/structure axis, rank, metafunction, instantiation, semogenesis, and intersemiosis. In each sub-section, Systemic Functional Linguistics is taken as a starting point, and the theoretical principles developed in the study of the semiotic system of language are then considered in relation to Multimodal Discourse Analysis.

### 3.3 Context-text relations

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) is a social, descriptive theory of language. Its primary architect is Halliday (e.g. 1978, 1985a), though important contributions have been made by collaborators and co-travellers including contributions to grammatical theory (e.g. Henrici, 1981; Huddleston, 1981a, 1981b; Hudson, 1981; Matthiessen,
1995), and to description of textual cohesion and discourse (e.g. Halliday & Hasan, 1976, 1989; Martin, 1992; Martin & Rose, 2003, 2008; Martin & White, 2005). Its applications have included analysis of educational discourse (e.g. Christie, 2002; Christie & Martin, 1997; Halliday & Hasan, 1989; Halliday & Martin, 1993; Foley, 2004, McCabe, O’Donnell & Whittaker, 2007), casual conversation (Egging & Slade, 1997), media discourse (e.g. Caple, 2008; Fowler, 1991; Iedema, Feez & White, 1994; White, 2003), service encounters (e.g. Ventola, 1987), institutional discourse (e.g. Iedema, 2003a, 2007), and clinical and medical discourses (e.g. Fine, 2006; Henderson-Brooks, 2008; Jordens, 2002; Mortensen, 2005), and it has contributed significantly to our understanding of the nature of social action and its mediation through language in each of these spheres.

As a theory, SFL has a number of fundamental principles which collectively distinguish it from other theories of language. The first is that it is a functional theory. That is, language is viewed not (primarily) as a formal system, but one which has evolved with human cultures and societies, playing a central role in the evolution and performance of social functions.

Using language is one of the forms of human life, and speech is immersed in the immediacy of social intercourse. The human body is that region of the world which is the primary field of human experience but it is continuous with the rest of the world. We are in the world and the world is in us. (Firth, 1968, p. 199)

For Firth (whose work Halliday built on), language cannot be viewed separately from its functions in context. Similarly, for SFL, the systematic relationship between context and text is a central part of the theory (see Halliday & Hasan, 1989).
Secondly, SFL is a systemic theory. That is, language is viewed as a system of choices - more accurately, a complex of systems of choices - operating at a number of levels. These systems of choices are fundamental to the theory, both in terms of its conceptualisation of what language is, and also in terms of its methods of describing and analysing language.

One of the things that distinguishes SFL is that it gives priority to paradigmatic relations; it interprets language not as a set of structures but as a network of systems, or interrelated sets of options for making meaning. Such options are not defined by reference to structure; they are purely abstract features, and structure comes in as the means whereby they are put into effect, or ‘realized’. (Halliday, 1994, pp. 15-16)

Viewing language as systems of choices means that SFL takes a paradigmatic perspective on language. The theoretical importance of this paradigmatic perspective is discussed in the sections below. In this section, a brief overview of the functional relation between context and text in the theory is given.

Language has evolved to perform particular social functions. Taking a social perspective on language, SFL sees the context-text relationship as theoretically fundamental, and Figure 3.1 is an attempt to represent the relations between context and language as conceived in SFL.16

In any given culture, members of the culture partake in familiar activities such as casual conversations, wedding ceremonies, service encounters, discussions, and story telling. Each of these can be identified by their structure, and by the patterns of language they employ (e.g. patterns of question and answer in interviews; patterns of initiation-response-feedback in lessons; set patterns of ritualised speech in

16 Not all scholars working in SFL agree that context should be stratified in the way that it is in Figure 3.1.
cere monies). Familiar, conventional patterns emerge in cultures by which such social activities are achieved, and these are modelled in SFL as genres, or “staged, purposeful, goal-oriented activity in which speakers engage as members of our culture” (Martin, 2001, p. 155).

Figure 3.1: The SFL co-tangential-circles model of language (following Martin, 1992)

In functional linguistics terms what this means is that genres are defined as a recurrent configuration of meanings and that these recurrent configurations of meanings enact the social practices of a given culture. This means we have to think about more than individual genres; we need to consider how they relate to each other. (Martin & Rose, 2008, p. 6)

By identifying and describing genres linguistically, and then mapping their relations, SFL models the context of culture as a system of meanings (see quote from Halliday & Hasan, 1989 in section 3.1 above) in a way that the relations between culture and text can be explained empirically and systematically. Because these relations are
fundamental to the theory, the text (not the sentence) is the basic unit of analysis in SFL.

One level down from the context of culture is the context of situation. Humans performing the same genre in the same culture can and do vary how and what they communicate (i.e. genre in SFL is not a deterministic concept.) They do this by ‘bending’ conventional genres, but also by working within the conventions of established genres and making choices which realise the particular context of situation.

There are three key variables in the context of situation (see for e.g. Eggins, 1994; Halliday & Hasan, 1989; Martin & Rose, 2008). The first (known as field in SFL) is the topic and the given social activity: e.g. whether it is an action-structured activity (such as recounting a recent event, or repairing a car) or not (such as classifying, say, rocks in geology), and whether it relates to a particular thing (such as a person, or an event) or a general class of things (such as males of a species). The second contextual variable (known as tenor in SFL) is the relation between the interactants: e.g. power relations (relatively equal or unequal), social distance (intimate or distant), and emotional involvement (detached or emotionally involved). The third variable (known as mode in SFL) is the distance between interactants: distance in space (face-to-face or not, such as a lecture versus a telephone call), and distance in time (synchronous or asynchronous, such as a conversation or IRC chat versus a novel). The ways in which texts can vary according to field, or tenor, or mode are illustrated by the examples in Table 3.4.
Chapter Three: SF-MDA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Field</th>
<th>Tenor</th>
<th>Mode</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| A baby who won’t stop crying can drive anyone to despair. You feed him, you change him, you nurse him, you settle him, but the minute you put him down, he starts to howl. | For goodness sake, turn that music down! It’s giving me a damned headache. | A: I came back and I can’t get it to come on.  
B: Was it OK before you went?  
A: Yeah fine.  
B: OK well just move this.  
No? Well push any of these ... No, that didn’t work. You probably have to hit this one.  
A: Oh great it’s back on. What happened?  
B: It was asleep. If you’re away from it for a while, it goes to sleep and you need to press this one to get it started again. |
| A PC which won’t stop crashing can drive anyone to despair. You boot it, you format the disks, you create a file, you try to protect your edits, but the minute you try to save your file the PC crashes. | Excuse me, I wonder whether you would mind turning your radio down slightly. My daughter is studying for her exams and the music is disturbing her concentration. We’d really appreciate it if you could. | Sleep mode: Computers go into a power saving sleep mode when left idle. The screen goes blank and the hard disk stops, but everything comes back on within a few seconds after the keyboard is touched. Computers can also be put into the sleep mode manually. (adapted from Di Nucci et al 1994:85) |

source: de Silva Joyce & Burns (1999, p. 62)

| source: Eggins (1994, pp. 3, 68) |

| Table 3.4: Text variation according to field, tenor, and mode |

Like differences in the social activity (or genre), which are meaningful to members of a culture, variations in the context of situation are also meaningful, and lead to systematic variation in texts. Languages have evolved to allow speakers to make linguistic choices that express what they want to mean in given cultural and situational contexts, according to their communicative purposes at a given time. These choices are complex and multi-layered, occurring ‘above the clause’ in the discourse semantics, in the lexicogrammar of clauses, and in the expression of language in
phonology, graphology or signing. In SFL, these different levels of language are systematically related, as language is systematically related to context. In this way, SFL is distinct from componential models of language (where, for example, syntax, semantics, phonology, and morphology are seen as separate components).

Turning from language and SFL to other semiotic systems, genre in SF-MDA is essentially the same as genre in SFL: a “staged, purposeful, goal-oriented activity in which speakers engage as members of our culture”, modelled at the stratum of context of culture (Martin, 2001, p. 155; cf. van Leeuwen, 2005a, p. 127). From an SF-MDA perspective, genres are “configurations of meaning ... typically realised through more than one modality of communication (i.e. some combination of language, image, sound, action, spatial design, etc.)” (Martin & Rose, 2008, pp. 44-5). Another way of thinking of genres in SF-MDA is as “multimodal communicative acts” which can be grouped according to whether or not they have the “typical characteristics” of a given genre (van Leeuwen, 2005a).

Martin (1994) extends the notion of genre to macro-genres, in which elemental genres17 (basic social/textual patterns recognised as genres) are combined in principled ways to form larger texts such as school curricula (e.g. Christie, 1997), text books, and extended academic texts (Martin & Rose, 2008). Because they are combinations of texts which instantiate other genres (e.g. news stories, advertisements), both home pages and online newspapers are macro-genres.

Genres regulate and mediate the ways we interact with each other in society, and websites and web pages are no exception. The website as a whole has generic features at the same time that it comprises many more specific genres. For example, the home page is a functional component within the larger-scale structure of the

17 Baldry uses the term mini-genres in a similar way - see Chapter 5.
website as a whole. The home pages also has the characteristics of a superordinate genre in its own right at the same time that many of its component parts are themselves distinctive mini-genres - linguistic, visual, musical and so on. (Baldry & Thibault, 2006, p. 113)

This macro-generic view of websites and home pages is explored further in Chapters 5, 6 and 7.

In keeping with his focus on multimodal documents, Bateman (2008) extends the view of genre outlined thus far to include aspects of the processes of production. Any document is constrained by its ‘canvas’ (e.g. papyrus scroll, versus A4 paper, versus computer screen), by production processes (e.g. hand-writing, versus printing press, versus computer software), by consumption/use of documents (e.g. to be read aloud, versus to be read on a train, versus to be mass-distributed online), and by the textual conventions associated with these constraints in a particular social context (e.g. patterns of language, layout, colour). These constraints are related to social practices and the environment at each level, as illustrated in Bateman’s visualisation of this model reproduced in Figure 3.2.

![Figure 3.2: The GeM model (source: Bateman, 2008, p. 16)](source)
Bateman’s model is not directly employed in the description of online newspaper genres in this thesis, but the constraints of production and reception as set out in his model are considered as part of the analyses in later chapters.

### 3.4 Paradigmatic meaning, system, and structure

Saussure’s conception of the sign can be seen as opening the possibility of viewing language, and other semiotic systems, paradigmatically (Culler, 1976, p. 34, though cf. Halliday & Hasan, 1989, pp. 3-4), and doing so in a systematic way. For Saussure, the sign (viewed synchronically) is an inseparable bonding of two arbitrarily associated elements. The **signified** (or *signifié*) is “an idea signified”, and the **signifier** (or *signifiant*) is “a form which signifies” (Culler, 1976, p. 20). So the stream of sound */trɪː/*, or the graphic representation *tree*, is used in English to signify a plant which conforms to a range of features (it falls within certain parameters of height, shape, and so on).

Saussure's well-known ‘arbitrariness of the sign’ is widely associated with the signifier. That is, we could in principle replace the sound */trɪː/* with any other sound, as long as speaker and hearer agree (by convention) to associate that sound (signifier) with that social concept (signified).

However, Saussure also conceives of the signified as arbitrary, in the sense that there is no pre-existing reality which language ‘names’ as it were. His point is that language is used to order the world, and the choices made as to what social
concepts will be construed as a *signified* in languages is social, not material. “Without language, thought is a vague, uncharted nebula. There are no pre-existing ideas, and nothing is distinct before the appearance of language” (Saussure, 1959, p. 112).

This can also be seen with /trɪː/. When does a plant stop being a bush and begin being a tree? The distinction is not biological or botanical; it is social and in an important sense arbitrary. The signs *bush* and *tree* do not index an objective, external reality, but signify *valeurs* (*associative meanings* in Saussure’s terms, or *paradigmatic meanings*) which are defined by their opposition to each other. Thus, a tree is a tree because it is not a bush, or a shrub, or a pot plant. A bush is a bush because it is not a tree, a pot plant, or a shrub.

The arbitrary nature of the sign explains in turn why the social fact alone can create a linguistic system. The community is necessary if values that owe their existence solely to usage and general acceptance are to be set up; by himself the individual is incapable of fixing a single value. (de Saussure, 1959, p. 113)

So Saussure’s signified is, like the signifier, arbitrary in the sense that the world may be divided by language in different ways. In fact, while signified and signifier are talked of separately, neither exists without the other, as they are mutually defining.

While signs are in an important sense arbitrary, at the same time, the ways that different languages construe human experience are socially motivated (see Halliday 2002/[1979], pp. 200-202; Volosinov, 1973, p. 22). For example, in English, the word *river* does not make a distinction on the conceptual plane which does occur between the French *fleuve* (which flows into the sea) and *riviere* (which does not - Culler, 1976, p. 24). The English *river* is a result of the evolution of a paradigmatic sign system in which the distinction between (for example) *stream* and *river* has been
signified as socially and culturally meaningful on the basis of human experience of one social group (a distinction which has been carried into the language currently known as English). In contrast, the distinction between *fleuve* and *riviere* has been signified as socially and culturally meaningful on the basis of the human experience of another social group (a distinction which has been carried into the language currently known as French). Thus, we can say that meanings are paradigmatic (deriving from meaningful oppositions) and social (deriving from shared human experience of the world).

Such distinctions are not only between words, but occur between phonemic, grammatical, discourse-semantic, and contextual units. For example, on the phonemic level, English makes no systemic distinction between the unaspirated phone /p/ and the aspirated /ph/ - they are allophones of the same phoneme and therefore have the same phonemic meaning in English. In contrast, in Thai (for example), they are separate phonemes and have different phonemic meaning.

This conception of paradigmatic meanings is also central to the understanding of context in SFL, and the relation between context and text. Drawing on Malinowski's context of situation, Firth conceives of language as a set of realisations emerging from lived human experience (Halliday & Hasan, 1989, pp. 5-9). Languages have evolved to function in relation to particular contexts of use, and the meaningful oppositions in the environment and human interaction with it give rise to the meaningful oppositions in language (compare the discussion of genre, and of field, tenor, and mode in section 3.3 above). In this way, accounting for context is central in SFL. The theory has been built on the basis of systematic descriptions of the
relationship between the contexts of experience and language use on one hand, and layered linguistic systems of meaning on the other (e.g. Halliday, 1978; Martin, 1992).

The abstraction here called context of situation does not deal with mere ‘sense’ or with thoughts. It is not a description of the environment. It is a set of categories in ordered relations abstracted from the life of man [sic] in the flux of events, from personality in society. (Firth, 1968, p. 200)

To return to Saussure then, Saussure’s signified is a socially determined meaning deriving from human experience in interaction with the environment, which has been brought into a paradigmatic semiotic order by its association with a signifier. If we extend this position to its logical conclusion, it is possible to posit language as signifier, and the context of situation as signified. Once this step is taken, and Saussure’s concept of the sign is moved beyond a union of sound and concept to include higher order signs (where signifiers are also linguistic units such as intonation patterns, clause structures, and even patterns of text organisation), the relationship between the signified and signifier is not arbitrary but social, and a two-tiered conceptualisation of meaning becomes insufficient.

To summarise, a paradigmatic perspective on language is one which sees meaning (at whatever level of language) as a set of oppositional choices, or valeurs. Building on Saussure and the anthropology of Malinowski, Firth theorises the paradigmatic as multi-layered and socially motivated, a tenet upon which systemic functional theory is developed.

SFL theory is paradigmatic in its origins. According to Firth (1968, p. 200): “The first principle of analysis is to distinguish between structure and system.” SFL
follows this analytic principle, and posits a principled relationship between the two: socially-motivated paradigmatic choices are realised in linguistic structures. Because the theory is descriptive, the systemic functional linguist begins with texts. Paradigmatic choices are posited, argued, and justified (or not) through observed structures. That is, in theory building, paradigmatic meanings must be structurally justified (or structurally motivated). Thus, linguistic structures serve to identify the possible social meanings at the disposal of the speakers of a language.

Halliday applies Firth’s system/structure axis to grammar. Taking the clause as the fundamental unit of grammar, different structural (syntagmatic) configurations in clauses realise different paradigmatic choices. This is illustrated by Caffarel, Martin & Matthiessen (2004, pp. 24-25; see also Henrici, 1981; Huddleston, 1981). Clauses (those grammatical units which have at least a Predicator) can be divided into those which also have the structural elements Subject and Finite, and those which do not. This division is illustrated in Figure 3.3.

Figure 3.3 is a basic system, “a finite set of things ... of which just one must be selected” (Henrici, 1981, p. 75). It gives structural realisations for each of the paradigmatic options. Reading left to right, a clause (the entry condition to this particular system) is realised by the presence of the structural element of a Predicator (indicated by the diagonal arrow which means is realised by). Continuing from left to right, clauses are one of either two types: imperative (which are ‘Predicator only’ as no further structural realisations are specified) or indicative (which have Predicator and Subject and Finite).
The system in Figure 3.3 is, in fact, an incomplete system, as indicative clauses can be further subdivided into declaratives (where the Subject is followed by the Finite, denoted Subject\(^{\wedge}\)Finite where \(^{\wedge}\) means followed by), and interrogatives (where the Finite is followed by the Subject, denoted Finite\(^{\wedge}\)Subject) as shown in Figure 3.4.

This introduces the notion of delicacy, where certain paradigmatic options are dependent upon prior choices in the system. Selecting for an indicative clause means a speaker can and must select also either declarative or interrogative, but selecting imperative means a speaker does not have this choice. Similarly, a speaker selecting interrogative has a more delicate choice of polar interrogative, or wh-interrogative.

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18 This thesis follows the convention of SF theory whereby class elements (such as clause) are written in lower case, and functional elements (such as Subject) are capitalised.
(Figure 3.5), realised by a ‘WH’ question word (+Wh), where the ‘WH’ question word is in initial position (#Wh) and is followed by a Finite (^Finite). “More delicate features (to the right) inherit realizations from less delicate ones (to the left); this helps to clarify the nexus between system and its structural output in the model” (Caffarel, Martin & Matthiessen, 2004, p. 24).

At the same time as selecting for imperative or indicative, a speaker has the choice of selecting positive or negative. Because this choice can co-occur with any of the choices given in the system above (i.e. imperative clauses, declarative clauses, polar interrogatives, and wh-interrogatives can all be either positive or negative), the two systems (imperative or indicative; and positive or negative) are simultaneous, and are therefore joined by a brace which indicates they are to be selected simultaneously, as illustrated in Figure 3.6. When simultaneous systems are joined in this way, we have a network of systems, or a system network.
This network has a point of origin (viz. clause) which is not a feature. The point of origin is in general a class of linguistic items; it defines the population which may possess the features in the network. Here it shows that all the features in the network are strictly clausal features and not features of some smaller linguistic unit within the clause, such as features of the nominal group acting as Subject of the clause. (Henrici, 1981, p. 76)

The technical term, then, for paradigmatic options within system networks is **feature** (also commonly called **valeurs**). Recalling the earlier quote from Halliday (1994) that features in system networks are “purely abstract”, it is necessary to empirically validate features with reference to a corpus of text. Put another way, “one is asking how the presence of features in a network ... can be justified” (Martin, 1987, p. 16).

To summarise, SFL prioritises the paradigmatic. Paradigmatic choices (features) are formalised in systems, which combine in system networks. Formal
features must be justified (or motivated) by structural distinctions. In principle, the system network is a rigorous account of the corpus with which the linguist works, and should be able to generate and distinguish between all linguistic structures which appear in the corpus.

Turning now from language to SF-MDA, Kress & van Leeuwen’s (1996) study of visual communication shows that, as with language, paradigmatic oppositions can also be identified in images. Their work details a large number of systemic oppositions and the structures which realise them. For instance, after discussing images with transactional structures (where one participant does something to another - later termed by them ‘narrative processes’), they continue:

The [narrative process] structure is not the only kind of structure which images can realize. ... In [another image], ... the structure is ‘analytical’. Here the participants have the roles not of ‘Actor’ and ‘Goal’ but of ‘Carrier’ and ‘Attribute’. This picture is not about something which participants are doing to other participants, but about the way participants fit together to make up a larger whole. (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, pp. 48-9; italics in original)

Kress & van Leeuwen contrast narrative processes in images realised by ‘vectorial patterns’ which connect participants, with conceptual processes in images where participants’ class, structure or meaning are used to portray them (ibid., p. 56). In so doing, they use the system/structure axis to inform their description and their ‘visual grammar’. Their basic system for this aspect of meaning in images is reproduced in Figure 3.7.

Throughout their extensive, book-length visual grammar, Kress & van Leeuwen include system networks mapping the systemic oppositions they identify, and tables which detail the structural realisations of these paradigmatic meanings. In
this way, the system/structure axis explicitly underpins their work, and provides a concrete tool for analysts using their work, and those critiquing it, to employ in examining and describing visual communication in texts (see Forceville, 1999).

![Figure 3.7: Main types of visual representational structure: Basic system (source: Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, p. 56)](image)

O’Toole’s (1994) description of paintings is also underpinned by the system/structure axis. He identifies a range of systems in painting. For example:

> Perspective is primarily a system of the Modal function, since it serves to guide the eye of the viewer. It is systemic in that it offers a choice between linear, reverse and multiple perspective - and, indeed, no perspective, since a negative option ... is itself a choice within the system. (O’Toole, 1994, p. 9; underlining in original)

In general, O’Toole identifies a large number of systems, but does not extend his descriptions to system networks. Even so, it is sometimes possible for the reader to discern the system/structure relations from O’Toole’s discussion.

- **Narrative themes** simply means the whole story, or complex of stories, if ... the painting is designed to tell a story. **Scenes** ... are those paintings which only set out to depict something without any action being involved, as with a landscape painting or still-life. **Portrayals** ... are those scenes which represent a person or a group of people. (O’Toole, 1994, p. 19; underlining in original)

From the above passage, it is possible for the reader to identify the paradigmatic or systemic oppositions (**narrative themes**, **scenes**, **portrayals**) and to some extent the
structures which realise them. These can be represented visually as shown in Figure 3.8, where the entry condition is ‘work’, or “the picture as a whole” (ibid.).

![Figure 3.8: Representational system of ‘work’ (following O’Toole, 1994, p. 19)](image_url)

As discussed above, the system/structure axis is fundamental to SF theory. In semiosis, texts mean in large part by their valeurs - the paradigmatic meanings they make. By mapping the valeurs in images on the basis of structural oppositions identified in texts, Kress & van Leeuwen (1996) (and to a lesser extent, O’Toole, 1994) have developed frameworks which move us towards the possibility of mapping the meaning potential of semiotic systems other than language which are expressed visually.

As with SFL, the system/structure axis generates other aspects of theory in SF-MDA, and is therefore important to the entire study reported to this research, and in particular to the interpretation of structure as the realisation of paradigmatic meanings in Chapters 5, 6 and 7.
3.5 Rank

In SFL, three strata of language are identified; expression (phonology, graphology, signing), lexicogrammar, and discourse-semantics. These are conceived as existing in a realisational relationship, so that meanings made in the discourse semantics are realised by choices in the lexicogrammar, are realised by phonology. All strata are meaningful, but each stratum represents a different level of abstraction.

Each stratum can be further subdivided into ranks, not on the basis of abstraction, but according to the structural principle of constituency. Constituency is “an extremely simple but powerful device, whereby parts are built up into wholes, and these again as parts into larger wholes, but with different organic configurations at each step” (Halliday, 1994, p. 16). Each of these steps is a rank, and collectively the ranks a rank scale.

A rank scale is a tool which has been applied to describing a number of semiotic systems (see Halliday, 1985a; O'Toole, 1994; O'Halloran, 2004a; Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975). At face value, ranks appear to be structural values, foregrounding as they do part-whole relationships which hold between constituents and the ‘whole’ of which they are a part. However, system and structure are a complementarity in SFL theory, not an opposition. Thus, rank “is informed by both systemic and structural perspectives” (Caffarel, Martin & Matthiessen, 2004, p. 32).

Structurally, the ranks in a rank scale are derived from the methods of description of scale and category grammar (see Hudson, 1981; Martin, 1992). For
example, a clause (a class item) is identified by its structural (functional) constituents, which are in turn identified in terms of their own class. Each class of item can in turn be identified in terms of its own functional constituent(s), each of which can again be identified in terms of their class, and so on down to the lowest rank. Each class-function cycle represents one rank, as illustrated in Figure 3.9.

But like strata, ranks are derived systematically. To illustrate, the structure of the clause in Figure 3.9 - *Ford parked the ship* - is a realisation of the features **declarative** and **positive** from the system network in Figure 3.6 above (reproduced as Figure 3.10 for convenience). Thus, realisation statements of formal features in a system network (in this case +Predicator; Subject^Finite) consist of functional constituents of the class item which acts as the entry condition for the system (see clause rank in Figure 3.9).

![Figure 3.9: Clause structure and rank (adapted from Martin, 1992, p. 6)]
This principle applies at each rank. System networks at group rank have as the realisation of their formal features the functional constituents of the group (e.g. +Event for verbal group; +Thing for nominal group - see group rank in Figure 3.9).

So structurally, ranks are wholes made up of parts, in turn made up of sub-parts, and so on. Systemically, the whole can be analysed in terms of its paradigmatic opposition with other units of the same class at the same rank (oppositions which are motivated structurally), as can the parts which constitute it, as can the sub-parts which constitute the parts, and so on. That is, at each rank, paradigmatic choices are available to the speaker.

Units at different ranks, then, have different valeurs. Separating them into different networks allows the analyst to account theoretically for the phenomenon of rankshift.
Rankshift is ... a strategy for compiling higher-ranking meanings from the vantage-point of a lower rank. Since this is typically the nominal group, rankshift is to a large extent a nominalising compilation of grammatical resources. (Matthiessen 1995, p. 101)

To explain, a given clause may function as a constituent at the rank of group (i.e. below the rank of clause). In the following example, the rankshifted clause (functioning as a Qualifier of *truck* within a nominal group) is in bold.

A Democrat MP and three other people were seriously injured Sunday when a pick-up truck they were travelling in skidded off the Tak-Mae Sot road and plunged down a steep mountain. *(Bangkok Post online, February 26, 2002)*

In this way, meaning can be packaged in a variety of ways. Valeurs from higher ranks can be brought into service at lower ranks. But rather than being required to explain this only in structural terms, system networks allow us to account for rankshifted structures paradigmatically.

Rank keeps the overall systemic potential manageable by "parcelling" it out into a number of system networks and it increases the systemic power by opening up the systemic potential repeatedly within a linguistic unit. (Caffarel, Martin & Matthiessen, 2004, p. 32)

This theoretical approach allows us to describe this aspect of the flexibility and creativity of human language (and of other semiotic systems - see Chapter 5).

By representing structure through a rank scale, one perspective on structure - and therefore one set of meanings - is privileged over others. Particulate meanings (as created in part-part and part-whole structures) are effectively described by rank scales, but prosodic meanings (in structures which map across segments) and periodic meanings (in wave-like structures which create peaks of prominence) are not necessarily effectively described in this way (Martin, 1996). A richer description
requires that “constituency ... slips into the background, and explanations come more and more to involve other, more abstract kinds of relationship” (Halliday, 1994, p. 16).

Turning from SFL to SF-MDA, O’Toole (1994) draws heavily on the analytical tool of rank in developing his framework for the analysis of images. Using a semiotic analysis of the *Primavera* by Botticelli, he argues for four ranks in paintings: work, episode, figure, and member, and identifies systems at play at each rank, for each of the three metafunctions of SF theory (see below). O’Toole points out that not every system will be ‘in play’ in every painting.

There are many paintings where not all the systems I have discussed will be relevant. On the other hand, there are a great many paintings where it does help to distinguish between the various ranks of unit, if only because we know our eyes tend to scan the surface of the canvas and “home in” on configurations that we recognize as a member, a figure, or a discrete episode, so that a kind of “shuttling” process begins to take place between our images of each unit and of the picture as a whole. (O’Toole, 1994, p. 12)

O’Toole’s work has been influential in the application of rank to the analysis of images (Libo, 2004; cf. Martinec 2005; Martinec & Salway, 2005) and other multimodal texts (O’Halloran, 1999a, 1999b, 2004a). Though informed by a systemic perspective, the role of paradigmatic meanings in O’Toole’s rank scale for paintings is largely implicit, no doubt motivated in part by the audience for whom he is writing. This makes the rank scale a useful heuristic, but raises questions about the development of rank scales for 2-D, multisemiotic, visual texts; their class-function cycles; the systemic oppositions at each rank; and their structural realisations (Zhao, forthcoming).
Despite these questions, O’Halloran (e.g. 2005, 2008) shows the value of a rank approach for identifying elements at different levels in different systems, so that the multisemiotic relations between units of different semiotic resources may be identified and examined. Nonetheless, questions such as those raised above need to be addressed in order to determine the theoretical (i.e. systemic) justification for rank scales. In this thesis, the extent to which rank is a useful tool for the analysis of online newspapers and their home pages is explored in Chapter 5.

3.6 Metadiscourse

The metadiscourse of SFL are one of the most often cited aspects of the theory in the literature on linguistics and applied linguistics. The theory of metadiscourse developed over decades of work on describing language and child language development. In approaching language from a social and functional perspective, Halliday (e.g. 1973; 1978) came to argue that there are three broad, overarching functions (i.e. metadiscourse) that language performs (see also Halliday & Hasan, 1989; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004; Martin, 1992).

The first is the ideational metadiscourse, or the way in which language is used to construe human experience. The second is the interpersonal metadiscourse, or the way in which language is used to create, maintain, and develop relations among people. The third is the textual metadiscourse (an ‘enabling’ metadiscourse), or the way in which language creates coherent wholes (or texts) which function meaningfully in their semiotic environment. Each metadiscourse is associated with a different kind of structure in SFL: particulate structure for ideational meaning, prosodic structure for
interpersonal meaning, and periodic structure for textual meaning (Halliday, 2002/[1979]; Martin, 1992).

Figure 3.11: Metafunctional relations between text and context in SFL

These three metafunctions map onto the three variables in the context of situation (field, tenor, mode), so that the field of discourse in the context of situation is expressed by the ideational metafunction in language; the tenor of discourse in the context of situation is expressed by the interpersonal metafunction in language; and the mode of discourse in the context of situation is expressed by the textual metafunction in language (Figure 3.11).

Language has evolved in such a way that these three metafunctions are expressed simultaneously. That is, the different structures realising metafunctional
meaning map onto one another, both in clause structure (e.g. Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004) and discourse structure (e.g. Martin, 1992).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ideational</th>
<th>Interpersonal</th>
<th>Textual</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic minority groups along the border</td>
<td>are broadcasting</td>
<td>malicious messages about the government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behaver</td>
<td>Process: behavioural</td>
<td>Range: Verbiage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject</td>
<td>Finite</td>
<td>Predicator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mood</td>
<td>Complement</td>
<td>Residue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme</td>
<td>Rheme</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3.12: Metafunctional lexicogrammatical meaning in an English clause

To illustrate, the ideational grammar of the English clause construes events and relations as Participants, Processes, and Circumstances. At the same time, interpersonal meanings are construed by the Mood block of the clause (i.e. the relation between the Subject and the Finite), and also by the use of Mood Adjuncts. Textual meaning is construed in the English clause by the positioning of elements: the point of departure or Theme of a clause is positioned at the beginning of the clause.

The simultaneous nature of clause structure is illustrated with a clause taken from the Bangkok Post of March 23, 2002, as shown in Figure 3.12. The Participants are Ethnic minority groups ... and malicious messages ... ,¹⁹ and this ideational configuration is one of a number of ways this event could have been construed linguistically. Compare:

a. Criticism of the government has been heard along the border.
b. Anti-government forces have stepped up their campaign.

¹⁹ Following Martin, Matthiessen & Painter (1997, pp. 125-6), this non-projecting clause is analysed as behavioural rather than verbal.
c. *Broadcasts from ethnic minorities along the border are awash with malicious messages about the government.*

These plausible alternate wordings illustrate that the lexical and grammatical choices made by the author construe this event (an element of human experience) in a particular way, and the ideational grammar of the clause in English provides speakers with systemic choices in how events can be construed. For example, the clause in Figure 3.12 could be construed as:

- an event of ‘saying’ (as in the original);
- an event of ‘hearing’ (as in a above);
- an event of ‘doing’ (as in b above);
- a relation where messages are an attribute of broadcasts (as in c above).

In the Mood block of the original clause shown in Figure 3.12, the Finite follows the Subject. In terms of interpersonal meaning, this structure means the MOOD of the clause is declarative, and the writer of the text is giving information. The systemic choice (i.e. declarative) realised by this clause structure construes a particular relationship between the writer and reader (a relationship which would be different if, for example, Finite preceded Subject and the clause read: *Are ethnic minority groups along the border broadcasting malicious messages about the government?*). The inclusion of Mood Adjuncts (e.g. certainly, surprisingly) is another interpersonal lexicogrammatical resource, though the choice in this particular clause is to *not* use one.

Textually, the Theme, or point of departure of the clause is *ethnic minority groups along the border*. The writer has the choice of, for example, using active or passive voice to place whichever Participant they choose as Theme in the clause.
In each clause, a speaker of a language makes meaning in these three ways simultaneously. Clause grammar in other languages sometimes construes aspects of metafunctional meaning in other ways, such as the use of particles to express interpersonal meaning in Thai (e.g. *khrap, kha, na* - Patpong, 2006), and textual meaning in Japanese (e.g. *wa*) and Tagalog (e.g. *ang* - Martin, 2004), but SFL descriptions of a range of languages (see Caffarel, Martin & Matthiessen, 2004) have led to the argument that the grammars of all human languages have evolved to express these three metafunctions. Additionally, there are ideational, interpersonal, and textual systems operating at the stratum of discourse-semantics (see Martin, 1992; Martin & Rose, 2007) as well as at the stratum of lexicogrammar.

As with rank, the theoretical justification for metafunctions is systemic. Halliday identifies a range of structural oppositions in the grammar of the English clause. For example, material-Process clauses have a structure which includes an Actor (which does something) and a Goal (to which something is done). Mental-Process clauses have a Senser and optionally a Phenomenon, or a projected clause. Attributive relational-process clauses have a Carrier and an Attribute, while identifying relational-process clauses have a Token and Value. These different clause types are realised by their different structures, and the different Process types of major clauses in English can be represented in a system network as shown in Figure 3.13.
Figure 3.13: System of ideational clause grammar in English (slightly adapted from: Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p. 173)

Figure 3.14: System network of interpersonal clause grammar in English
(reproducing Figure 3.10)
The systemic oppositions in Figure 3.13, realised in ideational grammar, exist alongside the systemic oppositions realised in interpersonal grammar. To explain, major English clauses (those with a Process) can be indicative (i.e. having a Mood - both Subject and Finite) or imperative (with no Mood). Imperative clauses can be declarative (Subject precedes Finite), or interrogative (Finite precedes Subject). This is shown as a system network in Figure 3.10 above, and reproduced in Figure 3.14 for convenience.

Looking at Figures 3.13 and 3.14 in conjunction, a clause may select any of the choices from Figure 3.13, and at the same time any of the choices from Figure 3.14. So the clause in Figure 3.12 - Ethnic minority groups along the border are broadcasting malicious messages about the government - selects behavioural from the experiential choices (see Figure 3.13), and declarative from the interpersonal choices (see Figure 3.14) simultaneously. A clause can also be:

- behavioural and interrogative
  - e.g. Are ethnic minority groups along the border broadcasting malicious messages about the government?
- behavioural and imperative
  - e.g. Broadcast malicious messages about the government!

The same combinations can be made with all other Process types. For example:

- **material-Process clauses**
  - declarative:
    - Foreign Ministry Commissioner extends Spring Festival Greetings to Macao People.\(^{20}\)
  - interrogative:
    - Does Foreign Ministry Commissioner extend Spring Festival Greetings to Macao People?
  - imperative:
    - Extend Spring Festival Greetings to Macao People!

\(^{20}\) source: People’s Daily, February 14, 2002
Chapter Three: SF-MDA

- **relational-Process clauses**
  - declarative:
    - *The water is still.*
  - interrogative:
    - *Is the water still?*
  - imperative:
    - *Be still!*

Similarly, choices from the textual system of Theme combine freely with the above choices (Caffarel, Martin & Matthiessen, 2004, p. 29; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, pp. 79-87). Systemically then, the ideational, interpersonal, and textual systems discussed briefly here are **simultaneous systems**, and the choices can be made from them independently.

This is the theoretical justification for the three metafunctions in SFL: “the categories of ideational, interpersonal and textual appear clearly in the semantic system itself, as system networks each having a high degree of internal dependence but a very low degree of external dependence” (Halliday, 2002/[1979], pp. 200-201).

This aspect of SFL becomes important in the analysis of other semiotic systems, as Kress & van Leeuwen (1996) and O’Toole (1994), for example, have argued that essentially the same metafunctions can be identified in visual texts (see Martinec, 2005). Terminology used to identify the metafunctions varies between studies, and some of the common terms are summarised in Table 3.5, slightly adapted from Martin (2002). In this thesis, the metafunctional terms from Systemic Functional Linguistics (i.e. **ideational, interpersonal, and textual**) are employed.

As discussed above, Kress & van Leeuwen (1996) identify systems for ideational meaning in images (representations in their terms - see Figure 3.7 above).
They also identify interpersonal systems (interaction and modality in their terms), such as the choice between **subjective images** (where the viewer position is ‘designed into’ the image) and **objective images** (where the design of the image ‘neutralises’ any perspective). More delicate systemic choices are also available to the author of a subjective image, including the **involvement** of the viewer (realised structurally by a frontal angle on the horizontal axis) or **detachment** (a valeur realised structurally by an oblique angle on the horizontal axis). These choices (a small illustration of the many mapped by them) are represented in Figure 3.15.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>metafunction</th>
<th>naturalising reality</th>
<th>enacting social relations</th>
<th>organising text</th>
<th>references</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>semiotic resource</td>
<td>ideational</td>
<td>interpersonal</td>
<td>textual</td>
<td>Halliday (1994)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>language</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>image</td>
<td>representation</td>
<td>interaction/ modality</td>
<td>composition</td>
<td>Kress &amp; van Leeuwen (1996)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>representational</td>
<td>modal</td>
<td>compositional</td>
<td>O’Toole (1994)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>presentational</td>
<td>orientational</td>
<td>organisational</td>
<td>Lemke (1998)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 3.5: Metafunctional labels in foundational work in SF-MDA (following Martin, 2002, p. 311)*

*Figure 3.15: Partial system of ATTITUDE (adapted from Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, p. 154)*
In addition to ideational and interpersonal systems, textual choices (composition in Kress & van Leeuwen’s terms) include **connection** and **disconnection** between elements in an image (realised by framing devices such as borders and space) and maximum or minimum **salience** of objects in an image (realised by position, size, colour, contrast, and other features). These choices (again, a small number of those identified by Kress & van Leeuwen) are represented in Figure 3.16.

**Figure 3.16: Partial system of COMPOSITION (adapted from Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, p. 223)**

The systems (and the structures realising them) developed by Kress & van Leeuwen are far more extensive and detailed than the brief, illustrative sketch provided here (cf. Chapter 6). The main point at this juncture is that the ideational choices (representation) they identify can co-occur freely with the interpersonal choices (interaction/modality), can co-occur freely with the textual choices (composition). Thus, the theoretical principles underlying the identification of metafunctions in Kress & van Leeuwen’s (1996) SF-MDA are consistent with those
underlying the identification of metafunctions in SFL. Aspects of this systemic functional ‘grammar’ of visual communication are applied and developed in the analysis of online newspaper home pages in Chapter 6.

3.7 Instantiation

The systems in SFL represent the possible choices in language - what a speaker can mean. In SFL, this is known as the meaning potential:

in order to make sense of the text, what the speaker actually says, we have to interpret it against the background of what he ‘can say’. In other words, we see the text as actualized potential; it is the actual seen against the background of the potential. (Halliday, 1978, p. 40)

Of course, speakers are free to make choices that have not yet been made by other speakers, and therefore add (a) feature(s) to the system of language, and speakers do this all the time, hence the meaning potential of a language (modelled in system networks in SFL, which are static and 2-dimensional due to the limitations of the technology we use to do the modelling) is always changing.

The systems that represent the meaning potential of the language are related to actual texts in SFL by the cline of instantiation. The most common way of explaining this is using the metaphor of weather and climate. Any given text is like an instance of the weather. The weather on a given day tells us something about climate, but it is only by observing the weather over a long period of time that we can make accurate and full descriptions of the climate.

Weather patterns and climate are not different phenomena from the weather; they differ only in generality. A weather pattern is nothing more than an accumulation of a number of instances of the weather;
and the climate is nothing more than an accumulation of a number of weather patterns. By the same token, the weather here in Sydney is nothing more than an instance of Sydney’s climate. (Caffarel, Martin & Matthiessen, 2004, p. 19)

As weather is to climate, so is text to meaning potential, or instance to system.

Different studies of semiotic phenomena can be positioned at different places along the cline of instantiation: studies of a single text at the ‘instance’ pole, studies of an entire semiotic system at the ‘system’ pole, and most studies somewhere in between, depending on the size and representativeness of the corpus of texts, and whether the study is intended to be descriptive or theory-building.

At different points on the cline of instantiation, patterns of choices from the system can be analysed quantitatively, and the probability that different systemic features will be present in texts and text types can be calculated (Caffarel, Martin & Matthiessen, 2004, p. 20; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p. 26), which allows detailed discourse analyses of single texts and/or relatively small numbers of texts (typically represented as ‘qualitative research’) to contribute to statistical analysis involving much larger samples (or ‘quantitative research’ - see Martin & Rose, 2003, pp. 269-73).

Like the system/structure axis, the cline of instantiation (the climate/weather-like relation between system and text) is conceptually the same for all semiotic systems. Some foundational work in SF-MDA such as Kress & van Leeuwen (1996) and O’Toole (1994) is located near the ‘system’ end of the cline, and attempts to map the meaning potential of semiotic resources such as images. This work, while extensive in scope, is exploratory in nature and can be compared to early maps of the
world which sketched the rough location of continents and islands as they were encountered, to be filled in, changed, and added to as more (and more detailed) exploration followed.

Many of the studies listed in Tables 3.2 and 3.3 are located much closer to the ‘instance’ end of the cline, applying the frameworks developed by Kress & van Leeuwen or O’Toole. Studies all along the cline of instantiation ultimately contribute to our knowledge of the entire system (at one end), and of the specific texts which instantiate it (at the other):

we collect a sample of texts or text extracts that is extensive enough to be representative of some higher point along the cline of instantiation - some text type or a family of text types, or of the overall system. How far we move along the cline of instantiation towards the system pole is of course a matter of choice. ... [T]he extent to which it is possible to move towards that pole while still developing reliable descriptions depends on how much text can be observed. (Caffarel, Martin & Matthiessen, 2004, p. 20)

Thus, in this relatively early stage of SF-MDA, studies describing different texts, text types, and families of text types are all needed to contribute to the ‘maps’ already put in place, and to find out in what locations and along what dimensions they are insufficient. This point is taken up in Chapter 9.

3.8 Semogenesis

The final theoretical principle in SFL to be considered here is semogenesis, the timescales of semiotic change. As discussed above, culture is modelled as a system of meanings in SFL. Cultures are dynamic and change over time. In SFL terms, this...
means that the meaning potential of the culture changes, and this long-term process is called **phylogenesis** in SFL.

Language does not only develop as a cultural system; individuals’ control of language over time also develops, and this development of language in the individual on the time scale of a human lifetime is known as **ontogenesis** in SFL.

Finally, the development of meaning in a single text as systemic choices unfold in relation to one another on a much shorter timescale is known as **logogenesis** in SFL (Halliday & Matthiessen, 1999; cf. Lemke, 2003a).

As Martin & Rose explain:

where a culture has arrived in its evolution provides the social context for the linguistic development of the individual, and the point an individual is at in their development provides resources for the instantiating of unfolding texts ... Conversely, logogenesis provides the material (i.e. semiotic goods) for ontogenesis, which in turn provides the material for phylogensis; in other words, texts provide the means through which individuals interact to learn the system. And it is through the heteroglossic aggregation of individual systems (that are always already social systems), though the changing voices of us all, that the semiotic trajectory of a culture evolves. (Martin & Rose, 2003, pp. 266-7)

This perspective becomes significant for this thesis as it is, in part, an examination of the development of genres over time, and the expansion of one part of the global media culture (phylogenesis). This is taken up in Chapters 7 and 9.

Reliable descriptions of semiotic systems do not only depend on the quantity of texts we can observe (see quote from Caffarel, Martin & Matthiessen, 2004 in section 3.7 above). They also depend on the rate at which the system pole of the cline
of instantiation changes, or the speed of phylogenesis (the development of culture). If
the meaning potential of the culture evolves more rapidly than we are able to describe
it, then the reliability of our descriptions of semiotic systems will obviously be thrown
into question. This is an important issue for semiotic theory, as language and other
semiotic resources are used in new communicative contexts (on the world wide web,
for example) in ways previously not possible, expanding the meaning potential of our
culture in a way probably not seen since the development of the printing press.

Semogenesis - the timescales of meaning and its development - is an important
aspect of SF-MDA. Lemke (e.g. 2002, 2003) examines different timescales on which
individuals and groups interact with texts, and the changing nature of texts and social
control:

not only social organization in the large, but also social control at
the scale of individuals and their activities, is mediated in part by
semiotic-material texts and artifacts which circulate in communities
and link large-scale, long-term processes, institutions and social
formations with smaller-scale, shorter-term actions and activities.
(Lemke, 2003, p. 139)

For Lemke, the evolution of multimodality and hypermodality\(^{21}\) means that new
forms of text are evolving, and with them new forms of communication and social
organisation. Authors and readers are in new kinds of relation with one another,
interacting over different timescales and different text scales (Lemke, 2002).
Logogenesis (the unfolding of meaning in texts) takes place on different timescales,
and this is related to individuals and to phylogenesis.

\(^{21}\) Lemke defines hypermodality as “the new interactions of word-, image- and sound-based meanings
in hypermedia, i.e. in semiotic artifacts in which signifiers on different scales of syntagmatic
organization are linked in complex networks or webs” (2002, p. 300).
Another multimodal perspective on logogenesis is given by Iedema (2003b, pp. 42-3), who describes the way verbal texts are “resemiotized” into written texts, then into plans, and finally into a building in a cultural process unfolding on a longer timescale than individual texts. The genesis of meaning is dependent not only on the semiotic system(s) (e.g. language, image, architecture) instantiated by each text, but also on the sequence in which they occur (and therefore re-contextualise each other) and on the materials and resources involved in the production of each text.

Also relevant to the current study is Djonov’s (2005) discussion of the unfolding of meaning over time on websites, where logogenesis is used “to refer to the history of a website from the perspectives of designers as well as users ... to reflect the fluidity of websites as hypermedia texts” (Djonov, 2005, p. 72, note 14). A similar perspective is taken up in the final chapter of this thesis, where, like Lemke, Iedema, and Djonov, I argue that online newspapers transcend the traditional boundaries of texts as construed in the discourse of Linguistics, challenge existing notions of the unfolding of meaning, and require a consideration of meaning on different timescales.

In summary, semogenesis is relevant to Chapter 5 (the evolution of hypertext and its impact on the ability of rank to account for structure in online newspapers), Chapter 6 (the development of online newspaper home page design over time), and Chapter 8 (the cultural evolution of the conventions of news images in newspapers) of this thesis, but is particularly relevant to the development of the meaning potential of culture as realised in online newspapers as discussed in Chapters 7 and 9.


3.9 Intersemiosis

The focus of Kress & van Leeuwen (1996) and O’Toole (1994) is to describe various semiotic systems, and in doing so they have opened a space for a systematic analysis of multimodal texts. There is now a growing body of work directed at addressing the interaction between different semiotic systems as they are instantiated in texts (sometimes termed intersemiosis, or intermodal relations).

Lemke (2002) describes the interaction between different semiotic systems in texts as creating “multiplicative” meanings:

the meaning potential, the meaning-resource capacity, of multimodal constructs is the logical product, in a multiplicative sense, of the capacities of the constituent semiotic resource systems. When we combine text and images, each specific imagetext (Mitchell, 1994) is now one possible selection from the universe of all possible imagetexts, and that universe is the multiplicative product of the set of all possible linguistic texts and the set of all possible images. Accordingly, the specificity and precision which is possible with an imagetext is vastly greater than what is possible with text alone or with image alone. (Lemke, 2002, p. 303)

He goes on to argue that the ‘common denominators’ that allow multiplicative meanings across semiotic resources are the three metafunctions of SF theory, and that “text and image mutually recontextualize one another, influencing our interpretations of each and both together” (2002, p. 322, italics in original).

O’Halloran builds on the SFL notion of grammatical metaphor and introduces the notion of semiotic metaphor, where “a shift in the function of elements occurs and new entities are introduced ... as a result of movements between semiotic codes” (1999a, p. 321). In addition, she draws on the linguistic work of Halliday (e.g. 1994) and Martin (e.g. 1992), O’Toole’s (1994) description of images, and work on
intersemiosis by Thibault (2000), Royce (e.g. 1999) and others\(^2\) to develop a framework for analysing intersemiosis in mathematical discourse.

The functions of language, the [mathematical] symbolism and the visual image [in mathematical discourse] may be summarized as follows. Patterns of relations are encoded and rearranged symbolically for the solution to the problem. The symbolism has limited functionality, however, so that language functions as the meta-discourse to contextualize the problem, to explain the activity sequence which is undertaken for the solution to the mathematics problem, and to discuss the implications of the results which are established. Visual images in the form of abstract and statistical graphs, geometrical diagrams, and other types of diagrams and forms of visual display ... show the relations in a spatio-temporal format which involves multi-dimensional time frames. (O’Halloran, 2005, p. 158)

Mathematical discourse is in many ways a ‘special case’: it “involves language, mathematical symbolism and visual images ... [and] mathematical printed texts are typically organized in very specific ways which simultaneously permit segregation and integration of the three semiotic resources” (O’Halloran, 2005, p. 11). Nonetheless, the specific ‘mechanisms’ of intersemiosis identified by O’Halloran can be applied to other texts where semiotic systems are combined in similar ways (such as print advertisements - see O’Halloran, 2008). In addition to semiotic metaphor, these mechanisms include:

1. **Semiotic Cohesion**: System choices function to make the text cohere across different semiotic resources.
2. **Semiotic Mixing**: Items [i.e. discernable textual units using one or more semiotic resources] consist of system choices from different semiotic resources.
3. **Semiotic Adoption**: System choices from one semiotic resource are incorporated as a system choice in another semiotic system.
4. **Juxtaposition**: Items and components within those Items are compositionally arranged to facilitate intersemiosis.
5. **Semiotic Transition**: System choices result in discourse moves in the form of macro-transitions which shift the discourse to another Item consisting primarily of another semiotic resource, or alternatively macro-transitions within Items occur.


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\(^2\) Including a number of her students, in O’Halloran (2004a).
Other work in SF-MDA looks also to theorise factors in the creation and reception of texts, ‘beyond the text’ as it were, in order to account for multimodal meaning. Building on their existing frameworks for analysis, Kress & van Leeuwen (2001) describe four “domains of practice”: discourse, design, production, and distribution. In each of these domains, different semiotic resources can be brought together in different ways, and these domains may be closely integrated or separate, depending on the nature of the semiotic action taking place.

At the level of social organisation of semiotic production, different configurations of discourse, design, production and distribution may occur. Three of these may be merged, for instance, in everyday conversational speech, where any speaker or listener incorporates discourse, design and production skills and probably experiences them subjectively as one and the same. ...

At the other end of the scale from everyday conversation we might have the speech, say, of professional voice-over specialists. Here the division of labour is maximised. Each [domain] involves different people and different skills. Expert sources provide the discourse, scriptwriters the design, voice specialists the voices, recording engineers the recordings, and so on. (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001, p. 9; cf. Bell’s 1991 news production roles in Table 2.2 above)

Of particular relevance to this thesis is Kress & van Leeuwen’s notion of design, which they relate to the general model of stratified meaning in SF theory (cf. Figure 3.1).

Design stands midway between content and expression. It is the conceptual side of expression, and the expression side of conception. Designs are (uses of) semiotic resources, in all semiotic modes and combinations of semiotic modes. Designs are means to realise discourses in the context of a given communication situation. But designs also add something new: they realise the communication situation which changes socially constructed knowledge into social (inter-) action. (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001, p. 5)

23 These are also labelled as strata by Kress & van Leeuwen, but are theoretically distinct from the strata of SF theory (cf. Caffarel, Martin & Matthiessen, 2004; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001, p. 4).
Online newspaper home pages are ‘templated’, and their design remains constant day by day. The design of news, and the ramifications of the way in which the medium of the world wide web requires online newspapers to work in a consistent design is considered in Chapters 6 and 7, and the ramifications of this are considered in Chapter 9.

Another process-oriented perspective on intersemiosis is provided by Bateman (2008), whose ‘Genre and Multimodality’ (GeM) model assumes that documents are multimodal, and provides a framework for describing and explaining the meaningful choices while taking account of the constraints in their production. Bateman’s approach involves close textual analysis to identify the meaningful elements in documents, and then looks at how “spatially arranged configurations of document elements” are meaningful (p. 21; italics in original). A number of ‘layers’ of analysis are applied, as shown in Table 3.6.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Descriptive Layer</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Content structure</strong></td>
<td>the content-related structure of the information to be communicated—including propositional content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Genre structure</strong></td>
<td>the individual stages or phases defined for a given genre: i.e., how the delivery of the content proceeds through particular stages of activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rhetorical structure</strong></td>
<td>the rhetorical relationships between content elements: i.e., how the content is ‘argued’, divided into main material and supporting material, and structured rhetorically</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Linguistic structure</strong></td>
<td>the linguistic details of any verbal elements that are used to realize the layout elements of the page/document</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Layout structure</strong></td>
<td>the nature, appearance and position of communicative elements on the page, and their hierarchical interrelationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Navigation structure</strong></td>
<td>the ways in which the intended mode(s) of consumption of the document is/are supported: this includes all elements on a page that serve to direct or assist the reader’s consumption of the document</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 3.6: The primary layers of the Genre and Multimodality framework (source: Bateman, 2008, p. 19)*
In addition to this aspect of the framework, Bateman’s (2008) genre-based approach to MDA incorporates a process perspective on genre which takes account of the conditions of production and reception of texts (see section 3.3 above).

3.10 SF-MDA: Conclusion

Systemic Functional Linguistics is a contextual and social theory of language. It views language from a functional perspective, and equally important is its systemic perspective.

Systemic theory takes the system, not the structure, as the basis of the description of a language, and so is able to show how ... types of structure function as alternative modes of the realization of systemic options. (Halliday, 2002/[1979], p. 217)

Aspects of the theory such as rank and metafunction are derived from the systemic description of language, in which structure realises the systemic oppositions.

As a theoretical approach to analysing texts, social semiotics has been developed most fully in relation to language in SFL, but more recently has been applied to other semiotic systems. As a result, this theoretical approach has also come to be known as Systemic Functional Semiotics (SFS), in order to indicate that the theoretical principles apply also to semiotic systems other than language, and to explaining human communication in multimodal texts.

Multimodal discourse analysis (MDA) as practiced by scholars working in the social-semiotic tradition employs the theoretical principles and tools of systemic
functional (SF) theory. While these are for the most part consistent with the principles of systemic functional linguistics (SFL), the expansion of the object of study to meaning ‘beyond language’ has ramifications for traditional theoretical boundaries.

In this chapter, the organisation of SF-MDA studies into Tables 3.2 (Some SF-informed studies of different semiotic systems) and 3.3 (Some SF-informed MDA studies of a range of 2D text types) above suggests that it is possible to maintain a clear distinction between text types and semiotic systems. However, one of the ramifications of the development of SF-MDA is that such a neat separation is no longer possible. “Instead we move towards a view of multimodality in which common semiotic principles operate in and across different [semiotic systems], and which it is therefore quite possible [for example] for music to encode action, or images to encode emotion” (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001, p. 2). This is taken up further by Kress & van Leeuwen, who question the identification of separate, fixed semiotic systems such as language or image:

it depends on the domain of practice, that is, on the precise cultural, social, economic location, and on the occasions in which it is used. Here, in this instance, it may be [a semiotic system]; in other domains in need not be. Is photography (rather than visual image as such) a [semiotic system]? If you are a photographer, no doubt our tests would be answered positively; if you are the man or woman in the street, there may, in your practice, not be a [systemic]/grammatical distinction between images in printing, etching, drawing, photography, etc. ...

‘Our’, the ‘Western’, recent history has left ‘us’, in the West, with views in which the representational resource ... either is or is not grammatical, subject to the rigidities, certainties and conventions which are caught up in the term ‘grammar’. We think that it is no longer a tenable approach: in some domains a resource is treated as though it were subject to grammar; in others it is not. These boundaries shift over time, and they vary between social-cultural groups. (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001, p. 60)

This perspective on multimodality and semiosis is central to the analytical approach taken in this thesis (Chapter 4), which approaches online newspapers as a
semiotic resource, and uses the tools of systemic theory (primarily the system/structure axis) to model ranks, and systemic ‘grammars’ at different ranks at a point on the cline of instantiation close to the ‘instance’ or ‘text’ pole. As the data for this study were collected over time, the chapters that follow give us a perspective on logogenesis and phylogenesis in new media, and on the role of the genres of online newspapers and their design in new forms of social control (Lemke, 2003).

In closing, SFL’s paradigmatic perspective on language has provided a theoretical basis from which to explore semiotic systems other than language systemically and systematically. Kress & van Leeuwen’s seminal work has drawn on a number of features of SFL, and their work (and that of contemporaries such as O’Toole) has been influential to the point where it is now appropriate to refer to social semiotics as SF theory or systemic functional semiotics (SFS). In turn, SFS has specific branches of study: systemic functional linguistics (SFL) and systemic functional multimodal discourse analysis (SF-MDA).

The study of online newspapers in this thesis employs SF-MDA to analyse the ways in which home pages and the texts appearing on them mediate communication between the authors and readers of newspapers, ideationally, interpersonally, and textually, and this is detailed in the following chapter.
Chapter 4: Methodology

4.1 Introduction

The current study examines visual communication on the home pages of three online newspapers: the Bangkok Post, the People’s Daily, and the Sydney Morning Herald. This section describes the data, and explains the data collection methods, and the data analysis.

4.2 Data

The data for this study come from three online newspapers, each published in a different nation state: Australia (Sydney Morning Herald), China (People’s Daily), and Thailand (Bangkok Post) (see Table 2.10). The Bangkok Post and the Sydney Morning Herald are both public businesses and therefore in the private sector; the People’s Daily is run by the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party and therefore governmental. The Bangkok Post and the Sydney Morning Herald are both written in English; the People’s Daily is an English translation of a Chinese-language newspaper. The Bangkok Post and the People’s Daily are both published in nations where English is not the official language, not commonly spoken, and has no history of institutionalisation: what Kachru & Nelson (2001, p. 12) term expanding circle countries. The Sydney Morning Herald is published in an inner circle country, one of “the old-variety English-using countries, where English is the first or dominant language” (Kachru & Nelson, 2001, p. 12). Each newspaper is, therefore, distinct from the others in a number of ways (cf. Chapter 1), and the data collected provide a
means to examine the extent to which such differences and similarities are realised in the visual discourse of each newspaper.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Private</th>
<th>Government</th>
<th>Inner circle</th>
<th>Expanding circle</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>Translated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sydney Morning Herald</strong></td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bangkok Post</strong></td>
<td>•</td>
<td></td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>People's Daily</strong></td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 4.1: Comparative features of the Sydney Morning Herald, the Bangkok Post, and the People's Daily*

These newspapers were selected according to the following criteria. First, they needed to be located in the Asia-Pacific region. As discussed in section 1.3.2.4, the reason for this was to position the study in the social and geographical region of the researcher, and outside the trans-Atlantic focus so common in mass media research.

Second, each newspaper needed to be an established newspaper, both in terms of its institutional history as a print newspaper, and (in relative terms) as an online newspaper. Third (and closely related to the second criterion), each newspaper needed to have some degree of international name recognition, and to be seen internationally as a representative of the news media in its nation state. Fourth, each newspaper needed to be widely viewed as a ‘serious’ (i.e. not tabloid) newspaper. Fifth, each needed to come from a different nation state in order to give an international perspective. While other newspapers met these criteria (e.g. *The Australian*, *The Jakarta Post*, *The Straits Times*, and the *South China Morning Post*), the three newspapers chosen were selected also on the basis of potential access to news rooms.
(the researcher’s location in Sydney, and personal history as a guest writer for the 
*BKP*), and for contrasting aspects of each newspaper as set out above.

The data can be divided into three parts: home pages, other pages, and 
interviews. A total of 45 home pages, 15 from each newspaper, were collected over 
the data collection period (see section 4.3 following). On each collection date, the 
main domestic news page (i.e. the home page of the ‘domestic’ news section of each 
newspaper: the *News* page in the *BKP*; the *China* page in the *PD*; the *National* page in 
the *SMH*) was also collected (another 45 web pages in total).

One each home page, a number of newsbites were ‘followed’ to ‘story pages’, 
and these pages (carrying longer versions of the ‘same’ story) were also downloaded. 
The same process was followed on the domestic news pages. The number of story 
pages downloaded varied depending on the number of stories on each page, on 
download speeds on given days, and on the changing focus of the research project 
(section 4.3 following), so fewer story pages were collected in the second and third 
data collections. A total of 513 story pages were collected. Table 4.2 summarises the 
web pages collected in this way. A representative sample of pages in the corpus is 
provided in Appendix A.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Newspaper</th>
<th><em>Bangkok Post</em></th>
<th><em>People’s Daily</em></th>
<th><em>Sydney Morning Herald</em></th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Home Pages</strong></td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Section Home Pages</strong></td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Story Pages</strong></td>
<td>140</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>513</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>170</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>603</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 4.2: Web pages in the corpus*
Later in the study, as part of the analysis of the thumbnail images on the home page of the SMH, story pages that were not in the corpus, but that were linked to newsbites carrying hard news stories with thumbnail images were also retrospectively searched and accessed on the web. The urls of these pages were recorded, but the pages were not downloaded.

In 2007, interviews were conducted with senior editors from the Bangkok Post (in January in Bangkok) and the Sydney Morning Herald (in July in Sydney). The transcripts of these two interviews are included as Appendices B and C.

In summary, the data for this study consists of 45 home pages, 45 domestic news pages, 513 story pages, and two interviews.

4.3 Data collection

The corpus of web pages used in this study was collected using the ‘constructed week method’. Bell (1991) explains that the data collection method of a ‘constructed week’ involves the collection of media texts on one day per week for a period of seven weeks (in a seven-day constructed week: Monday to Sunday) or a period of six weeks (in a six-day constructed week: Monday to Saturday). The reason for constructing a six-day week is that the content of Sunday newspapers can differ significantly from their weekday counterparts (Bell, 1991, p.19). Though Bell specifies Sunday newspapers, the Sydney Morning Herald is not published on a Sunday, and the Saturday edition is titled the ‘weekend’ edition. For this reason, both Saturday and
Sunday newspapers were excluded from this study, and a five-day constructed week was used.

The first collection of web pages was made from February 14 to April 8, 2002. As initially conceived, the first data collection was the complete data set of the study. But in late 2005, all three newspapers had changed the design of their home pages. It was apparent that a single data collection was not going to be representative of the home pages of the three newspapers, and that a thesis published on 2002 home pages would be a historical document (this issue is explored further in Chapter 9). As a result, a second round of data collection was made from September 2 to November 2 in 2005.

At the end of 2005, the BKP and SMH again changed the designs of their home pages. This suggested the documentation and explanation of design change over time as a research focus, and so a third data collection was made immediately. As a concession to my supervisor, whose concern was growing as a factor of the rate of growth of the corpus multiplied by the length of the candidature, I stopped collecting data at this point. In all then, the data consist of three constructed 5-day weeks for each newspaper. Figure 4.1 provides a visual summary of the data collection periods.

In all three data collections, logistical constraints in downloading the data meant that data was not always collected in running weeks, something which ‘stretched’ each data collection period longer than the five weeks that would typically be expected to compile a constructed five-day week. Normally, it is reasonable to assume that a constructed week is representative of the content of each newspaper for
a 6-month period (Bell, 1991; Riffe, Aust & Lacy, 1993). However, the current study is of visual design, and not content. Online newspapers change their content daily and their design periodically. Over the data collection period of this study, the BKP had four different home page designs, the SMH four, and the PD had two different designs. It is possible to consider the pages collected during each design period as representative of the visual design of the pages from each newspaper over that entire period.

Figure 4.1: Timeline of data collection

As stated above, interviews were conducted in January and July of 2007. Prior to these interviews, ethics approval was sought and gained from the University of Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee.24 The interviewees gave informed consent before the interviews. Each interview was transcribed and edited for readability, and each interviewee was supplied with a transcript of their interview. Neither interviewee suggested any amendments nor made any objection to their interview transcript. The ethics consent form and information form for participants are

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24 The texts in the corpus, in contrast, were freely available texts in the public domain, and therefore their collection required no ethics approval.
included as Appendix D of this thesis, and as stated above, the interview transcripts are included as Appendices B and C.

4.4 Data analysis

The online newspaper home pages in the corpus were analysed as multi-semiotic, visual signs.

4.4.1 Pages

As stated in section 2.4 above, the language of news has been studied in detail from a variety of perspectives, over a long period of time. While news is often refashioned online (see Chapter 6), it is also true that much of the language of online newspapers is ‘shovelware’, indistinguishable lexicogrammatically from stories published in print editions.

The initial intention of this study was to analyse both language and visual design, and in the early part of the study comprehensive linguistic analysis was conducted on a large number of texts. Over time, though, the visual analysis was both more productive and more interesting, and linguistic analysis was not pursued further. Therefore, the study developed into a ‘mapping’ of the visual design of news on the home pages of the online newspapers studied, and questions of news content (what stories, topics, and events the newspapers covered) and news flows (across media, organisations, and within newsrooms) were superfluous to the focus of the research.
Kress & van Leeuwen’s (1996) framework was applied to the home pages as visual texts. Some of the tools developed by them (e.g. visual-verbal taxonomies) were very useful and explanatory, with relatively little adaptation required in accounting for the data. Other aspects of their ‘visual grammar’ (e.g. the Ideal-Real and Given-New oppositions) required fundamental re-working (Chapter 6).

4.4.2 Newsbites

The earliest analysis conducted in this research was the linguistic analysis of newsbites from the home pages in the corpus, and this led to the identification of newsbites as a distinct news genre. The second and third data collections led to problems for the early description of newsbites, however, particularly the texts collected from the SMH. The rapid expansion in the diversity of newsbites led to a relatively large number of structural descriptions, and raised the issue of how this variation could be accounted for theoretically.

The paradigmatic perspective, privileged in SF theory, was brought into service to account for this variation, and the structural differences between newsbites, differences which expanded over time, were modelled as realisations of paradigmatic meanings at the stratum of genre. This made it possible to map the development of the meaning potential of newsbites over time (Chapter 7).

4.4.3 Rank

The analyses of home pages and newsbites raised questions concerning their relation to one another, and how these could be accounted for theoretically. Djonov’s (2005, 2007) work on logico-semantic relations in websites was relevant, but the decision
was made to pursue the complementary perspective of rank, due to its importance in
the development of Systemic Functional Linguistics, and the fundamental questions
still posed with regard to rank in relation to SF-MDA (section 3.5 above). Class-
function cycles were identified in the data set, and (potential) systems at each rank
were also identified.

4.4.4 Images

A study of the images on the home pages was not intended as part of this study, but as
the researched progressed it became increasingly clear that an account of visual
communication on these home pages could not avoid the question of images on the
page. Viewed collectively, the two most remarkable features of the images in the
corpus were, firstly, that there were so few of them in the BKP and the PD, and
secondly, that there were very large numbers of thumbnail images (and most of these
close-up shots of faces) in the SMH.

The analytical tools developed by Kress & van Leeuwen (1996) were again
applied, together with other SF-based work such as Caple’s (2009) account of
Stenglin’s (2004) work on interpersonal meaning in three-dimensional space was also
important in accounting for the functions of thumbnail images on the home page of
the SMH.
4.4.5 Interviews

In order to inform interpretations made on the basis of the visual discourse analysis, and to relate the analyses to ‘insider’ perspectives, interviews were conducted with editorial staff of the BKP and the SMH.

In the case of the BKP, a senior editor of one of the sections of the newspaper (published in print and online) with whom the current author is familiar was contacted. This editor agreed to be interviewed, and also supplied the name of the person with primary editorial responsibility for the online version of the BKP. Emails to the online editor, and a personal visit to that editor’s office drew no response. In the case of the SMH, a senior editor with responsibility for the online version of the newspaper was first contacted by email. After contact was established, an interview was agreed to and set up. The PD did not respond to a number of attempts to make contact by email.

The interviews were semi-structured, and aimed in part to collect information about the decision making processes in news design. This kind of information was not successfully gathered in the interviews (see transcripts in Appendices B and C). The interview data were not subjected to discourse analysis or qualitative analysis, but they were used to test and inform a number of interpretations made on the basis of the discourse analysis and the literature, and provided very helpful background in developing explanations and in considering implications.
4.5 Methodology: Conclusion

This thesis uses SF-MDA to analyse three constructed weeks of data from three online newspapers collected over a four-year period. Interviews with editorial staff from the two of the newspapers were used to triangulate the findings.

The following chapters use the theory set out in Chapter 3, and the methodological approach set out in this chapter to examine the three newspapers from different perspectives: a focus on the whole website using the tool of rank in Chapter 5; analysing the visual structure of home pages in Chapter 6; analysing the structure of news stories in the SMH (newsbites in particular) in Chapter 7; and focussing on the use of images (thumbnail images in the SMH in particular) in Chapter 8.
Chapter 5: A rank scale for online newspapers

5.1 Introduction

As discussed above, this thesis examines the evolving macro-genres of online newspaper home pages, and newsbites and images on these home pages, from a systemic functional perspective. The purpose of this investigation is to inform our understanding of the nature of these genres and their relations with the social contexts in which they are developing. In order to establish a theoretical base for this exploration of home pages and newsbites, two preliminary issues are addressed in this chapter. These are, first, the question of how newsbites and home pages are related to one another within the structure of the online newspaper, and second, where they stand in relation to the entire structure of the online newspaper. These questions are addressed here using the analytical tool of rank.

Rank, where parts at one structural level combine to form wholes at the next level up, has been an important tool in the development of systemic functional (SF) theory as applied in the analysis of language, and more recently to multimodal texts as discussed in Chapter 3 (see also section 5.3 below). Even so, the suitability of rank as a tool to investigate multimodal discourse remains an open question.

The choice of having ranks or not ... seems to me to be determined by factors such as the size and nature of the phenomena under investigation ... [and] also seems to depend on what one needs the analysis for ... . (Martinec, 2005, pp. 162-3)
More specifically, the applicability of rank to analysing websites has been questioned by Kok (2004), who examines web pages as one level, or ‘order of abstraction’ in a hierarchy of hypertext:

these orders of abstraction are not necessarily related to each other by constituency. Indeed, the orders of abstraction are different in nature to [a rank scale] because hypertext is not a semiotic resource, but a platform for the codeployment of different semiotic resources. (Kok, 2004, p. 134).

But regardless of the nature of the levels and the relationship between them, multimodal communication in online newspapers clearly operates on a number of structural ‘levels’ simultaneously (cf. Baldry & Thibault, 2006, p. 144). That is, what we ‘read’ at any given time makes meaning in relation to:

- other visual and verbal elements on the screen
- other elements off-screen but on the same page
- other pages of the newspaper and their constituent elements.

Because home pages and newsbites (not websites and their ‘levels’\(^\text{25}\)) are the focus of this thesis, the corpus was not collected in order to study whole websites. For this reason, the discussion in this chapter is partial, and exploratory in nature. However, in order to contextualise the analysis of home pages (Chapter 6) and the newsbites appearing on them (Chapter 7), some consideration of how home pages and newsbites function as parts of the whole text of the online newspaper is important. Additionally, the current study provides an opportunity to reflect on the nature of the structural ‘levels’ in online newspapers, and the extent to which the analytical tool of rank - a fundamental theoretical construct in SF theory, and one whose role in SF-MDA is still under investigation and debate - is applicable to online newspapers, in an informed manner.

\(^{25}\) ... and not hypertext, as is the case for Kok (2004), ...
Due to its importance in the development of Systemic Functional Multimodal Discourse Analysis (SF-MDA) (O’Toole 1994; O’Halloran 2004a; Martinec 2005; Zhao, forthcoming), the analytical tool of rank is used here in order to address the framing question set out in Chapter 1:

- What can the analytical tool of rank scale tell us about relations between home pages and their elements, and other elements of the online newspaper? What are the limitations of rank scale in describing the structure of online newspapers?

Section 5.2 following looks at existing descriptions of website structure as given by Djonov (2005, 2007), whose work is based on a detailed study of children’s websites, including children’s news websites. This is then used to inform the complementary description of a rank scale for online newspapers in section 5.3, which is outlined in a ‘top-down’ manner based on the corpus of this study. The implications of this description for the current study, and also for the application of the tool of a rank scale to online newspapers and multimodal discourse analysis more broadly are then considered in section 5.4.

5.2 Web design and periodicity

Djonov (2005, 2007) outlines three perspectives on website structure. The first two draw on the literature in the fields of web useability, information architecture, and human-computer interface. The third perspective, developed by her, integrates aspects of the first two perspectives with the SF notion of hierarchy of periodicity (Martin, 1992; Martin & Rose, 2007; see also Martin, 2002).

26 Examples from outside the corpus are also used at times.
The first of Djonov’s three perspectives, strongly informed by website usability studies (e.g. Nielsen & Tahir, 2002), is the **segmental perspective**. In the segmental perspective, the structure of the website is viewed from the perspective of the number of ‘clicks’ it takes to reach any given page from the home page, and the availability (or lack) of links ‘controls’ a website user’s access to different parts of the website.

Defined in this way, website hierarchy is a control hierarchy. Its *horizontal dimension*, also known as ‘breadth’ or ‘width’, is determined by the number of webpages accessible from the homepage, and its *vertical dimension*, or ‘depth’, by the number of levels below the home page. (Djonov, 2005, p. 132)

Djonov illustrates this perspective with the diagram reproduced here as Figure 5.1.

![Figure 5.1: Website hierarchy from a segmental perspective (source: Djonov, 2005, p. 132)](image)

In contrast, the **holistic perspective**, informed by information architecture (e.g. McGovern, Norton & Dowd, 2002), views websites from a containment perspective. The whole website contains sections, and each section may in turn contain its own, hierarchically subordinate sections.

From the holistic perspective, the *horizontal dimension* of a website is determined by the number of sections the information is grouped into,
whereas its *vertical dimension* is defined by the number of subdivisions (subsections, subsubsections, sub-subsections, etc.) within these sections. (Djonov, 2005, p. 134)

Djonov illustrates this with the diagram reproduced here as Figure 5.2.

![Figure 5.2: Website hierarchy from a holistic perspective (source: Djonov, 2005, p. 135)](image)

The third perspective offered by Djonov, and in fact developed by her, is the **periodicity perspective**. Building on the SF notion of hierarchy of periodicity (or information flow), websites are conceived as hierarchies of Themes. In SF theory, Themes\(^{27}\) serve as the point of departure for information, and give the reader expectations of what is to follow (Martin & Rose, 2007). Djonov demonstrates how web pages at higher levels in the hierarchy of periodicity in (effective) websites are designed to predict what comes ‘below’ them through the organisation of their

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\(^{27}\) Here, the term Theme (a clause-level structure) encompasses the closely related notions of macro-Theme, and hyper-Theme (which are text-level structures).
content, the links provided, and in the way that links are designed to orient the reader to content on the lower pages and aid navigation.

In doing so, she incorporates aspects of the segmental perspective (what is ‘clickable’ from a given page) and the holistic perspective (what is ‘contained’ in each section) by building website navigation into her theory of website hierarchy.

What that means for websites is that a main page below the level of the homepage can function as a higher-level Theme only to webpages belonging to the same section, subsection, subsubsection, and so on. In other words, the subdivision of a website section into subsections can be seen as giving rise to a separate hierarchy of Themes. Each subdivision thus creates a new sequence of webpages available for users to explore or branch away from to visit webpages in other such sequences. All such hierarchies of Themes, however, are united by the homepage as the website’s highest level macro Theme. (Djonov, 2005, p.148)

The periodicity perspective is illustrated by Djonov with the diagram reproduced here as Figure 5.3.

![Figure 5.3: Website structure as a hierarchy of Themes (source: Djonov, 2005, p.147)](image-url)
Chapter Five: Rankscale

The holistic perspective (built on the structural notion of containment, with wholes encompassing smaller sections) outlined above provides at first glance a very similar perspective to the tool of rank (built on the structural notion of constituency, with wholes being built from smaller structural elements) outlined in section 5.3 following (see also Chapter 3). Containment and constituency clearly have similarities as structural principles, but as Djonov (2005, p. 134) explains, there is an important distinction between the two. Applying the principle of containment, “websites may consist of sections, which may consist of subsections, which may consist of sub-subsections and so on”, but applying the principle of constituency, websites must consist of at least one section, which must consist of at least one page, which must consist of at least one zone, and so on. There are important ramifications once these different principles are applied (such as the status of home pages relative to other parts of a website, and the way that the form-function relationship is handled) and this becomes plainer in the course of the discussion in section 5.3 following.

In conclusion to this section, Djonov (2005, p. 134, n.1) notes that future research “may be able to establish a rank scale for modelling the organisation of information in websites as hypermedia texts”. In the section that follows, a rank scale for online newspapers is proposed, though the extent to which it is applicable to websites more generally is an open question (cf. Zhao, forthcoming).

5.3 A rank scale for online newspapers

As discussed in Chapter 3, rank is a central conceptual tool in SFL theory, and has been applied to describing semiotic systems other than language such as visual art,
sculpture, and architecture (O’Toole, 1994, 2004), and multimodal genres such as museum exhibitions (Pang, 2004), print advertisements (Cheong, 2004), and text books (Libo, 2004). A rank scale takes a specific perspective on structure.

A structure is basically a set of relations; primarily part-whole relations, with secondary part-part relations derived from them. ... The elements of structure are the functions defined by these relations... (Halliday, 1981, pp. 129-130)

This is the principle of constituency, “an extremely simple but powerful device, whereby parts are built up into wholes, and these again as parts into larger wholes, but with different organic configurations at each step” (Halliday, 1994, p. 16). Each of these steps is known as a rank, and collectively the ranks as a rank scale.

Figure 5.4 shows, on the left of the figure, the five ranks of the rank scale for online newspapers as discussed in this chapter. On the right of the figure, the class (in lower-case and square brackets) and function (in upper-case and bold) elements, each cycle of which constitutes a single rank, are set out as discussed in the sections following. The claim is that, structurally, online newspapers consist of sections, which in turn consist of pages, which consist of zones, which consist of texts. At each rank, different [class elements] are distinguished by their differing Functional Structures. In the following sub-sections, the ranks in the rank scale are described in turn from the top (newspaper) down.
Chapter Five: Rankscale

5.3.1 Online newspapers

From the perspective of constituency, online newspapers have a predictable, functional structure. This means that in order to function effectively, all websites that belong to the class of online newspapers need to have at least the following three structural elements:

- Portal (which functions as the ‘gateway’ to the newspaper)
- Content (which functions to report the news to the readers)

Figure 5.4: Class-function diagram showing a rank scale perspective on online newspaper structure, from newspaper to newsbite
- Administration (which functions to facilitate the legal and commercial activities of the news institution).

Figure 5.5 illustrates.

![Diagram of online newspaper structure](image)

**Figure 5.5: Proposed constituent structure of online newspapers at the rank of newspaper**

The argument presented in Figure 5.5 is that online newspapers share a *semiotic* structure. The three structural (i.e. functional) elements shown in the figure are at the same ‘level’ in the hierarchy, and realise the class element of online newspaper. This ‘class-realised-by-function’ structure is the fundamental relationship at each rank in a rank scale: each rank is defined by a class-function relationship (typically known in SF theory as a class-function cycle). In turn, each functional element at a given rank (e.g. Portal) is realised by a class element at the rank below (e.g. Portal realised by home section - see further discussion below).

The fact that Portal, Content, and Administration are at the same level in the hierarchy in the rank scale is something which immediately distinguishes this perspective from the segmental and periodicity perspectives discussed in section 5.2 above, both of which place the home page at the top of their respective hierarchies. It is also distinct from the holistic perspective in section 5.2 above, which views website
structure from a formal rather than functional perspective (websites are structured in sections, sections in subsections, all of which are formal elements, as they are not distinguished in terms of their function in the website, nor in terms of their own structure).

Turning to the three functional elements at the rank of online newspaper, the first is a **Portal**, which is the gateway to the newspaper (and includes, but is not limited to the home page). The vast majority of readers enter the site through the Portal each time they read the newspaper, and it is the place to which most readers are directed. The Portal is the ‘home’ of the newspaper’s online presence, through which other areas of the site can be accessed.

**Content** is the *raison d’être* of the online newspaper, and incorporates the ‘news’ of the newspaper and associated content (opinion, background information, blogs, advertising, weather, and so on): what Bell (1991) refers to as editorial content. At the broad level of structure under discussion here, the Content can be distinguished from both the Portal, and from that functional area of the newspaper not devoted to providing current information and debate to readers: **Administration**.

Administration is the ‘institutional nuts-and-bolts’ of the online newspaper, devoted to functions of the news institution including commercial operations (e.g. selling advertising space, selling print subscriptions), legal operations (e.g. providing copyright information, stating the privacy policy), management (e.g. recruiting, publishing annual reports) and so on.

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28 Compare the use of this term by Large, Beheshti & Cole (2002).
Each of these structural elements have different functions (as described by their capitalised functional labels), and in order to fulfil these functions, class elements at the rank below (i.e. the class of elements known as website sections, identified by form rather than function) are brought into service.

Moving down from the rank of newspaper to the rank of section, the three structural elements of the newspaper (Portal, Content, and Administration) are realised by formal elements of website sections (home section, content section, and functional section respectively) at the rank below. In SF theory, this distinction between functional elements and formal elements (called class elements in SF theory) is a fundamental aspect of the theory. Because there is not a one-to-one correspondence between function and form, distinguishing function elements from class elements allows the theory to move beyond formal description, and account for semiotic phenomena such as rankshift and grammatical metaphor (see Chapter 3). The explanatory power of this perspective is illustrated in section 5.4 below.

Figure 5.6 aims to capture the notion of constituency (i.e. parts combining to make wholes) visually, while showing the relationship between the newspaper as a whole, its functional (structural) elements at the rank of newspaper, and the formal (class) elements - website sections - which realise that structure at a rank below. As indicated in Figure 5.6 and discussed above, each functional element (indicated by Initial Capitals) in the overall structure is in turn realised by a class element (written in lower case) at the rank below. So in Figure 5.6, each level of ‘boxes’ (online newspaper at one level, then sections at the next) represents one rank.
Chapter Five: Rankscale

Thus far we have identified the ranks of newspaper and section (each of which represents a class of items which have their own functional structure). As explained in Chapter 3, taking this structural perspective on online newspapers allows us to explore paradigmatic oppositions at different ranks. Taking the rank of newspaper, a

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Other elements of structure may be identified by further analysis.
system can be posited as shown in Figure 5.7. This Figure presents a system classifying (a sub-set of) genres collectively known as newspapers, differentiating online newspapers from print newspapers in terms of their structure.30

What practical benefit does this approach provide? Bateman (2008) questions the extent to which online newspapers can actually be considered as belonging to the same genre family as print newspapers. He argues that online newspapers are closer in some respects to other online texts such as search-engine results pages.

Although there are many issues of design and usability to consider here, what is most relevant for our present discussion is the way in which the properties of the online newspaper align with very different sets of cogeneric texts than might have originally been thought on the basis of its informal classification as a ‘newspaper’. (Bateman, 2008, p. 181)

Questions such as the social role and function of online newspapers, how their structure reflects their social purposes, and the ways in which they are similar to and different from other texts (print, multimedia, and/or online), require thorough and rigorous analysis from a range of theoretical and disciplinary perspectives. Using the tool of rank and deriving systems from the rank scale provides one way forward to address such questions empirically, in a theoretically grounded manner. It may be, as Bateman suggests, that online newspapers are a web genre with little or no structural relation to print newspapers, and this may lead us to a completely different set of paradigmatic relations akin to that illustrated in Figure 5.8.

30 The structure of print newspapers has not been analysed in this study, and I am unaware of any studies describing the structure of print newspapers from a rank-scale perspective.
In this case, questions would arise about how such web genres are related, and the kind of analysis used in this chapter might further lead us to mapping relations between web genres in a way similar to that suggested by Figure 5.9.

Important though they are, such questions are beyond the scope of this thesis, which does not rely on the assumption that online newspapers are systemically related to print newspapers (nor to other web genres), and which provides evidence for the evolution of genres in online newspapers distinct from those which occur within print newspapers (see Chapter 7). Nonetheless, future work aimed at addressing the
relationship between online newspapers, print newspapers, and other web genres could usefully take a systemic approach, where structures on the syntagmatic axis are theoretically related to paradigmatic possibilities, as one starting point.

Combined with work such as that done by Djonov (2005, 2007 - see section 5.2 above), a rank scale allows us to move beyond lay understandings of how online newspapers are structured, and beyond technically-based descriptions of website hierarchy, while incorporating their insights.

### 5.3.2 Sections

In section 5.3.1, the rank of newspaper was described, and the relationship between this rank and the rank of section (i.e. that the structural elements at the rank of newspaper are realised by class elements at the rank of section) was described. This section (5.3.2) considers the three kinds of website section found in online newspapers as identified here (**home sections**, **content sections**, and **functional sections**), each of which has their own functional structure.\(^{31}\)

The home section of an online newspaper has two structural elements: an optional **Splash**, and an obligatory **Orientation**. Figure 5.10 illustrates the home section from a Thai newspaper, *The Nation*, in 2008, and is used here to illustrate a

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\(^{31}\)Djonov (2005) also identifies **surfacing sections**, in which links to pages from a range of different content (and/or functional) sections are grouped together on a single 'home page' (see section 5.3.3 below for discussion of home pages). For the purposes of this chapter, surfacing sections are assumed to be structurally the same as content sections (in terms of constituency) and are therefore not considered separately. This assumes, however, that different sections (at one rank) share constituents (pages) at the rank below, which challenges the notion of constituency as it has been used in SF theory.
home section with its potential structure fully realised, as there are no Splashes in the corpus of this study.32

Figure 5.10: Illustration of the home section of The Nation online, September 9, 2008

Historically, some news websites have had included a Splash (realised by a splash page at the rank below) in their home section (cf. Djonov 2005, p. 113 n.1). Splash pages “served no navigational function. Instead, the screen was eye candy for users, ... [and the] splash screen was not popular with news websites” (Cooke, 2003, p. 171). The Splash (as used in Thai online newspapers at the time of writing) highlights a single event or issue as being extraordinarily newsworthy, and where present is particularly revealing of the values of the news institution, and of the community of readers they are attempting to foster. While there are no Splashes in the current corpus, many Thai online newspapers periodically include a Splash (e.g. during the mourning period following the death of members of the Thai Royal family;

32 The Orientation used in this figure was retrieved from an archive approximately two weeks after publication.
during the trial of then prime minister Samak Sundaravej and other key events in the 2008 Thai political crisis).

While the Splash is optional and usually absent, the Orientation (realised by a home page at the rank below) is essential, and functions:

- ideationally (by providing an overview of the news of the day from various news categories, in particular that news valued by the authors of the newspaper as being most important; and related information)
- interpersonally (by establishing the authority of the voice of the newspaper, by verbal and visual valuation of the content presented, and by establishing ‘communality’ among the authors and readers of the newspaper by building familiarity)
- textually (by providing navigational information and links, by acting as a Macro-Theme for the newspaper which “gives us an orientation to what is to come: our frame of reference as it were” (Martin & Rose, 2003, p. 181)).

The structure of home pages functioning as Orientation in home sections is the subject of Chapter 6, and also considered briefly in section 5.3.3 following.

Turning from home sections and their structure (i.e. Splash and Orientation), to content sections and theirs, content sections have a structure of Briefing and Dispatch. The Briefing is, like the Orientation in home sections, realised by the class of page called home page (see further discussion below), and gives the reader an overview of the information (i.e. news content) in a given section of the newspaper. In contrast, the Dispatch (realised by the class of page called story page) gives the details of one or more news stories (Figure 5.11).
Chapter Five: Rankscale

**Figure 5.11:** Partial illustration of the ‘China’ content section of the People’s Daily online, January 5, 2006

**Figure 5.12:** Partial illustration of the ‘national’ content section of the Sydney Morning Herald online, March 3, 2006, showing serial expansion of story pages
Within a content section, the Briefing is realised by one and only one home page, while the Dispatch is realised by one or more than one story pages. In technical terms, class elements have the potential for serial expansion (i.e. the same class element can be repeated), and this potential is realised by story pages as shown in Figure 5.12.

Just as there can be serial expansion of story pages in the Dispatch of a content section (Figure 5.12), so too can there be serial expansion of entire content sections (e.g. a ‘national’ section, a ‘business’ section, and so on) each having the same functional structure (Figure 5.13).

![Figure 5.13: Serial expansion of content sections and story pages](image)

The theoretical principles of class-function cycles (e.g. online newspapers realised by Portal+Content+Administration, realised in turn by sections), constituent structure (e.g. Briefing+Dispatch at section rank), and serial expansion (e.g. Dispatch being realised by a series of story pages) provide us with the tools to map the *semiotic* structure of online newspapers both ‘vertically’ and ‘horizontally’ from a particulate perspective.
Thus far, both home sections and content sections and their respective structures have been discussed. The third kind of section, **functional sections**, are so named following the terminology of the web design literature.

**Content** and **functional** website sections are the only two types of website sections recognised in hypermedia design. Content sections contain information on a given topic or activities of a certain type (e.g. voting polls, chat forums, games, quizzes). ... Functional sections, by contrast, inform users about the purposes, privacy policy, content and organisation of the website, its designers, sponsors and/or the institution it represents. (Djonov, 2005, p. 123; bold type in original)

For this thesis, the structure of functional sections (which realise the newspaper-rank structural element of Administration) has not been analysed, and this aspect of the rank scale is not pursued further in this thesis.

![Diagram of online newspaper structure](image)

*Figure 5.14: Illustration of the ranks of newspaper and section*
Chapter Five: Rankscale

The layer of structure described in the preceding paragraphs allows us to extend the diagram in Figure 5.6, as shown in Figure 5.14. In turn, taking a systemic perspective on the rank of section, the diagram in Figure 5.14 gives rise to the system shown in Figure 5.15 (cf. Figures 5.7 - 5.9 which posit oppositions at the rank above).

![Diagram of section hierarchy](image)

*Figure 5.15: Basic system of sections in online newspapers*

As with a systemic approach at the rank of newspaper, this approach to online newspaper sections allows us to map the *semiotic* architecture of online newspapers in addition to the *web* architecture by considering the paradigmatic oppositions at play. Sections differ in terms of their functional structure (e.g. *(Splash)^Orientation* contrasts with *(Briefing)^Dispatch*), providing a semiotically-grounded basis for distinguishing different website sections which incorporates both their structure, and the paradigmatic oppositions realised by the different structures at this rank.

To this point, we have looked at the ranks of newspaper and section, how systems can be derived at each of these ranks. In the following sub-sections, we examine the ranks of page, zone, and text.
5.3.3 Pages

The rank of page reflects an important phylogenetic development:

in modern society the page is an important textual unit and a comparison of virtually any page from contemporary publications (whether newspapers, school textbooks or scientific journals) with those of previous generations will show that this change in status is due mainly to the rise of the multimodal page in the last fifty years (Kress, van Leeuwen, 1996).

(Baldry, 2000, pp. 41-2; cf. Cooke, 2003)

The multimodal pages of the online newspapers in the corpus under investigation realise the structural elements of sections, and different classes of page have emerged in response to the functional demands of online newspaper authors and readers.

Beginning with the pages which realise the functional elements of home sections, splash pages realise the functional element of Splash, and home pages realise the functional element of Orientation as illustrated in Figure 5.16 (recalling Figure 5.14).

![Figure 5.16: Classes of page realising functional elements in home sections](image-url)
Splash pages (which realise the Splash) are rarely used in online newspapers. They typically have a single link to the home page of the newspaper, and are visually engaging with little verbal content. As explained in the discussion of the Splash in section 5.3.2 above, these pages are revealing of the values around which the newspaper builds its readership, but have little informational value. Because there are no splash pages in the corpus of this study, and because they are relatively rare in online newspapers, there is no analysis here of their structure.

Moving from splash pages to home pages, home pages realise the Orientation (see Figure 5.16 above). Home pages (of websites in general) have been discussed by various authors. Thurstun (2004) identifies homepages as a separate ‘text type’, and defines them as “the external pages of a site, the pages that provide a map of the website and which are the user’s introduction to the site”. According to Kok (2004, p. 140), a website homepage:

- “serves the function of welcoming and introducing the [hypertext reader] to a series of linked webpages”
- “is held to be the locus of point to all the other linked webpages”
- “may also serve as an index of varying degrees”.

Nielsen and Tahir’s ‘useability’ perspective is a business-oriented approach to home pages, and is also relevant to the current purpose. “The most critical role of the homepage is to communicate what the company is, the value the site offers over the competition and the physical world, and the products or services offered” (2002, p. 2).

These descriptions of home pages are all functional, and in fact correspond to the Orientation *function* of the home section of online newspapers which is realised
by home pages, but do not necessarily correspond to the class of home page, which can map on to more than one function (as discussed below - cf. Figure 5.14 above).

Home pages are identifiable by their structure. The home pages in this study have a predictable structure which distinguishes them from other classes of page in

Figure 5.17: Home page from Bangkok Post, March 15, 2002, with structural elements indicated
online newspapers (though story pages have a very similar structure, and this is taken up further below). The elements of structure of home pages in the corpus of this study are illustrated in Figure 5.17. Home pages have a Brand - an area on the page which prominently and explicitly provides the identity of the newspaper. The Brand (realised by a header) establishes the identity of the newspaper, often by some to the print newspaper front page. Home pages also have the structural element of Navigation (realised by navigation zones), which functions to allow the reader to navigate beyond the page to other pages and sections of the newspaper. In addition, home pages have a Signature which signifies ownership of the content of the newspaper and is realised by a footer. Home pages can also include Marketing, which sells products or publicises other parts of the newspaper. Finally, and importantly, home pages also have the functional element of News Coverage. News Coverage functions to give an overview of events and/or issues in one or more news domains (e.g. international news, entertainment news), and is realised by a visual or visual-verbal taxonomy (discussed in section 5.3.4 below).

Figure 5.18: Classes of page realising functional elements in content sections
The home page illustrated in Figure 5.17 realises the function of Orientation in the home section of the *BKP*. Having considered both splash pages and home pages in home sections, we turn now to those pages which realise the functional elements of content sections. **Home pages** realise the functional element of Briefing in content sections, and **story pages** realise the functional element of Dispatch as illustrated in Figure 5.18 (recalling Figure 5.14).

As home pages realise the functional element of Orientation in home sections and the functional element of Briefing in content sections, there is some justification in asking how they can realise both. The reason for this analysis is that the functional structure of those pages realising the two functions of Orientation and Briefing is the same (i.e. they share the structural configuration of Brand, Navigation, Signature, Marketing, and News Coverage). For this reason, there is no structural justification for distinguishing between *home pages* (which are class elements), but there is justification for distinguishing between the *functional roles* this class of page realises in different semiotic environments at the rank above.

In SF theory, there is not a one-to-one correspondence between elements of structure and the class elements which realise them. Taking the case of the class of home pages, in this thesis home pages are defined by their functional structure. At the same time, as wholes in their own right, they can realise different functional roles at a higher rank. This is one advantage of taking a rank perspective on structure: it is possible to show how home pages functioning as an Orientation in a home section are related to those functioning as Briefing in a content section. That is, they have the same structure when examined ‘from below’ at the rank of page. At the same time, it
is possible to show how they differ: they realise structures playing different functional roles when examined ‘from above’ at the rank of section. In short, they have the same form, but realise different functions, a relationship which cannot be accounted for in theories which do not distinguish between function and form.\textsuperscript{33}

Figure 5.19: Structure of home pages functioning as Orientation in the home section (left) and as Briefing in a content section (right) Sydney Morning Herald, January 5, 2006

Figure 5.19 compares home pages playing different functional roles in the same newspaper on the same day, and demonstrates the structural consistency between them.

\textsuperscript{33} As discussed in section 5.3.6 below, the ability to distinguish between function and form comes at a cost, and that is the accessibility of analyses due to the volume of technical terminology necessary to describe phenomena such as online newspapers in a rigorous and theoretically consistent manner.
Turning to pages realising the function of Dispatch in content sections, this functional element is realised by story pages, which are typically dominated by the text of one and only one news story, and which may instantiate any of a variety of news genres (e.g. editorial, hard news story, feature - see Iedema, Feez, & White,
1994). The text of a story page may be verbal/visual (e.g. ‘traditional’ newspaper stories), or aural/visual (e.g. sound clips, or video clips). Story pages provide the text of a given story in greater detail than is allowed for on home pages.

The structure of story pages is very similar to that of home pages. Both classes of page have the structural elements of Brand, Navigation, Signature, and Marketing, but unlike home pages, story pages have the element of News Excursus rather than News Coverage (Figure 5.20; cf. Figure 5.17).

In summary, on the basis of the description of pages provided in this section, four classes of page can be identified: functional pages (not described in this thesis), splash pages, home pages, and story pages. Two of these page types (home and story pages) report the news, and their shared function is realised in a shared structure. A system network of options at the rank of page in online newspapers can be derived as shown in Figure 5.21.

![Figure 5.21: Partial and provisional system of pages in online newspapers](image)
One interesting point illustrated by this system is the relative lack of structural variation between news pages. There are only two kinds of news page which can be distinguished on the basis of their structure, and these share an almost identical constituent structure.\textsuperscript{34} This consistency between pages can be explained partly by the virtual nature of web pages, and the need to build navigation into the design of each page (see Djonov, 2005, 2007). This is also related to building reader familiarity with the newspaper - it is vital to the survival of the institution to build a committed readership who are comfortable with the reading experience they get from the newspaper (Thurman, 2007; see Chapter 8).

At the same time, issues raised by Bateman (2008) as to the relation of online newspapers to other print and online genres (see section 5.3.1) are relevant again here.

The online page is ... in many respects closer generically to online offerings such as web-browser result pages and simple lists, possibly with subheadings breaking those lists down into categories. The multidimensional access possibilities of the print newspaper are severely reduced. (Bateman, 2008, p. 181, emphasis in original)

At the rank of page, Bateman’s argument is strongly supported by the analysis of online newspapers presented here and summarised in Figure 5.21. That is, there appears to be more structural similarity than diversity between news pages playing different functional roles in online newspapers. In Chapter 7, we return to this argument at a lower rank, and examine how online newspapers home pages appear to be evolving to reconcile the need for page-rank consistency across the newspaper on

\textsuperscript{34} Subsequent studies devoted to online newspapers may identify additional classes of news page realised by different functional structures, particularly when looking at pages employing audio and video multimedia.
one hand, with the need for ‘multidimensional’ design on the page in presenting stories on the other.

In summary to this sub-section, the four elements of structure at the rank of section - Splash and Orientation in home sections, and Briefing and Dispatch in content sections - are typically realised by three classes of page - splash pages (for Splash), home pages (for Orientation and Briefing), and story pages (for Dispatch). Because this thesis is an examination of home pages, there is no further detailed consideration of story pages in this chapter.

**5.3.4 Zones**

As described in the previous section, the functional elements of home pages are realised by zones. Table 5.1 gives the relationship between elements of structure at the rank of page (as identified above), and the class elements at the rank of zone which realise them (cf. Figure 5.17 above). These zones each have their own structure, but due to the focus on news texts in this thesis, only the structure of **news taxonomies** (which realise the functional element of News Coverage) are explored in this section.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page-rank structure</th>
<th>Class of zone</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brand</td>
<td>header</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Navigation</td>
<td>navigation zone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News Coverage</td>
<td>news taxonomy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing</td>
<td>marketing zone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Signature</td>
<td>footer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 5.1: Relation of realisation between page-rank structures and classes of zone on online newspaper home pages in the corpus*
Figure 5.22: Covert news taxonomy (left) from the SMH, February 26, 2002, and overt news taxonomy with category headings circled in red (right) from the BKP

February 26, 2002

News taxonomies (which realise News Coverage) have a structure including two functional elements. The first is one or more Superordinates, which may be
**overt** and realised in the form of verbal titles, or **covert** and realised visually, but not verbally. The second is one or more **Subordinates** (realised in the form of news stories). The **covert** visual taxonomy in Figure 5.22 positions ‘hard’ news (in the left column) against ‘lite’ news (in the right column), and these are differentiated at zone rank by positioning (in the two columns), relative size, and the white space that separates the two columns, but have no verbal classification (see Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996).35 The **overt** taxonomy in Figure 5.22 has verbal **Superordinates** (*General News, Business News, Entertainment, Outlook, Horizons Travel, Real.Time*, circled in red in the figure) which classify the Subordinates in conjunction with coloured bars and borders. These visual-verbal taxonomies of news are discussed at length in Chapter 6 following, and so are not explored in any more detail at this point.

As at other ranks, it is possible to systematize the options at the rank of zone, but because a detailed description of other elements of this rank (such as headers, navigation zones, footers, and so on) would require a level of detail beyond what is necessary for the current purpose, a systemic description of this rank is not explored further at this point.

In conclusion to this sub-section, zones each have their own functional structure. The zone relevant to the current purpose, the news taxonomy, has a structure of Superordinates (realised verbally and/or visually) and Subordinates (realised by news stories). The next section describes the rank of text.

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35 Note that ‘hard’ news is sub-classified verbally further down the page into **OTHER TOP, WORLD, BIZTECH, OPINION, ENTERTAINMENT & ARTS**.
5.3.5 Texts

The structures of zones on home pages (only one of which was described in section 5.3.4 above) are realised by texts at the rank of text. In order to describe these texts, the “basic prefabricated meaning-making resources” called mini-genres by Baldry (2000, p. 60) make a useful starting point. The kinds of texts identified by Baldry (as shown in Table 5.2) represent some of the text types found on online newspaper home pages. While not all Baldry’s examples are found in the corpus of this study, and not all the elements found in the corpus appear in Baldry’s table (see section 5.4 below), it nonetheless provides a useful overview of the kinds of static texts that can be expected on many contemporary pages, online and print.36

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verbal</th>
<th>Visual</th>
<th>Visual and Verbal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Abstracts</td>
<td>1) Bars (top, side, etc.)</td>
<td>1) Captions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Acknowledgements</td>
<td>2) Diagrams</td>
<td>2) Charts (flow, pie, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Affiliations</td>
<td>3) Drawings</td>
<td>3) Graphs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) Headings and Titles</td>
<td>4) Logos</td>
<td>4) Maps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) Interviews</td>
<td>5) Photographs</td>
<td>5) Tables</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6) Letters (to the editor)</td>
<td>6) Sketches</td>
<td>6) Tree structures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7) Main verbal (running) text with Reports, Hypotheses, etc.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.2: Different types of mini-genres (source: Baldry 2000, p. 59)

To take the example of news taxonomies (at the rank of zone), their structural elements of Superordinates can be realised verbally by item 4) in Baldry’s Verbal column (Headings and Titles), or implicitly realised by item 1) in the Visual column (Bars (top, side, etc)). Meanwhile, Subordinates are realised by item 7) in the Verbal

36 Baldry’s typology is meant to focus on elements that can function as complete ‘texts’ in their own right. Other meaningful design elements such as typography or layout design, are dealt with at different ranks.
column (Main verbal (running) texts with Reports, Hypotheses, etc.), more specifically in this case, news stories (see Figure 5.22 above).

As illustrated in Figure 5.23, there are three kinds of news stories on home pages (all of which realise the structural element of Subordinates at the rank above).

The least common in the corpus of this study (and more generally) are **standalones**, which have a relatively large image, an extended caption, but no hyperlink. Much more common than standalones are **newsbits**, which are headline-only hyperlinks to story pages (though in some online newspapers outside the corpus - particularly some tabloids - these are becoming more complex, sometimes including thumbnail images and sometimes systematically differentiated by font type and size). The third kind (and the subject of Chapter 7) are **newsbites**, which are the one-paragraph
headline+lead+hyperlink stories which feature on home pages and which, like newsbits, typically link to story pages.

Because newsbits are the news text which are the focus of this thesis (and described in detail in Chapter 7), the structure of standalones and newsbits will not be pursued in this section. For the current discussion, it is sufficient to explain that newsbits minimally have three structural elements: **Focus**, **Event**, and **Link** (Figure 5.24).

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*Figure 5.24: Newsbites from Bangkok Post (top), People’s Daily (middle), and Sydney Morning Herald (bottom), February 26, 2002 showing basic structural elements*
Chapter 5: Rankscale

A partial system for news stories at the rank of text is shown in Figure 5.25.

Chapter 7 pursues this system in terms of delicacy, and its evolution over time. The argument presented in Chapter 7 is that the issues raised by Bateman (2008) in relation to home pages as discussed in section 5.3.1 and 5.3.3 above (i.e. their relation to other print and online genres, and the affordances they offer authors and readers of online newspapers) need to be explored in a way which incorporates a thorough consideration of newsbites and other news texts, and that a systemic approach can offer insights that would be difficult to reach by other analytical methods.

![Diagram](image)

*Figure 5.25: Partial system of news stories on online newspaper home pages*

For this section, it is sufficient to say that newsbites are one of three kinds of news text found on online newspaper home pages, that texts in the current corpus can be distinguished systemically, and that newsbites can be differentiated at more delicate levels as described in Chapter 7, below.
5.3.6 Rank scale: Conclusion

There are five ranks in the rank scale for online newspapers described here: **online newspaper**, **section**, **page**, **zone**, and **text**. At each rank, systems can be derived which give options for sub-classes of elements at that rank.

**Figure 5.26: Class-function diagram showing a rank scale perspective on online newspaper structure, from newspaper to newsbite (reproducing Figure 5.4)**

Various diagrams have been used to this point to illustrate the rank scale, but the ‘class-function’ diagram typical of SF descriptions has thus far not been used.
Class-function diagrams show the relationship between class elements (in small letters and square brackets in the diagram) and functional elements (with Initial Capital in the diagram) in a tree-structure. Figure 5.4 (reproduced as Figure 5.26 for convenience) shows a class-function diagram which includes all the elements discussed to this point (apart from the structure of story pages). The broken lines in the diagram indicate aspects of the rank scale not included in the diagram.

In light of the discussion which has brought us to Figure 5.26 (and which is summarised therein), we can return to the two issues outlined in the first paragraph of this chapter: first, the relationship between home pages and newsbites, and second, their place in the overall structure of the online newspaper.

The first point to clarify is that this thesis does not examine home pages; rather, it examines home pages realising the Orientation function of the home section of online newspapers. Thus, the term **home page** as used in this thesis refers to a ‘home page realising the Orientation function of the home section of an online newspaper’ unless otherwise indicated.

With regard to the relation between home pages and newsbites, newsbites appear in news taxonomies which realise the News Coverage function of home pages, and do not appear in other zones such as headers, footers, or navigation zones (which realise other functions on the page). Newsbites obviously play an important role collectively in introducing a sample of the news of the day (specifically selected and prioritised by the institutional authors of the newspaper) to the readers. Functioning as Subordinates in news taxonomies, they are classified within the higher-level structure.
of the home page, and their brevity (both verbally and spatially) allows the authors of
the newspaper to construct the news taxonomies which classify the news content on
the home page, while at the same time giving enough information for readers to
follow their interests by navigating to story pages. In this way, they provide effective
entry points to a variety of content sections, and contribute to the ideational (or
informational) and textual (or navigational) functions of home pages. Newsbites
contribute also to the interpersonal functions of home pages both visually and
verbally, and this is discussed further in Chapters 6 and 7.

With regard to their place in the overall structure of the online newspaper, in
constituent terms both home pages and their newsbites are located in home sections
which realise the Portal (through which the majority of readers come to the online
newspaper), and are therefore important in readers’ initial experience of an online
newspaper.

Home pages (and the Orientation function they realise) are relatively ‘high’ in
terms of the constituent structure of the newspaper, and are therefore less likely to be
consciously ‘read’. That is, elements at or near the top of the constituency structure
have an important rhetorical function in terms of the overall structure of the
newspaper, but are more opaque to lay notions of what it means to ‘read’ a text,
notions which are dominant also in educational systems and literacy approaches
where:

- lexicogrammatical meaning is privileged over (often to the exclusion of)
  meaning in higher linguistic strata (i.e. grammar over discourse, register, and
  genre - Martin and Rose, 2008)
ideational meaning is privileged over (often to the exclusion of) interpersonal and textual meaning (i.e. traditional grammar rules over the structures of evaluation, reader positioning, information structure, and cohesion - Lemke, 2002; Unsworth, 2006), and

linguistic meaning is privileged over (and often to the exclusion of) multimodal meaning (i.e. language over image, layout, colour, gesture, space, and so on - Kress, 2000).

In contrast, at the ‘bottom’ of the constituent structure outlined here, newsbites appear at face value as short, or partial versions of ‘traditional’ news texts which can be read unproblematically as texts in their own right. Yet their brevity belies their key role in presenting the news on the home page (which plays a key role in introducing the reader to the online newspaper day by day), and this suggests that they are worthy of greater attention than they typically receive in the literature.

In summary to this section then, the rank scale shows the positioning of home pages and newsbites in the overall constituent structure of the newspaper, a constituent structure with five ranks.

5.4 Implications of the rank scale

The analytical tool of the rank scale is central to Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), and has been pivotal in some of the foundational work in SF-informed Multimodal Discourse Analysis (SF-MDA) (e.g. O’Halloran, 2004a; O’Toole, 1994). The analysis in section 5.3 above demonstrates that a rank scale analysis of online
newspapers is possible. Further, it demonstrates that the rank scale analysis of class elements and their functional structures at different ranks, and the identification of the paradigmatic oppositions at play between different classes of element at each rank, can offer insights that other approaches to analysis may not, or may nor readily offer.

In terms of describing the structure of an online newspaper, a rank scale approach offers a number of insights, including the following. The first is the identification of the home section (realising the Portal) as a separate section from content and functional sections, a perspective which contrasts with the segmental, holistic, and periodicity perspectives on website structure recounted in section 5.2. The distinct, yet complementary structural perspective provided by the rank scale gives the analyst the ability to account for home pages (functioning as Orientation in home sections) and particularly splash pages (functioning as Splash in home sections) within the structure of the website rather than as pages that somehow ‘stand apart’ from other structural elements of the website (see the segmental and holistic approaches in section 5.2).

The second finding to highlight here is the identification of home pages as a class element which function as an Orientation in the home section (introducing readers to the entire online newspaper), and which also function as a Briefing in content sections while having the same structure when analysed ‘from below’. This allows the analyst to account for the relation between home pages on one hand, and so-called ‘main pages’ or ‘section pages’ (i.e. home pages functioning as Briefing in a content section) on the other in a theoretically consistent manner.
One key advantage of taking a rank scale approach, is the ability to explain the
phenomenon of rankshift. In rankshift, functional elements are realised not by class
elements from the rank below, but from class elements at the same or a higher rank. In
language, for example, a clause may realise the function of Subject within another
clause. Take the constructed example: going to the beach is fun. In this example, the
non-finite clause going to the beach realises the functional element of Subject, which
would ‘normally’ be realised by a nominal group from the rank below (e.g. this game
is fun).

In online newspapers, a similar phenomenon occurs where the functional
element of Content at the rank of online newspaper is realised not by a content section
(from the rank below), but by a rankshifted online newspaper (from the same rank)
(cf. Martinec & van Leeuwen, 2009, Chapter 7). An example of this is the SMH of
2008 and early 2009, where Content is realised by serially expanding content sections
(section 5.3.2 above) along with rankshifted online newspapers.37 The Content of the
newspaper associated with the topic of sport, for example, is not realised by a content
section, but by an online newspaper with its own embedded structure of Portal
(realised by a home section with an Orientation, but no Splash) and Content (realised
by serially expanding content sections of NRL, Union, Beijing Olympics, Cricket, and
so on). (Figure 5.27)

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37 Another constructed example can show how this operates. The Subject in the following clause is
realised by serially expanding class elements, namely two nominal groups (from the rank below), and
two non-finite clauses from the same rank: Violence, war, people killing people, and people killing
animals are all wrong. In the same way, Content in the SMH as discussed here is realised by serially
expanding content sections (from the rank below) and online newspapers (from the same rank).
Compare Figure 5.13 above.
Chapter Five: Rankscale

Figure 5.27: Rankshift in the SMH of January 30, 2009

In some cases, the Content is realised once again not by a content section, but by another online newspaper. In the example above, the Union hyperlink takes the reader to the rankshifted online newspaper called Rugby Heaven, which is an online rugby newspaper shared by the SMH, and sister publications The Age, Brisbane Times, and WA Today (Figure 5.28). This can be represented in a class-function diagram as shown in Figure 5.29.
Reading across the bottom of this class-function diagram, it is possible to see the path of home pages that a reader might take to find a current story on rugby. The navigational path from home page to home page shows the connection between the constituency perspective taken here, and the periodic perspective taken by Djonov (2005, 2007). Following the rank of page from left-to-right in Figure 5.29 (also Figure 5.27), home pages function as successive Orientations as the reader navigates into
rankshifted online newspapers, and then finally as Briefing as the reader enters a content section. Following Djonov’s periodic perspective, home pages function textually as successive Macro-Themes as the reader navigates through them in their role in the hierarchy of Macro-Themes of the online newspaper. From the metafunctional perspective of SF theory, these two structural perspectives (periodic and particulate) are simultaneous.

Figure 5.29: Class-function diagram illustrating the relation between SMH and Rugby Heaven
Chapter Five: Rankscale

Returning to rankshift, rankshift also occurs at the rank of text, with the functional elements of Tangent and Navigator Menu in some newsbites (see Chapter 7) being realised by the class elements of newsbits and menus respectively at the same rank (Figure 5.30).

Figure 5.30: Newsbites with rankshifted menu functioning as Navigator Menu (top) and rankshifted newsbits functioning as Tangents (bottom) from SMH of March 27, 2006

So, while the development of a rank scale is costly in terms of the time necessary to identify and label the ranks, their class elements, and their functional elements, and in terms of the volume of technical terminology that must be borrowed / co-opted / invented in their construction, from a theoretical perspective a rank scale for online newspapers appears to provide a valuable and powerful tool to help explain the products and processes of semiosis in this semiotic environment.

Rank scales are fundamental also in the generation of system networks in SF theory (Chapter 3). The systemic perspective afforded by using a rank scale also
presents a number of advantages for analysts of semiosis in online newspapers. As discussed in section 5.3.1 above, a paradigmatic (systemic) perspective provides a useful analytical approach to examining empirically the extent to which online newspapers are generically related to print newspapers, and to other online genres (cf. Figures 5.7 and 5.9 above).

The structural consistency between home pages and story pages, and the identification of the ‘news area’ of the page (i.e. the structural element of News Coverage versus News Excursus) as the element where there is differentiation in page structure, as discussed in section 5.3.3 are illustrated well in a systemic perspective. In addition, the identification of systemic distinctions between news texts on home pages (section 5.3.5) opens this level of structure for the analysis in Chapter 7. The analysis presented there contributes to explaining the ways in which online newspapers are evolving to allow for the needs of newspaper authors and readers to have ‘multidimensional access’ to stories (Bateman, 2008; see Chapter 7), at the same time as having consistency in design from page to page in order to aid navigation (see Chapter 6).

The application of a rank scale to online newspapers is not, however, without its problems. For instance, video stories once tended to appear on separate story pages (in those cases where online newspapers carried them at all). Increasingly, however, home pages of ‘video’ content sections run complete video stories on the home page (performing the function of Dispatch) along with the overview of the content on the same page (which plays the function of Briefing), blurring the distinction between
page and video screen. The SMH’s ‘video news’ page, for example, has a number of ‘channels’ (News, Entertainment, Life & Style, Executive Style ...) and realises the functions of both Briefing and Dispatch on the same page, if indeed these are the functional elements of this section (Figure 5.31). In this way, developments in technology and in institutional approaches to presenting the news online continue to pose theoretical challenges, some of which may not be accounted for by using the structural principle of constituency (see Zhao, forthcoming).

Figure 5.31: The ‘video news’ page from the SMH, February 2, 2009

Contributing to these challenges also is the very use of semiotic resources such as video (which is timed and therefore has a very different relationship to a page on which it appears than a static image or verbal text) and sound (which is not ‘part’ of the page at all). Such elements clearly cannot be considered as parts which combine

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38 This suggests that the class element of ‘screen’ or ‘window’ may now sit alongside ‘page’ in realising functions from the rank of section.
into whole zones which in turn combine into whole pages in the same way as the texts listed in Table 5.2 and discussed in section 5.3.5 above. This poses fundamental problems for any attempt to describe home pages, and therefore online newspapers using the structural principle of constituency.

In a similar way, marketing zones in online newspapers are not always adequately described by the notion of constituency. The advertisements that appear on online newspaper pages may appear as pop ups, as temporary animated overlays, or even as animations that move across or around the screen (and disappear, or not). It is difficult to maintain an argument that such texts are a constituent of marketing zones, and such texts therefore also challenge the very notion of constituency.

In conclusion to this section, applying the tool of a rank scale to online newspapers has a number of advantages, but also a number of important limitations. It requires the analyst to identify the elements of analysis explicitly and consistently, and to be clear about the elements of structure, the levels of structure, and the relations between them. Because there is not a one-to-one correspondence between the structural elements and the class elements which realise them, it allows the analyst to move beyond formal descriptions, and account for the functional roles played by different forms (for example, the different roles played by home pages, and also the phenomenon of rankshift).

Like any analytical tool or model, rank scale should be pushed until it loses its explanatory power, until it breaks. The issues which cause key problems for rank scale mentioned above (for example, single pages which appear to simultaneously
realise a number of the functions at the next rank up; and the existence of elements in online newspapers such as video texts and animation which defy the structural principles of constituency) in fact did not cause significant problems for the current study as the pages in the corpus are largely static.\(^{39}\) This immediately dates the corpus, and illustrates how quickly online newspapers are evolving and producing challenges to the analytical tools we might have expected to be most useful in the early days of their development.

In short, online newspapers have not yet broken the rank scale, but serious cracks are emerging, and the kind of theoretical rigour once applied to developing this tool will need to be applied to developing the next generation of analytical tools, with close attention to the texts under investigation (cf. Barnhurst, 2009).

5.5 Rank and online newspapers: Conclusion

It is now possible to return to the framing question set out in Chapter 1 and repeated in section 5.1 above:

- What can the analytical tool of rank scale tell us about relations between home pages and their elements, and other elements of the online newspaper? What are the limitations of rank scale in describing the structure of online newspapers?

Home pages play a role near the top of the constituent structure, in the Portal of the online newspaper and are therefore important in introducing readers to the content of the newspaper. Newsbites appear in the News Coverage on home pages,

\(^{39}\) It is worth repeating here that the corpus was collected in order to study home pages, not websites, so there may have been elements of the online newspapers under examination that would have caused such problems, but were not collected.
and allow the newspaper authors to classify the news on the page in news taxonomies, giving readers entry points to content sections and an overview of the news stories valued as most important by the newspaper (see section 5.3.6 above).

Rank scale is a useful tool to analyse online newspapers, particularly online newspapers which carry texts that are primarily static. Especially in the early days of online newspapers, when they consisted primarily of shovelware (Boczkowski, 2004a; cf. Barnhurst, 2009), a rank scale would have been relatively unproblematic in its application.

However, the evolution of new ways of presenting news, which have come about due to advances in technology and changes in the institutional practices of newspapers (e.g. the use of video footage and slide shows to tell stories) means that the structural principle of constituency may become progressively less able to account for the structure of online newspapers as they evolve.

In conclusion to this chapter, as mentioned a number of times throughout already, applying the tool of a rank scale in a thorough manner is a labour-intensive practice, requiring a high volume of technical terminology, and therefore a high degree of effort on the part of the analyst, and on the part of the audience to whom the analyst is writing. It provides an important and effective tool for theorists, but requires judicious application (see below) and careful translation in its reporting. Further, much of the technicality in a rank scale needs to reside in the background when the structures it describes are brought into pedagogical texts for practitioners, educators, and students. This kind of translation of SF theory has already been done successfully
in fields including language education (e.g. Feez, 2001; Martin, 1999), media
discourse (e.g. Iedema, Feez & White, 1994), and other fields (see Chapter 3), and the
rank scale description outlined here is one contribution to the longer-term, collective
process of developing empirically- and theoretically-grounded descriptions which are
accessible to practitioners and students not familiar with Systemic Functional
Multimodal Discourse Analysis.

Returning to the point made by Martinec (2005) at the outset of this chapter,
the usefulness of rank as an analytical tool in MDA depends on a range of factors,
including, crucially, the nature of the semiotic phenomenon under investigation.
Language lends itself to constituency analysis because the structural principle of
constituency is consistent with a fundamental structural principle in language (see
Chapter 3). Texts employing (combinations of) other semiotic resources (such as
dynamic web pages) have emerged in different social contexts, to meet different
communicative demands, and are therefore likely to develop with different kinds of
structure (see Zhao, forthcoming). Thus, in using what we know in order to learn
about what we don’t, we need to remain mindful of what our analytical tools reveal,
and what they may hide.
Chapter 6: Home pages

6.1 Introduction

The home page is the most visible and commonly viewed page of an online newspaper. Fishman & Marvin (2003) describe the front page of print newspapers as:

the editorial face of the newspaper. From an infinite informational world, front page news carves out familiar group interests and identities in concentrated visual space. Here is where the [newspaper] speaks loudest, the most important news of the day appears, and news values and practices are most sharply drawn (Gelsanleiter, 1995; Resiner, 1992).

(Fishman & Marvin, 2003, p. 33)

This description applies equally well to home pages of online newspapers, and with the emergence and rise of online newspapers, home pages have been examined from various theoretical perspectives as discussed in Chapter 2.

In this chapter, home pages are described from a systemic functional perspective. The multimodal design of online newspaper home pages (which are understood here as complex, multi-semiotic signs - cf. Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1998, pp. 187-8) is described. The description is organised in terms of the metafunctions of SF theory (Chapter 3), describing the ideational, interpersonal, and textual structure of home pages.

The description of home pages and newsbites presented in this and the following chapter is based on the current corpus, though examples from outside the corpus are used at times. Online newspapers are evolving rapidly, and increasingly use the semiotic resources of animation, video, sound, and other communicative
devices that hypertext has made possible. Such elements rarely feature in the corpus of this study beyond advertisements, and are therefore not investigated in this chapter. The ongoing, trans-disciplinary investigation of online newspapers will, however, need to include description and analysis of such features (see Chapter 9).

Section 6.2 below describes home pages as visual signs, firstly in terms of their ideational structure, then their interpersonal structure, and then their textual structure. In doing so it draws heavily on the work of Kress & van Leeuwen (1996). In section 6.3, conclusions are drawn.

6.2 Home page design

This section describes the visual structure of online newspaper home pages, providing a consideration of the ideational, interpersonal, and textual meanings construed in the design of the page. The focus is on home pages functioning as an Orientation in home sections of the newspaper (see Chapter 5), because these are the ‘face’ of the newspaper.

As explained in Chapter 4, the approach taken in the analysis for this thesis is to examine home pages as complex visual signs which include language, rather than as linguistic texts which include visual meanings.40 Drawing on the metafunctions of SF theory, this led to the question of how meaning is construed visually on the page, as set out in the relevant framing question posed in Chapter 1, and repeated here.

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40 Of course, this is not an either/or question, because home pages are multi-semiotic texts (both visual and verbal) (see Lemke, 2002). Rather, it is a question of what is the best ‘way in’ to the data based on the questions posed.
How do home pages - as unified visual signs in their own right:
- represent the human experience of events which are deemed newsworthy enough to appear on the page?
- construe a relationship between the readers of the newspaper, the institution of the newspaper, and the actors and events reported?
- construct coherent and cohesive messages?

The three parts of the question are addressed in sections 6.2.1, 6.2.2, and 6.3.3 respectively.

### 6.2.1 Home page design and ideational meanings

Recalling the discussion in Chapter 5, home pages have a constituent structure which includes the following elements:

- Brand
- Navigation
- News Coverage
- Marketing
- Signature.

The discussion in this section focuses primarily on the News Coverage of home pages for a number of reasons. First, it is the structural element of the News Coverage (realised by news taxonomies) which differentiates online newspaper home pages from story pages in the corpus of this study in terms of their constituent structure (see Chapter 5). All news pages in the corpus have a Brand realised by a header across the top of the page, a Signature realised by a footer across the bottom, Navigation realised by one or more navigation zones in the left column and/or across the page towards the top (and often also near the bottom), and Marketing realised by marketing zones typically spread around the page. Thus, the News Coverage can be seen as the key structural element differentiating home pages from story pages.
Second, other elements on the page play a more important role in other metafunctions. The Brand and Signature, for example, are elements in the constituent structure of the page, but in terms of communicating news content to the reader they contribute little or nothing. In contrast, they both play an important interpersonal role in defining the relationship between the reader and the newspaper. The Brand identifies the newspaper, connects the website to the established institution of the print newspaper, and establishes the authority of the ‘voice’ of the home page and the entire online newspaper. In a similar way, the Signature signifies ownership of the newspaper copy, establishing that reader and newspaper have differential rights in relation to the content of the newspaper, and in doing so helps to define the social roles of newspaper and reader and therefore the relationship between them (see section 2.5.1). The functional element of Navigation plays an important textual role on the page, orienting the reader to the field of discourse and to the structure of the website. Navigation creates expectations for the reader about what kind of content can be found, and allows the reader to find their way to it (and back), but does not provide that content. Therefore, in terms of the ideational content of the home page, the News Coverage is the most important structural element.

Finally, news taxonomies are a particularly useful aspect of page design to examine for the development of pedagogical approaches to ‘reading’ and ‘writing’ home pages (Chapter 9). They are, perhaps, the most transparent aspect of the role that design plays in communicating content on online newspaper home pages, and for readers and (prospective) authors, developing an understanding of how news taxonomies can be ‘written’ and ‘read’ is a very achievable pedagogical goal, and an empowering one.
Turning now to the home pages, in Kress & van Leeuwen’s terms:

visual structures of representation can either be
- **narrative**, presenting
  - unfolding actions and events,
  - processes of change,
  - transitory spatial arrangements, or
- **conceptual**, representing participants
  - in terms of their more generalized and more or less stable and timeless essence,
  - in terms of class, or structure, or meaning.

(Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, p. 79; reformatted and emphasis added)

Home pages, as coherent units of visual meaning, are not narratives. Technologically, they could, in principle, use video, animation, collections of images, and/or other tools of hypertext to construct an unfolding visual synopsis of current news events. Socially though, print newspapers come from a history of representing events primarily in language, and using the visual semiotic of layout to organise verbal meanings (see Chapter 2). In this way at least, the institutional practices which have evolved with news-in-print are continued online to a large extent, and home pages represent the day’s ‘world of news’ visually not as an unfolding narrative, but as a collection of items which exist in relation to one another.41 They do this by constructing taxonomies of news. In the following paragraphs, we look at the nature of visual taxonomies, and then turn to a description of the home pages in the corpus based on this notion.

Kress & van Leeuwen (1996) discuss **visual classification**, where visual objects are (1) of approximately the same size and shape, (2) consistently spaced against a plain background, and (3) overtly or covertly connected in a taxonomical

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41 As one scrolls down the page, there is no sense that a story is unfolding. Rather, the reader is presented with a collection of comparable items from which they are invited to choose.
relationship. News stories on the home pages in the corpus of this study are of approximately the same size and shape, and consistently spaced against plain backgrounds. Where there are consistent visual differences between news stories (for example, in the PD as discussed below) they are grouped with others of the same size and shape. In this way, they are visually identified as members of the same class of item, and afford the construction of visual taxonomies.

Figure 6.1: Overt visual-verbal classification, BKP home page, 26 February 2002
On some home pages outside the corpus, news stories are grouped together, but are sometimes of a different size or shape. In such cases, other visual similarities such as colour, font type and size, and layout signify that they are members of the same class of item. This is discussed and exemplified later in this section.

Visual classification on the home pages of this corpus can be illustrated by the BKP's home page design in BKP Period I, where the newsbites are sized, grouped and framed in distinct categories (General News, Business, and Entertainment which has the sub-categories of Outlook, Horizons Travel, and Real.Time), each of which approximates a screen of information (see Figure 6.1).

The use of coloured horizontal bars and narrow vertical borders to frame different categories of news clearly indicates this visual organization - General News is headed by a blue bar, Business News by brown, Entertainment and its sub-categories by purple - and the interaction between visual framing and verbal headings construes a visual-verbal taxonomy (cf. Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996, pp. 79-89; Unsworth, 2001, pp. 78-85), or an ideational structure as indicated in Figure 6.2.

![Figure 6.2: Taxonomy of newsbites from the Bangkok Post home page](image)
Kress & van Leeuwen (1996) identify two kinds of visual classification. **Overt taxonomies** are those visual structures which “include the Superordinate. The process [i.e. the relations between the different participants in the taxonomy] usually takes the form of some kind of tree structure” (p. 81). In contrast, **covert taxonomies** are those visual structures in which “the Superordinate is either only indicated in the accompanying text, or inferred from such similarities as the viewer may perceive to exist between the Subordinates” (p. 81).

![Diagram: A topological perspective on overt and covert visual classification]

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On the home pages in this study, explicit tree structures are not used, and the Superordinate (typically *News*) is not named. The overt / covert distinction is, therefore, viewed as a cline rather than a dichotomy (i.e. topologically rather than typologically), and the presence or absence of devices such as explicit framing (with, for example, borders), and the verbal naming of categories are taken to indicate the extent to which taxonomies are overt or covert. Thus, the terms **overt / covert taxonomy** are used slightly differently here than in Kress & van Leeuwen (1996), and their meanings in this thesis are represented diagrammatically in Figure 6.3.

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42 On home pages functioning as Orientation in home sections, the Superordinate (typically *News*) is never named in this corpus. On home pages functioning as Briefing in content sections, the Superordinate (e.g. *National, Business, Sport*) is often named at the top of the News Coverage.
Chapter Six: Home pages

Figure 6.4: Covert visual classification, SMH home page, 26 February 2002

The taxonomy on the home page of the Bangkok Post as shown in Figure 6.1 above can be seen as a relatively overt taxonomy, as the Subordinates are verbally labelled and clearly visually indicated by bars and borders.

More covert classification is used on the Sydney Morning Herald home page during SMH Period I (mid 1999 - March 2002), as can be seen on the home page in Figure 6.4, where both the middle and right columns are occupied primarily by...
newsbites. Each list of headline-only hyperlinked newsbites in the bottom part of the centre column is also roughly the same size as individual newsbites in the same column. The two columns (two classification categories) in the SMH are un-named and implicitly framed, separated only by white space and differentiated by the size of newsbites in each column (determined partly by column width). In the SMH, the centre column contains hard news (i.e. the reporting of current or recent events which are the traditional mainstay of newspaper stories), and the right hand column holds lite news (i.e. news centred on ‘personalities’ or the lives and issues of individuals, rather than the public - see Chapter 2).

While visual classification (i.e. positioning in the news taxonomy) does not always match with institutional and verbal classifications of news as ‘hard news’, ‘soft news’, or ‘lite news’ (Chapter 2), when a story appears on a home page, the authors of the page have a clear choice to make. On the home page of the SMH at this time, the choice is:

Is a given story to be classified as:

- hard news (and valued as serious), or
- lite news (and valued as falling towards the ‘gossip’ end of the news-entertainment spectrum)?

The classificatory choice of positioning on the page has ramifications for the design of the story on the home page (even in texts as short as newsbites), including headline design, layout, the use (or not) of an image, the choice (and cropping) of the image where used, and the wording of the story (Chapter 7).
On this SMH home page, readers are presented with a visual taxonomy of news realising a different system of classification than that on the BKP home page, and realised by different visual devices (e.g. white space versus borders; column width versus coloured bars with verbal headings). This classification is illustrated in Figure 6.5.

In summary, the overt - covert cline in news taxonomies is illustrated and exemplified in Figure 6.6, which brings together Figures 6.1 - 6.5.

As foreshadowed above, news taxonomies on the home pages of this corpus (and in other online newspaper) also display another choice in their visual design of ideational meanings. This is a choice of the extent to which those items being classified are represented as being the same as each other (i.e. homogeneous), or as having differences (i.e. heterogeneous). To illustrate, we can turn again to the home page of the BKP of February 26, 2002. As shown in Figure 6.4, the different categories of news (General News, Business, Entertainment) are very similar in size and in their visual design (e.g. shape, framing), and the news stories in them are also very similar in size and visual design. These design choices construe these elements visually as homogeneous. Not only are they all members of the same class of item, but beyond that they are very similar members of the same class.
Looking at the same home page, there are two more elements of the news taxonomy that we have ignored thus far in this chapter. These two elements, in the right column, are visually distinct from the remainder of the news taxonomy, yet they are part of the News Coverage. Figure 6.7 illustrates.
Departing from Kress & van Leeuwen, we can see the different elements on the page as multisemiotic (visual and verbal) units which fall under the same Superordinate, regardless of their visual similarity.\footnote{Bateman’s (2008) ‘layout structure’ has similarities to this approach, though Bateman separates this out from rhetorical structure and other layers.} In this news taxonomy, we can see that there are elements which are visually construed as homogeneous, and others as heterogeneous (e.g. General News in the centre column versus Highlights in the right column). As with the covert / overt distinction, the homogeneous / heterogenous
choice is a cline, and home pages tend to differ according to the extent to which they represent the visual elements in the news taxonomy as homogeneous and heterogeneous.

In Figure 6.8, the homogeneous category of General News at the left of the figure has four news stories, each of roughly the same size and shape, and also having the same font, font size, colour scheme, and headline design. In contrast, at the right of the figure, there are four newsbites with the same design, one newsbite with a different design (including a large image), and eight newsbits in two groups. Despite their heterogeneity, we read them all visually as news stories, and therefore as part of the same taxonomy.

News taxonomies can mix homogeneous and heterogenous classification at different levels within the taxonomy. For example, in PD Period I, the categories of news are visually heterogeneous when compared with one another, but within each
category the Subordinates are visually homogeneous (Figure 6.9). The same applies to PD Period II (Figure 6.10).

![Image of PD home page on February 26, 2002]

Figure 6.9: Home page from PD, 26 February, 2002, showing heterogeneity between categories (marked with red border), and homogeneity within categories

Visually, each of these different areas of the News Coverage on the PD home page can be seen as a separate taxonomy (each has elements of the same size, against a plain background, with a named Superordinate, presented visually as members of...
the same class). But by virtue of appearing together on the same home page, they can be read as Subordinates of the Superordinate News (Figures 6.9 and 6.10).

Figure 6.10: Home page from PD, 2 September, 2005, showing heterogeneity between categories, and homogeneity within categories

At the rank of zone, news taxonomies on the home pages in the corpus offer two choices, overt/covert and homogeneous/heterogenous. Systemically, these are

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44 Thus, the News Coverage can be seen as a taxonomy with rankshifted taxonomies realising the functional role of Subordinates, which would ‘typically’ be realised by texts at the rank below (see Figure 6.11; cf. Chapter 5).
simultaneous design choices as a news taxonomy can be, for example, **covert and homogeneous**, OR **covert and heterogeneous**. Further, both choices are applied again and again at each level of the taxonomy. Because the choices are made repeatedly, in systemic terms, they are recursive.

![System network of news taxonomies](image)

*Figure 6.11: System network of news taxonomies*

A system network of news taxonomies is shown in Figure 6.11. The double-headed arrows indicate that the oppositions of overt/covert and homogeneous/heterogenous are clines, not dichotomies, and the choice to **go again** re-enters the system. That is, in the system, one of the simultaneous choices is to **stop** (having also chosen **covert** or **overt**, and **homogeneous** or **heterogeneous**) or to re-enter the system and make the choices again at another level. (The left-facing square bracket at the entry condition is an ‘either/or’ choice, just as right-facing square
brackets are. So the entry to the system is a choice of an initial news taxonomy, or re-entry.)

Having considered the nature of visual taxonomies and how they can present and classify news on home pages, we now turn to the development of news taxonomies over time in the SMH, PD, and BKP over the data collection period.

6.2.1.1 Sydney Morning Herald
Beginning with the SMH, Table 6.1 recalls the discussion in Chapter 4 of the four design periods of the SMH, and provides the dates of each period.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sydney Morning Herald Period I</th>
<th>Sydney Morning Herald Period II</th>
<th>Sydney Morning Herald Period III</th>
<th>Sydney Morning Herald Period IV</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Table 6.1: Design periods in the SMH represented in the corpus
Figure 6.12: Visual-verbal sub-classification of hard news on the SMH home page, 8 April, 2002 (SMH Period II)

Figure 6.13: News taxonomy of the home page of the SMH, Period II
Over these four design periods the news taxonomies on the home page of the
*SMH* become progressively more complex. As shown above, the home page during
the first design period has a basic taxonomical division of **hard** and **lite** news, though
hard news is verbally sub-classified, with the sub-classifications towards the bottom
of the page having lists of *newsbits*, rather than newsbites as found at the top of the
page. Thus, the sub-classifications of **TOP STORIES, WORLD, BIZ-TECH, OPINION**, and
**ENTERTAINMENT & ARTS** can be added beneath *Hard* in the tree structure in Figure
6.5 above.

In the second design period, grey horizontal bars provide more overt sub-
classification of hard news, and this sub-classification includes hard-news newsbites
(Figure 6.12). This can be represented as a tree diagram as shown in Figure 6.13.

In *SMH* Periods III and IV, there are significant changes to the news taxonomy
on the *SMH* home page. Beginning with Period III, a new column is introduced. Hard
news remains in the widest, most salient column on the page, and lite news remains in
the right column, but between the two, a column of newsbites which includes feature
stories on a range of topics is added (Figure 6.14). Like the **hard** and **lite**
classifications, this column is un-named, and is labelled here as **soft news**. The news
taxonomy on the *SMH* home page during this design period can be represented in a
tree structure as shown in Figure 6.15.
Chapter Six: Home pages

Figure 6.14: Home page of SMH, 12 October, 2005 (SMH Period III)

Figure 6.15: News taxonomy of the home page of the SMH, Period III
With the addition of the category of soft news, the home page of the SMH in Period III has four columns, including the main navigation zone on the page in the left column. Looking at the navigation zone, the first menu titled news is virtually a repetition of the different sub-classifications of hard news, though not in the same order (Table 6.2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initial menu items in Navigation Zone</th>
<th>Subordinate categories under hard news</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>news</td>
<td>TOP (un-named)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>breaking</td>
<td>WORLD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>national</td>
<td>NATIONAL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>world</td>
<td>BUSINESS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>business</td>
<td>TECHNOLOGY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>technology</td>
<td>ENTERTAINMENT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sport</td>
<td>SPORT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rugbyheaven</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>entertainment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.2: Navigation and taxonomical labels on SMH home page, Period III

The repetition between the menus in the navigation zone and the Subordinate headings in the news taxonomy down the page raises two design issues. The first is redundancy, and whether the redundancy in navigation menus and news taxonomies is managed efficiently on the page or not (cf. Djonov, 2005). The second issue is the space at the bottom of the Navigator, where approximately half of the left column on the page is completely empty (Figure 6.14), a situation that would not be acceptable on the front page of a print newspaper.
Chapter Six: Home pages

Figure 6.16: SMH home page (SMH Period IV) and basic news taxonomy
These issues are dealt with in the design of the home page in Period IV.

Navigation is moved from the left column to a number of locations on the home page: to a horizontal bar across the top of the News Coverage, to another at the bottom of the page above the Signature, and also where relevant to the horizontal bars which

Figure 6.17: Columns on the home page of the SMH, Period IV
demarcate the different sub-categories under hard news in the left column (Figure 6.16). In this way, there is still redundancy in navigational hyperlinks, but it is much better managed (see Djonov, 2005, 2007 for a comprehensive account of the design of website navigation), and all space on the ‘prime real estate’ of the home page is used to the newspaper’s advantage. At the same time, the news taxonomy in Period IV differs markedly from that in Period III. The news taxonomy in Period IV sub-classifies news into main news and soft news. Main news is further classified into a number of categories such as World, National and so on (all but one with verbal headings), and each of these categories is further classified into hard news and features (Figure 6.16).

Overall, the page is divided into two main columns - down from four in Period III (Figure 6.14), with the widest column consisting of a number of horizontal subdivisions, each of which is further subdivided vertically. This gives the visual impression of a third, ‘middle’ column on the page, so there is continuity between the news taxonomy of Period III (with its three columns of hard, soft, and lite news) and the appearance of the page in Period IV (Figure 6.17).

Taxonomically though, the use of verbal headings, horizontal bars, and vertical borders construct a news taxonomy in which the ‘middle’ column is subordinate to the verbal subcategories of TOP (un-named on the page), TIME OUT, WORLD, NATIONAL, OPINION, BUSINESS, TECHNOLOGY, ENTERTAINMENT, and SPORT. This can be illustrated by taking one of these categories and looking closely at the use of framing. In Figure 6.18, the sub-category is headed TECHNOLOGY, and the horizontal bar in which this verbal heading is placed extends completely across the ‘main’
column. A light, vertical line separates the news stories on the left from the image-dominated news story on the right, while both clearly come under the category of TECHNOLOGY (cf. Figure 6.17). Overall, the design of the news taxonomy falls between the poles of covert and overt (having covert properties because the Superordinate and first level of Subordinates are all un-named and therefore implicit; and having overt properties because the Subordinates in the ‘main’ column have verbal headings and because explicit framing is used to delineate all classifications).

In Period IV, the design of the SMH home page appears to strike a better balance between navigation zones and the news taxonomy. By re-designing the main navigation zone as a horizontal menu above the news taxonomy, more space is given to the News Coverage the taxonomy realises, and the redundancy between the hyperlinking Subordinate category headings (e.g. BUSINESS, ENTERTAINMENT, SPORT) and the navigation menus is used to advantage.

At the same time, developments in technology have contributed to this change, with animated drop-down menus employed in the navigator menu across the top of the page (Figure 6.19).
Thus, while the news taxonomy in Period IV is more repetitive conceptually than in earlier design periods, it appears to be better designed for the computer screen, with a similar pattern of visual classification repeating itself as the reader scrolls down the page (cf. the discussion of the BKP home page’s overt taxonomy above). Thus, the structure of information on the home page in SMH Period IV has been better designed for the medium than in previous page designs.

In summary, over the data collection period, the news taxonomy on the home page of the SMH becomes more complex in terms of its classification scheme (see Figures 6.5, 6.13, 6.15, and 6.17), while at the same time becoming progressively more overt. In Period IV, there is a clearer use of visual resources to indicate the relations between categories, and the designers have taken into account the
affordances and constraints of the scrolling screen, and made better use of the consistency between the structure of the news taxonomy and navigational menus, employing hyperlinks and the evolving tools of hypertext such as animation. This suggests an increasing familiarity on the part of the news institution with the online medium, and a conceptual move away from ‘simply’ presenting columns of stories beneath a masthead, and towards a page designed more specifically for the world wide web.

6.2.1.2 People’s Daily

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>People’s Daily Period I</th>
<th>People’s Daily Period II</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Table 6.3: Design periods in the PD represented in the corpus

Turning now to the People’s Daily (PD), the home page designs of the PD display a mix of devices to classify the news on the home page. Recalling the discussion of
newspaper design periods in Chapter 4, Table 6.3 shows the two design periods for the PD.

Figure 6.20: Visual-verbal classification, PD home page, 26 February 2002 (PD Period I)

Figure 6.21: Taxonomy of news from the PD home page, PD Period I
In *PD* Period I, newsbites (top and centre of page) are visually distinguished from other news texts (newsbits and a table) by visual form, framing,\(^{45}\) and positioning on the page. Each group of texts realises a Subordinate in the news taxonomy on the page, and all Subordinates are named (except the group of newsbites) (Figure 6.20).

Because most of the categories have verbal headings, and there is also explicit use of framing to distinguish between them, this design is relatively overt. At the same time, it is heterogeneous *between* categories, and homogeneous *within* categories (see discussion of Figure 6.9 above). The classification realised by the design of the home page in Figure 6.20 is shown in Figure 6.21.\(^{46}\)

When the PD changes its website and home page design in May 2004, the Subordinate categories in the news taxonomy on the home page also change, but the page continues to feature a mix of visually distinct, explicitly framed categories (Figure 6.22).

The new page design leads to a re-classification of the ‘world of news’ presented to the readers of the PD, with the ‘flat’ taxonomy with seven Subordinates from *PD* Period I replaced with a taxonomy with a mid-layer of four categories, and 15 news categories at the ‘lowest’ level of the taxonomy (Figure 6.22).

\(^{45}\) Framing includes the use of borders, bars, and background colours.
\(^{46}\) The group of newsbites on the page is given the label *Main news* in Figure 6.21.
The bottom layer of Subordinates in the taxonomy has two visual levels for reasons of presentation and legibility. Conceptually, China, Business, World and so on are at the same level.
The main navigation menu, a horizontal bar at the top of the news taxonomy in PD Period I, moves to the top of the left column in PD Period II. The items in this menu are also the category headings in the bottom half of the central column (see Figure 6.22), and so like the home page of the SMH in SMH Period IV, the redundancy between the navigation menu (visible in the ‘first screen’ of the page) and the verbal headings in Special-topic news in the news taxonomy (visible as the reader scrolls down past the ‘first screen’) is used to advantage.

Like the SMH, the trend in the development of the news taxonomy on the home page of the PD during the data collection period is towards a more intricate news taxonomy, though the PD uses a range of framing devices together with verbal classification in both periods to construct a relatively overt taxonomy, with heterogeneity at ‘higher’ levels of classification and homogeneity within categories.

6.2.1.3 Bangkok Post

Moving from the PD to the BKP, the BKP went through four design periods during the data collection period as discussed in Chapter 4 and shown in Table 6.4.

Compared with the changes in the news taxonomies in the SMH and PD, the changes in the design of the BKP home page through BKP Periods I-III are much more straightforward, simply adding new categories to the taxonomy as shown in Table 6.5.
### Table 6.4: Design periods in the BKP represented in the corpus

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BKP Period I</th>
<th>BKP Period II</th>
<th>BKP Period III</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Subordinate categories**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BKP Period I</th>
<th>BKP Period II</th>
<th>BKP Period III</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General News</td>
<td>General News</td>
<td>General News</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business News</td>
<td>Business News</td>
<td>Business News</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entertainment</td>
<td>Entertainmen</td>
<td>Entertainment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outlook</td>
<td>Outlook</td>
<td>Outlook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horizons Travel</td>
<td>Horizons Travel</td>
<td>Horizons Travel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Real.Time</td>
<td>Real.Time</td>
<td>Real.Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IT News</td>
<td>IT News</td>
<td>IT News</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 6.5: Subordinate categories of newsbites on the BKP home page over three page designs: August, 2001 - December, 2005**
Around the end of 2005, ‘Post Digital’ was formed as a separate business operation within the Post Publishing Public Company Limited, and a significant redesign of the BKP home page was made (see Appendix B). The colour scheme of the
redesigned newspaper changes to being designed around red and pink. As a result, in the new design, the main, centre column of news is demarcated visually with pink horizontal bars with verbal headings. The same basic categories remain, with *IT News* renamed *Database* (making it consistent with the print edition), and *Sports* added. Taxonomically, the main change in this design period is a flattening of the taxonomy from earlier periods (Figure 6.23).

*Figure 6.24: Visual-verbal classification and simplified taxonomy of newsbites, BKP after July 2004*
After the data collection period for this study, in August, 2006, the design of the home page of the BKP is again updated, and a more fundamental change in the taxonomy of news results. A number of the categories of news are moved out of the centre column to the bottom of the page (Outlook, Database, RealTime, Motoring, Horizons, and Perspective) and distinguished visually. The Subordinates of these categories are headed by blue horizontal bars with verbal headings, and each category has a single newsbite with thumbnail image (Figure 6.24). Taxonomically, this change adds a Subordinate category in the taxonomy (i.e. Perspective), but more fundamentally re-classifies the news content on the home page into hard and soft news.

Throughout the changes discussed above, the classification on the home page of the BKP over the data collection period moves slightly towards a more covert taxonomy, in contrast to the other two newspapers. The framing device of borders is removed, though coloured horizontal bars and verbal Subordinate headings are used throughout, so the shift is minor. Throughout though, the classification is consistently based on the institutional structure of the newspaper. With the exception of Breaking News, each of the Subordinates on the page had their own editor and staff, and over time various desks in the news institution were granted their own ‘slice of real estate’ on the home page (e.g. the IT or Database desk in September 2003, the Sports desk in December 2005, the Perspective desk in August 2006) (cf. Appendix B). The taxonomy, then, represents the institutional structure, and the changes in the taxonomy are likely to reflect institutional decision making processes, institutional politics, and/or interpersonal relationships within the institution.
This relationship between news taxonomies on home pages on one hand, and the structure and practices of the news institutions on the other, is now considered.

### 6.2.1.4 News taxonomies and news institutions

As Kress & van Leeuwen point out: “Classification processes do not, of course, simply reflect ‘real’, ‘natural’ classifications” (1996, p. 81). The design of the page constructs (or re-presents) an institutional version of the ‘real world’ (see van Leeuwen, 1993), and such constructions inevitably represent some relations at the expense of others. For instance, on the BKP home page after July 2006 (Figure 6.24), the hard news category included *General news, Sports,* and *Business* (among others). At the same time, soft news included *Perspective* (which includes commentary, analysis and investigative pieces), *Horizons* (the travel section), and *Motoring* among others. Topically, the content of the *Perspective* section of the newspaper is closely related to the content of the *General news* section, but not to *Motoring* or *Horizons.*

Yet institutionally, *Perspective* is one of the weekly lift-out sections of the print newspaper with its own desk and staff, and presumably therefore, grouped with other lift-out sections from the print edition and represented differently to *General News* on the home page.

Beyond the question of *how* different newspaper desks are classified on the home page, the fact that different desks are not represented *at all* in the BKP taxonomy at various times shows that home page classifications do not necessarily

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48 *General news* and *Perspective* are also more closely related topically than *General news* and *Sport.*
reflect lay classifications or institutional structure. I spoke about this to a senior editor at the *Bangkok Post*.

JK: And now, once upon a time, on the home page for example, [your section of the *Bangkok Post*] was just one small link in a column.

Ed: Yeah, we wonder why you know. I think why can they all read every other section, right? And then for [my section], they have to look for it. And then I think they changed it only recently. They made it easier only recently.

JK: So was there any involvement from [your] staff in that change, or was that just something that came about independently?

Ed: I think somebody around just complained. I did not make any formal protest or did not make any formal question as to why [my section] was sidelined like that.

(interview with author, January, 2007 - see Appendix B)

This ‘remove’ between the editorial staff of the newspaper and the online version reflects the institutional context at the *BKP*. In the *Bangkok Post* building in January, 2007, the online edition of the *BKP* was produced in a small office in a section of the complex, very distant from the newsroom. Stories were uploaded onto the newspaper’s computer system by journalists and editors, then downloaded and ‘shovelled’ into the online version by workers sitting in an office at computer terminals.

This is in contrast to the institution of the *SMH* in July of 2007, where the relationship between the print and online editions of the newspapers in the newsroom was far more integrated, with online and print journalists and editors located together and working together (Appendix C).
Newspapers have organisational practices and structures which are reflected in textual practices. For instance, the taxonomies construed by the design of the home page are obviously central to the financial and ideological missions of any online newspaper (cf. Fishman & Marvin, 2003; Thurman, 2007). The categorisation of news presented by the home page should presumably reflect readers’ understandings of the world, or editors’ and journalists’ ‘expert’ understandings of the world of news (as reflected in the institutional practices and structures of the newspaper). In a perfect world for the news institution, it would represent both.

Where the categorisation on the home page does not represent such socially constructed realities, news institutions need to consider the extent to which the design of their home page represents a productive challenge to the status quo (either the social order, or individual readers’ understandings of it), or at the other end of the spectrum, poor communication. There is a need for research into the processes of making such design decisions, the rationale behind them, and their relationship to institutional practices and structures (see de Vries, 2008; cf. Bell, 1991; Boczkowski, 2004a; McCargo 2000). Why, for instance, did the PD taxonomy lose (for instance) Today’s Headlines and Today in History, and gain (for instance) News Features and Most Popular in the change from PD Period I to PD Period II? How consistent are these changes with institutional practices and structures, and/or readers’ understandings of the world? The interviews conducted in the course of this research were an attempt to shed light on these processes, but were unable to yield any data on them (Appendices B and C).
What is clear, though, is that decisions about the design of the home page of an online newspaper are fundamental to the way in which the newspaper represents the events which become the news (de Vries, 2008). In this way (and others), home page design (as part of newspaper design) is a fundamental aspect of the culture of the institution, and mediates the ideational meanings communicated by the newspaper institution to its readers.

6.2.1.5 News taxonomies: Conclusion

In conclusion to this section, news on home pages can be classified in very different ways, not just between newspapers, but also in the same newspaper over time. For readers and teachers of reading, explicit knowledge of how these classification schemes are constructed visually and verbally can be applied to understanding the ways in which events and actors are represented and categorised in individual newspapers, including what is made explicit and what is left implicit. This is one element in reading online newspapers critically. Explicit consideration of news taxonomies on home pages involves readers in looking beyond the content of the newsbites and newsbits which dominate home pages, and beyond the language of story pages, to the semantic structure of pages and the website (see Chapter 5; Djonov, 2005). It can also assist in developing an understanding of the relations between institutional practices and structures on one hand, and the ways in which newspapers communicate the ‘world of news’ on the other. For the education of prospective news workers and designers, explicit descriptions of news taxonomies and the design features that realise them can assist in developing a common language between educators, designers, and news workers.
In summary, online newspapers in the current corpus use news taxonomies in their ideational representation of the news on their home pages. News taxonomies can be largely overt (including explicit devices such as verbal labels and framing) or largely covert (using few or no verbal labels and implicit visual devices); and relatively homogeneous (with a high degree of consistency between and within categories) or heterogeneous (with a high degree of diversity); and the organisation of taxonomies can be expected to bear some relation to the structure of the news institution, though the extent to which this is the case is likely to vary widely from institution to institution, just as the news taxonomies themselves differ.

6.2.2 Home page design and interpersonal meanings

All texts (verbal, visual, aural, multimodal ...) mean interpersonally - they construe relations between ‘authors’, ‘readers’, and the content of the text. As units of visual meaning, home pages:

- communicate the stance of the newspaper (e.g. authoritative or speculative; reporting or entertaining; objective or subjective; factual or creative)

- value actors and actions in the news

- mediate relations between the newspaper and the audience in a way that engages readers.

It is the first of these - the stance of the newspaper - with which this section is primarily interested. Chapter 7 has more to say about how design contributes to valuing actors and events, and Chapter 8 about how readers are engaged through visual design.
In texts using language, interpersonal relations are enacted linguistically in systems such as:

- at the stratum of discourse semantics (Martin, 1992; Martin & White, 2005):
  - APPRAISAL (or evaluation: the encoding of the speaker’s stance towards something and the positioning of the hearer in relation to it)
  - NEGOTIATION (the structural choices available in verbal exchanges)
  - SPEECH FUNCTION (whether language is used to ask for or offer information, or goods and services)

- at the stratum of lexicogrammar (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004):
  - MODALITY (the ‘space’ between positive and negative polarity in a clause, or between yes and no)
  - MOOD (whether a clause is declarative, interrogative, or imperative).

In visual texts, interpersonal relations are enacted in systems such as (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996):

- ATTITUDE (whether an objective or subjective viewing position is constructed visually)
- MODALITY (the extent to which ‘reality’ is encoded visually)
- CONTACT (realised by gaze and the way readers are addressed visually)
- SOCIAL DISTANCE (the construal of proximity in, for example, the use of close-ups or long shots).

The systems of CONTACT and SOCIAL DISTANCE are most relevant to images, and are considered in Chapter 8 in relation to news images on home pages. In this chapter though, CONTACT and SOCIAL DISTANCE are not considered, and the discussion
focuses on the visual systems of ATTITUDE and MODALITY as described by Kress & van Leeuwen (1996).

The three newspapers in this study, like all newspapers, must engage the readers in such a way that they return to the site (Thurman, 2007), as they compete with a wide range of news media (e.g. television, radio, print newspapers, magazines) and web genres (other news sites, entertainment / infotainment sites, social networking sites) in what Gauntlett (2000) calls ‘the attention economy’. As broadsheets, they must also appear objective and authoritative. These aims of attracting and engaging readers, while remaining (or appearing to remain) an objective observer are potentially contradictory, and the design of the home page must find a balance between these interpersonal demands if it is to be effective.

6.2.2.1 Attitude

In terms of Kress & van Leeuwen’s (1996) system of ATTITUDE, the visual design of online newspaper pages can encode a ‘point of view’ which is subjective or objective. In subjective visual design, composition is consistent with what would be visually perceived ‘in the real world’, and the viewer therefore is positioned by the ‘author’ in a particular position in relation to the composition. Kress & van Leeuwen (1996, p. 138) illustrate this with a magazine advertisement, where the product being sold is placed on a window sill, and the viewer sees the product and the background and can ‘read’ the image as though they were in the position from which the photograph was taken (Figure 6.25). Because readers are ‘subjected’ to this viewing position (i.e. ‘forced’ to perceive the object from a given point of view), the image has a subjective perspective.
The point of view of the subjective, perspectival image has been selected for the viewer. As a result, there is a kind of symmetry between the way the image-producer relates to the represented participants, and the way the viewer must ... also relate to them. The point of view is imposed, not only on the represented participants, but also on the viewer, and the viewer’s ‘subjectivity’ is therefore subjective in the original sense of the word, the sense of ‘being subjected to something or someone’. (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, p. 137)

Figure 6.25: Subjective image in advertisement (source: Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, p. 138)

In objective visual design, the viewer perspective is not ‘designed into’ the text. On the home pages in this corpus, for example, the squared, compartmental design of the page does not encode a viewpoint whereby the reader is positioned at an oblique horizontal angle to the page (e.g. ‘viewing from the sidelines’), nor one which manipulates the vertical angle (viewing ‘from above’ or ‘from below’). Instead, the home pages appear without perspective: they are abstract visualisations that show “what is objectively there, rather than what we would see if we were looking at them in reality, rather than what is subjectively there” (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, p. 137).
Figure 6.26: Home page (left), and manipulated home page (right) of PD, 15 September, 2005

To illustrate, Figure 6.26 shows the home page from the *PD* of September 15, 2005 on the left, and another, manipulated version of the same page on the right. By skewing the side columns and making the page appear three-dimensional, the viewer has a spatial relation to the manipulated page which is absent from the unaltered home page. The reader views the centre column, the Brand, and the Signature of the manipulated page ‘front on’, while the side columns appear at an oblique angle. This places the reader directly in front of the page: the reader is subjected visually to a given perspective by the page’s design. (If the reader were ‘side-on’ to the page, one of the side columns would appear flat, the centre column would be oblique, and the ‘closest’ side column would almost disappear.)
Similarly in Figure 6.27, the front page of the print edition of the Thai-language daily *Matichon* is shown at an angle and meant to resemble a door, which presumably is ‘welcoming’ the reader to ‘enter’ this part of the site and read the annual report. This design construes a subjective perspective, and the ‘reader’ of the image views it as though we are positioned at an angle in relation to the page, the door frame, and the report ‘behind it’, an angle specified by the image itself.

This kind of reader perspective, or ‘subjectivity’, is not designed into the unaltered home page of the *PD* in Figure 6.26, nor in the front page of the *Matichon*...
as it is published everyday. Both ‘normal’ pages are designed with a perspective that is ‘objectively’ ‘just like this’ regardless of the reader’s position. In this way, objectivity is a feature of the visual design of all home pages in this corpus: they “neutralize the distortions that usually come with perspective, because they neutralize perspective itself” (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, p. 149).

Figure 6.28: Mr.News.Mx home page from 19 August, 2006

Perspective can be illustrated further with the home page design of Mr.News.Mx, an online English-language newspaper from Mexico, accessed in August, 2006. In this case, it is not the design of the individual page that encodes subjectivity, but the visual design of the navigation menu and the virtual pages (construed visually as material pages) the navigation menu represents (Figure 6.28). By making the web pages appear visually as material pages, the reader is positioned literally ‘at arm’s length’, as a newspaper reader, not a web surfer. A particular kind of relation between the author, the newspaper reader, and the content - one which draws on the conventional values of these social constructs - is construed visually. As Kress & van Leeuwen comment in relation to different kinds of text, the choice to
include a subjective perspective in visual design “adds nothing to the representational meaning of these [texts]; but it does add attitudinal meanings” (1996, p. 152).

Figure 6.29: Objective perspective: Home pages of BKP (BKP Period I); PD, (PD Period I); and SMH, (SMH Period III)

Regardless of other aspects of interpersonal meaning construed in the visual design of the home pages in the corpus (see following sub-section), all have an objective perspective (Figure 6.29). In terms of ATTITUDE, then, the visual design construes a stance of objectivity on the part of each home page, a stance consistent with the social role of broadsheet newspapers which are expected to provide objective reports of newsworthy events.
6.2.2.2 Modality

Turning to the visual system of MODALITY, Kress & van Leeuwen’s MODALITY is a borrowed term “from linguistics [which] refers to the truth value or credibility of (linguistically realized) statements about the world” (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, p. 160). Applying the visual system of MODALITY to online newspaper home pages, the interpersonal visual design of home pages contributes to the creation of an ‘objective’ and ‘factual’ stance on the part of the newspaper by employing a number of design principles which are ‘at play’ in all three newspapers.

On the home pages in question, there are three primary means by which MODALITY is realised. The first is the use of hypertext resources (the more simple / static, the higher the MODALITY); the second is the use of space and shape in page design (the more squared and ordered, the higher the MODALITY); and the third is the use of colour (the more ‘black and white’, the higher the MODALITY). Each of these parameters is discussed in turn.

6.2.2.2.1 Stasis and MODALITY

When one considers the potential for innovative design on websites (as demonstrated even in much of the advertising carried on online newspaper pages), and how they could choose to present the news, the home pages of the three newspapers under discussion are relatively conservative (even when compared with, for example, the home pages of children’s websites, and tabloid newspaper websites). The home pages in the corpus of this study are static, with animation only used to ‘unfold’ navigation menus, and to expand the space of newsbites by rotating them (see discussion of SMH
Period IV in Chapter 7). As Kok (2004) found with the Singaporean Ministry of Education website, the newspaper home pages:

foreground credibility and background ‘playfulness’ ... [foregoing] the creativity that different semiotic resources and hypertext facilities afford, making the website relatively ‘conservative’ compared with other webpages. (Kok, 2004, p. 146)

With the exception of advertisements, ‘eye- and ear-catching’ design features such as animation, pop-ups, coloured backgrounds, non-standard coloured fonts, oversized fonts, block-letters, flashing elements, elements which change or make sound when ‘rolled over’ with the mouse, and music are either not used at all, or used in a conservative manner on the home pages in the corpus.

This relative ‘non-playfulness’ tends to focus attention towards the content of the newspaper, rather than towards the hypertext resources used to present it. This is not unlike traditional perspectives on the presentation of information in print, in which typography was seen as “a humble craft in service of the written word” (van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 142). The social value of accessing these online newspapers is not in experiencing hypertext (which is used relatively ‘humbly’, ‘in service of the message’), but in reading the ‘news’. In this way the online newspapers in this corpus align themselves socially with the tradition of the printing press, and present themselves as a complementary medium to print, radio, and television, and as a credible source rather than something that is ‘too new’, ‘too different’, or ‘too flash’ for broadsheet readers to engage with.

In many other traditional publishing media, most strongly in books, but with echoes in the other media forms, there is a sense of them

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49 The animation of newsbites has become more common on online newspaper home pages since the data collection for this research ended, but choices in what is animated (image, text, or both), how it is animated (how often and in what way transitions unfold), and the size of what is animated (large versus small) signify different modality values.
being definitive statements, once made fixed for all time. Hypermedia, on the other hand, tends to be experienced in a different way. It is more provisional, more open to modification and change, more firmly embedded in a “cut and paste” culture, where nothing is permanent and all is process. (Cotton & Oliver, 1997, p. 51)

The relatively ‘traditional’ identity favoured by most of the home pages in the corpus, and the modality value it bestows on the content of the home pages, is also strengthened by the Masthead on each page, which provides an overt connection between the print newspaper (and the authority and tradition of the institution it represents) and its online counterpart. Mastheads can be limited to the top left corner of the page, but the page design of all newspapers in the corpus have a header - a strip across the top of the page - which visually resembles the Masthead of print broadsheets.

6.2.2.2.2 Shape, space, and MODALITY

Visual elements on the home pages in the corpus are all squared - there are no circles or curves, no tangential lines, and no oblique angles. These design choices, consistent across all home pages, present a squared, componential, ordered page design to the reader, as illustrated in sketches placed alongside images of home pages in Figure 6.30. This contributes to the MODALITY of the page as a visual sign as explained below.

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50 The masthead of the SMH in Periods I, II and III incorporates a circle in its logo, and advertisements in each newspaper sometimes use circular or tangential designs.
The squared, componential approach to page design contributes to representing a reality where visual objects (many of which in this case, are also verbal)
reports of ‘actual’, ‘real-world’ events) can be identified, classified, and grouped (cf.
section 6.2.1 above). The world of news as construed visually is consistent with a
model of the world where events are subject to measurement, classification, and
deliberate arrangement. Visually, news stories on the home page, and the events they
represent, are delineated and ordered.

It is not the categories (which are ideational) that are relevant to MODALITY
(which is interpersonal), but the shared understanding that the visual act of separation
and ordering is valid and rational, and therefore factual:

modality is a system of social deixis which ‘addresses’ a particular kind of
viewer, or a particular social/cultural group, and provides through its system
of modality markers an image of the cultural, conceptual and cognitive
position of the addressee. (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, p. 178)

We live in a world where events and actors can be measured, defined, and evaluated.
Elements on the page are fixed and ordered, and in a clear relationship to one another.
The ordered, compartmentalised presentation of ‘news’ presents the information
visually as though it is ordered, logical, and factual, regardless of the actual content.

Compare, for example, the relative ‘chaos’ in the design of Thai print
newspaper front pages as described by Knox, Patpong & Piriyasilpa (2010) and
shown in Figure 6.31. Visual elements on these print front pages are squared, but font
sizes and colours vary, background colours vary, the size of elements (images and text
blocks) vary, and the configuration of elements, including the position of the
Masthead, changes from day to day. Without recourse to language, it is not possible to
‘read’ which elements of the page go together to make stories. This is in stark contrast
to the ordered design on the home pages in the current corpus, as illustrated in Figure
6.30. Compare also the home pages from children’s websites in Figure 6.32, both of which present visual taxonomies, but not in the rational, neatly ordered manner of the home pages in Figure 6.30 as illustrated above.

*Figure 6.31: Front page of the Thairath (left) and the Matichon (right) of 15 March, 2007*

Some home page designs in the corpus are less overtly squared and compartmentalised than those illustrated in Figure 6.30. These pages can be viewed as having, in relative terms, a lower MODALITY than pages where the visual compartmentalisation of the news is more overtly expressed. But even on these pages, a squared, componential page design is evident to some extent, as shown by the red lines in Figure 6.33.
The design of the home pages in the corpus implies a stance towards events whereby they have been viewed, analysed, and presented in a factual, ordered manner. Thus, we can conceive of a cline whereby the more componential and ordered an
online newspaper home page is, the higher its MODALITY on this parameter. Figure 6.34 illustrates.

Figure 6.34: The relative MODALITY of pages on the parameter of shapes in space: Squared, componential, and ordered page design of home pages from (left to right) SMH (March 15, 2002), BKP (April 5, 2006), SMH (April 5, 2006), PD (October 24, 2005), and BKP (September 2, 2005)

This componential aspect of home page design is due, in large part, to the design templates of these pages. In comparison, the home pages in Table 6.6 use a range of visual design features that challenge the order imposed by design grids. Home pages such as those in Table 6.6 work ‘against’ or around design templates,
construing a different kind of relationship between author, reader, and content than
the relationship construed by the online newspaper home pages in the current corpus.
They have different MODALITY values.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Home page</th>
<th>Design features construing a non-ordered, non-componential view of reality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| ABC Kids’ *The Playground* home page  
(source: Djonov, 2005, p. 202) | - unframed illustrations  
- coloured splashes blurring boundaries between objects  
- objects of different shapes  
- nuclear design motif  
- curved/wavy edge signifying border between navigation and content |
| National Museum of Singapore home page  
(accessed November 19, 2008) | - visually dominant empty space  
- animation (orange letters of various sizes move randomly around the white space, crossing the three faint vertical lines which divide the main space of the page)  
- shading (shadows above the “Highlights” headings, and to the left and right of the main space) suggests a 3-dimensional page which is not completely flat  
- ‘border crossing’ (boundaries created by vertical lines are crossed by the floating letters, by the grey shading in the bottom third of the page, and by the brown strip at the bottom of the page) |
| *try science* home page  
(accessed November 19, 2008; cf. Djonov, 2005) | - nuclear design motif  
- use of circles and rounded corners  
- contrast between main elements on page in shape (squared vs circular) and orientation (skewed vs upright)  
- elements in skewed orange space overlap to create ‘haphazard’ effect |

*Table 6.6: Home pages using design features to construe a less-ordered reality*
Figure 6.35 compares home pages from the corpus with the home pages in
Table 6.6, and illustrates the use of shape and space on home pages, and how diversity
in the use of shapes and space contrasts with a more ordered and componential
design, and that the greater the diversity on this parameter, the lower the modality of
‘factuality’.\footnote{‘Factuality’ is not necessarily opposed with ‘fiction’. It may be opposed with ‘fantasy’, ‘fun’, ‘imagination’, ‘creativity’, or other values (cf. Bednarek, 2006).}

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure6.35.png}
\caption{Illustration of differing modality values by shape and space}
\end{figure}

\section{Colour and MODALITY}

Another aspect of page design which contributes to modality values is the use of
colour. As stated earlier, modality is “a system of social deixis which ‘addresses’ ... a
particular social/cultural group” (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, p. 178). For the
scientific community, and those who put their trust (perhaps implicitly) in it:
‘real’ means ‘what can be known by means of the methods of science’, that is by means of counting, weighing and measuring. By this standard of what is real, a technical line drawing, without colour or texture, without light or shade, and without perspective, can have higher modality than a photograph. (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996, p. 169)

In a similar way, the visual history of news print (black ink on white paper) carries a historical value of authority, factuality and objectivity (cf. Bicket & Packer, 2004), so the historical visual conventions of print newspapers contribute to the modality values of online newspaper home pages.

This can be seen in the consistent use of white background in the text-dominated news taxonomies of many of the homes page in the corpus (while side columns or other zones on the page often have a coloured background). On this white background, the text of news stories on the home pages of all three papers is black. This obviously draws on the visual tradition of print newspapers (see Boczkowski, 2004a; Cooke, 2003); there is no technical reason why fonts could not be brown, or green for instance, nor white on a dark background.

In contrast to the text of news stories on the home pages, headlines in the corpus most commonly appear in the conventional underlined blue of hyperlinks on the world wide web (Figure 6.36). Exceptions to this include the use of hyperlink blue without underlining (SMH Period IV); dark-blue font without underlining (SMH Period III); black font with underlining (PD Periods I and II); black font without underlining (SMH, Periods I and II); and red font without underlining (BKP Period IV) (Figure 6.37).

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52 In relation to news discourse, we might add ‘by observing’.
Figure 6.36: Text-dominated news taxonomy featuring underlined blue headlines on the home pages of the BKP (left), the bottom and right of the PD (centre), and the SMH (right) of September 15, 2005.

The PD and SMH home pages also include ‘non-standard’ headlines.
Figure 6.37: Text-dominated 'main' columns featuring 'non-standard' headlines on the home pages of the BKP of 3 March, 2006 (left) the PD of 27 March, 2002 (centre), the SMH of 27 March, 2002 (right)
One clear reason for the difference in typography between headlines and story text is the need to distinguish hyperlinks from ordinary text. In headline design, the newspapers in the corpus follow the following conventions:

1. **UNDERLINED BLUE IS THE NEW BLACK**
   Underlined blue font, as the conventional colour/format of hyperlinked text on the world wide web, is an acceptable substitute for black in headlines.

2. **ANY COLOUR GOES**
   Colours other than blue or black are acceptable for headlines, providing they are consistent with the colour scheme employed on the page and conform with convention 3 (below).

3. **HYPERTEXT OR ROLLOVER**
   Any headline on white background that is not the conventional underlined blue of hyperlinks on the world wide web (including black headlines) must change when rolled over with the mouse.

On the parameter of colour, the closer the page is to black text on white background the higher the modality. With ‘blue as the new black’, pages move away from a high modality value if there is a large number of hyperlinks, as the page comes to look more like a web page than a print newspaper page. Apart from the ratio of words (and therefore space) devoted to hyperlinks against those devoted to ‘plain’ news text, factors that can contribute to a lower modality value include the use of coloured bars and backgrounds, images, and the amount of advertising space (which tends to use many features which signify a ‘lower’ modality in favour of attracting

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54 In *SMH* Period I, headlines of ‘hard news’ stories were not hyperlinks, and were in black font without underlining. This is discussed in Chapter 7.
attention). There is no precise formula to calculate the relative impact of these different features on modality (cf. Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, pp. 618-9; Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, pp. 176-80), but Figure 6.38 illustrates how different combinations of choices can result in different modality values being communicated visually by online newspaper home pages.

![Figure 6.38: The relative modality of pages on the parameter of colour versus black on white: Home pages from (left to right) News of the World (July 9, 2007), The Daily Telegraph (July 9, 2007), BKP (September 2, 2005), SMH (April 5, 2006), PD (September 15, 2005), and SMH (March 15, 2002)](image)

6.2.2.2.4 ‘Reading’ MODALITY values

The three ‘parameters’ of MODALITY (stasis, shape and space, and colour) as discussed above interact with one another, and the modality of each home page is a complex of these values. So how do we ‘read’ modality on online newspaper home pages?
If we take the design of PD Period II and BKP Period II (Figure 6.39), we can observe that there is no use of animation, sound, pop-ups, or other features of hypertext which would contrast dramatically with the possibilities of print. That is, both are relatively conservative in their use of hypertext resources, presenting a largely static page to the readers, and therefore they have a relatively high modality on this parameter.

![Figure 6.39: Home page of BKP of September 2, 2005 (left) representing the design of BKP Period II, and PD of September 15, 2005 (right) representing the design of PD Period II](image)

In terms of their use of shape and space, both are clearly squared and compartmentalised, with the BKP making overt use of coloured horizontal bars to visually separate areas of the page, and therefore arguably having a slightly higher modality value than the PD on this parameter.
In terms of colour, the *BKP* is dominated visually by the strong background colours of the side columns, the footer, the header, and the advertisements positioned in those areas. The underlined blue of the headlines and the thick coloured horizontal bars also add colour to the predominately black-on-white main column of news, and the overall effect is one of dominance of colour on the page. This gives the *BKP* home page a relatively low modality value on this parameter. In contrast, the *PD* uses some light, coloured background in peripheral areas of the page, and includes three colour images (two of which are small thumbnails). Large headlines at the top of the page are black, and the headlines dominating the bottom half of the page are the conventional underlined blue of hyperlinks. Overall the page is largely black-on-white, and has a relatively high modality value on this parameter. Figure 6.40 illustrates.

![Figure 6.40: Modality configuration of BKP Period II, and PD Period II (cf. Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, p. 176)](image)

In language, interpersonal structure is typically prosodic, which lends itself to being represented in clines (i.e. topologically rather than typologically). An alternate representation of Figure 6.40 would be to construe the different valeurs in the system of MODALITY in a system network, as shown in Figure 6.41.
As with art (see Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, pp. 176ff.), the modality configuration of online newspaper home pages can be complex, and the visual communication of modality draws on a range of features which may or may not be consistent with one another (cf. Barnhurst, 1991).

The modality of home pages in the corpus interacts with the ‘factual’ and ‘non-negotiable’ language typical of the headlines which appear on them. Headlines are constructed linguistically in a way which is either grammatically unarguable (e.g. use of a non-finite clause; omission of a verbal group; use of nominal group only) or factual (e.g. use of present simple tense) (see Halliday, 1994, Appendix 2; Martin, Matthiessen & Painter, 1997, pp. 70-71). To illustrate, Table 6.7 shows headlines from a number of newsbites appearing in the corpus, and shows how the conventional language of headlines can take the grammar of negotiability away by omitting...
elements of the clause such as Subject and/or Finite, the entire verbal group, Deictics in nominal groups, or by presenting nominal groups on their own.\textsuperscript{55}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Newspaper</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Headline</th>
<th>Grammatical feature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bangkok Post</td>
<td>Feb 14, 2002</td>
<td>Verdict on Chalor due</td>
<td>Verbal group omitted; Deictic in nominal group omitted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>September 15, 2005</td>
<td>Trekking in the drizzling rain</td>
<td>Mood element (Subject and Finite) absent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nov 1, 2005</td>
<td>Southern fish plants hit by lack of labour</td>
<td>Finite omitted; Deictic in nominal group omitted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People’s Daily</td>
<td>Mar 27, 2002</td>
<td>Actions Obstructing Peaceful Reunification Opposed</td>
<td>Finite omitted; Deictic in nominal group omitted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>September 15, 2005</td>
<td>UNSC’s role “irreplaceable”, Chinese President</td>
<td>Verbal groups (verb ‘to be’; reporting verb) ommitted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nov 1, 2005</td>
<td>China’s foreign trade to exceed $1.4 trillion this year</td>
<td>Finite omitted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sydney Morning Herald</td>
<td>Mar 27, 2002</td>
<td>Porn going upwardly mobile</td>
<td>Finite omitted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>October 12, 2005</td>
<td>23,000 dead, 2.5 million homeless after quake</td>
<td>Verbal group (verb ‘to be’) omitted; Head of nominal group omitted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>September 15, 2005</td>
<td>Obesity crisis</td>
<td>Unattached nominal group</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 6.7: ‘Unarguable’ headlines from the corpus*

Together, language and visual design tend to realise a relatively high value of modality on the home pages in this corpus, construing a stance of objectivity and factuality, though as already shown, this varies according to a number of design factors.

6.2.2.3 Interpersonal meanings: Conclusion

In conclusion to this section, the discussion above has considered a number of factors in the visual communication of interpersonal meanings on online newspaper home pages. In terms of the system of ATTITUDE, the home pages present an objective

\textsuperscript{55} Not all headlines share these grammatical features.
perspective. In terms of the system of MODALITY, the pages vary in the way their designs use stasis, shape and space, and colour. Combining the semiotic resources of visual design and language, all the pages tend towards presenting a factual and objective stance to the reader, but there is variation between them.

This gives rise to questions of home page design and the intended interpersonal stance of the newspaper. There is a need for audience research which examines interpersonal communication in addition to traditional areas of investigation such as information recall, content analysis, agenda setting, and eye tracking. There is also a need to work with newspaper authors and designers to investigate how they see the stance of their newspaper, and the extent to which this is consistent with how audiences read the interpersonal meanings of the home page, and the design factors discussed above.

In the Japan Australia Forum on the Responsibility of Media Reporting held in Sydney in 2006, the (then) foreign editor of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, Peter Hartcher, commented that the home page of the online version of the *SMH* was more tabloid-like than the front page of the print edition (Hartcher, 2006), suggesting that he preferred the interpersonal stance of the front page of the print edition to the home page of the online edition. Anecdotally, other readers of the *SMH* have commented to me that they feel that the online edition is not ‘written to them’, and that they read the print edition but not the online edition for this reason.

The interpersonal meanings communicated by the home page are crucial in building and maintaining the readership of a newspaper, and there is much scope for
further research which can explicitly identify the design factors which mediate the newspaper-audience relationship (see also Chapter 8).

6.2.3 Home page design and textual meanings

Thus far in this chapter, we have considered the ideational meanings conveyed in the visual design of news on the page (primarily through the use of news taxonomies), and the interpersonal construal of the relationship between the newspaper and its readers (through the construal of attitude and modality in page design). In this section, we look at the textual meanings on the page: the way that layout and composition of elements (i.e. their relative positioning on the page) is meaningful.

6.2.3.1 Framing, salience, and information value

Kress and van Leeuwen (1998) describe the layout of traditional-newspaper front pages in terms of three organizational systems of meaning: **framing** (the use of various visual devices to connect or separate different elements on the page), **salience** (assigning visual ‘weight’ to elements on the page), and **information value** (the meaningful positioning of content). This sub-section outlines Kress & van Leeuwen’s framework for analysing textual meanings, and the following sub-section (6.2.3.2) presents analyses which illustrate where this framework needs to be adapted to account for the home pages in this study.

Framing contributes to the organisation of elements on the page, and signifies their compositional (or textual) relationship to one another. This is achieved by, for example, the use of borders or empty space between different elements; by consistency or disjunction in background colours, font size and colour, or images; by
the use of shapes; and by the use of vectors where, for example, lines or gaze from images point to other elements on the page (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1998, p. 203).

Turning to salience, the system of salience creates ‘a hierarchy of importance’ among the elements on the page visible on-screen at any given time (cf. Kress & van Leeuwen, 1998, p. 200). A range of visual variables interact in order to assign different ‘weight’ to different elements on the page, including size, contrast, colour, balance, and the use of visual elements (e.g. religious figures or symbols; sexually suggestive images) which are salient in a given cultural context. Underlying the combination of such variables on online newspaper home pages is a simple principle which has developed with the vertically scrolling web page. This principle is that, all other things being equal, a greater proximity to the top of the home page of an online newspaper means greater salience. This is a particularly important principle in the positioning of newsbites (Bateman, 2008).

After framing and salience, the third system considered here is the system of information value. The notion of information value is taken from Kress & van Leeuwen (1996, 1998), who argue that on print newspaper front pages, information value is signified by compositional choices based on three primary oppositions: top-bottom, left-right, and centre-margin. A top-bottom opposition of different or contrasting elements represents a distinction between Ideal and Real. Positioning at the top signifies Ideal, “the idealized or generalized essence of the information” (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1998, p. 193). Being positioned at the bottom signifies Real, or more specific, factual, and/or practical information such as details, tables, graphs and so on (ibid.). In contrast, the left-right opposition of content signifies Given-New.
Given is “something the reader already knows, ... a familiar and agreed departure point for the message” (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1998, p. 189). New signifies “something which is not yet know to the reader, ... the crucial point of the message” (ibid.).

Some newspaper pages are composed in such a way to oppose content positioned in the centre of the page against that which appears around the periphery. That is, content positioned in the central position of the page is signified as Centre, “the nucleus of the information to which all the other elements are in some sense subservient” (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1998, p. 196). Content positioned in peripheral areas, in opposition to the Centre, is signified as Margin, ancillary to, and/or dependent upon, the Centre (ibid.). These systems of information value are summarised visually in Figure 6.42.

![Figure 6.42: Kress & van Leeuwen’s (1996, p. 209) ‘dimensions of visual space’](image-url)
6.2.3.2 Information value on home pages

In the discussion that follows, framing and salience are considered primarily in terms of their interaction with the system of information value. Information value, as it operates on the online newspaper home pages in the current corpus, differs from the framework of Kress & van Leeuwen outlined above in a number of important ways (cf. Bateman, 2008). The information values identified here are **Head / Tail** (realised by top-bottom opposition), **Primary / Secondary** (realised by left - right opposition), and **Macro-Theme / Rheme** (realised orthogonally or top-bottom, and recursively across news pages on the website). Each is outlined in the following sub-sections.

6.2.3.2.1 Head / Tail

To begin with, readers are required to scroll home pages vertically, and can only view a portion of the page at any given time. This feature of home pages means that the top-bottom distinction which does operate on the home page of all three newspapers does not afford an Ideal-Real contrast. In fact, the top-bottom opposition operating on a home page is not only spatial (as it is with print newspaper pages where the whole page can be viewed at once), but also temporal, as the reader must move through time in order to see the bottom of the page. This temporal feature of scrolling pages exists despite the fact that it is the reader, and not the author, who controls the timing of the scroll.

The top-bottom *opposition* on online newspaper home pages is the distinction between the *first screen* of a page, or that portion of the page ‘above the fold’ (Nielsen & Tahir, 2002, p. 23), and the *remainder* of the page to which a reader must
scroll in order to access. This operates in harmony with the principle of diminishing salience (which is continual rather than oppositional in nature) as discussed above.

The top-bottom distinction realises a binary information-value opposition not of idealisation (Ideal-Real), but of initiality. That content which appears above the fold on online newspaper home pages heads the news on that page; it can be said to be valued as the **Head** of the content (information valued as of the most immediate relevance and importance). The content below the fold appears subsequently to the Head, and decreases in impact and immediacy as the reader scrolls down. This principal of progressive atrophy of information value as one scrolls below the Head is signified by assigning the label of **Tail** to that information below the fold, whose impact on the reader is by necessity less immediate, and subsequent to the Head.

The Head of the page includes the Masthead of the newspaper, the main navigation menu, the major or ‘leading’ news story of the day (often with a larger headline), and often a large image (typically the largest image on the page) and ‘breaking news’.\(^{56}\) Where such elements are positioned in the Tail rather than the Head, there is a good case to argue for poor design (see below).

Most home page designs in the corpus have a ‘default’ fold indicated in the design of the page, though it is not possible to specify the location of the ‘actual’ fold as viewed by readers of the newspaper (i.e. the bottom of the first visible screen on

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\(^{56}\) In Australia, **masthead** refers to “the written name of the publication in a distinctive style, design and lettering that appears on the front page and in reduced size on the editorial page” (*SMH* glossary, last accessed February 10, 2010 at: [http://www.heraldeducation.com.au/view_page.asp?intpageid=6](http://www.heraldeducation.com.au/view_page.asp?intpageid=6)). This is known in newsrooms in some other countries (including the UK and US) as the **nameplate**. See also the glossary on the website of *The News Manual* (last accessed February 10, 2010 at: [http://www.thenewsmansual.net/Resources/glossary.html](http://www.thenewsmansual.net/Resources/glossary.html)).
readers’ actual computer screens) as this varies from computer screen to computer screen according to a range of factors, including but not limited to screen size and browser settings. There is also variation in the extent to which the ‘fold’ is explicitly indicated, and where indicated in the visual devices by which this is done.

In the first two periods of the Bangkok Post, the default fold is signified by the bottom of the frame which surrounds the category of General News. The Head includes the Masthead, the main navigation menu (left column), and the four leading news stories (Figure 6.43).

![Figure 6.43: Head-Tail structure of BKP home page (BKP Periods I and II)](image-url)
In the third design of the BKP home page, a ‘Breaking News’ section is moved into the Head, but to the exclusion of the main news stories of the page. This leads to a number of problems (Figure 6.44). First, the most important stories in the value system of the newspaper are pushed from the Head and into the Tail by the most recent stories, regardless of importance. This puts the most highly valued news space in the newspaper at the mercy of ‘what comes off the wire’, rather than in the hands of the editors. Second, while the Masthead and navigation menus remain unchanged, the change in the appearance of that part of the news taxonomy that appears in the Head means that readers are presented with ideational changes to the news taxonomy (i.e. a different categorisation, and also the Subordinates in the Breaking News category are realised by newsbits instead of newsbites). Third, the use of blue hyperlinks against a split background (grey, then white) in the Breaking News category gives the Head of the page a lower modality value (blue text on grey instead of black text on white with blue headlines), as well as making this section internally visually inconsistent. Fourth, this change in colour (including the use of a blue bar with white and yellow text, and green circles) also changes the visual identity of the newspaper, until the reader
scrolls down past the Head to where the familiar visual design of the BKP home page is still used. Thus, readers cannot adjust to the new visual design, but rather must scroll past the Head to ‘return’ to the home page ‘as they know it’.

In the redesigned page in BKP Period IV, the Head includes Breaking News, but also includes the main news stories as newsbites. A large image (illustrating either the first or second newbite on the page) has been added to the design, and the modality of the news taxonomy as visible on the Head of the page is consistent with the Tail of the page. The demarcation of the Head and Tail is not explicit in this design, though the practice of ‘pushing’ information towards the Head of the page is (Figure 6.45).

![Figure 6.45: Screen shot of BKP home page, 10 January, 2006 (BKP Period IV)](image)
Like the *Bangkok Post*, the home page of the *People's Daily* in both Periods I and II provides a clear visual distinction between the first screen and the content below the fold. The newspaper’s masthead, the advertisement, and important navigational and content menus are also valued as Head. The fold is clearly indicated by framing in both page designs. In *PD* Period I, a search tool spans the centre column, and framing devices of background colour, font size, and font colour employed in the two side columns. In *PD* Period II, the two *[news features]* newsbites across the centre column mark the Head / Tail boundary (Figure 6.46). Both design periods include the Masthead, the main navigation menu, newsbites, and a large image in the Head.

*Figure 6.46: Head-Tail structure of PD home page (PD Periods I and II)*
The design of the *SMH* home page moves progressively from an implicit Head/Tail boundary towards a more explicit one. In *SMH* Periods I and II, the Masthead, main navigation menu, large image, and main story (signified by a large headline) appear in the Head, but there is not a clear indication of where the Tail begins. In *SMH* Period III, the heading and horizontal line indicating the beginning of the *WORLD* category of news in the main column appears near the bottom of the newsbite with the large image in the adjacent column, and indicates the Head / Tail boundary. In *SMH* Period IV, the *TIME OUT* newsbites in the main column appear near the bottom of *THE PLANNER* newsbites in the adjacent column, indicating the Head / Tail boundary. Figure 6.47 indicates the Head / Tail textual structure of the *SMH* home pages.

![Head-Tail structure of SMH home page (SMH Period I, II, III and IV)](image)

In summary, all three newspapers ‘design for’ the first screen of the page. Typical elements include the Masthead, ‘breaking news’, the main stories of the day, the main navigational menu, and a large image. While the Head / Tail boundary is not
always clearly indicated by the design of the home page, in many cases it is (e.g. BKP Periods I - III; PD Periods I - II; SMH Periods III - IV). This can also be observed in the design of the home page of many online newspapers beyond the current corpus.

### 6.2.3.2.2 Primary / Secondary

The vertical dynamism of each home page which gives rise to the Head-Tail opposition is balanced by horizontal consistency in the home pages in the corpus. In each of the three newspapers, content on the home pages is organized in columns which remain consistent as the reader scrolls down the page.

On all home pages of all three newspapers, the widest column consists of news content, and is visually distinct from one or more narrower side columns of content. The distinction here realises an information value of Primary / Secondary. Information positioned in the larger (left or middle) column is signified as being of primary importance in the ideological value system of the newspaper. It is invariably news content, and is signified as **Primary** because it provides the *raison d'être* of the newspaper. Relative to the content of the wider column, the content valued as **Secondary** (which may be navigational, promotional, or less-valued news content) is subordinate in newsworthiness according to the newspaper's ideology.

This compositional feature of the home pages in the corpus is clearly related to the ideational news taxonomies discussed above. The most important category or categories in the taxonomy are positioned textually as Primary information, a different value from being positioned in the Head of the page (as discussed above). In this way, soft and lite news on the SMH home page, for example, can be valued highly in terms
of initiality by being place in the Head of the page (creating a greater impact on the first screen). But by virtue of being positioned textually as Secondary information, their information value relative to stories positioned textually as Primary is signified by the left-right compositional distinction.

![Figure 6.48: Primary-secondary structure of BKP home page (Period I, II and IV)](image)

The Primary-Secondary opposition is exploited differently in the three newspapers, though navigation columns are consistently valued as Secondary when they are vertical. On the home page of the BKP Periods I-IV, advertising, stock and weather information, and links to special features are included in the right, Secondary column (see Figure 6.48). And on the home page of the PD Period II, the right, Secondary column has similar content (Figure 6.49). The home page of the SMH Period III has two columns of news content valued as Secondary (Figure 6.50), while
the home page of Period IV has a Primary / Secondary opposition, with a second Primary / Secondary opposition within the main Primary column (Figure 6.50).

![Image of primary-secondary structure]

**Figure 6.49: Primary-secondary structure of PD home page (PD Period I and II)**

In summary, the home pages in the corpus are designed in columns, and each home page is composed with a wider column of information which signifies an information value of Primary, while narrower columns of navigation, news, advertisements, and other content are signified as Secondary.
There is another information value opposition on the home pages in the corpus which can be realised orthogonally (top and left), or as a top-bottom opposition. The information value is \textit{Macro-Theme / Rheme}. In order to explain this adequately, it is necessary to go beyond the individual page and consider briefly the entire online newspaper.
Online texts have a different materiality to paper texts. A reader who holds a letter, a book, or a newspaper in their hand can see and feel where they are positioned in the text. There is a physical relationship between reader and hard copy which allows the reader to navigate; navigation is embodied within the material artefact in a way which is typically completely absent from online texts.

Online newspapers, like most online texts, provide the reader with navigational devices to fulfil this function, and create cohesion and coherence across pages. Cohesive textual devices do not function solely at the level of the page - they allow readers to keep track of their location and progression across the entire text.

In the newspapers in the corpus, certain zones are repeated across all news pages: the header (realising the Brand function, and including the Masthead), and the main navigation zone (realising all or part of the Navigation function). The Brand is always a header across the top of the page. The main navigation menu may appear beneath this, and in such cases together Brand and Navigation combine as Macro-Theme of the page (Figure 6.51). In other cases, the main navigation menu is positioned in the left column, and the Macro-Theme of the home page is realised orthogonally (Figure 6.52). This consistent point of departure, mirrored on each news page of the online newspaper, provides a consistency of branding, of reading experience, and an ability for the reader to navigate the website. In this way, the Macro-Theme of each page contributes to cohesion and coherence across the website, and as the ‘point of departure’ for each page.
Note that in Djonov’s analysis of home pages as Macro-Theme (Chapter 5), the entire home page is functioning as Macro-Theme at the rank of website (and home pages in content sections are thematic at the rank of section). Here, the analysis is of the Macro-Theme at the rank of page.

Figure 6.51: MacroTheme-Rheme structure of PD home page (PD Period I) and SMH home page (SMH Period IV)
In summary, the masthead and main navigational menu are the Macro-Theme of the page, which is to say that they act as the point of departure for the message of the page (cf. Bateman, 2008, p. 65, n. 8), and are the locus of textual and interpersonal orientation for the reader. This does not mean that they are the first thing the reader ‘reads’, but that they function textually as the starting point for the message of each page.
6.2.3.3 Textual meanings: Conclusion

The home pages in this corpus display systems of information value distinct from those identified by Kress & van Leeuwen (1996, 1998). This is, perhaps, not surprising given Bateman’s (2008) critique of applications of Kress & van Leeuwen’s notion of information value, in which he suggests that such analyses are likely to be far more genre-specific than Kress & van Leeuwen suggest.

Textually, it appears that there are three different oppositions operating on the home pages in the corpus, each complementary to the others, and each realising a different kind of prominence: the Head / Tail opposition (realised by design which takes account of the ‘first screen’); the Primary / Secondary opposition (realised by design which sets the ‘main viewing area’ apart from other parts of the page); and the Macro-Theme / Rheme opposition (realised by design which repeats the same identifying and navigational elements across all pages to establish a consistent ‘point of departure’).

6.3 Home pages: Conclusion

In summary, the home pages in the corpus show similar functional patterns of visual design, though their realisations vary. Ideationally, all pages use news taxonomies, and these range from being largely covert to largely overt, and also vary in the way they classify the ‘world of news’ for the reader. These classificational differences are related to institutional factors in news production.
Interpersonally, all home pages in the corpus present an objective perspective in the visual system of ATTITUDE, but vary in terms of the three variables - stasis, shape and space, and colour - in the visual system of MODALITY.

Textually, compositional oppositions of Head / Tail, Primary / Secondary, and Macro-Theme / Rheme are present in all newspapers in the corpus, but again their realisations differ.

The argument, then, is that the visual design of the home pages in the corpus demonstrates that the same design choices are ‘at play’ in all three newspapers during their different design periods. The choices as set out above are meaningful, and the ways in which home pages classify news, construe their relationship with their readers, and compose the content on their pages indicates that the online newspaper home pages share a number of functions in terms of their visual design, yet these shared patterns allow for a wide range of flexibility.

The design features identified in this chapter can be applied to analysing online newspaper home pages beyond the corpus, and help with the teaching of reading the news online (for first- and second-language learners), and the critical analysis of such texts.

Considering the experiential meanings realised in page design to begin with, pedagogical tasks requiring learners to identify news taxonomies and the extent to which they are covert or overt can assist in developing the ability to read the page, which can only be viewed one screen at a time. Such activities can be extended to
comparing classification schemes in different newspapers, comparing the
classification of the same story in different newspapers, or even the critical analysis of
the classification of groups based on gender, ethnicity, and other variables over time.
One illustration of such an approach can be shown by looking at the representation of
Australians on drug charges overseas on the home page of the SMH during Period III.
There are three such stories in the corpus, which are reproduced in Table 6.8.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Newsbite</th>
<th>Verbal Text</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Newsbite</th>
<th>Verbal Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2 Sep, 2005</td>
<td>Bali bribe claim</td>
<td>Bali bribe claim in the Michelle Leslie case is investigated.</td>
<td>12 Oct, 2005</td>
<td>A mother weeps as her son faces his drug accusers</td>
<td>A mother weeps as her son weeps in court</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>24 Oct, 2005</td>
<td>New plea to save Australian from hangman</td>
<td>New plea to save Australian from hangman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>* Michelle Leslie case is investigated.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>* Condemned Australian is valuable drug witness</td>
<td>* Condemned Australian is valuable drug witness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>* Mother's desperate plea to save son</td>
<td>* Mother's desperate plea to save son</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.8: Stories representing Australians on drug charges overseas on the SMH
home page: L-R, September 2, 2005; October 12, 2005; October 24, 2005

While there are linguistic differences between the stories, perhaps more
revealing is their classification on the page. As presented in the news taxonomy, the
story involving the accused woman is classified as lite news, whereas the other stories
are classified as hard news. The classification of these stories on the home page raises
questions, about the representation of social actors, and the extent to which their
gender, occupation (Michelle Leslie was a model), and/or physical appearance
influences how they are represented.
On home pages where taxonomies are covert and/or heterogeneous, the advantages to the newspaper and/or reader of avoiding overt homogeneous classification in the design of the page can be explored. Does covert, heterogeneous classification encourage readers to ‘browse’ the home page in a way more similar to the way print newspapers are browsed? Is this an effective method in encouraging readers to enter sections of the website they might not otherwise access? Does it position the reader as a more sophisticated, media-literate consumer of the news? Research examining reader behaviour and its interaction with page design could be usefully informed by a social semiotic perspective on ideational meanings in page design, such as that outlined in this chapter.

In terms of interpersonal meanings, an explicit pedagogical focus on the design features which realise different modality values can assist learners in understanding how home pages can construe different relationships with their readers. This can allow them to compare newspapers based on specific analysis, rather than impressionistic and imprecise arguments, and decide on the extent to which their visual design is tabloid or broadsheet in orientation independent of the language of the newspaper. The consistency / inconsistency between visual design choices and the language of newspapers can also be identified, which can inform understandings about the target audience of the newspaper, and the ways in which readers are positioned.

Such an approach could also empower readers in critiquing the practices of newspapers which ‘declare’ themselves as broadsheet, but which may share tabloid characteristics. Taking the Michelle Leslie story (Table 6.8), the modality of the SMH
home page during this design period (SMH Period III) is relatively high, presenting a relatively factual stance to the reader. Learners could investigate the extent to which the representation of women in this newspaper is similar to tabloid home pages with a much lower modality, and the extent to which the depiction of woman in language, image, layout, and in their multisemiotic combinations differ between ‘broadsheets’ and ‘tabloids’. The analytical approach outlined in this chapter provides the means by which such a question can be examined, and a pedagogy based on this approach could provide learners the knowledge, and the terminology to compare the portrayal of women in the *Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Sun*; to distinguish between *The New York Times* and *The News of the World* in such a way that (for example) content analysis alone cannot. Such explicit knowledge can be applied in informed and critical discussions about the media, their functions, and their roles in society. It can also prepare learners for authoring home pages, whether they are in the role of web designer, editor, or in any other personal or institutional role where they are involved in authoring on the world wide web.

Turning finally to textual meanings and page design, understanding what is typically positioned in the Head or in the Primary column of the page, and how page-rank Macro-Themes contribute to cohesion across the website, can likewise develop explicit knowledge in learners that they can apply in reading and writing web pages.

In conclusion, compared with print, the world wide web is a new medium, and online newspapers are a new macro-genre. A range of relatively predictable functional structures realised in the visual design of home pages have been proposed in this chapter. Some of these may be readily generalisable beyond the corpus, some may
require adaptation, and some may be replaced as home pages continue to evolve and
analysis of a wider sample yields different results. The findings provide a starting
point for the social-semiotic investigation of the visual design of news on home pages,
for the development of accounts of the multi-semiotic interaction between language
and visual design on home pages, and for the continuing development of pedagogical
approaches to reading and writing in new media.
Chapter 7: Newsbites

7.1 Introduction

With the advent of online newspapers, a new news genre has emerged - the newbite. In the literature, newsbites are also known (or dismissed) as blurbs (Lewenstein, et al., 2000) or abstracts (Massey, 2004); among journalists as write-offs or woffs (at the Sydney Morning Herald, for example), and stand alones (at The Australian, for example) (see Appendix C). These short headline-plus-lead-plus-hyperlink news texts (see 7.2 below) feature on online newspaper home pages, including home pages in content sections (such as the National content section, or the World content section - see Chapter 5).

The emergence of newsbites has not attracted a great deal of attention in the literature on media studies, journalism, or discourse analysis. To date, newsbites appear to have been accepted as a transparent, or ‘natural’ result of newspapers moving online, and their impact on the mass-mediation of information in and across societies has ‘slipped beneath the radar’ of critical scrutiny. In this chapter, the argument is presented that newsbites constitute a new news genre: they are a new way of telling stories in the mass media, and not simply an ideologically transparent or neutral summary of ‘full-length’ stories appearing elsewhere in the online newspaper. Their historical origins indicate that they are an evolution, rather than a revolution in mass-media story-telling. Nonetheless, the relatively small semiotic burden on language in these short texts - there is a limit to what can be said in a headline and a sentence (though cf. Bell, 1998) - has led to an increase in the demands on visual
communication. Visual communication already plays an important role in print newspapers (Chapter 2), but the brevity of newsbites, the affordances and constraints of the online medium, and the practices of online newspaper readers make newsbites a different genre than the stories on print newspaper pages.

In the corpus of this study, newsbites are used extensively. While there were developments in the design of newsbites in the *BKP* and the *PD* over the data collection period, by far the greatest changes in newsbite design was observed in the *SMH*. For this reason, this chapter charts the multi-semiotic design of newsbites on the *SMH* home page, and its development over time.

In section 7.2, a brief overview of the structure of newsbites is given, along with a glossary of functional terms used in the remainder of this chapter. In section 7.3, a historical trajectory is charted which shows that newsbites have emerged in response to changes in social context, and the functions of newsbites are discussed.

Section 7.4 provides a more detailed examination of the structure of newsbites than the overview provided in section 7.2, and charts the developments in newsbite structure from February, 2002 to April, 2006 on the *SMH* home page. At the same time, this section takes a systemic perspective on newsbites and their evolution, showing how the design of newsbites, and the structural changes over time realise paradigmatic oppositions which value these news stories in ways which are unlikely to be obvious to the newspaper reader, but which are ideological.
This chapter charts a case of phylogenetic change on an ontogenetic timescale. That is, in the SMH, the genre of the newsbite is evolving rapidly, on a timescale much faster than that typically associated with the development of genres in a culture, and certainly much faster than the evolution of genres in print newspapers (cf. Chapter 2). Reasons why this is the case, and why newsbites have evolved so rapidly over this period are considered in section 7.5, the conclusion to this chapter. The challenges this rapid evolution poses for descriptions of media discourse, and semiosis more generally are considerable, and these questions are taken up in Chapter 9.

7.2 Structure of newsbites: Overview and terminology

Probably the single most important genre on online newspaper home pages is the newsbite. The newsbite is a relatively new genre of news story, which has evolved as a result of social and technological developments in the mass media, including obviously the emergence of online newspapers. Newsbites feature on home pages (and may also be found on story pages where they are typically valued compositionally as Secondary - see Chapter 6). Examples of newsbites from the home pages of SMH, PD, and BKP are given in Figure 7.1.

The relatively recent emergence of the online newspaper and the newsbite contribute to rapid and considerable change in newsbites at this stage of their development. Despite this change, in the corpus of this study, it is possible to identify
three essential structural elements of a newsbite. The first two, the headline and the main text of the story, are given the functional labels of Focus and Event respectively. The third obligatory functional element is the Link, which may be realised by a separate hyperlink (Figure 7.2). Often, the headline and/or image function as a hyperlink.

Figure 7.1: Examples of newsbites from the PD (top), BKP (left), and SMH (right)

In addition to these obligatory structural elements, newsbites also may feature an Illustration (realised by an image). Another optional structural element is a heading placed above the headline, typically in a smaller and different coloured font, which functions to frame the newsbite, either in terms of the wider social context of a particular story, or in terms of the newspaper’s structure (e.g. TRAVEL, OPINION) or value system (e.g. EXCLUSIVE) and is given the functional label of Verbal Frame (Figure 7.3).

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57 Bell (1998) and Iedema, Feez & White (1994) provide frameworks for analysing such texts linguistically. This thesis and this chapter take a multimodal perspective on the structure (and paradigmatic meanings) of these texts.

58 This chapter follows the convention used in SFL, whereby the first letter for functional labels is capitalised. Technical terms introduced in this thesis are in bold font the first time they appear in each section.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Structural Feature</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Focus</td>
<td>a heading at the beginning of the story which orients the reader to the content; the focus of a story (typically realised by a headline)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tradition-Focus</td>
<td>a Focus in traditional, black font drawing on the visual conventions of print newspapers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hyper-Focus</td>
<td>a Focus which draws on the visual conventions of the world wide web, often (but not exclusively) in blue font and underlined</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modern-Focus</td>
<td>a Focus with visual features which draw in part on the conventions of print newspapers, and in part on the conventions of the world wide web</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scream-Focus</td>
<td>a Focus which is larger than other headlines on the page, and therefore with parallels to so-called ‘screamer headlines’ in the tabloid press</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Event</td>
<td>the main verbiage of the newbite where the details of the story are given, usually in one or two sentences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Link</td>
<td>a hyperlink to a longer version of the ‘same’ story, or a version of the story using different semiotic resources (e.g. audio or video)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invitation</td>
<td>a Link which is an explicit verbal indication that the reader can click to access a longer or modally different version of the ‘same’ story, and which has no other overt verbal function</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Navigator</td>
<td>a hyperlink in a newbite which takes the reader to the home page of a content section rather than a story page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tangent</td>
<td>a hyperlink in a newbite to a related, but different story</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illustration</td>
<td>an image in a newbite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lure</td>
<td>an Illustration which appears before the main verbiage of a newbite, and which dominates the newbite visually</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbal Frame</td>
<td>a heading appearing above the headline which frames the newbite in a wider social context, in terms of the website structure, or in terms of the newspaper’s value system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Border</td>
<td>a visual feature which explicitly demarcates the spatial boundary of a newbite (typically a line-border, or background shading)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 7.1: Definitions of structural elements in newbites*

In addition, **Tangents** - headline-only hyperlinks appearing with a newbite - allow readers to follow one or more links to story pages which have content related to
a given newbite, and provide more entry points to the content of the newspaper.

Finally, **Navigators** are hyperlinks from a story which take the reader to the home page of a content section, rather than to a story page. Figure 7.3 shows the same newbites as shown in Figure 7.2, this time with all structural elements identified. Each of these elements is discussed and exemplified (and some elaborated) in section 7.4 below. At this point, a glossary is provided for the reader’s reference (Table 7.1).

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**Figure 7.2: Newsbites with obligatory structural elements indicated (reproducing Figure 5.24)**

Having presented an overview of the structure of newbites, the following section provides a historical perspective on their emergence.
7.3 Emergence, and functions of newsbites

This section charts a historical perspective on the evolution of newsbites. Having established a textual basis for the genre of newsbite in the previous section, the purpose of this section is to argue from a social perspective that these short texts instantiate a new genre. Thus, questions of the social purpose of newsbites, and how this purpose differs from that of other similar genres, are also addressed.
7.3.1 Emergence of newsbites

7.3.1.1 From print to screen
As outlined in Chapter 1, newspaper institutions took to internet publishing with surprising speed. As a screen-mediated phenomenon, the world wide web provides affordances and challenges for story-telling which differ from those of the printed page. It is not ‘natural’ that newsbites emerged - the move to screen was, of course, one important factor, but short headline-plus-lead news stories are not unique to online newspapers (see below), and there are other approaches that online newspapers could have adopted on their home and section pages (cf. Bateman, 2008; Cooke, 2003; Engebresten, 2000). As Boczkowski (2004a) argues was the case with the emergence of online newspapers, newsbites emerged as a result of social and institutional factors, as much as from changes in the technology of news delivery (cf. Barnhurst & Nerone, 2001). Here, I give three reasons for the emergence of newsbites: the historical development of hard-news stories in English-language newspaper reporting; the news values of immediacy and salience which bring news ‘highlights’ to the ‘front’ of news texts; and the demands of screen reading.

7.3.1.2 Hard news and the Nucleus-Satellite structure
As discussed in Chapter 2, hard-news stories in English-language newspapers have evolved verbally into a Nucleus-Satellite structure, where the primary social purpose of this ubiquitous genre, “describing an event in terms of its potential for ‘destabilisation/ stabilisation’”, is achieved in the headline and lead (Iedema, Feez & White, 1994, p. 115). This has made it possible for home page authors to include only the verbal Nucleus of stories on the home page, and to supplement this with other
structural elements such as a Verbal Frame, Tangents, and/or Illustrations (see section 2.3.1; section 7.2; and further discussion below).

7.3.1.3 News values - ‘fronting’ the news

The second reason for the emergence of the newsbite, like the first, has to do with the institutional practices of mass media organisations and their interaction with society more broadly. This is the importance of the ‘news values’ of immediacy and relevance (see Chapter 2). In broadcast news, ‘headlines’ are presented at the ‘top’ of the broadcast; in the macrogenre of the print newspaper, the most important stories appear on the front page, and these stories are often split, with the majority of the story continuing on a later page.

In some cases ... the article does not even appear on the front page, so that the page becomes a kind of summary, signalling both the relation between the paper and its readers and the relation between these two and the events and issues represented on the page, and in the newspaper as a whole. (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1998, p. 205)

The institutional practice of putting important news ‘up-front’ in broadcast and print news, and where necessary splitting stories, combines neatly with the affordances of the online medium.

As news has become increasingly commoditized, and is increasingly blended with entertainment (Ursell, 2001; cf. Machin & Niblock, 2006, p. 10; Perlmutter, 2003, p. 12), the textual products of news must compete in what Gauntlett (2000) calls ‘the attention economy’. The institutional tendency towards capturing readers’ attention (rather than maintaining it) can be traced back as far as the emergence of tabloids in the mid-19th century (Machin & Niblock, 2006, p. 139), and seen also in the 20th century phenomenon known as ‘soundbite news’. Though often associated
with broadcast and so-called ‘tabloid’ news, in a marketplace where all news providers compete for ideological and economic gain, the ‘quality’ broadsheet press and its online offspring also reflect this social and textual development (cf. Gauntlett, 2000; Hallin 1997; Iedema 1995, pp. 91-3; Lumby 1999, pp. 14-19; Pilger 1994, pp. 63-68; Sparks, 2000, pp. 273-6), and the verbal brevity of newsbites is consistent with this social and institutional trend.

7.3.1.4 Screen reading

Finally, text presented on a computer screen requires unique reading practices (Jewitt, 2002; Kalantzis, 2001; Thurston, 2000). It is not possible to scan large tracts of text quickly, and any long text requires the reader to scroll down the page. In online publishing, longer texts are commonly divided into smaller chunks, which are then hyperlinked together due to the demands of screen reading (cf. Jewitt, 2002; Thurston, 2000; Zhao, 2008). Newsbites allow the reader of the electronic newspaper to scan major news stories, and thus to read the news quickly, seeing a number of news texts in their entirety without the burden of scrolling through long texts on the screen (cf. de Vries, 2008).

7.3.1.5 Emergence of newsbites: Conclusion

Three factors have been discussed in this section: the social development of the Satellite-Nucleus structure in newspaper reports; the existing institutional practice in the mass media to bring important texts to the ‘front’, and to split texts where necessary in order to reconcile the demands of immediacy and relevance on one hand and space on the other; and the reading practices associated with the medium of the computer screen. Together, these factors dovetail in the genre of the newsbite.
7.3.2 Newsbites and co-text

If the social and historical trajectory charted above means that newsbites are a different genre, there should also be textual evidence that an uncritical understanding of newsbites (i.e. that they are simply an extract from a longer story) is incomplete. This section provides such evidence, in the form of:

- different wordings of newsbites and the stories to which they have a Link
- the use of different wording in newsbites which appear on different pages in the same newspaper, yet have a Link to the same story page
- newsbites which use different semiotic resources to the hyperlinked story (e.g. written language vs video).

Newsbites hyperlink to a longer version of the ‘same’ story. This ‘same’ story has its own headline and lead, but the wording and image can differ between the newsbite and the longer text. These longer stories are not a continuation, but a different construal of the story on a different page, in a different verbal and visual context (Figure 7.4a, 7.4b, 7.4c).

Such instances demonstrate that newsbites function as texts in their own right, and go through an institutional authoring process which constructs them differently from stories which appear on story pages.

Moving to the second phenomenon which provides textual evidence that newsbites are not ‘simply’ an ‘extract’ from a longer story, newsbites sometimes appear on more than one page in the same newspaper. In such cases, they enter into
different intertextual relationships with the other texts (linguistic and visual) on each page. This can lead to different wordings and/or different visual presentation of the ‘same’ newsbite (Table 7.2).

**WATERWORLD**

**Surf hot spots put on the map**

The noble, ancient art of map making is to make room for the lexicon of the surfer as the NSW Government announced a plan to allow the nomination of surf break names along the coast to the Geographical Names Board. [Full report](#).

- Graphic: *Naming Sydney’s surf breaks*

---

The last word on surf hot spots: see you at the winkipop, bra boy

---

On the map ... surfer John Sutton catches a wave breaking between “dunny bowl” and “stormy” at Maroubra beach yesterday. Photo: Andrew Taylor

By James Woodford, Environment Writer

- Graphic: *Naming Sydney’s surf breaks*

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The noble, ancient art of map making is to make room for the lexicon of the surfer - a waterworld where a good break can be known as anything from dunny bowl to voodoo.

The NSW Government yesterday announced a plan to allow the nomination of surf break names along the coast to the Geographical Names Board - a move the Information Technology Minister, Kim Yeardon, hopes will improve response times for lifesavers and rescue officers.

**Figure 7.4a: Newsbite appearing on home page (top), and extract from the ‘same’ story on a story page (bottom) to which the newsbite is hyperlinked (SMH, March 15, 2002)**
Latham’s a gold medal hand biter: Beazley

September 15, 2005 - 12:16PM

Opposition Leader Kim Beazley says former Labor leader Mark Latham used the party to get to the top before arbitrarily turning on the people who had backed him.

Mr Latham has launched a stinging attack on Labor and Mr Beazley in his soon-to-be-released diaries.

But Mr Beazley today dismissed Mr Latham’s criticisms as fanciful, saying the former Opposition leader had to take responsibility for last year’s election loss.

Mr Beazley said he had not ruled out taking legal action against Mr Latham over some of his comments.

“In these sort of circumstances, quite frankly when you look at both documents and coverage, you do reserve your legal position,” he said.

Mr Beazley said if the character traits now being displayed by Mr Latham had been manifest if he had won last year’s election, then Labor might have had to move on him.

“I know about myself and my cabinet colleagues, or what would have been my cabinet colleagues, that if anything went seriously wrong we would have dealt with it,” he said.

“We are a trustworthy group, those of us on the front bench.”

Mr Beazley conceded the issue would hurt Labor.

“We’ll take some water, you always do when something like this arises,” he said.

Figure 7.4b: Newsbite appearing on home page (top), and extract from the ‘same’ story on a story page (bottom) to which the newsbite is hyperlinked (SMH, September 15, 2005)
Obesity: the new crisis for women

By Julie Robotham and Justin Norris
September 15, 2005

Women in their 20s have put on an average five kilograms in just seven years, according to a landmark national survey that suggests an imminent health crisis for Australia.

More than half of middle-aged women are also revealed as being overweight in the study, which highlights greater female participation in the workforce, longer hours spent behind desks, and increasing difficulty balancing work and family commitments as key reasons for the unhealthy trends.

"It's astounding," said Christina Lee, the coordinator of the Commonwealth-funded study, which will follow the fortunes of the same 40,000 women for at least another decade. "The younger women have already caught up with the older generation. We are going to have higher rates of heart disease and diabetes."

Figure 7.4c: Newsbite appearing on home page (top), and extract from the ‘same’ story on a story page (bottom) to which the newsbite is hyperlinked (SMH, September 15, 2005)

Table 7.2: Related newsbites on home page and section page
Thirdly, many newsbites have a Link to a video or audio story, and sometimes newsbites have a Link to the home page of a content section, and no Link to a story page. In such cases, the newsbite clearly cannot be considered an ‘extract’.

In spite of the examples given above, in the corpus of this study, the text of the Focus and Event of newsbites are often identical to the headline and lead of the story to which the newsbite has a Link, and newsbites on the home pages of different content sections are often identical. Nonetheless, these examples demonstrate that the process of authoring newbsites involves conscious decision-making on the part of the editorial staff of the newspaper, and that newbsites function (i.e. make meaning) according to their placement and relation (both visual and verbal) to the texts appearing on the same page, regardless of the texts to which they are hyperlinked. As online newspapers continue to evolve and exploit the affordances of publishing on the world wide web, we can expect the specialised authoring of newsbites for particular pages to become far more common.

Thus far, we have considered the structure of newsbites, and their historical and textual contexts. We now turn to consider how newsbites function.

**7.3.3 Functions of newsbites**

Newsbites’ textual brevity, and their superficial appearance as an ‘extract’ from ‘the whole story’ can create the impression that they are not significant or important texts, perhaps not even texts in their own right. This contributes to making them ideologically almost invisible, and paradoxically makes them an important site for investigation of the mass-mediation of ideology in new media. In newspapers which
feature them, they are the texts that the reader typically encounters first and most in reading the paper (cf. Homqvist et al., 2003).  

The social purpose of an individual newsbite is to present the focal point of a story with immediacy and impact, presenting the core (or Nucleus) of a story, “foregrounding what is considered important and who is considered important” (Iedema, Feez & White, 1994, p. 106; italics in original). As mass communication has moved onto the computer screen, methods of communicating important information in an accessible and efficient manner in this medium have become socially necessary. Newsbites are short enough to be read in their entirety on the screen, while remaining consistent with important features of existing written news discourse as already described.

Collectively, newsbites allow the news authors to present an overview of the most important news of the day on a single page, highlighting these stories in the context of the whole newspaper, classifying them, and evaluating their importance comparative to other stories on the same page according to the ideological values of the news institution. This valuation is made by the placement of different newsbites on the page (see Chapter 6) and their design (see section 7.4 following), in a way not possible with longer versions of the ‘same’ story, and not possible in the same way in print newspapers.

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59 ‘Promiscuous’ online readers who use manual news portals such as Fark <http://www.fark.com> and the Drudge Report <www.drudgereport.com>, or automatic news indexes such as Google News <http://news.google.com> often bypass the newspapers’ home pages (Thurman, 2007), which means that the institutional practices (including the multimodal design of news) of such aggregators is also in need of investigation.
Stories are ascribed relative importance by virtue of being included as a newsbite on a home page - the alternative is to be written as a **newsbit** (i.e. a headline-only hyperlink, often appearing in lists), as a **Tangent** (an additional hyperlink to a related story that sometimes appears in a newsbite - see section 7.2), or as a **standalone** (a short news story typically featuring an image but no hyperlink - see section 5.3.5). This is in contrast to **newsbriefs** (Iedema, Feez & White, 1994), or ‘single-sentence news stories’ - the short, headline-plus-lead stories which are used to fill space on print newspaper pages (Bell, 1998), and which newsbites verbally resemble. Newsbriefs give brief accounts of events evaluated as relatively *insignificant* relative to other stories in the print newspaper, whereas newsbites indicate that a story is *important* relative to others.

Another function of newsbites is to provide a large number of ‘entry points’ to the newspaper, attracting readers to follow links to other pages in content sections of the website, and bringing revenue to the newspaper in the process.

In summary, newsbites function to present the focal point of stories with immediacy and brevity according to news values of institution; give an overview of the news valued by the newspaper as most important at any given time; afford the classification of news on the home page; contribute to the visual evaluation of stories; and provide readers with many entry points to the newspaper and therefore to the copy and advertisements contained therein.
7.3.4 Evolution and functions of newsbites: Conclusion

To summarise this section, newsbites have emerged as a result of a number of socio-historical factors: the historical development of the Satellite-Nucleus structure and shorter news texts across the mass media, the mass media’s preference for putting important news ‘up front’ and splitting stories where necessary, and the demands of screen reading. While technology has obviously played an important role, it cannot be viewed as the determining factor of the emergence of online newspapers, nor of newsbites (cf. Barnhurst & Nerone, 2001; Boczkowski, 2004a). As Caple (in press) argues in relation to the development of photojournalism, “what the technology affords, the social, in its own good time, will take advantage of”. The purposes of newsbites identified in this section are to present, classify, and evaluate news stories according to the ideological values of the news institution, in keeping with the affordances of the screen-mediated web page, and in a way that can maximise the newspaper’s revenue.

This section has charted a brief historical perspective on the emergence of the newsbite in online newspaper home pages. From this perspective, it can be seen that this new semiotic practice reflects social change, and is not simply providing a ‘summary’ or ‘abstract’ for a complete story. The following section provides a systemic description of newsbites on the SMH home page, and charts their evolution over a four-year period.
7.4 Newsbites in the SMH: System and structure

In this section, the development of newsbites in the SMH over the three data collection periods (spanning February, 2002 to April, 2006) is described. This description charts the changes in their design, and how systemic oppositions in each design period can be derived from the structural differences between newsbites, regardless of page design. The systemic differences between newsbites, which increase over the four years, are in principle independent of page structure, but in practice closely related to page structure.

As cited in Chapter 5, Bateman (2008) has characterised the home pages of online newspapers as much poorer than print newspapers in terms of their ability to visually signify the relative value of stories on their pages. As Bateman explains, this is due in part to the page templates used in online newspapers, which are necessary both for editors to work with and for readers to have the consistency necessary to navigate their way around pages and around the website effectively and efficiently. The analysis that follows demonstrates that, in the SMH at least, these constraints on page design in online newspapers co-exist with an expanding paradigm of choices in newsbite design two ranks below.

The argument grounded in the analysis that follows is twofold. First, the increasing diversity in the design of newsbites provides an increasingly sophisticated paradigm of choices by which the authors of the home page can value news stories on the home page. Second, this evolution of choice in newsbite design has occurred in part to ‘offset’ the page-rank restrictions that Bateman describes.
If the [page design] pattern is truly static [as it is on the home pages of the three newspapers in this study, and in most online newspapers], it elevates form over function. The violence done to news values depends on the subtleties of the layout, but no layout designed a priori can genuinely reflect the news values of each and every day and their relationship to each other. The world does not order itself as conveniently as that. (Evans, 1976, p. 75)

The web page offers different affordances to the printed page, yet the demand for ‘multidimensional access’ is as important for online newspapers as it is for their print ancestors. Newsbite design is evolving to provide newspaper authors and readers with the functionality once provided by the print page, but with a different set of constraints and affordances.

As explained in Chapter 4, the data collection period spans four home-page designs of the SMH. Table 7.3 repeats the dates of these four design periods. Newsbites from home pages from each of these design periods are discussed chronologically. Conclusions are presented in section 7.5.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SMH Period I</th>
<th>SMH Period II</th>
<th>SMH Period III</th>
<th>SMH Period IV</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Table 7.3: Design periods for SMH

### 7.4.1 SMH Period I (mid-1999 - March 2002)

In Period I, the home page of the SMH classifies newsbites in a basic taxonomy of hard news and lite news (Figure 7.5). This classification is reflected in a systemic opposition between hard and lite newsbites, an opposition motivated by structural differences. That is, in addition to the visual classification devices of the news taxonomy at the rank of zone (Chapters 5 and 6), there are a number of elements of
the structure of newsbites which allow us to systemically differentiate between hard and lite newsbites at the rank of text, irrespective of their positioning on the home page. In addition to hard and lite newsbites, there is a third systemic category of newsbites in Period I: cataloguing newsbites.

![Image of SMH home page from SMH Period I (top) and basic visual-verbal taxonomy of news (bottom)](image)

*Figure 7.5: SMH home page from SMH Period I (top) and basic visual-verbal taxonomy of news (bottom)*

Hard newsbites reflect the continued dominance of text over image in hard news in online newspapers at this stage of their development. Text dominates the
page. Headlines in hard newsbites are the most visually salient text on the page. There are few (typically two or three) hard newsbites with images on each home page. In those hard newsbites which do have an image, text dominates the image spatially, and the thumbnail images in hard-news newsbites are typically logico-semantically related to a Participant in the headline (see Chapter 8). Figure 7.6 illustrates that coloured hypertext and thumbnail images exist on the visual peripheries of the core of black-and-white print in hard-news newsbites in the SMH at this stage of their development. The message is: our core product is still hard news, in black and white, in writing.

Lite newsbites demonstrate a greater degree of experimentation in news design in this period.

7.4.1.1 Hard versus lite versus cataloguing newsbites: Basic distinction

There are three basic categories of newsbites on the home page of the SMH in Period I: hard, lite, and cataloguing. These can be distinguished by differences in structure.

7.4.1.1 Focus

The first distinction to note is the size and colour of the font of the Focus of newsbites. Hard newsbites have a headline which functions as the Focus, which is in a larger font than the remainder of the newsbite, and which is black. These headlines draw on the conventions of the traditional print newspaper with its large headlines and predominately black text on white background (Figure 7.6). The Focus in hard newsbites is not a hyperlink.
Chapter Seven: Newsbites

Reith fingers bungling bureaucrats
Former defence minister Peter Reith today blamed bungling by defence bureaucrats for the government’s failure to correct claims that asylum seekers threw their children overboard. Full report

- Marian Wilkinson How Australia was fed a lift that grew into a gross distortion
- Ministers skip up at our case wonder
- Children overboard the main players
- Are you satisfied with the government’s explanation? Here your say | Your view

ECONOMY

Unemployment up to 7 per cent
A surge in jobseekers pushed Australia’s unemployment rate to 5.6 per cent in January despite the creation of more than 100,000 new jobs, official figures showed today. Full report

WINTER OLYMPICS

Inquiry into pairs medal as anger mounts over gold
Canada will appeal against the judges’ decision to award the figure skating pairs gold medal to Russia’s Elena Berezhnaya and Anton Sikharulidze ahead of Canadians Jamie Salé and David Pelletier. Full report

- America lay up Roy HG’s arrest on Salt Lake
- For full Olympic Fred a place in Sydney’s heart
- 2002 Winter Olympics

CITY Slickers

Rich are richer and living in Sydney
The rich are getting even richer and the divide between the city and the bush is becoming increasingly evident. But more eye-opening is the increasing concentration of wealth developing in Sydney compared to the rest of the country. Full report

MARKET BLAST

Fairfax profits plunge 53 per cent
John Fairfax’s net profit more than halved to $36 million in the December half as the newspaper publisher suffered the worst advertising recession in a decade and wrote off $11 million on the sale of its unprofitable Citysearch online directories to Telstra. Full report

- Range on sport catches up with News Corp

SULTANS OF THE STATES

Liberal renegade gives Labor a full house
Every state and territory government is, for the first time, in the hands of Labor after an expelled Liberal MP yesterday dumped the nation’s last conservative administration. Full report

UNLATEABLE UNEATABLE

Fox hunting outlawed in Scotland
Scotland’s semi-autonomous assembly today voted to ban hunting with dogs, making it the first part of Britain to pass the controversial measure to outlaw fox hunting. Full report

ACTION SETTLED

Herald to say sorry to ex-police chief
A defamation case brought by former NSW police commissioner Tony Laver against The Sydney Morning Herald and former Liberal Party adviser Gary Sturgis was settled today for an undescribed amount. Full report

Figure 7.6: Hard newsbites on SMH home page, Period I: the news ‘in black and white’

In contrast, the headlines of lite newsbites appear in the same font size and type as the remainder of the newsbite. Further, they are underlined and blue, drawing on the more recent conventions of the world wide web to signify that they are also hyperlinks. So in lite newsbites, the Focus is conflated with a Link (a hyperlink to a story page - Figure 7.7).
Intertextually then, the visual design of hard newsbite headlines references the visual discourse of traditional news genres, while lite newsbite headlines reference the visual discourse of hypertext and the web. These distinctions in visual-verbal intertextuality contribute to the different ideological valuation of hard and lite newsbites, a recursive realisation of the classification signified by the design of the home page. The visual form of each of these two types of Focus realises a different intertextual function: **Tradition-Focus** and **Hyper-Focus** (Figure 7.7).

![Figure 7.7: Hard (left) and lite (right) newsbite from SMH home page Period I, showing different visual design of headlines](image)

The Focus in cataloguing newsbites is a heading, not a headline. It draws on the conventions of the world wide web, with light blue text accompanied by icons, and is therefore a Hyper-Focus (Figure 7.8). This Hyper-Focus is also a hyperlink, but does not function as a Link, because it does not take the reader to a different version of the ‘same’ story. Rather, it functions as a Navigator, as it takes the reader to the home page of a content section (Chapter 5).

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60 It belongs to a different class of item, but has the same function as the Focus in other newsbites.
In summary, in hard newsbites, the Focus is not a hyperlink. In lite newsbites, the Focus is conflated with a Link, and in cataloguing newsbites, the Focus is conflated with a Navigator.

7.4.1.1.2 Verbal Frame
In addition to making a distinction between hard, lite, and cataloguing newsbites on the basis of different kinds of structure, a distinction can also be made in terms of the presence and absence of certain structural elements. Hard newsbites on the SMH home page always have a Verbal Frame (a heading above the headline); lite and cataloguing newsbites never do (see Figure 7.7 above). The function of the Verbal Frame is to ‘frame’ the story (cf. Gumperz, 1982). It helps to clarify for the reader how a given newsbite - a particular news commodity - is of relevance to them.

7.4.1.1.3 Link
Another indication of the importance of verbiage to the news institution at this time is the form of the hyperlink of hard newsbites. Hard news stories in Period I always have a Link (a hyperlink to a longer version of the ‘same’ story) explicitly and separately identified. This hyperlink reads: Full report, a linguistic declaration that the newsbite is incomplete, and that to get the ‘whole story’, the reader needs to navigate beyond the newsbite to a story page. This kind of Link functions as an Invitation to the reader to navigate to the story page. As stated above, the headline in
hard newsbites in Period I is not a hyperlink. Partly because hard news provides the
raison d'etre of the newspaper, the Link in hard newsbites is separate and explicit, and
the wording of this Link is standardised. It signifies linguistically that the reader
should be reading on, and that the newspaper does have the “full story”. Thus, despite
the brevity of the newsbite, the newspaper maintains its interpersonal stance as an
authoritative and credible source of news.

Lite news, by comparison, requires the institution to make no such assurances.
It is attractive and appealing enough that interested readers will read as their interests
dictate, and brief enough to be seen as a relatively minor diversion from the serious
business of the newspaper. And in contrast to hard newsbites, the headline in lite
newsbites is a hyperlink (more technically, the Link is conflated with the Focus).
Therefore, lite newsbites have no need to include an Invitation, and do not.

Cataloguing newsbites also have a Link, but not an Invitation. The Link
consists of a portion of the Event identified as a hyperlink (Figure 7.8 above).

7.4.1.4 Summary: System
At the rank of zone, it is possible to classify hard and lite news due to the ideational
news taxonomy (Chapter 5). At the rank of text, there is structural motivation a for a
systemic opposition between hard and lite newsbites, and also for a third category of
cataloguing newsbites. This structural distinction rests on the different functional
elements of Tradition-Focus and Hyper-Focus, and the presence / absence of a Verbal
Frame, Invitation, and/or Navigator. This is illustrated in Table 7.4.
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Table 7.4: Hard v lite v cataloguing newsbite

The structural differences discussed above and evident in Table 7.4 can be represented systemically, as shown in Figure 7.9.

As discussed in Chapter 3, reading from left to right, the system has an entry condition (newsbite in this case), and the square brackets signify that one choice must be selected. The blue diagonal arrows in the system mean is realised by. The symbol ^ means is followed by; + means a structure is present; / means is conflated with.

In summary, it is possible to identify systemic multimodal differentiation in the design of newsbites on the home page of the Sydney Morning Herald in Period I.
Differences in the multimodal structure of hard, lite, and cataloguing newsbites, and in the design of their structural elements align hard newsbites intertextually with the visual discourse of print newspapers and the traditions of news institutions, while lite and cataloguing newsbites draw more on a different visual discourse, that of the world wide web.

Within the three basic categories of hard, lite, and cataloguing newsbites, more delicate distinctions can be made. Each category is now discussed in turn.

7.4.1.2 Hard newsbites: More delicate distinctions

More delicate distinctions can be made within the category of hard newsbites in Period I. The first hard newsbite on the page always has larger a headline than those below it. This difference in font size is consistent in every edition of the newspaper - it is systematic and functional. The larger-sized headline is aligned with so-called ‘screamer’ headlines in print newspapers, so it is here given the functional label Scream-Focus. In Figure 7.6 above, the Scream-Focus is worded: Reith fingers bungling bureaucrats.

It is always (and only) the first hard newsbite which has a Scream-Focus, so we can make a binary distinction between those hard newsbites that are sub-classified as first (realised structurally by the presence of a Scream-Focus), and those that are sub-classified as following. This distinction can be represented as a system, as Figure 7.10 illustrates.
7.4.1.3 Lite newsbites: More delicate distinctions

Among lite newsbites during Period I, it is possible to identify two distinct types of newsbite, **standard lite newsbites** and **leading lite newsbites**.

7.4.1.3.1 Newsbite: lite: standard

The first subtype is the type which most closely resembles hard newsbites, and is called here the **standard lite newsbite**. As explained above, it is differentiated from hard newsbites by the presence of a Hyper-Focus conflated with a Link. Figure 7.11 shows examples of this sub-type, which has a headline at the top of the newsbite, and in those cases where it has an image, an image below the headline and on the left of the newsbite.

![Figure 7.11: Standard lite newsbites with and without image: SMH, Period I](image-url)
7.4.1.3.2 Newbite: lite: leading

![Image of a leading lite newsbite](image)

Lure

Figure 7.12: Leading lite newsbite, SMH home page, Period I

The second subtype of lite newbite is called the **leading lite newbite**. It is the first lite newbite on the home page, and visually the most salient, maximising the visual impact of the Head - or the ‘first screen’ - of the page (Chapter 6). These newbites have a top-bottom division, with the image at the top dominating the newbite visually. Unlike other newbites, the image in the leading lite newbite appears above all verbiage, with headline and story below. Its large size - the image in this newbite is the largest on the home page - and positioning above the verbiage differentiates this Illustration from others, and it is here given the functional label of **Lure** (Figure 7.12).

7.4.1.3.3 Summary: System

On the basis of the discussion presented in this sub-section, the category of lite newbite can be divided systemically into two further sub-categories, **standard** and **leading**. Table 7.5 compares these two sub-types, and they are represented in systemic form in Figure 7.13.
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Table 7.5: Lite newsbites in SMH Period I

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standard</th>
<th>Leading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image1.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td><img src="image2.png" alt="Image" /></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 7.13: Lite newsbites in SMH Period I: System

7.4.1.4 Cataloguing newsbites

As discussed above, cataloguing newsbites have a graphic combining language with one or more icons as a heading across the top of the newbite. This heading (not a headline) functions as the Focus (and is a Hyper-Focus - drawing as it does on the visual conventions of the world wide web rather than those of traditional, print newspapers). As a Hyper-Focus, it is conflated with Navigator because the hyperlink
Chapter Seven: Newsbites

takes the reader to the home page of a content section. The main text of these newsbites presents one or more stories from a given section of the newspaper, each with a Link (Figure 7.14).

Figure 7.14: Cataloguing newsbite, SMH home page, SMH Period I

While the cataloguing newsbite is always titled multimedia in Period I, another item, titled sports roundup, also appears on the home page during this Period, and has many similarities to cataloguing newsbites. The sports roundup item has a bullet list of sports stories, which constitute a menu of stories from which the reader can choose (Figure 7.15).

Figure 7.15: Cataloguing newsbite and menu, SMH home page, SMH Period I

The menu items in the sports roundup have no Link - their hyperlinks are all Navigators. In appearance and structure, the sports roundup item is a hybrid, half newsbite, half menu. Systemically, it does not have a Link, and is therefore not analysed as a newsbite here.
7.4.1.5 Illustrations

Images (which function as Illustrations in newsbites) appear in hard, lite, and cataloguing newsbites. There are few (typically five or six) newsbites with images on each home page in Period I, but apart from leading lite newsbites, it is not possible to predict whether or not a newsbite will have an Illustration (see Figure 7.5 above). We can make a systemic distinction in all newsbites between those that are illustrated, and those that are not, as shown in Figure 7.16.

![Illustrations in newsbites, SMH home page Period I: System](image)

7.4.1.6 Tangents

A feature of hard, lite, and cataloguing newsbites is that they may or may not include Tangents (hyperlinks to stories and/or home pages of content sections related to the story reported in the Event of the newsbite) in addition to the Link (a hyperlink to a longer or modally different version of the ‘same’ story). In hard newsbites, Tangents typically occur below the Event (Figure 7.17).

![Hard newbite with Tangents, SMH home page Period I](image)
In lite and cataloguing newsbites, Tangents may be positioned visually in the same way as in hard newsbites (Figure 7.18) or within the main verbal text of the newsbite (Figure 7.19). As with the use of hypertext font in headlines, this aligns lite and cataloguing newsbites intertextually more with the web, and less with traditional newspapers.
A systemic opposition can be made between tangenting newsbites (those that have one or more Tangents) and non-tangenting (those that have none), as illustrated in Figure 7.20.

![Figure 7.20: Tangenting and non-tangentning newsbites, SMH home page Period I: System](image)

7.4.1.7 Summary: System network, *SMH* Period I (mid-1999 - March 2002)

The three systems of *hard/lite/cataloguing, illustrated/unillustrated*, and *tangenting/non-tangentning* are simultaneous, and together constitute a system network at the rank of text. All the systemic oppositions in the visual-verbal design of newsbites on the home page of the *smh online* as discussed above are represented in the system network presented in Figure 7.21.

Reading from the left, *newsbite* is the entry condition, and the brace means that there are three simultaneous choices:

- **hard** or **lite** or **cataloguing**; AND
- **illustrated** or **unillustrated**; AND
- **tangenting** or **non-tangentning**.
Because a Lure (one type of Illustration) is an obligatory element in a leading lite newsbite, it follows that in the system network, if the feature leading is selected, then the feature illustrated must also be selected. This is indicated by the use of superscript $I$ (for if) with the feature leading, and superscript $T$ (for then) with the feature illustrated (i.e. IF leading is selected, THEN illustrated must be selected).

Representing newsbites systemically in this way shows at once their structural similarities and differences, and also the paradigmatic choices, or meaning potential,
available to the authors of the home page as ‘designed into’ newsbites. In the next section, the design of newsbites in Period II is considered.

7.4.2 SMH Period II (March 2002 - May 2004)

The design of the home page of the SMH in Period II changed in a number of ways from that in Period I. In the News Coverage, this included a change from a Roman to a sans serif font, inclusion of overt verbal sub-classification of hard newsbites, and an increased use of images (Figure 7.22).

Moving ‘down’ to the rank of text, from Period I to Period II, hard newsbites, standard lite newsbites, and leading lite newsbites all remain essentially the same in terms of their visual-verbal design (Table 7.6).

One important change in Period II is that the Focus of hard newsbites becomes a hyperlink. Therefore, the Focus (whether Tradition-Focus as in hard newsbites, or Hyper-Focus as in lite newsbites) is conflated with a Link in every newsbite, and the structural realisation of a newsbite (the entry condition to the system network) consequently changes from Focus followed by Event, plus Link:

\[
\text{Focus}^+ \text{Event} + \text{Link}
\]

to Focus conflated with Link followed by Event:

\[
\text{Focus/Link}^+ \text{Event}
\]
Systemically, the only changes between Periods I and II is the change in the entry condition, and the disappearance of cataloguing newsbites in Period II (Figure 7.23).
Table 7.6: Newsbites from SMH home page, Period I and Period II

Figure 7.23: Newsbites on SMH home page: System network, Period II
7.4.3 *SMH* Period III (May 2004 - November 2005)

The changes in Period II represent a consolidation of newsbite design. In Period III however, significant changes in page design (as discussed in Chapter 6) are reflected in similar changes in newsbite design. Figure 7.24 shows a home page from Period III, and the basic taxonomy of news construed in the visual design of the home page (see Chapter 6 for discussion).

*Figure 7.24: SMH home page from SMH Period III (top) and basic visual-verbal taxonomy of news (bottom)*
This page design gives the home page authors three basic classification choices in the news taxonomy (up from two basic choices in Periods I and II), with further verbal sub-classification in the case of hard news. In line with Bateman’s observation cited at the outset of this section (i.e. section 7.4), the multidimensional access possibilities are relatively constrained here, at the rank of zone. By expanding the meaning potential ‘designed into’ newsbites (represented in SF theory as systems networks) at the rank of text, authors are offered more choice in the visual valuation of news on the home page. This section describes the paradigm of choices in newsbite design in Period III, and how this meaning potential is related to social and institutional developments in the construction of online news, and to design choices in the news taxonomy at the rank of zone.

7.4.3.1 Hard versus lite versus soft newsbites: Basic distinction

The representational taxonomy shown in Figure 7.24 is reflected in systemic oppositions in the design of newsbites. Figure 7.25 shows a sample of the three basic categories of newsbite on the SMH home page in Period III, with hard newsbites on the left, soft newsbites in the middle, and lite newsbites on the right. The structural elements shared by all newsbites are the same as in Period II: a Focus conflated with a Link, followed by an Event.

Figure 7.25: Variation in newsbites: SMH home page Period III

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Hard newsbites (which have two primary sub-types), like their predecessors in Periods I and II, have an Invitation, as indicated in Figure 7.26.

![Figure 7.26: Invitation in hard newsbite, SMH home page, Period III](image)

Lite newsbites have no Invitation, and their Focus is always a Hyper-Focus. As can be seen in Figure 7.24, some hard newsbites have a Hyper-Focus, some do not. It is primarily the presence or absence of an Invitation which structurally distinguishes hard from lite newsbites (Figure 7.27). \(^{61}\)

![Figure 7.27: Hard (left) and lite (right) newsbites with Hyper-Focus, SMH home page, Period III](image)

\(^{61}\) Width of newsbite is dealt with at the rank of zone (Chapters 5 and 6).
Soft newsbites (which have three primary sub-types), all share the structural features of a Border and an Invitation. Figure 7.28 illustrates.

![Diagram showing the structure of a soft newsbite](image)

*Figure 7.28: Invitation/Link and Border in soft newsbite, SMH home page, Period III*

The division of newsbites in Period III into three basic sub-types is illustrated as a basic system in Figure 7.29. These distinctions demonstrate that there are structural differences at the rank of text that classify the newsbites into the three main categories, and that these are consistent with the visual categorisation made by the news taxonomy at the rank of zone above.

![Diagram showing the system of newsbite sub-types](image)

*Figure 7.29: Newsbites on SMH homepage, Period III: System*
7.4.3.2 Illustrations and Tangents

As with Periods I and II, the choices of illustrated/unillustrated and tangenting/non-tangenting combine with the three basic categories of newsbite, forming simultaneous systems with the system in Figure 7.29 to give a system network as illustrated in Figure 7.30.

Each of the three basic categories of newsbite - hard, lite, and soft - is now considered in turn.
7.4.3.3 Hard newsbites: More delicate distinctions

Hard news is institutionally the most important category of news (cf. Bell, 1991), and it might be expected that the authors of the home page need more flexibility in designing hard newsbites than newsbites in other news categories. At the rank of page, hard news is valued textually as Primary, and for this reason also has high salience in the zone-rank news taxonomy (being the widest column). The systemic choices described below demonstrate how, in Period III, newsbite design allows the home page authors to value hard news stories relative to each other, in addition to valuing them against stories in other categories.

Turning now to the data, hard newsbites in the SMH in Period III share many of the features of their predecessors in Periods I & II. The Focus (headline) is in a larger font than the remainder of the text. Images, when they are included, appear at the left, under the Focus and to the left of the text of the Event. The Event (main verbiage of the story) is in black font, and the background remains white (Figure 7.31). Thus, key aspects of the basic design of hard newsbites in Period III are consistent with Period II. Nonetheless, there are a number of important developments in hard newsbite design, as discussed below.

Figure 7.31: Hard newsbites from SMH Period II (left) and SMH Period III (right)
7.4.3.3.1 Invitations

The verbiage of the Invitation (the explicit Link to a longer version of the ‘same’ story) in Period III changes from Full story to more. This is a minor change in the context of the development of the home page and newspaper overall, but it does remove the verbal implication that hard newsbites do not have the status of a ‘full story’. Further, the Invitation is no longer capitalised, a small move away from the standard written English which is highly valued in print broadsheets, and towards less formal typographical conventions more commonly found in other forms of screen- and computer-mediated communication.

This small change, then, can be seen in relation to changes in language use, and also the shifting alignment of online newspapers from a paradigm of print media towards a paradigm of online media (cf. Bateman, 2008; Chapter 5). From being positioned in relation to printed texts which feature standard written English, this small change (which is nonetheless scattered across every home page, every day during this design period) represents the emerging position of online newspapers in relation to screen-based texts and their linguistic conventions. One obvious example of this is the delivery of news to mobile phones, where news stories can be read along with sms messages, notorious targets for criticism from the ‘guardians’ of standard written English.

7.4.3.3.2 Verbal Frame

In Periods I and II, each hard newsbite includes a Verbal Frame (a heading above the headline which ‘frames’ the content of a newsbite). These have disappeared from hard newsbites in Period III. This can be explained in part at least with reference to the
overt verbal classification of hard news introduced in Period II (Figure 7.22 above) and continued in this Period (Figure 7.24 above). This move towards a more overt sub-classification of hard news means that each hard newsbite (except for those ‘above the fold’) is already verbally classified in terms of the newspaper’s content sections, and makes Verbal Frames somewhat superfluous. It also provides for a ‘cleaner’, less cluttered visual design (Figure 7.32).

Figure 7.32: Extract from SMH home page in Period II (top) and Period III (bottom) showing Verbal Frames and zone-rank verbal classification

7.4.3.3.3 Focus

More obvious, perhaps, than changes involving the Invitation and Verbal Frame are changes in the visual design of the Focus. The Focus in hard newsbites in Period III is, like the Event (or story), in a sans serif font rather than a Roman font. This is unlike Period I, where both Focus and Event are in a Roman font, or Period II, where the Focus is in a Roman font, and the Event in a sans serif font (see Table 7.7). Roman fonts - used since the earliest days of the European printing press - are associate through visual intertextuality with tradition and stability, while sans serif
fonts were produced as modern, functional alternatives to traditional fonts in the early 20th century, and carry this visual intertextual reference (Dabner, 2004; see van Leeuwen 2006 for a critical perspective on this approach to typographical meaning). The change of fonts is another example of the move away from the tradition of the printing press and towards the contemporary conventions of the online environment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Period I</th>
<th>Period II</th>
<th>Period III</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Event</td>
<td>Roman</td>
<td>Roman</td>
<td>sans serif</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Roman</td>
<td>sans serif</td>
<td>sans serif</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 7.7: Font types in newsbites on SMH home page, Periods I-III*

In addition to a change in font type from Roman to sans-serif, the colour of headlines changes from black to blue in Period III. The headlines in newsbites appearing at the top of the home page are a dark blue. They are not underlined, and are larger than other hard newsbite headlines on the page (see Figure 7.33).

*Figure 7.33: Top and topical hard newsbites, SMH Period III*
We can identify a distinction, then, among hard newsbites on this basis. Those hard newsbites appearing at the top of the page have a headline functioning as a Modern-Focus (i.e. the Focus draws on the visual conventions of both print newspapers and the world wide web), and are named here top hard newsbites. The remaining hard newsbites on the page can be identified by their underlined, light-blue Hyper-Focus, and are named here topical hard newsbites (Figure 7.34).

![Diagram of hard newsbite classification]

Figure 7.34: Top and topical hard newsbites: Basic system

The label top news comes from the home page of the SMH, and its own labelling of the ‘unclassified’ stories appearing at the top of the home page in all four periods as top stories (see the menu of newsbits at the bottom of the first section of newsbites in Figure 7.35). The label topical news come from Bell’s (1991, p. 14) classification of news, where news classified as sports, business, computer, and so on is termed special-topic news.

Also, among top hard newsbites, a further distinction can be made between the first top newsbite (with the larger Focus, or Scream-Focus), and the following top
newsbites (Figure 7.33 above). This additional distinction provides a more delicate system for hard newsbites in Period III as shown in Figure 7.36.

Figure 7.35: Catalogues beneath top hard newsbites in Periods I - IV (top-bottom)
The headline of topical hard newsbites is explicitly signalled as a hyperlink by underlining and the light blue font conventional of hyperlinks (see Figure 7.33 above and discussion below). This is a significant change in hard-newsbite headlines from Periods I and II, once again aligning the design of newsbites more closely to texts of the world wide web, and representing another subtle contribution to the move away from the conventions of print newspapers.

Nonetheless, all hard newsbite headlines are in a larger font (and different font) than the remainder of text in the newsbite, and are in bold, so they are visually signified as headlines not only by placement, but also by size, style, and ‘weight’. ⁶² Thus, the shift of visual-verbal intertextuality towards hypertext is not absolute. Compare, for instance, the headlines of lite newsbites in Period I (Figure 7.37). From this perspective, the use of a larger, distinct, bold font in hard newsbites in Period III retains at least some of the visual distinctions between headline and story which exist in print newspapers.

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⁶² where ‘weight’ is signified by bold font, making the text heavier and therefore more salient.
As with Invitations, the changes in the visual design of the Focus in hard newsbites in Period III (including font type and formatting) reflect a re-orientation of the newspaper’s identity, away from the tradition of print and towards the conventions of the world wide web. This is also indicative of the shifting relations between online newspapers and other genres in the global culture.

### 7.4.3.3.4 Bylines

Hard newsbites in Period III appear with or without a **Byline**, a structural element which did not appear in Period I or II, and which gives the name of the journalist (or agency) responsible for the story, and in some cases the journalist's position and/or ‘beat’. In some cases, it also includes the dateline.63

Where they appear, Bylines are in square brackets and in small, grey font beneath the headline and immediately before the story (see Figure 7.38). Newsbites with Bylines belong to the category of **signed** hard newsbites.

The inclusion of Bylines is likely to be related to a number of factors. The developing status of newsbites as news texts (cf. the discussion of Invitations above)

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63 The location from where the journalist researched the story.
may mean that at this stage of their evolution, these texts are ‘worthy’ of carrying a Byline.

Figure 7.38: Newshite with byline, SMH Period III

Additionally, the institutional acknowledgement of multiple publication of journalists’ writing is a potential factor. The expansion of print newspapers into the online environment has been complex and raised fundamental issues in institutional and social practices of newsgathering and reporting. Issues underlying disputes over ownership and online reproduction of stories written by freelancers (Boczkowski, 2004a, p. 55 ff.) may apply also to staff journalists. And as online newspapers play a more important role in the practices of the institution and in the social practices associated with ‘news’ more generally, journalists are more likely to seek explicit recognition of their work in online newspapers, in addition to print publications (cf. Cawley, 2008).

I asked a senior editor at the SMH about the reasons for the introduction of Bylines in Period III.

Ed: I don’t know to tell you the truth. I wasn’t aware that we had a situation where we weren’t necessarily using bylines. I’m not aware of that. Generally, most of our stories in the paper would carry a byline, or [be] attributed to the wire service which it may have come from: Reuters, or Australian Associated Press ...

JK: I’m talking about the home page now.
Ed: I don’t know. Sometimes we might use the name, sometimes not. Particularly if you’ve got someone like, as I was saying before, someone who might be well known in that area, and this might come up in sport. People follow Mike Cockerill in soccer for example. People who are well known - in politics for example, our people who we can guess that people will come and want to know that that’s their article. (interview with author, July, 2007 - see Appendix C).

This suggests another reason that Bylines were introduced. As the online ‘arm’ of the newspaper has developed, and the institutional practices of publishing the SMH online have become established and integrated with those of the print edition, the newspaper has developed expertise in online publishing, including a greater understanding of the online audience (see Appendix C). This growing expertise in online publishing can be expected to be ‘fed into’ the redesign. The newspaper has become increasingly adept at marketing its commodity, and Bylines are one way in which this is done.

7.4.3.3.5 Time

Some hard newsbites include the time of publication in the same position as the Byline, but in red font (Figure 7.39). These newsbites belong to the category of **timed** hard newsbites.

![Figure 7.39: Newsbite with time of publication, SMH Period III](image)

The inclusion of time of publication is a reflection of the fragmentation of the ‘daily news cycle’ of print newspapers (Bell, 1991; Boczkowski, 2004a; Cawley,
2008; Perlmutter, 2003; see also Appendix C), an increasing institutional commitment to the currency of news (also evident in the inclusion of ‘Breaking News’ sections, now typical of online newspaper home pages), and perhaps most importantly, the commitment to the appearance of providing up-to-the-minute news.

7.4.3.3.6 Byline and Time: Simultaneous systems

Hard newsbites may include Byline, Time, both Byline and Time, or neither Byline nor Time (see Table 7.8). Systemically, this means that the options of signed/unsigned, and timed/untimed are simultaneous. These choices are available with hard newsbites, but not lite or soft newsbites, and are added to the choice of top/topical as simultaneous systems within a system network describing hard newsbites, as illustrated in Figure 7.40 (cf. Figure 7.36).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>newsbite: hard: signed</th>
<th>newsbite: hard: unsigned</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hard newsbite: timed</td>
<td>Hard newsbite: untimed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parkin departed US, 9/11, now serves in Iraq</td>
<td>Parkin departed US, 9/11, now serves in Iraq</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US peace envoy Scott Parkinson was today reported to be a victim of a terrorist attack in Iraq. Terrorists target American envoy, killing, injuring others.</td>
<td>US peace envoy Scott Parkinson was today reported to be a victim of a terrorist attack in Iraq. Terrorists target American envoy, killing, injuring others.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7.8: Paradigm of timed and signed newsbites, SMH home page, Period III

7.4.3.3.7 Hard newsbites: Conclusion

In conclusion to the discussion of hard newsbites on the home page of the SMH in Period III, it is possible to identify a number of small changes in the visual-verbal design of hard newsbites from Period II to III. Individually, each is relatively minor, but collectively they reflect three trends. The first is for changes in page design (such as the verbal categorisation of news at the rank of zone) to be accommodated in hard newsbite design (e.g. the omission of Verbal Frames). The second is for hard
newsbites to draw increasingly on the conventions of online (and other electronic) texts (e.g. the design of headlines; the change in the wording of the Invitation). The third is a greater recognition of the validity of online forms of news (and newsbites in particular) and their centrality to the business of the institution of the newspaper (e.g. the wording of the Invitation; the inclusion of Byline and Time). These social and institutional factors have led to changes in the structure of hard newsbites, and these structural changes realise systemic oppositions, or developments in the multisemiotic meaning potential of these short news texts. In the following section, lite newsbites in Period III are discussed.

Figure 7.40: Hard newsbites on SMH home page, Period III: System network
7.4.3.4 Lite newsbites

The *SMH* has a longstanding tradition as a respected broadsheet (as the print Masthead proudly proclaims: *First published 1831*). Hard news represents the mainstay of the *SMH*, and matches the expectations of the established *SMH* readership. In contrast, lite news focuses on the ‘private sphere’ (Chapter 2), and is more tabloid in nature. For this reason, it is perhaps not surprising that lite newsbites have no sub-types in Period III, in contrast to the changes in hard newsbites (above), and the development of a number of new visual-verbal conventions in soft newsbites (below).

Lite newsbites in Period III share the same features as standard lite newsbites in Periods I & II, with the exception that headlines are in a slightly larger and slightly different font than the remainder of the newsbite, and are in bold. The fonts used in lite newsbites in Period III are the same font type as hard newsbites in the same period, but a slightly smaller size. Lite newsbites in Period III may have Tangents and/or Illustrations, but have neither Time nor Byline (Figure 7.41).

![Figure 7.41: Topical hard (left) and lite (right) newsbites, SMH Period III](image-url)
7.4.3.5 Soft newsbites: More delicate distinctions

The greatest change in newsbites in Period III reflects the greatest change in page design in this period, and that is the newly-introduced column of soft news (Figure 7.42). As explained in Chapter 2, the term *soft news* is widely used in the literature on the mass media to refer to news that is “not time-bound to immediacy” (Bell, 1991, p. 14; cf. Iedema, Feez & White, 1994, p. 138-54).

There are three clearly distinct types of soft newsbites in Period III: leading soft newsbites, feature soft newsbites, and cataloguing soft newsbites. Each shares the structural features of a Border and an Invitation (Figure 7.28 above), and each is described in turn below, before turning to a consideration of the implications of these developments in newsbite design.

**7.4.3.5.1 Newsbite: soft: leading**

The first soft newsbite on the page is the **leading soft newsbite**. Figure 7.43 shows two examples of leading soft newsbites from Period III. These newsbites are obviously a continuation of the **leading lite newsbites** in Periods I and II. They are re-classified in the zone-rank taxonomy from lite to soft (moving now into a different column from standard lite newsbites), and at the rank of text they share systemic features with other soft newsbites in Period III that they do not share with lite newsbites.
Leading soft newsbites have an **Invitation**. The background of the text area is shaded grey (the only newsbite on the page where the main body of text is not set against a white background), and this shading functions as a **Border**, visually denoting the spatial boundary of the newsbite.

The font and its size are the same as lite newsbites (and, therefore, slightly smaller than hard newsbites), but the headline font (blue, bold, and underlined) is the same size as the font of the remainder of the story, in contrast to both hard and lite newsbites. Clearly, the visual impact of the image is more important in drawing readers to these newsbites than the headline.

**Tangents** are an optional feature in leading soft newsbites, but an **Illustration** is obligatory. Obviously, the Illustration - the **Lure** (Table 7.1 above) - is designed to have a visual impact on the ‘first screen’ (or the Head) of the page. As in Period I and Period II, it remains the only newsbite on the homepage where the image is above all text in the newsbite. The size of the image has increased by something in the order of 100% over the size of the corresponding image in Period I and II. Composite images are often used in these newsbites in Period III (a feature of leading newsbites in all four periods), and this is discussed further in Chapter 8.
7.4.3.5.2 Newsbite: soft: feature

Scrolling down the page, the next type of soft newsbite the reader meets is the **feature soft newsbite** (Figure 7.44). Like leading soft newsbites, features are polarised top-bottom, and the Illustration dominates the newsbite visually and functions as a **Lure**. At the same time, the Lure is conflated with the Focus of the story. Interestingly, this resembles the design of magazine covers and pages, and also the features pages of some print newspaper sections (cf. Economou, 2008), an alignment which is in contrast to the changes described above in hard newsbite design.64

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64 This may account (in part) for why this newsbite design did not continue into Period IV.
Like leading soft newsbites and hard newsbites, feature soft newsbites have a verbal **Invitation** worded: *more*. They have a grey frame which functions as a **Border**. Features are always illustrated, and always non-tangented.

Like leading soft newsbites, features sometimes use wordplay for comic and rhetorical effect, and this often plays on intersemiotic relations between text and image (cf. Caple, 2008).

![Feature soft newsbites, SMH Period III](image)

**Figure 7.44: Feature soft newsbites, SMH Period III**

### 7.4.3.5.3 Newsbite: soft: cataloguing

The third type of soft newsbite is the **cataloguing soft newsbite** (Figure 7.45). These newsbites have a heading which hyperlinks to the home page of a content section, and therefore functions as a **Navigator** (Table 7.1). Cataloguing soft newsbites have an **Invitation**, worded: *more*, a grey frame functioning as a **Border**, and a white background. **Illustrations** and **Tangents** are optional. In contrast to all other
newsbites in the *SMH* of Periods I, II, and III, the optional Illustration in cataloguing newsbites in Period III appears on the right-hand side of the newbite.

Like the cataloguing newsbites in Period I, cataloguing newsbites in Period III ‘promote’ a particular content section of the newspaper with the Navigator, and by previewing the content of at least one news story with the Focus and Event. In this way, they provide a number of entry points to the newspaper for the reader. Functionally then, they are different from ‘features’ which hyperlink only to one story page.

In Period I (above) and Period IV (below), cataloguing newsbites constitute a separate systemic category of newsbites. In Period III, however, they share important structural features with leading and feature newsbites, and therefore belong with these other sub-categories in the category of soft newsbites.
7.4.3.5.4 Summary: System

The three categories of soft newbite - leading, feature, and cataloguing - are represented as a basic system in Figure 7.46.

![Diagram of soft newbites]

It is clear that soft news is presented as a visually distinct category of news on the home page of the SMH in Period III, both taxonomically at the rank of zone and systemically at the rank of text. The importance of images in soft newbites is demonstrated in the use of Lures in the first four soft newbites on the home page. There seems to be some consistency with the historical value placed on the ‘written word’ over images in the value system of ‘quality newspapers’ (see Bicket & Packer, 2004), with language dominant in the ‘more important’ hard news, while image is dominant (at least at the top of the page) in the ‘less important’ soft news.

Nonetheless, the use of images and Navigators appears to represent an increasing sophistication in the ability of the newspaper to offer a variety of entry points for the readers of the SMH, suggesting that the newspaper is actively developing ways to ‘market’ the commodity of news stories to its readers, and to
‘deliver’ readers to the advertisers paying for space on story pages in content sections of the newspaper.

7.4.3.6 Summary: System network, SMH Period III (May 2004 - November 2005)

Overall, Period III represents an increase in the diversity of the visual design of newsbites. More varied and delicate distinctions within the category of hard newsbites can be identified. Leading newsbites have expanded in size and salience, demonstrating a significant shift in the text-image balance on the first screen of the home page. Features are another example of the increasing importance of image.

These developments provide the authors of the home page with a greater array of choices in presenting news, and more importantly in valuing newsbites relative to one another than was available in Periods I and II. This reflects a greater understanding of the affordances of the medium (on the part of both authors and readers of the newspaper), and an increasing responsibility placed on the visual semiotic in valuing the news on the home page.

The system network for newsbites on the home page of the SMH in Period III is produced in full in Figure 7.47.
Figure 7.47: Newsbites on SMH home page, Period III: System network
There are two ‘if-then’ conditions in this system network, indicated respectively by the superscript $I_1, T_1$; and $I_2, T_2$. Firstly, as in the networks for Periods I and II, a Lure (one type of Illustration) is an obligatory element in leading soft newsbites and features, so in the system network, if either leading or feature is selected, then illustrated must also be selected. This is indicated by the use of superscript $I_1$ with leading and feature, and superscript $T_1$ with illustrated (i.e. IF leading or feature is selected, THEN illustrated must be selected). Similarly, features never have Tangents, and so are always non-tangenting. This is indicated by the use of superscript $I_2$ with feature, and superscript $T_2$ with non-tangenting (i.e. IF feature is selected, THEN non-tangenting must be selected).

This system represents the ways in which the authors of the home page can value news stories relative to each other on the home page. Hard newsbites have systemic choices ‘built in’ to their design which other newbites do not (for example, to identify the author in a Byline, to show the time of publication in the Time, to increase headline salience). Each hard newsbite can be: first OR following OR topical; AND signed OR unsigned; AND timed OR untimed; AND illustrated OR unillustrated; AND tangenting OR non-tangenting. While these last two choices are also ‘designed into’ other newsbites on the home page, only hard news provides the home page authors with this degree of choice - 48 possible combinations of systemic choices for each hard newsbite. Recalling the issue of ‘multidimensional access’ on online newspaper home pages as raised by Bateman (2008), the degree of choice available to authors of the home page in valuing hard newsbites alone suggests that constraints at the rank of page are compensated at the rank of text, a point taken up at the end of this chapter.
Turning to soft newsbites, leading and feature soft newsbites are always illustrated, showing the importance of images to soft news as presented on the home page. These and other evolving practices in newsbite design\(^\text{65}\) show that the newspaper is exploring ways in which to provide entry points to the home pages and story pages in as many content sections of the newspaper as possible to their readers, and this provides the authors of the home page with an array of choices for story telling on the home page.

Thus, by taking a social-semiotic perspective on the design of newsbites, it is possible to see how the institutional values and practices of the SMH are ‘built into’ the design of these very short texts, and how the meaning potential of newsbites has expanded with the re-design of the newspaper in Period III in ways that are consistent with the social contexts of mass-mediated communication, and the institutional context of the newspaper.

The expansion in meaning potential also demonstrates the degree to which semiotic power is vested in the design template of the home page, and raises questions about the process of design change, and who is involved in this process (see Chapter 9).

7.4.4 SMH Period IV (November 2005 - August 2007)

In November 2005, the design of the home page of the SMH once again changed significantly. As discussed in Chapter 6, the redesign of the website and home page

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\(^{65}\) (such as the use of Navigators in cataloguing newsbites)
resulted in a new news taxonomy on the home page. In this redesigned taxonomy, the Superordinate **news** is sub-classified into **main** and **soft** (Figure 7.48). As discussed in Chapter 6, there is further sub-classification at the rank of zone.

Moving from the rank of zone to the rank of text, newsbites in Period IV can be categorised into four main classes, one of which does not map onto the zone-rank taxonomy. The developments in newsbite design from Period III to Period IV reflect developments in technology, institutional values, and the ubiquity of online newspapers, and these developments are discussed in this section. In the next sub-section, the four basic classes of newsbites on the home page during Period IV are described.

### 7.4.4.1 Basic distinctions

All newsbites in Period IV share the structural features of a **Modern-Focus** (a headline drawing on both the visual conventions of the world wide web and print newspapers), an **Event** (the main body of the story), and a **Link** (a hyperlink to a longer or modally different version of the ‘same’ story). The Focus and Link are conflated. In this period, the four basic categories of newsbites are: hard, lite, feature, and cataloguing.
Figure 7.48: SMH home page from SMH Period IV (top) and basic visual-verbal taxonomy of news (bottom)
7.4.4.1 Hard newsbites

Hard newsbites in Period IV are a continuation of hard newsbites from earlier periods, though in Period IV all have a **Modern-Focus**. Table 7.9 compares hard newsbites from Period III and Period IV.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Period III</th>
<th>Period IV</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>newsbites:</td>
<td>Pay for private water even if dams are full</td>
<td>Time to cut and run, Bealey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hard: top</td>
<td>Scully dips a toe into the water with funnel</td>
<td>TOM ALLARD: The US, Australia and its allies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>test plants</td>
<td>Must now seriously consider pulling their forces out of Iraq, Kim Beazley said.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>More troops bound for Afghanistan; report</td>
<td>... More troops bound for Afghanistan; report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Graphic: Solution from the sea</td>
<td>... Australian troops pull out; it’s safe to speak now</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>newsbites:</td>
<td>3G’s sure call is new services, subsidies</td>
<td>Cyclist’s agonising death ‘preventable’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hard: topical</td>
<td>(State Report) Victoria Australia set the scene for another White-hot Christmas season for mobile phones with the launch of its 3G mobile services.</td>
<td>The death of a seven-year-old girl who was stung on the leg and chest by a box jellyfish near Bamaga on Cape York Peninsula was swift.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 7.9: Hard newsbites from Period III and IV*

7.4.4.1.2 Lite newsbites

Lite newsbites in Period IV are visually similar to hard newsbites (Figure 7.49), but have less structural potential than hard newsbites (as discussed further below).

*Figure 7.49: Hard (left) and lite (right) newsbites, Period IV*

7.4.4.1.3 Feature newsbites

Feature newsbites in Period IV (Figure 7.50) have a Lure, and are similar in design to leading soft newsbites from Period III (which appeared at the top of the page).
7.4.4.1.4 Cataloguing newsbites

Cataloguing newsbites in this period provide the reader with entry points to content sections of the newspaper by way of at least one Navigator, as well as by way of a Link to a story page from a particular section. They have a Verbal Frame, and the Illustration is always to the right of the Event. There are a number of different sub-categories of cataloguing newsbite (Figure 7.51), and these are discussed below.

7.4.4.1.5 Tangents and Illustrations

In Period IV, Tangents combine freely with all categories and sub-categories of newsbites, and therefore represent a simultaneous system with the either/or choice of hard / feature / lite / cataloguing (as in Periods I, II and III). Illustrations, however, with two exceptions (which are discussed further below)
are an obligatory structural element of all newsbites except hard newsbites in Period III.

7.4.4.1.6 Summary: System network

The four different kinds of newsbites as briefly described above are represented systemically in Figure 7.52, together with the simultaneous system of tangenting/non-tangenting. Each category is discussed in more detail in the sections that follow.

![Figure 7.52: Basic system network of newsbites, SMH Period IV](image)

7.4.4.2 Hard newsbites: Simultaneous delicacy

Hard newsbites in Period IV share many of the structural features of the hard newsbites of Periods I, II and III (Table 7.8 above). As with the developments from
Period II to Period III, the inclusion of similar structural elements (e.g. Focus, Event, optional Illustration, optional Byline) in essentially the same spatial arrangement (e.g. headline at top, image at left) on white background. Viewed historically, the developments in hard newsbite design from Period I through to Period IV, while significant when mapped systemically, can be seen as evolutionary, not revolutionary (Figure 7.53), consisting of a range of subtle changes which can be explained in relation to social and institutional factors.

Figure 7.53: Hard newsbites from SMH Period I, II, III & IV

7.4.4.2.1 Focus

In Period IV, hard newsbites can again be sub-categorised on the basis of the visual design of headlines. Consistent with Periods I - III, the Focus of the first hard newsbite on the page is in a larger font that all other headlines in Period IV. The
Focus of the remaining hard newsbites appearing at the top of the page (i.e. not under any verbal classification heading) is in turn, in a larger font than the Focus of hard newsbites appearing further down the page (i.e. under separate classification headings such as Business, Sport, and so on). Consistent with Period III, these newsbites are named first, top, and topical hard newsbites respectively (see Table 7.10).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>newbite:</th>
<th>Flood fears as Clare hits WA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>hard: first</td>
<td>9:12AM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Video: Cyclone in WA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>newbite:</th>
<th>Not enough money to patrol beaches</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>hard: top</td>
<td>SOPHIE GYLES AND AAP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Video: Sydney surfers still swim with the sharks</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>newbite:</th>
<th>Doctors move to end Sharon coma</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>hard: topical</td>
<td>Doctors treating Ariel Sharon hope that the Israeli Prime Minister will show signs of consciousness as he is resuscitated from a drug-induced coma.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Video: Heir apparent has to learn mentor's tactical skills</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 7.10: First, top and topical hard newsbites, SMH Period IV*

In Period IV then, there are three distinctions in the Focus of hard newbite headlines, signified primarily by font-size (with ‘first’ newbite headlines also in bold). In contrast to earlier periods where the design of the Focus realised one of a number of binary choices (Figure 7.36 above), the distinction in Focus in Period IV can be seen as a cline realising the three categories of first, top, and topical realised by headlines occupying three distinct points on a scale (Figure 7.54). This distinction is represented systemically in Figure 7.55.
Unlike Period III, first, top, and topical hard newsbites in Period IV all have headlines of the same colour, and none are underlined. This provides for a greater visual consistency on the page, resulting in a ‘cleaner’ design and a more consistent and intuitive realisation of the paradigm for readers to follow (cf. de Vries, 2008).

At this stage of the analysis, it is possible to take a historical perspective on headline design on the SMH home page over the four design periods. In Period I, hard newsbite headlines visually reference print newspapers (e.g. larger font, black colour, bold), while lite newsbite headlines reference the world wide web (e.g. same-sized font, blue colour, underlined). The two are mutually exclusive, and there is no middle ground. Over the four periods, there is a move away from this binary opposition (Tradition-Focus and Hyper-Focus, respectively) and towards a combination of the two (Modern-Focus). To illustrate, Figure 7.56 compares headlines from hard
newsbites appearing on the SMH home page in Periods I, II, III, and IV (proportions are accurate). Viewed in this way, the shift in headline design over time, which moves away from the conventions of print and towards the conventions of the world wide web, is clear. Verbally, the grammar of headlines (see Halliday, 1985a, pp. 372-377) continues to signify their function.

7.4.4.2.2 Invitations

In Periods I, II, and III, each hard newsbite has an Invitation (a link to a longer or modally different version of the 'same' news story - worded Full Report in Periods I and II, and more in Period III). In Period IV, there is no longer an Invitation in hard newsbites (Figure 7.57).

Figure 7.56: ‘First’ hard newsbite headlines from Periods I, II, III, and IV (top-bottom)

Figure 7.57: Hard newsbites from Period II (top), Period III (middle), and Period IV (bottom)
This can be explained with reference to a number of factors. Firstly, in Periods III and IV, the use of blue headlines which change appearance when ‘rolled over’ with the cursor (see Figure 7.56 above) signifies that the headline is a hyperlink (systemically, the Focus is conflated with the Link). This makes Invitations redundant.

Figure 7.58: ‘Ten years on the Web’, SMH Periods III & IV

After more than ‘ten years on the web’ (a fact the SMH overtly proclaimed at this time - Figure 7.58), the institution of the newspaper can make assumptions about its readership not possible in earlier years. In their discussion of writing for hypermedia and the use of hyperlinks, Cotton & Oliver comment:

One needs to know whether the audience is going to need to be gently introduced to the medium or whether it will find such an approach patronizing. (Cotton & Oliver, 1997, p. 71)

The SMH readership at this time is far more likely to have the online literacy skills necessary to navigate the newsbites and pages of the website without the verbally explicit cues that were necessary in earlier years, particularly when hard newsbite headlines took the visual form of a Tradition Focus. Considering the developments in the design of the Focus and Invitation in hard newsbites (Table 7.11), it is possible to chart a general development away from the two functions of Focus (realised by headline) and Link (realised by hyperlink) being separated in form, to their co-
existence and conflation, to a point where there is no longer a need for a separate Invitation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Period I</th>
<th>Period II</th>
<th>Period III</th>
<th>Period IV</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>black</td>
<td>black</td>
<td>blue</td>
<td>blue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Roman font</td>
<td>Roman font</td>
<td>sans serif font</td>
<td>sans serif font</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>hyperlink</td>
<td>hyperlinked</td>
<td>hyperlink</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invitation</td>
<td>Full story</td>
<td>Full story</td>
<td>more</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 7.11: Temporal development of Focus and Invitation in hard newsbites*

An additional factor is the institutional status of newsbites as texts in their own right. Online newspaper readers read newsbites as self-contained stories as they scan the home page for the relatively few stories they will read in more depth (see Chapter 2). Each newsbite can be seen as a Full story, whether or not a longer version of the ‘same story’ is accessed by the reader. At this stage of the historical development of online newspapers (and in particular the *SMH*), newsbites have become established as a fundamental element in the process of reading the news online. It is assumed that readers who want to read more know how to do so.

7.4.4.2.3 Byline and Time

The practice of including a Byline and/or the Time of publication continues from Period III into Period IV. In Period IV, the font size of the Byline is slightly larger than in Period III and appears in CAPS, which gives the Byline a higher visual salience within the newsbite. The Time is still in red font, and still follows the Byline where the two appear together (Table 7.12).
Chapter Seven: Newsbites

The fact that these two elements remain virtually unchanged suggest that they are a successful aspect of design, functioning effectively in the social and institutional context as discussed in section 7.4.3.3 above.67

The choices of signed/unsigned (based on the presence/absence of a Byline), and timed/untimed (based on the presence/absence of Time) are simultaneous with each other, and with the choice of first / top / following above.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>signed &amp;</th>
<th>Period III</th>
<th>Period IV</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>signed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meenstruck minister tells Luna Park neighbours to shush</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23,000 dead. 2.5m homeless after quake</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trapped and tormented: woman survives 8-day ordeal</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29.000 dead. 2.5m homeless after quake</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t panic over bird flu: UN</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>timed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11:44AM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>riots Australia’s fishing fleet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9pm Flood: community feels panic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9pm flood: community feels panic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9pm Flood: community feels panic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>signed &amp;</th>
<th>Period III</th>
<th>Period IV</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>signed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meenstruck minister tells Luna Park neighbours to shush</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23,000 dead. 2.5m homeless after quake</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trapped and tormented: woman survives 8-day ordeal</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29.000 dead. 2.5m homeless after quake</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t panic over bird flu: UN</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>timed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11:44AM</td>
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<tr>
<td>9pm Flood: community feels panic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9pm flood: community feels panic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9pm Flood: community feels panic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7.12: Signed and timed hard newsbites from Periods III and IV

7.4.4.2.4 Verbal Frames

In the corpus of Period IV, Verbal Frames are, on rare occasion, used in hard newsbites. There are two instances of Verbal Frames naming the author of opinion pieces, one instance of a Verbal Frame placing a newsbite in a wider social context (A-LEAGUE GRAND FINAL), and one evaluating the newsbite according to the value system of the newspaper (EXCLUSIVE) (Figure 7.59).

67 Compare, for example, in Period III, feature soft newsbites which visually resemble print magazine and print newspaper features pages, and are not found in Period IV.
This option gives the authors of the home page an additional choice in the valuation of hard newsbites. Systemically, the choice of whether or not to include a Verbal Frame (i.e. framed/unframed) combines freely with the choices of first/top/topical, timed/untimed, and signed/unsigned for hard newsbites, and is therefore modelled here as a simultaneous system (see Figure 7.60).

7.4.4.2.5 Illustrations

In Period IV, lite newsbites, feature newsbites, and cataloguing newsbites all have images, but not all hard newsbites have images. Therefore, in this Period, the choice illustrated/unillustrated is modelled as a more delicate option in the category of hard newsbites, rather than as a simultaneous choice for all newsbites on the home page as in the first three periods.
The paradigmatic change in the choice of illustrated/unillustrated from being a universal choice on the home page, to being limited to hard newsbites, can once again be understood in relation to the historical status of ‘the printed word’ in ‘quality’ newspapers, and suggests that in the SMH online, the commodity of verbal reports of hard news events is still valued highly enough by the institution and the readers to stand without an image on the home page. Conversely, other news categories are always illustrated, consistent with the ‘rise of the visual’ and the growing importance of images to visual communication on the SMH home page.

7.4.4.2.6 Summary: System network

The basic structure of hard newsbites is largely unchanged between Periods III and IV. In isolation, each of the changes that have been made is relatively minor. But paradigmatically, there are a number of simultaneous choices available to the authors of the SMH home page when writing hard newsbites in Period IV as outlined above, and represented systemically in Figure 7.60. What is significant about this system network, especially when viewed in comparison to the choices ‘designed into’ hard newsbites in earlier periods, is the degree of choice that news designers and news authors have for the multimodal presentation and valuation of hard news.

The authors of the SMH home page have at their disposal 96 possible structural combinations, or systemic choices (including tangenting/non-tangenting) by which they can value hard news relative to other hard news, in addition to valuing it relative to other content on the home page. This degree of choice is not available with any of the other categories of newsbite, implying that the institution places importance on the ability to distinguish hard news in ways more subtle and complex.
than is possible in the composition of pages (e.g. Head-Tail, Primary-Secondary) at the rank of page, and with zone-rank verbal classification (e.g. WORLD, NATIONAL).

Hard news, it appears from this perspective, remains the ‘core product’ of the SMH.
7.4.4.3 Lite newsbites: Increasing delicacy

There are two sub-categories of lite newsbites in Period IV: standard lite newsbites and transitional lite newsbites.

![Lite newsbites on the first screen, Period IV](image)

**Figure 7.61: Lite newsbites on the first screen, Period IV**

7.4.4.3.1 Newsbites: lite: standard

Standard lite newsbites appear under the zone-rank verbal classification of *TIME OUT*, across the bottom of the Head (or ‘first screen’) in the main column of the page (Figure 7.61). They have a grey background which functions as a Border (Figure 7.62) and which differentiates them from hard newsbites in the same column.
7.4.4.3.2 Newsbites: lite: transitional

Transitional lite newsbites (Figure 7.63) were an innovation at the time they first appeared on the SMH home page. A single space on the page shows a number of newsbites one by one, appearing and disappearing in turn by animation (Figure 7.64). This use of animation to ‘rotate’ newsbites, a device which ‘expands’ the space available on the page (see Djonov, 2005), is now commonly used on online newspaper home pages.
newsbites appear in the right column on the page, and are the only newsbite in this column where the image is to the left of the text.

![Animation sequence of transitional lite newsbites, SMH home page, 27 March, 2006](image)

**Figure 7.64: Animation sequence of transitional lite newsbites, SMH home page, 27 March, 2006**

### 7.4.4.3.3 Summary: System

Table 7.13 compares standard and transitional lite newsbites and Figure 5.65 construes them as a system.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>newsbite: standard</th>
<th>lite: standard</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>On a shoestring</strong></td>
<td>A good day out in Sydney is still cheap.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>newsbite: transitional</th>
<th>lite: transitional</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Swank splits with husband</strong></td>
<td>Oscar winner Hilary Swank and husband Chad Lowe have separated after more than eight years.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>newsbite: standard</th>
<th>lite: standard</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>No shades of grey</strong></td>
<td>Furry, the newly married feminist, reveals her true colours to Christine Baranski.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 7.13: Lite newsbites, Period IV**

Standard lite newsbites and transitional lite newsbites are grouped on the basis of structural similarity - the obligatory Illustration is followed by the Event, and
unlike hard newsbites which they visibly resemble, they include a Border, but never include a Byline, Time, or Verbal Frame. Beyond this, structural differences allow us to identify two categories of lite newsbites as shown in Figure 7.65.

![Figure 7.65: Lite newsbites, SMH Period IV: System](image)

Lite newsbites are analysed here as a systemic category at the rank of text, yet this category ‘cuts across’ their placement in the news taxonomy at the rank of zone. Like cataloguing newsbites in Period I, this represents, in a limited way, an ‘opening up’ of the meaning potential available to designers by ‘playing off’ different ranks against each other. While developments such as the introduction of animation are obvious to all, the subtle interplay between design choices at different ranks is likely to remain opaque to readers of online newspapers.

### 7.4.4.4 Feature newsbites: Increasing delicacy

Like leading soft newsbites and feature soft newsbites in Period III, feature newsbites in Period IV are polarised top-bottom, with a large image functioning as Lure and placed above all verbiage. They can be sub-classified into two types, leading feature newsbites and classified feature newsbites (Table 7.14).
Table 7.14: Feature newsbites, SMH Period IV

Figure 7.66 represents soft newsbites on the SMH home page in Period IV as a system.

The use of large images all the way down the page reflects the growing importance of images in the visual communication of news on the home page. Lures also act as entry points to story pages in various content sections, and using this design in every verbal category of news down the page provides consistency for the reader, and once again a ‘cleaner’ design.
7.4.4.5 Cataloguing newsbites: Increasing delicacy

Cataloguing newsbites in Period IV have a number of sub-types. All have Navigators, but the primary division is based on whether the newsbite has Tabs and the Navigator stands alone (tabbed cataloguing newsbites) (Figure 7.67), or whether the Navigator is conflated with a Verbal Frame (titled cataloguing newsbites) (Figure 7.68).

Figure 7.67: Tabbed cataloguing newsbites, Period IV

Figure 7.68: Titled cataloguing newsbites, Period IV
Titled cataloguing newsbites may also have a menu of Navigators beneath the Verbal Frame (Figure 7.69). These distinctions are shown as a system in Figure 7.70.

The developments in cataloguing newsbites maintain the (obviously effective) design elements which give readers entry points to home pages and story pages in content sections, consistent with the cataloguing newsbites of Periods I and III.
Tabbed cataloguing newsbites are another example of the experimentation with animation and the ‘expansion of space’ it can provide.

7.4.4.6 Summary: System network, SMH Period IV (November 2005 - August 2007)

The systemic choices on the home page of the SMH in Period IV are shown in a single system network in Figure 7.71. There are two if/then conditions in the network, indicated by the use of superscript I (for if) with the features lite and cataloguing, and superscript T (for then) with the feature non-tangenting (i.e. if lite or cataloguing is selected, then non-tangenting must be selected).

The complexity of the system network is representative of two important trends in the genesis of the SMH. The first is the developing sophistication in presenting the news commodity in this medium. This is shown, for example, in the use of animation in transitional lite newsbites and tabbed cataloguing newsbites. Further evidence can be seen in the increasing use (and importance) of images, now obligatory in all but hard newsbites; and in the design of headlines, which are consistent across the page, and draw on conventions of both print newspapers and the world wide web. Neither the authors nor the readers of the SMH require an explicit verbal hyperlink in Period IV: the home page has outgrown Invitations.
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Figure 7.71: Newsbites on SMH home page, Period IV: System network

The second trend reflected in the system network is the growing status of newsbites. Their institutional status as valid texts in their own right is reflected in the
absence of Invitations, in the presence of other structural features such as Byline and Time, and also in the range of design choices available in newsbites on the home page. The overall complexity of paradigmatic meanings available to the home page authors shows that the newsbites appearing on the home page are institutionally highly valued, and this institutional status has led to a wide and flexible range of meaningful choices being built into the design of these short texts. At the same time, the continued institutional value placed on hard news in particular is evident in the degree of choice available in the presentation of hard newsbites relative to other sub-categories.

### 7.4.5 Summary: Newsbites in the *SMH* over four design periods

The analysis above shows the changes in newsbite design over the data collection period, which are more broadly representative of the four design periods of the *SMH* online from 1999 - 2007 (see Chapter 4). Over time (particularly in Periods III and IV), there is an increasing degree of paradigmatic choice available to the authors of the home page in how they present the news, and a general tendency away from the conventions associated with print newspapers (and print texts more broadly), and towards those of the world wide web and other screen-mediated environments.

The developments in newsbite design indicate a number of things. First, there is increasing expertise and familiarity with the online medium on the part of designers, authors, and readers of the news. Second, there is an increase in the institutional status of newsbites. And third, emerging from these two factors, there is increasing expertise on the part of the newspaper in selling the commodity of news in this medium.
7.5 Newsbites: Conclusion

Newsbites are little texts, and can easily ‘slip beneath the radar’ of readers and researchers of online newspapers. Their brevity, and their superficial resemblance to newsbriefs (section 7.3.3) are probably contributing factors to this situation.

However, newsbites have their own structure, which has evolved as a result of historical and social factors, and which functions uniquely in the semiotic environment of the online newspaper home page. They function to give the focal point of a given news story, to engage the reader and provide them with one or more entry points to content sections of the newspaper, and to value the news they report relative to other news on the page.

Newsbites are a new genre, and for a social institution which has worked with the printing press for centuries, it is not surprising that the SMH (and other online newspapers) drew significantly on the traditions of the print newspaper in the design of newsbites before developing greater expertise in the presentation of news on home pages. What is more surprising perhaps is the speed with, and extent to which the design of newsbites diversified and took up the affordances of the online medium, as demonstrated in the discussion and analysis of newsbites in Periods I, II, III, and IV above. The rapid expansion of meaning potential in newsbites over the four periods can be observed by comparing the system network from each of the four periods (Figure 7.72).
Chapter Seven: Newsbites

The *BKP* and the *PD* did not exploit the design potential of newsbites to nearly the same extent as the *SMH* during the data collection period of this study, though the paradigmatic options in newsbites did expand in the *PD* over the data collection period, and has expanded a number of times subsequently in the case of the *BKP*. Beyond the three newspapers studied in this thesis, a cursory examination of the home page of a range of online newspapers demonstrates the degree of choice at the rank of text described here is not limited to the *SMH*, nor is it limited to broadsheets, nor is it limited to newsbites, as at the time of writing the potential of newsbits to be differentiated by font colour and size, and image are exploited on the home pages of some tabloid online newspapers such as *The Sun* and *The News of the World* in the UK.

![Figure 7.72: Evolution of meaning potential: SMH Periods I - IV](image)

If we model culture as a complex of genres (Martin & Rose, 2008), the developments in newsbites show the rapid development of an aspect of culture, or phylogeneses (Chapter 3). Compared with the evolution of print newspaper genres (see Chapter 2), the evolution of newsbites is occurring so quickly as to be on a
completely different timescale to print news genres. The development of newsbites as charted in this chapter represents phylogenesis on an ontogenetic timescale. Why is this occurring?

In the high-demand environment of the newsroom, communicative impact and economy of expression (visual and verbal) have come to be highly valued. Further, the valuation of stories relative to each other is central to the business of the mass media, so there is strong imperative on the institution to develop this ability in the online environment, and particularly on home pages given their crucial role in the newspaper. The challenge is to bring the meanings which have evolved over centuries of institutionalised practices aimed at producing print pages into a medium with which the institution has only a few years of experience.

But because web pages are viewed on screen, the established institutional communicative practices by which news stories are valued on print newspaper pages cannot be transferred directly from print to web pages. Therefore, the functionality of the print page, if it is to be retained, requires a ‘redistribution’ of the ‘semiotic division of labour’ (Matthiessen, 2007) when news is presented on the web page.

Together with the analysis in Chapter 6, the analysis in this chapter demonstrates that: (1) such a redistribution has taken place, and descriptions of home pages as being ‘like front pages’ do not capture the ways in which home pages construe meaning multimodally, and (2) the functionality of print pages has been retained, but by different means according to the affordances and constraints of the
medium. This challenges descriptions of home pages as merely lists of news stories, in which the semiotic possibilities of print are lost.

Recalling again the quote from Bateman as discussed at the outset of section 7.4 above:

The online page is then in many respects closer generically to online offerings such as web-browser result pages and simple lists, possibly with subheadings breaking those lists down into categories. The multidimensional access possibilities of the print newspaper are severely reduced. (Bateman, 2008, p. 181)

In fact, what the analysis presented here exemplifies is that the potential for valuing news has not necessarily diminished in online newspapers, but that the ways in which these multimodal meanings are made has been ‘reconfigured’ in the new semiotic environment, and a share of the semiotic burden on the page has been ‘pushed down’ from page design to newsbite design. Newsbites (viewed collectively on the screen) take up systemic design options which work with the affordances of the new medium, allowing the news institution to maintain the kind of ‘multidimensional’ flexibility they are accustomed to in presenting news in print, while conforming to the more rigid requirements of web page templates which bring consistency to news presentation on the computer screen.

Meeting these contradicting demands (flexibility in design to value news, versus consistency in design to aid navigation and therefore communication) is something which, in some institutional contexts could be a long process of evolution. In newspapers however, the dual demands of editors and readers are fundamental to the successful functioning of the newspaper, and without successful resolution of the contradiction inherent in using templates, the communicative, ideological, and
financial success of the newspaper is at risk. There is, therefore, significant imperative for news design to resolve this quickly.

Under these demands, the publishing practices of the newspaper create an evolutionary environment for semiotic practices whereby variations in practice can take place rapidly, with unsuccessful attempts being jettisoned quickly, and successful attempts surviving to be taken up repeatedly. This is due in part to the rapidity and high frequency of publication of newspapers - daily in Periods I and II of the SMH, and minute-by-minute by Period IV; in part also to the ability of news institutions to track which story pages are accessed and which are not.

Eyetracking studies (Chapter 2) tell us that readers of print newspapers tend to look over the whole paper, hence the ‘design as map’ metaphor applies to the entire print newspaper, as the collective design of pages guides readers through the events of the day. In contrast, online newspaper readers scan the home page searching for the few stories they will read in depth. The authors of the online newspaper have a limited time, and the space of a single page, to do the ideological work of the design of an entire print newspaper.

Over the data collection period, the SMH (and other online newspapers observed over this time, including to a lesser extent the BKP and PD) have moved away from simple lists to building the ideological work of design into newsbites. The online newspaper home page does not employ design as a map, but presents design as choice.
The increasingly intricate ‘coding’ of choice in newbite design in hard newsbites in the *SMH* (Figure 7.72) is implicit: to include or not Tangents, Verbal Frames, or Illustrations; to signify a story as top or topical by headline design; to flag immediacy by including Time, or ‘promote’ the story by including a Byline. These choices are ideological: they value the stories, and position the actors and events in relation to each other, to the news institution, and to the readers subtly, but systemically.

Diversification in the presentation of soft and lite news in feature newsbites and cataloguing newsbites increasingly construes news as a commodity, and readers as consumers with a visually diverse array of choices at their disposal. But the choices of hard, lite, soft, or otherwise, and the other choices available to news consumers, are designed by the authors of the newspaper, who set the paradigmatic possibilities for the consumers of their product.

To conclude, newbites are evolving at breakneck speed, and this evolution can be seen in relation to a wide range of factors. Textual factors that impact on newbite design include choices in design at the ranks of page and zone. Broader social factors include changes in the news cycle from daily to rolling, the ‘rise of the visual’, the evolving reading practices of online newspaper readers, and the gradual realignment of online newspapers from a world of print texts, to a world of online texts. From this perspective, the little texts labelled here as *newbites* provide a surprisingly rich window on the evolving culture of individual institutions, and the globalised media more broadly.
Chapter 8: News images on home pages

8.1 Introduction

Examining online newspaper home pages from a visual perspective leads inevitably to questioning the role of news images on home pages. In this chapter, the use of images on the home pages of the corpus is considered. All three newspapers use a large image on the first screen (or Head) of their home page, as is common on online newspaper home pages in general. In addition to these relatively large images, over time the SMH has also come to use thumbnail images extensively.68

The ‘rise of the visual’, and the popular hype surrounding the internet and the world wide web, have contributed to a common perception that online newspapers are somehow more visual, or more visually oriented than print newspapers (see section 1.1.2). An extension of this view would be that image prevails over language in the value system of online newspapers:

as one photo editor described it to me in citing the advantages of his newspaper’s Web site over the paper itself: “more pictures” and “all of them in colour.” (Perlmutter, 2003, p. 10)

At face value, the trend towards verbally-shorter news texts on online newspaper home pages would appear to support such a view, and news images are obviously an important element in online newspapers. Most home pages have a large image featured on the first screen, and story pages ‘lower down’ in the website’s hierarchy often feature larger images. Some newspapers also exploit the online

68 *Thumbnails* is used in this thesis to refer to small ‘thumbnail-size’ images as commonly used on online newspaper home pages and other websites, and not to mean ‘sketches’.
medium to present images in ways not possible in traditional newspapers. Any suggestion, though, that image is dominant over language on online newspaper home pages can be quickly discounted by perusing the extent to which each semiotic resource is used to communicate the news on any newspaper’s home page (see section 8.3 below). Images are increasingly important, but language remains the mainstay of newspaper reporting (see Barnhurst, 2002; cf. Hall, 1981).

In some ways, the thumbnail images common on the home page of the SMH and many other newspaper home pages are the photographic equivalent of newsbites: they are ‘little texts’ which are associated with the medium of the world wide web, but whose history can be traced from print newspapers. Also like newsbites, thumbnails seemed to have ‘slipped beneath the radar’ of critical scrutiny to a large extent, and the argument presented in this chapter is that they have an important role to play in the interpersonal and textual meanings construed visually on the home page. For these reasons, much of this chapter is focused on the use of thumbnails on the home page of the SMH.

In section 8.2, the use of larger images on the home pages of the three newspapers in the corpus is described. Following this, in 6.3, thumbnail images on the home page of the SMH are considered from a metafunctional perspective. In their historical and social environment, the thumbnails as used on the SMH home page have come to challenge the boundaries between writing and image, and this boundary is explored in section 8.4. Finally, section 8.5 presents the conclusions of this chapter.
8.2 Images on home pages

In the three newspapers of this study, there are both similarities and differences in the ways images are employed on their home pages over the data collection period. In this section, the use of images on the home pages of the BKP, the PD, and the SMH are considered in turn.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BKP Period I</th>
<th>BKP Period II</th>
<th>BKP Period III</th>
<th>BKP Period IV</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Table 8.1: Home pages from the BKP with news images circled in red, dates of publication, and template-design time periods
Turning first to the *BKP*, this newspaper had no news image on its home page from August 2001 to the end of 2005. From January to July, 2006, it featured one image on the first screen of the home page (Table 8.1).

Figure 8.1 shows all the images from the home page of the *BKP* in the corpus of this study (all from *BKP* Period IV - see Table 8.1). All these images are captioned, and accompany either the first or second newsbite on the home page.

![Figure 8.1: Collection of 'first’ news images from the BKP in the corpus](image)

The use of news images on the home page of the *BKP* in *BKP* Period IV has a number of similarities with the use of news images on the home page of the *PD* in *PD* Periods I and II. Over the data collection period, the *PD* home page featured one large image in *PD* Period I, and one large image plus two thumbnails in *PD* Period II (Table 8.2).
### Table 8.2: Home pages from the PD with news images circled in red, dates of publication, and template-design time periods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Published Date</th>
<th>Images</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PD Period I: Nov, 2001 - May, 2004</td>
<td>March 27, 2002</td>
<td><img src="image1" alt="Home page with news images circled in red" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PD Period II: May, 2004 - June, 2007</td>
<td>March 3, 2006</td>
<td><img src="image2" alt="Home page with news images circled in red" /></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 8.2 shows the news images in the corpus from the PD over the data collection period, not including the thumbnail images.
Chapter Eight: Images

In both the BKP and the PD, the positioning of the large image in the Head of the home page is obviously intended to engage readers. Each individual image could be analysed in detail employing analytical tools from SF-MDA (see Caple, 2009; Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996), and collectively for what they tell about the focus and development of each newspaper (e.g. the increasing inclusion over time of images of young women on stages at the expense of images of party officials is an interesting development in the PD, as is the correlation in the images between youth and female on one hand, and middle- or old-age and male on the other). Such analysis is beyond the scope of the current chapter, however, and the argument presented here is that the

Figure 8.2: Collection of ‘first’ news images from the PD in the corpus
images shown above are similar to print newspaper images in a number of important ways.

In both newspapers, the large images on the home page function in a number of ways similar to print news images. Like press photographs, they are captioned, and recalling section 2.4.1, do most or all of the following:

- have high impact and can be ‘read’ quickly (cf. Griffin, 2004)
- reduce complex events and issues to the persons involved with them (cf. Hall, 1981; Machin & Niblock, 2006)
- increase the salience of their associated verbal story on the page (cf. Griffin, 2004)
- provide readers with recognition of, and more importantly proximity to the social actors in the image, so a collective visual memory of ‘who’ (if not ‘what happened’) can develop (cf. Barnhurst & Nerone, 2001; Hall, 1981; Trivundza, 2004)
- provide a hook, or lead-in point to a story (cf. Bicket & Packer, 2004; Griffin, 2004)
- are selected and ‘authored’ in a process which is both institutional and ideological (cf. Barthes, 1977; Darling-Wolf, 2004; Hall, 1981; Wardle, 2007, p. 265).
### Table 8.3: Home pages from the SMH with dates of publication, and template-design time periods, and ‘first’ image circled in red

|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|

Additionally, all these images are in **Visual Record Key**. Photographs in Visual Record Key have:

highly constrained evaluative options that contribute to creating the rhetorical effect of ‘factuality’ and objectivity and, thus, the backrounding of authorial subjectivity. ... They are captioned, naturalistic, visual depictions of some material reality. (Economou, 2008, p. 257)

In contrast to Visual Record Key, some newspaper images are more obviously ‘authored’, and photographic techniques such as cropping, enlargement, colour
saturation, and focus are clearly used for rhetorical effect. Images employing such devices in this way are in **Visual Interpretation Key**, and such images are often associated with non-news contexts (such as art and film genres) that can invoke predictable attitudes among the target readership (Economou, 2008, pp. 260-1). In short, photographs in Visual Record Key can be likened to ‘factual’ and ‘objective’ hard news reporting, while those in Visual Interpretation Key can be likened to ‘interpretive’ and ‘reflective’ opinion and commentary pieces.

![Figure 8.3: Collection of ‘first’ news images from the SMH in the corpus](image)
In comparison to the use of images on the home pages of the BKP and the PD, the SMH uses more images, and demonstrates more experimentation with their use in page design (Chapter 6) and newsbite design (Chapter 7) than the other two newspapers in the current study (Table 8.3). Looking at the large images on the first screen of the SMH home page (Figure 8.3), there is a tendency for the image in this ‘first’ position to feature one or more human faces in close up, and there is also a number of other image authoring techniques used.

The photo of the tall ship and gold bullion, and of the British Queen Mother and Ali G (Figure 8.4) from Periods I and II respectively are obviously ‘authored’ images. Other ‘authored’ images positioned at the top of the page tend to be collections of faces, and these are explicitly marked as ‘image complexes’ (rather than being presented as collages) by the use of framing (see Figure 8.4). The inclusion of a headline in the Anarchy in the USA image (see Figure 8.3) is similar to the use of headlines in images in feature newsbites on the SMH home page during SMH Period III (Chapter 7). This particular image, placed at the top of the page, is the only one of its kind in the corpus, and represents a marked design of the home page used for exceptional news events such as Hurricane Katrina, and the death of Australian media figure Steve Irwin (cf. Evans, 1976, p. 12). A senior editor at the SMH spoke to me about this as we discussed the use of home page templates.

Ed: We are templated. I wouldn’t actually say that the technology restricts us, but the reality of the site is that it is templated. So those pictures are that size in our template. You can’t decide that you’re going to run a bigger picture here in this spot. Now there are several versions we can use and you may have seen sometimes where we run a bigger presentation across the top of the site?

JK: Yes.
Ed: So we have the ability to do that within our template. We have that freedom to do that. So there are a number of different templates that we can put into practice depending on the size, I guess the weight that we want to give that story on the page.

(interview with author, July, 2007 - see Appendix C)

Collectively, the tendency towards using close-up images, and also to combining images into a single frame tends to push these images away from Visual Record Key, and towards Visual Interpretation Key.

![Combining images on the SMH home page](image)

*Figure 8.4: Combining images on the SMH home page*

The tendency in the ongoing application of the homepage template of the *SMH* is to have a close-up image of one or more faces in the first and largest image on the page (i.e. in 10 out of 15 images in the corpus). During *SMH* Period IV, where the
‘middle’ column consists of feature newsbites with relatively large images in a visual design similar to the first newsbite (see Table 8.3; see also Chapter 7), there is also a tendency to include close-up shots of one or more faces (i.e. in 24 of the 28 images in this position on the page in this corpus). In fact, of all 250 news images in the SMH corpus, 183 (or 73%) are close-ups of faces. This use of close-up shots of faces is consistent with the recognised role of news images in personalising the news, and also with the use of so-called ‘mug shots’ as discussed in section 2.4.1. So, while it is not a new phenomenon, the use of close-up images of faces is an interesting one as it is so prevalent on the home page of the SMH. This tendency is investigated further in relation to thumbnail images below.

In conclusion to this section, images at the top of the home pages in this corpus have a prominent position in the Head of the page (see Chapter 6), and clearly have an important role in engaging readers when they first access the website. There appears to be a tendency towards including close-up shots of faces (particularly, but not exclusively in the SMH), and this may be related to the size of images on computer screens (as compared to print newspaper pages) and the need for them to be easily read and engage readers directly and quickly (see section 8.3 following). In the BKP and the PD, these images are in Visual Record Key and tend to have similar features and functions to images in print newspapers. In contrast, the SMH uses overt image ‘authoring’ techniques to combine images, employing Visual Interpretation Key in addition to Visual Record Key, something that would not normally be expected, for example, in the main image on the front page of the SMH print edition.

69 This includes non-human faces and company logos - see below for discussion.
8.3 Thumbnails on the *SMH* home page: Image as image

This section examines the use of thumbnails on the home page of the *SMH* during the data collection period, and in particular the use of close-up shots of faces - or thumbnail faces - in hard news stories. Thumbnails function very differently to the way news images have traditionally functioned in print newspapers, and also function differently to other, larger images on story pages and home pages in online newspapers. Like larger images in print newspapers and on online newspaper home pages (in particular, so-called mug shots), close-up shots of faces are a common choice in thumbnail images, and an exceptionally common choice in the thumbnails from the *SMH* home page which are considered below.

Historically, photojournalism developed over the course of the 20th century as an valued institutional practice whereby ‘factual’ representation of actual events provide evidence for the newspaper reader, and a visual experience of the news event. The most highly valued images also capture the ‘critical moment’ of an event, and recontextualise that critical moment in an aesthetically striking manner (see Chapter 2; Caple, 2009). Thus, photojournalism has evolved with the development of hard news, and the two have existed in a symbiotic relationship. Institutionally, photojournalism needs the verbal reporting of hard news events for its existence; discursively, verbal hard news reports are enhanced by the inclusion of photographs which provide evidence of the events, ‘take the reader there’ visually, draw the reader to the written story, and also tell (an aspect of) the story in a way that words cannot.
In the following subsection, the social, institutional, and technological conditions in which thumbnails (particularly thumbnail faces) have become a common feature on many online newspaper home pages is considered. Following that, thumbnails as used on the SMH home page over the data collection period are described from a metafunctional perspective.

8.3.1 Thumbnails and their environment

A range of factors - technological and institutional - mean that thumbnail images are well-suited to online newspaper home pages, and that close-ups of faces are likely to be effective in such thumbnail images.

The medium of the web page has different affordances from those of the traditional newspaper page. The first is that the web page must be viewed by means of a screen, which means that information on web pages must be visually ‘packaged’ for the screen.

Spatially large objects work against the affordances of the scrolling page, and if different elements of the page are intended to be viewed together, it is necessary to ensure that their size is such that they can fit on the same screen. In fact, the limited viewing area of the web page (as mediated by the screen) is widely disregarded in popular and professional discourses, and in the research on online news (see section 2.5.2), and it is partly because of the limitations of screen viewing that newsbites and newsbits are used on home pages. These short texts allow stories to be grouped together, and to be viewed simultaneously on the same screen. When verbiage is designed to occupy a small space, it is not surprising that the images that accompany
that verbiage are also spatially small. While there are exceptions to this principle, it is nonetheless the case that thumbnail images are common place on online newspaper home pages (see Barnhurst, 2002).

Images in online newspapers are usually relatively low in resolution so that pages can be downloaded and viewed by readers quickly. This low resolution, and the typically small size of images, mean that images which are too complicated and/or which have too much detail are less likely to work well on web pages (Zavoina & Davidson, 2002, p. 65), so images which can be quickly perceived are likely to be favoured. This development works with existing institutional practices, rather than creating new ones.

As every photojournalism student quickly learns, news organizations emphasize pictures with simple and immediate ‘impact’; they desire photographs that can be ‘read quickly and easily’, and that symbolically support the verbal text, often as a prompt or lead-in for the reader’s eye. (Griffin, 2004, p. 384)

A thumbnail face satisfies all these demands.

Thumbnail images are small in size, and overall they occupy significantly less space than the verbal text on the SMH home page, especially in the Primary column on the page. Size is an important element in the relative salience of objects on the page (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996), and while this alone does not serve as a measure of the importance of images, newspapers historically value the written word highly. ‘In the modern newspaper, the text is still an essential element, the photograph an optional one’ (Hall, 1981, p. 226). A quarter of a century after Hall wrote this, his observation still applies (see Barnhurst, 2002), so it is perhaps not surprising that images are typically given less space than language on online newspaper home pages,
particularly when findings from eye tracking research also suggest that readers are drawn more immediately to written text than images on these home pages (see Chapter 2).

The relative importance of language over image in news is also shown by the use of captions in print newspapers. Images are almost never given the status (commonly enjoyed by language) of independent story-teller: a caption must be provided to tell the reader ‘what the picture is’, and perhaps more importantly ‘what the picture means’ (see Barthes, 1977; Hall, 1981). It is not uncommon for studies of press photography to treat the ‘photo-caption item’ as a single unit of analysis, either explicitly or by default (Fishman & Marvin, 2003, p. 34; see also Griffin, 2004; Trivundza, 2004; Wardle, 2007). The fact that the thumbnail images on the home pages in this corpus do not have captions70 is one of the features which sets them apart discursively from news images as traditionally used.

Newspapers have evolved in Western, English-speaking contexts to foreground the interpersonal: “the News Story begins at the point of greatest crisis, intensity, or human impact” (Iedema, Feez & White, 1994, p. 112). This discursive practice is the driving factor behind the Nucleus-Satellite structure of hard-news stories in English-language newspapers (see Chapter 2). Because the interpersonal ‘peak’ of news stories has been ‘distilled’ to the top of the story over time, and because the language of newsbites and newsbits on home pages consists of this interpersonal peak of information, it is not unexpected that any images appearing in this semiotic environment would similarly construe this interpersonal peak. The

70 This is because there is no ‘story’ in the image to be ‘translated’ for the audience, as argued below.
thumbnail faces in hard-news stories on the home page of the SMH also communicate a highly interpersonal semiotic value visually, and allow the story to do so in a way that language alone cannot (cf. Hall, 1981, pp. 236-7; Lemke, 2002).

Online publishing places very tight time demands on journalists, editors, photographers, and technicians. In an environment where a home page is updated several - sometimes many - times a day, editorial decisions and processes need to happen quickly, so the traditional editorial process of image production (planning, shooting, submitting, selecting, editing, and publishing) would place considerable pressure on the home page authors, pressure which the use of close-cropped thumbnails taken from current or archived images can mitigate (see Barnhurst, 2002, p. 484; Zavoina & Davidson, 2002, p. 62). Similarly, the economic imperatives of news organisations and the enormous demand for images in print publications with ‘the rise of the visual’ has contributed to the rise of photo agencies, and the strong trend toward freelancing in photojournalism (Hartley, 2007, pp. 556-7; cf. Machin, 2004). While the SMH continues to use images taken by their own photographers, this trend towards the use of image banks and archives is also consistent with the use of thumbnail faces, which can also be (and are) re-used for different stories, rather than requiring a new image each time.

In summary, the affordances of the medium discussed above are the relatively limited space on a single scrolling screen, the use of verbally short news stories on home pages, and the low resolution of images in online newspapers. The institutional practices discussed above are the preference for ‘impact’ images in newspapers, the higher institutional value placed on language compared to image, newspapers’
preference for foregrounding interpersonal meanings in telling stories, the time
constraints in the news production process in online publishing, and the trend in the
industry towards the use of image banks and archives. Together, these affordances
and practices contribute to a situation where close-up thumbnails of faces are by far
the most commonly-used image in hard-news stories on the home page of the SMH in
the corpus of this study.

The ways in which these images are used on the home page of the SMH in the
current corpus are considered in the next section.

8.3.2 The use of thumbnails on the SMH home page

Newsbites on home pages hyperlink to a ‘longer’ version of the ‘same’ story on a
story page by means of the Focus of the story and/or an Invitation (see Chapter 7). In
SMH Periods II, III and IV, news images also function as hyperlinks to the story page.
But thumbnail images used in newsbites on the SMH home page give little indication
of whether there will be an image on the story page, or if so what that image will be.

To elaborate, each hard-news newbite with a thumbnail on the SMH home
page hyperlinks to a story page. Of those story pages to which hard-news newbites
with images in the corpus hyperlink, 55% have no image at all; 11% have a
completely different image (i.e. with no relation to the thumbnail on the home page);
and 34% have an ‘expanded’ or otherwise altered version of the thumbnail
accompanying the ‘longer’ story.\footnote{This part of the data analysis was conducted subsequent to the data collection. Of the 94 hard-news
newbites on the SMH home page in the corpus, the longer, hyperlinked story could not be accessed in
14 cases at the time of the analysis. Therefore, the figures given here regarding images in hyperlinked
images

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as texts ‘in their own right’ (Chapter 7), but also serves as evidence that, like newsbites, thumbnails function ‘in their own right’, and not simply as ‘edited-down’ versions of images available elsewhere in the online newspaper.

In the corpus, a total of 250 news images appear on the home page of the SMH, 192 of which are thumbnails. Only those thumbnails in hard news stories (i.e. classified as hard news in news taxonomies on the home page - see Chapter 6) are considered in this section. This decision is based on the traditional roles of photojournalism in relation to hard news, and the contrast that thumbnail images in hard news stories present against hard news images in print newspapers.

Of the 192 thumbnails in the SMH corpus, 94 are hard-news images (see Figure 8.5). A break down of the number of hard-news images during each of the four design periods is shown in Table 8.4.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Hard-news images in corpus</th>
<th>Home pages in corpus</th>
<th>Average number of hard-news images per home page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Period I</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(mid 1999-Mar 2002)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Period II</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Mar 2002-May 2004)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Period III</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(May 2004-Nov 2005)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Period IV</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Nov 2005-Aug 2007)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8.4: Hard-news images on home pages by design period

stories come from 80 of the 94 newsbites (85.1% of the relevant stories in the corpus). This limitation applies only to these figures.
Table 8.4 shows that the general trend across the four periods is an increasing average number of hard-news stories which include images on each home page. This increase in hard news thumbnails is matched by a progressive increase in all news images on the home page. This is in line with what may reasonably be expected, as the institutional authors of the *SMH* home page develop greater expertise in packaging news in this new medium, and online newspapers have concurrently emerged as an authentic news medium in their own right, rather than simply being a vehicle for ‘shovelware’ (Chapters 6 and 7). In addition, image use in hard news has become more systematic with each re-design of the *SMH* home page, in line with greater regimentation of content sections and the number and pattern of stories within each section (see Chapter 6).

![Figure 8.5: Hard-news thumbnails on the SMH home page over the data collection period](image-url)
Of the 94 hard-news thumbnails, 73 (78%) were close-ups of faces (human and non-human) or company logos.\textsuperscript{72} These figures are presented in Table 8.5.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>hard news images</th>
<th>all news images (includes hard news)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>face</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>logo</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>face/logo</td>
<td>73 (78%)</td>
<td>183 (73%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other</td>
<td>21 (22%)</td>
<td>67 (27%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total</td>
<td>94 (100%)</td>
<td>250 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textit{Table 8.5: Images on the SMH home page during data collection periods}

The significant minority of hard-news images (22%) which are not faces are typically iconic, depicting elements such as environmental actors (e.g. bushfire, cyclone, jellyfish, forest), urban features (e.g. homes, water, bus), social institutions (e.g. ports, stock exchange), social groups (e.g. tradespersons), and sports (e.g. skating, surfing). This makes them, for the most part, quickly recognisable and ‘easy to read’ in a way similar to faces. These images share a number of other similarities with thumbnail faces.

Firstly, they do not ‘tell stories’. With few exceptions, the thumbnail images give no sense of the events that have taken place. Rather, they characterise an actor involved in the events (this is discussed further in the following section). In the exceptions (such as the image of a bushfire), the ‘event’ depicted can be interpreted as a social actor. Consider the story of which the bushfire image plays a part:

\textsuperscript{72} Company logos are considered here as the face of a human collective, and therefore thumbnails of company logos are counted as thumbnail faces (see Mouzelis, 1995 for discussion of collective social actors; Latour, 1999 for discussion of human and non-human social actors).
Crews battle bushfire in western NSW
Almost 200 firefighters are battling to contain a bushfire in a central western NSW national park.

(SMH, January 5, 2006)

Grammatically, the bushfire is a Participant (a Goal) in the two clauses where it is represented. This practice of turning events into things is a feature of many registers of English (e.g. Martin, 1993; van Leeuwen, 1996), and (as argued below) can be seen in this multimodal register as a feature of online newspaper discourse. In this instance, it can be argued that the thumbnail answers the question What happened? (A: There was a bushfire), and therefore portrays an event. But it can equally be argued that it answers the question Who was involved? (A: A bushfire [and firefighters, both of whom battled]), and therefore portrays a participant in the event, based on the verbal representation of the event.

This feature of thumbnails contributes to the next similarity between thumbnail faces and other thumbnails in the corpus. These images can be used with any story where the represented participant features in the verbiage, because they do not have what Trivundza calls the “generic conventions of photojournalism, with the criterion of newsworthiness and its inherent emphasis on time and place” (Trivundza, 2004, p. 491). In fact, they are ‘timeless’ and ‘placeless’, as the following short multiple choice exam illustrates.

Choose the headline that matches the image:

1.  
   a. The future of bus city - clogged streets  
   b. New bus timetable delayed again  
   c. STA to buy 300 new buses: Carr
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2.

a. Extreme climate events to increase: Garnaut
b. Flood fears as Clare hits WA
c. Katrina lashes New Orleans

Viewed this way, the non-face thumbnails, like the thumbnail faces, rely on the verbiage to locate the image in time and space, which makes these images re-useable.73

In summary, thumbnail images in hard news stories on the SMH home page function as images independently from images used in stories on story pages, and also function differently from the ways in which photographs are used with hard news stories in print newspapers. Thumbnails on the SMH home page in the corpus are not captioned, and portray participants in the story rather than events. They are ‘authored’ (selected, cropped, otherwise manipulated) in such a way that they are easy to ‘read’, and that makes them ‘timeless’ and ‘placeless’ and therefore possible to use repeatedly. Like other news images on the SMH home page in the corpus, the majority of these images (73%) are close-ups of human faces, labelled here thumbnail faces.

The following sub-sections examine these images from a metafunctional perspective.

8.3.3 Thumbnails and ideational meanings

This section looks at ideational meanings, or the ways in which thumbnails portray a version of events or experience. As discussed above, hard-news thumbnails on the

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SMH home page add little or no experiential content to the verbal text of their newsbite. They do not portray events, nor provide evidence for the events of the story. They do not illustrate ‘what happened’, and except in rare instances they do not give any information about the events of the story which is not also provided verbally.\(^\text{74}\)

Applying Kress & van Leeuwen’s (1996) visual grammar of images to analysing the representation of events in these thumbnails, they construe neither narrative processes, which “present unfolding actions and events, processes of change, transitory spatial arrangements” (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, p. 56), nor conceptual structures, which “represent participants in terms of their class, structure or meaning” (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, p. 56). Rather, these thumbnail images appear to represent a single Participant, or “the subject of the communication” (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, p. 46), which cannot ‘tell a story’ on its own, but can be read as participating in the story told by the verbal co-text.

In terms of the Circumstances of these images (i.e. their Setting; the Means, or elements beyond the main Participants in the image which are used in the event(s) depicted; or the Accompaniment, or elements that are ‘with’ the main Participants) (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, pp. 71-3), in essence these images have none. They are almost always completely de-circumstantialised (Machin 2004), which is what gives them their ‘timeless’ and ‘placeless’ quality as discussed in the previous section. In his analysis of the Getty image bank, Machin comments:

> A key characteristic of the vast majority of Getty images is that the background is either out of focus, or eliminated altogether – many of the images are made in the studio, against a flat background. By

\(^{74}\) This is not to say that information can be ‘translated’ completely between language and image. Rather, the point is that the image can be deleted without any significant loss in the ideational meaning of the story.
means of such decontextualization a photograph is more easily inserted into different contexts ... . (Machin, 2004, p. 320)

In Figure 8.5, the background in almost every image is either completely obscured by the subject of the image, or completely indistinguishable. Thus, an image of an individual, animal, social group, environmental actor (and so on) can be used with any story in which that individual (animal, social group ...) is written about should the editors of the newspaper so choose, and it is indeed common for these images to be re-used when social actors appear in a number of stories over time as mentioned in the previous sub-section. This also allows for the Getty-like practice of image-banking, where necessary. A senior editor at the SMH commented on the use of thumbnails, particularly thumbnail faces on the SMH home page.

If what you’re asking me is why so many of them are of people, then I’d say it’s because the stories usually are, and so therefore if we’re running a story about, say, Conrad Black, to have a photo of Conrad Black in that picture. We do use sometimes small generic images to denote something - a police story perhaps, or perhaps a court story where we aren’t able to use photographs for legal reasons - we’ll use that. (interview with author, July, 2007)

In comparison to images typical of photojournalism in print newspapers, we can characterise thumbnails on the SMH home page as operating with a much more limited visual grammar. Participants are portrayed, but Events and Circumstances are not. This means that, ideationally, thumbnails rely on the verbal co-text to communicate a newsworthy message in a way that press photography traditionally has not.

Turning then to image-verbiage relations in the thumbnails on the SMH home page, in Royce’s terms, the relation is typically one of intersemiotic repetition.

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75 A convenient co-occurrence of this is that the newspaper can draw on any available image of the actor depicted, thus avoiding the necessity of sending photographers out to document stories as they occur.
where “a lexical item ... encodes the same experiential meaning encoded in the visual” (Royce, 2002, p. 194; cf. Martinec & Salway, 2005). To illustrate, in the two newsbites in Figure 8.6, the images of John Brogden and Kim Beazley are a visual repetition of the verbal naming of these people in the story. The images help the reader ‘put a face to the name’, but tell nothing about where the images were taken, what kind of event is being reported, or any aspect of the story that adds to or provides evidence for the verbal content. The headlines could read *Brogden defeats Obama*, or *Beazley kidnaps baby*, and the same images would be equally effective. The same is true of every thumbnail face in the corpus, with one exception.76

![Brogden to give police killers mandatory life sentence](image)

![Time to cut and run: Beazley](image)

*Figure 8.6: Newsbites with thumbnails from SMH home page, April 8, 2002 (top), and January 10, 2006 (bottom)*

The thumbnails can often be related to different verbal representations of the same social actor in a single story. To exemplify, the image in the top newsbite in Figure 8.6 is related to the grammatical participant *Brogden* in the headline, and the grammatical participant *NSW Opposition Leader John Brogden* in the lead. Similarly, in Figure 8.7, the image is related to the grammatical participants *London Bomber, I*,

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76 In the single exception, there is deixis in the verbal text which can only be resolved with reference to the thumbnail face: i.e. *this woman* and *her*. The image is still decontextualized and portrays a single actor, and not an event.
and a soldier in the headline, and One of the four London suicide bombers, his, and Muslims in the verbiage. While the thumbnails visualise these verbal representations, they do not convey any other new information (i.e. information that is not provided in the verbal story). Rather, they function to visually represent a central element in the verbiage, and bring it to the ‘front’ of the story, as a way of orienting readers to the newsbite (see the discussion of interpersonal and textual meanings in the following sub-sections).

**Figure 8.7: Newsbite with thumbnail from SMH home page, September 2, 2005**

Thus, the ideational meanings construed in these images are very limited. The minimum amount of visual information necessary to identify a social actor (individual or collective, human or non-human) is provided, and in terms of portraying experience, the images add very little to the verbal text of the news story.

Moving beyond newsbites to the role of thumbnails on the entire home page, ideationally, the home page relies on verbal text to present hard news - thumbnail images play almost no role in ‘presenting the news’. Figure 8.8 shows the Primary column of hard news on one SMH home page from each of the four design periods. At the top of Figure 8.8, the thumbnail images are blacked out and the text remains. At the bottom of the figure, the verbal text of the hard-news column is whited out and

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77 Logico-semantic relations between the image and each mention in the verbiage may differ - see Martinec and Salway (2005) and Royce (2002).
only the images remain. A reader faced with the top half of Figure 8.8 would ‘get the news’. A reader faced with the bottom half would have little or no idea about any of the news events reported on the home page. This illustrates the ‘semiotic division of labour’ (Matthiessen, 2007), or extent to which each semiotic resource (language and image) contributes to providing the content of hard news on the home page. It also raises the question of what meanings thumbnails contribute. If they provide so little ideational content, then why include them at all? The answer to this is that they provide important interpersonal and textual meanings in newsbites and on the home page as a whole, and these are explored in the following sub-sections.

Figure 8.8: Hard news from SMH home pages, Periods I-IV (L-R): Text minus image (top), and image minus text (bottom) (originals in colour)
8.3.4 Thumbnails and interpersonal meanings

In the preceding section, the argument is presented that thumbnail images on the SMH home page in the corpus contribute relatively little in terms of ideational meaning. To some extent (when compared with stories on story pages, for example), a similar argument can be made for the verbal stories in which they appear - both newsbites and newsbits on the home pages of online newspapers are verbally brief:

the net paper texts must compete for reader attention by means of links from the [home] page. Using a link to catch a reader to a story means feeding the reader with much poorer information on the story content than when the story presents itself spread out on the page of a [print] newspaper. (Holmqvist et al., 2003, p. 669)

In order to compensate for the relative lack of ideational information (i.e. information about events), these short multimodal texts on newspaper home pages increase the interpersonal information load by finding ways to engage readers visually (for example, through the use of different font sizes, and colour) and verbally (for example, through the use of more intensified language in headlines and leads - cf. White 1997). Thumbnail images also play an important part in ‘increasing the interpersonal load’ of newsbites, and we turn now to look at the interpersonal meanings of thumbnails on the SMH home page in more detail, first in terms of their meanings as texts in their own right, then in terms of the role they play in newsbites, and finally in terms of their role on the home page, and in the discourse of the entire newspaper over time.

In Kress & van Leeuwen’s visual grammar, close-up shots in images construe a level of intimacy between the viewer and the object in the image (analogous to the relationship between the dominance of an object in one’s field of vision, and physical
distance), whereas long shots construe a more public relationship (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996). This is the visual construal of one kind of interpersonal meaning. In almost every instance, the hard-news thumbnails on the SMH home page are close-up shots. The intimacy between the object construed in the image and the viewer which this signifies is not limited to the 67 (of 94) thumbnails that are close-ups of human faces. Images of a glass of water and a shark, for example, construe an intimate distance between the viewer and object depicted (see Figure 8.5 above); even the images of a bushfire and a stock exchange fill the viewer’s field of vision (as construed by the boundaries of the image) signifying an intimate relationship between viewer and object depicted (see Figure 8.5 above).78

At the same time, the small size and extreme ‘intimacy’ of these thumbnails reduce the effectiveness of other choices in construing interpersonal meanings visually. For example, manipulation of the vertical angle of photographs construes interpersonal meaning: high shots looking down on the object construe power on the part of the viewer, and low shots looking up construe power on the part of the object viewed (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996). The manipulation of this vertical axis, however, has less effect in intimate shots (Figure 8.9). Theoretically, intimacy (distance of shot) and power (vertical axis) are independent variables, but in practice they appear to be related (in thumbnail faces, at least), and the intimacy signified in an extreme close-up ‘spills’ into other interpersonal meanings, including gaze and horizontal orientation (Figure 8.10). Therefore, the overwhelming choice to construe social actors at an intimate distance (80 of 94 images, or 85%) limits the impact of

78 When a bushfire is close enough to fill your field of vision, you have a very close visual, aural, olfactory, physical relationship with it.
other choices typically available, and typically manipulated for meaningful effect in print newspaper images.

Nonetheless, the high degree of intimacy construed in these images means that each hard-news story which includes a thumbnail is ‘personalised’ to an extent that would not be possible without the image, and without the shot being framed in close-up: thumbnails construe a relationship between the depicted Participant and the reader that language cannot.

Individually then, the thumbnail faces on the home page of the SMH contribute to the interpersonal meanings of newsbites. Collectively, they also contribute to the interpersonal meaning of the entire home page as a visual sign. The relation between the reader of the home page and the content is determined by a range of factors, including, on the home page of the SMH, thumbnail images, and especially
thumbnail faces. And given the central role of the home page in readers’ experience of the online newspaper, thumbnails on the home page contribute also to the interpersonal stance of the entire newspaper, and the interpersonal positioning of readers.

As discussed above, individual newsbites are personalised by the use of thumbnails, and in particular thumbnail faces which ‘populate’ the home page with news actors. Cumulatively, the impact of thumbnail faces on the home page can be seen as a personification of the news. That is, the hard news as presented on the home page is visually populated with faces, and as a result the public issues and events construed there are personified. In order to explore the significance of this, Habermas’s notion of the public sphere is helpful.

For Habermas, the public sphere “refers neither to the functions nor to the contents of everyday communication but to the social space generated in communicative action” (2002, p. 359, italics in original). He continues:

For the public infrastructure of such assemblies, performances, presentations, and so on, architectural metaphors of such spaces recommend themselves: we speak of stages, forums, arenas and the like. These public spheres still cling to the concrete locales where an audience is physically gathered. The more they detach themselves from the public’s physical presence and extend to the virtual presence of scattered readers, listeners, or viewers linked by public media, the clearer becomes the abstraction that enters when the spatial structure of simple interactions is expanded into a public sphere (2002, p. 359, italics in original).

Home pages mediate a relatively new public sphere. At the same time, they carry the long institutional history of newspapers, where ‘the spatial structure’ of the ‘simple

79 The high percentage of close-up shots of human faces in larger images on the home page as discussed above also contributes to this.
interaction’ of telling a story has evolved into the widely-shared and -understood genres found in newspapers.

These genres are not the same as those found in the coffee houses, clubs, letters, and journals of 16th and 17th century Europe from which Habermas (1991) traces the evolution of the bourgeois public sphere. By their mass-mediating nature, newspapers are a less personal form of human contact. But by personifying the news on the home page, thumbnail faces make this public sphere (in which the authors and readers of the newspaper interact) more familiar than would otherwise be the case.

Like traditional hard news images, thumbnail faces exploit the ‘natural relationship’ between photographic images and human visual perception of the material world. Unlike traditional hard news images however, they do not perform the evidential or documentation function by which images in a broadsheet contribute to the newspaper’s authority. Rather, individuals’ interpersonal experience of social life (specifically, visual contact with social actors in social settings) is construed in these images. Regardless of whether readers recognise the various individuals in the thumbnail faces, these social actors are offered up by the newspaper to be publicly shared by the community of readers, and therefore mediate the interpersonal orientation of the reading public to the issues and events reported.

In the ephemeral discourse of the *SMH*, thumbnail faces represent a continuous stream of personified issues and events open for negotiation among the readers and writers of the newspaper. They provide an immediately accessible currency in this public sphere, one which directly addresses the ‘promiscuous’ readers
of online newspapers (Thurman 2007). Simultaneously, more entry points (and more engaging entry points) into the content sections of the website are offered to the reader, and a greater number of hits on a wider variety of pages can be recorded.

Over time, the use of thumbnail faces contributes to a particular kind of discursive relationship that regular readers come to expect from the SMH, and go to for that experience. Kress & van Leeuwen (1996, pp. 28-9) contrast the visual design of the front page of The Sun (published in the UK) and the Frankfurter Allgemeine (published in Germany). The difference between the design of each page is stark, and Kress & van Leeuwen elaborate, commenting that newspaper readers:

are habituated to a complex set of practices, which, we would suggest, have far-reaching effects on the formation of their subjectivity and identity. If each of these papers is thought to be reader-friendly by its readers, then each is a very specific kind of friend - and each set of readers a very specific set. (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996, p. 30)

In the act of reading (as in any other semiotic act), the readers of the SMH negotiate their complex identities as social actors (e.g. as an online newspaper reader; as a member of particular social circles; as conversant in the ‘news of the day’). That is, their news reading practices, and their continuing interaction with the SMH home page over weeks, months, even years contribute to the ongoing negotiation of each individual reader’s identity. Concurrently, as part of the same process, each reader’s affiliations with other individuals and groups is continually negotiated in the emergence and dissipation of common attitudinal orientations towards publicly shared persons and the topics and events with which they are associated (see Knight, 2010; Knox, Patpong & Piriyasilpa, 2010). On this broader timescale then, the shorter-timescale functions of thumbnail faces (i.e. personalising individual stories, and personifying the public sphere of the home page and newspaper) contribute to
establishing and maintaining complex affiliations among the community of SMH readers. And it is this bonding function of news discourse that thumbnail faces are particularly well suited to contribute to over time.

Bonding is concerned with the way the [readers] of a [newspaper] are positioned interpersonally to create solidarity. In cultural institutions like [newspapers], Bonding is concerned with making [readers] feel welcome and as though they belong, not just to the [home page and the website], but to a community of like-minded people. Such feelings of belonging are also crucial to the long-term survival of the [newspaper]. (Stenglin 2004: i)80

While Stenglin’s (2004) research is on the semiotics of three-dimensional space and the practices of museums, her arguments regarding bonding in museums apply equally to newspapers, and the argument here is that bonding occurs not on the timescale of a single, personalised story; nor on the timescale of the personified discourse of a given edition of a newspaper; but over the course of months, years, and decades of interaction between a newspaper and its readers. Bonding is an interpersonal process, and the primarily interpersonal nature of thumbnail faces affords this social-semiotic process in the online reading practices of SMH readers.

Attracting and maintaining a readership is essential for the commercial survival of a newspaper; some even argue that it is the main goal of the newspaper’s editors to build a loyal audience (Thurman 2007, p. 301). Caple (in press) discusses the different discursive events in which readers of the print SMH can participate, including reading ‘image nuclear news stories’ (which feature large, aesthetically pleasing photographs and playful headings) and hard-news stories (cf. Singer 2006). “By sharing such experiences with their readers, the newspaper is able to create a

80 The original quote from Stenglin discusses museums and their visitors, rather than newspapers and their readers.
sense of togetherness, inclusiveness and affiliation, and it is around these shared feelings that we bond” (Caple in press).

From a journalistic perspective, the use of thumbnail faces reflects institutional news values and the importance of communicating events of significance which resonate with the community of SMH readers. As a senior editor at the SMH commented in regard to thumbnail faces:

the close-up nature of them is you get greater impact from having them in close-up. And people because they’re human. Stories always work best when you can make a contact with them. (interview with author, July 2007 - see Appendix C)

From a marketing perspective, thumbnail faces are one aspect of the online ‘news product’, by means of which the news institution develops and maintains a readership which meets its commercial imperatives to sell advertising space to its customers. As online promotional material aimed at potential advertisers in the SMH explains:

A leader in the Australian online news and information market, smh.com.au - together with theage.com.au - has transformed the way Australians get their news.

Complementing the traditional strengths in news, business, technology and sport is smh.com.au's rich approach to travel, entertainment and lifestyle readers. Our sections burst with opportunities for readers to interact with the brands, including blogs, videos and multimedia specials.

Through quality and innovation, smh.com.au delivers an engaged and loyal audience for advertisers. (Fairfax Digital Adcentre n.d.)

Thumbnail faces play an important role in the relatively new and evolving discursive practices of presenting hard news on the SMH home page. This role facilitates achieving the journalistic imperatives of making stories “human”, and finding a way for the audience to “make a contact with [these stories]”; and the marketing
imperatives of presenting “opportunities for readers to interact”, and making the audience “engaged and loyal”.

Thus, in terms of the interpersonal meanings they construe, thumbnails contribute to personalising newsbites, personifying the home page, and over time, contribute to both the ideological and commercial objectives of the online newspaper.

### 8.3.5 Thumbnails and textual meanings

Having considered the hard-news thumbnails on the *SMH* home page from an ideational and interpersonal perspective, in this sub-section, a textual perspective is taken on the composition of thumbnails themselves, and also on the textual meanings they contribute to newsbites, and to the home page.

Press photographs make textual meanings in their compositional choices. Highly valued newspaper photographs tend to “vacate the centre of the frame” where possible, and align key participants in images around so-called “hot spots” in the photographic frame (Caple, 2009). Based on ‘insider knowledge’ of these institutional practices, and her analysis of a corpus of hundreds of newspaper photographs, Caple has built on Kress & van Leeuwen’s visual grammar to develop a textual grammar of the composition of news photographs.

The compositional choices typically made by news photographers include centring an object; moving an object off-centre and balancing it diagonally with another (either with another object within the frame, or outside the frame and implied by a vector); mirroring an object in the frame; and presenting a number of matching,
serialised objects within the same frame (Caple, 2009). As can be observed in Figure 8.5, of the 94 hard-news thumbnails under discussion here, 78 (83%) are centre-frame. A small number (5 of 94, or 5.5%) have two faces serialised or balanced; a small number have the object placed slightly off-centre; but it is generally not possible to ‘vacate the centre’, nor to compose thumbnails around hot spots. Thumbnails are too small to exploit the semiotic potential of photographs to place actors in relation to one another (or to their surroundings) by the use and manipulation of foregrounding and backgrounding, vectors, framing, or focus.

Thus, the compositional choices available to the authors of the SMH home page when using thumbnails are, again, limited when compared to the choices available with larger photographs. Due to the small size of the images and the fact that the faces fill most of the frame, compositional choices are also extremely limited. Most faces are centred in the image and dominate the frame, thus making them highly salient in the image. The textual meanings which are construed by these images when considered as texts in their own right (as opposed to considering their interaction with the verbiage they accompany) are relatively consistent collectively, and are rarely manipulated for communicative effect (i.e. the faces are almost always centre-frame).

As discussed in the previous sections, in hard-news newsbites on the home page of the SMH, thumbnails bring a central element in the verbiage to the ‘front’ of the story, and orient readers interpersonally to the newsbite (cf. Martin, 2002, p. 322).

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Note that the orientation of the face in relation to the camera, and the direction of the gaze, are interpersonal aspects of visual communication (see Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996).
In this way, they can be seen as functioning as interpersonal Hyper-Theme in newsbites (Martin 1992; Martin & Rose 2007).

A Hyper-Theme is neither a lexical nor a grammatical element, but a discourse-level phenomenon (typically a sentence or paragraph) which “gives us an orientation to what is to come: our frame of reference as it were. Beyond this, the hyperTheme is predictive; it establishes our expectations about how the text will unfold” (Martin & Rose, 2003, p. 181). Headlines serve as Hyper-Themes in newspaper texts in that they orient the reader to the text, predicting what is to come.

Martin (2002) demonstrates how, in multimodal texts, images can function as a visual interpersonal Hyper-Theme. In examining the Australian government’s *Bringing Them Home* report (among other texts), he looks at the use of images typically occurring at the beginning of sections of the text, and the way they orient the reader interpersonally to the verbal content of each section. Similarly, Caple (2008) identifies large press photographs as Hyper-Theme in the ‘image-nuclear news stories’ in her corpus (see also Economou, 2006). Like the images discussed by Martin (2002), Economou (2006), and Caple (2008), the thumbnails on the *SMH* home page function as an interpersonal Hyper-Theme, working visually with the large, coloured font of the Focus and orienting the reader interpersonally to the news story.

Interestingly, this newsbite design works together with reader behaviour as measured in the Stanford-Poynter eyetracking study. Heatmaps are a way of presenting eyetracking data, and indicate the percentage of participants in the research
whose eyes fixate on a certain part of the page. Figure 8.11 shows the heatmap data on a mock home page made for the EyeTrack III project (Outing & Ruel, 2004). Red indicates 100%, orange about 75%, blue about 40%: the cooler the colour, the fewer participant eye-fixations on that part of the page.

Figure 8.11: Heat map data from EyeTrack III (source: Outing & Ruel, 2004)

The only thumbnail image on this mock page is at the top right, but interestingly, the heatmap indicates that eye fixations concentrate on the locations on the page where hard-news newsbites are located on the SMH home page. This may be
fortuitous, or may be a result of careful planning as the SMH editorial staff are aware of this research (Appendix C). What it suggests is that the hard-news thumbnails on the SMH home page are likely to orient the readers of the page to the newsbites, and function effectively as interpersonal Hyper-Theme.

Moving from newsbites to the role of thumbnails on the home page, online newspaper home pages have been described as featuring ‘lists’ of stories (e.g. Barnhurst, 2002; Bateman, 2008). On the SMH home page, the ‘list’ of hard news stories is punctuated by thumbnail images in a way similar to the punctuation of lists in more traditional, paper-based documents with bullet points. Figure 8.12 illustrates how, over a relatively short period of time, the use of hard-news thumbnails has changed from being relatively random, to being a systematic feature of the visual organisation of verbal text on the SMH home page.

As Figure 8.12 illustrates, the thumbnails in the ‘list’ of hard news stories on the SMH home page function in a similar way to bullet points, and also in a way not totally divorced from the use of decorated initial letters in illuminated manuscripts (see section 8.4 below), and the use of large initial letters in contemporary print-newspaper feature stories. Seen this way, the affordances of computer-mediated communication and the evolving practices of online news discourse are combining with evolving features of written language (such as typography and punctuation) to organise information on the home page. This perspective is explored in detail in section 8.4 below.
To summarise this sub-section, hard-news thumbnails on the home page of the *SMH* have relatively few compositional choices available due to their small size, and to the other constraints set out above, and offer very limited choices in comparison to the images typical of print photojournalism. In terms of their role in newsbites, they function as interpersonal Hyper-Theme, orienting the reader to the content of the story. And finally, on the home page, they function textually to punctuate the page in a way that contributes to its visual texture as a cohesive, compositional unit.
8.3.6 Thumbnails as images: Conclusion

Thumbnail images and close-up images of faces have historical precedents in the print press. The use of thumbnails and thumbnail faces on the SMH home page, and on many other online newspaper home pages, can be seen as the continuation and adaptation of the existing practice of using mug shots in print newspapers. But on the SMH home page, the use of thumbnails in hard news stories is distinct from hard news images in print newspapers in a number of ways.

Employing the tools developed by Kress & van Leeuwen (1996) and Caple (2009), it is apparent that many of the systemic options available to photographers, photo editors, and page editors working with print pages are not available in the authoring of thumbnails for the home page, for a variety of reasons.

Thus, the hard-news thumbnails on the SMH home page are not hard news images as we have come to know them; they play a very different role in the construal of news. Ideationally, they represent a participant rather than telling a story and rely on the verbiage they accompany to make meaning. Interpersonally, they function to attract attention, to personalise and personify the news, and to bond with readers in a way words alone cannot do. Textually, they work to bring a participant ‘to the front’ of the story as interpersonal Hyper-Theme, and function like bullet points on the page, punctuating the news on the home page. These aspects of thumbnails have emerged in a particular technological and institutional environment as described in section 8.3.1 above, and it is clear that they represent a new social practice in the reporting of hard news.
While this section has considered newsbites from a range of perspectives, there are other aspects of the historical and discursive environment in which they have emerged that have not yet been considered. In the following section, thumbnails are examined from three perspectives, and their status as images on the home page of the *SMH* is reconsidered in light of this.

### 8.4 Thumbnails on the *SMH* home page: Image as language

The argument in the previous section is that the choices available to photo editors, page editors, and page designers when using thumbnails are limited. Firstly, almost every thumbnail on the *SMH* portrays a social actor (human, social, environmental). An image not immediately and overtly connected to the verbiage will generally not suffice. Further, all thumbnail images on the *SMH* home page are decontextualised, so the choice of visually situating actors in relation to different contexts is not available: all context is provided by language. Due to the thumbnails’ extreme close-up nature, other choices in the interpersonal grammar of images (e.g. construing power on the vertical axis) are either ‘washed out’ to a large extent, or not ‘in play’ at all. And compositionally, thumbnails restrict photo editors for the most part to centred, single-object images.

By reducing the typical structural configurations in images (e.g. actors but not scenes; close-up, but not long shot; centred, but not aligned with compositional ‘hot spots’), and also, therefore, their possible combinations, thumbnails as used on the home page of the *SMH* effectively reduce the possibilities usually available in the
‘grammar’ of news photographs (on the syntagmatic axis), and therefore the potential visual meanings available to the authors of the *SMH* home page (on the paradigmatic axis). In fact, the choices available with thumbnails are so limited, that there is a question as to whether these images share a ‘grammar’ with other images, or whether their potential to make visual meaning has been reduced to the point where their signification draws on other semiotic paradigms.

In this section, this line of argument is followed with reference to three historical trajectories. Viewing thumbnails on the home page of the *SMH* in relation to the historical development of photojournalism, to the historical development of typography, and to the historical development of punctuation, can lead us to question whether these thumbnails are functioning as images, or whether they are functioning as language.

### 8.4.1 Historical perspective I: News photography

The history of news photography is discussed in Chapter 2, and the contrasts between photojournalism as it has emerged in the 20th and early 21st centuries, and the use of thumbnail images in hard news on the home page of the *SMH* home page are discussed there and also in section 8.3 above.

In short, thumbnails represent a narrowing of the possibilities of news photography, and contrast many of the typical features and functions of photojournalism, presenting a distinct contrast to news illustrations of the 19th century, to news photographs from the mature photojournalism tradition of the 20th century, and to more recent developments in the use of images in news story-telling in
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online newspapers such as image galleries and slide shows. A number of these distinctions are listed in Table 8.6.

The hard-news thumbnails on the home page of the *SMH* can therefore be seen as distinct from the news images produced by the longstanding practices of photojournalism. They are different kinds of text, that make different kinds of meanings, in different ways.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>carry aesthetic value</td>
<td>Caple (2007, in press)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Perlmutter (2003)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tied to a specific event, or the ‘here and now’ of a story</td>
<td>Trivundza (2004)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>provide ‘evidence’ for the events reported</td>
<td>Barthes (1977)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Griffin (2004)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hall (1981)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Huxford (2001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Machin &amp; Niblock (2006)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Schwartz (2003)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wardle (2007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Zelizer (2005)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>provide ‘evidence’ that the newspaper was ‘at the scene’</td>
<td>Barnhurst &amp; Nerone (2001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>capture the ‘critical moment’</td>
<td>Barnhurst &amp; Nerone (2001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Caple (2009)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Perlmutter (2003)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tell a story</td>
<td>Barnhurst &amp; Nerone (2001)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 8.6: Some typical features and functions of photojournalistic images not shared by thumbnails*
8.4.2 Historical perspective II: Typography

Language has been written for at least 5,500 years (Crystal, 1987; Halliday, 1985b), and emerged from a functional need to retain a record of linguistic communication (a need not met by speech) as human groups began to settle in permanent locations (Halliday, 1985b).

There was ... a resource ready to hand: people had been making visual images for tens or hundreds of generations, so it was natural to exploit this ability and map the visual representations on to language. This enabled language to satisfy a new range of functional demands. (Halliday, 1985b, pp. 39-40)

The writing systems which emerged in different geographical and cultural locations around the world took different paths, but over millennia, each evolved from language being encoded in images, to being encoded in conventional symbols which bore increasingly less iconic resemblance to the linguistic meanings they signified (see Barnhurst, 1994; Halliday, 1985b; Lester, 2006).

Image and language had come together to produce writing, but have generally been considered separate semiotic systems. The history of decorated and illuminated manuscripts, however, provides us with evidence of the two working very closely together. Nordenfalk (1992, p. 1) discusses the manuscripts of Homer and Euripides, explaining how illustrations served a textual function, appearing at the beginning of each section of text and therefore, in the absence of page numbers and indices, orienting readers to (each section of) the text. He continues:

The function of the first cyclic illustrations of the Bible was probably similar [to the manuscripts of Homer and Euripides]. Whether placed in the text or, beside, in the margin, the illustrations (mostly simple drawings) served as a kind of pictorial rubrics [sic]. That would explain why in a later stage of the development we also find them collected, like a list of contents, at the beginning of the book, as, for example, in the oldest preserved illustrated codices of the Gospels. (Nordenfalk, 1992, p. 1; cf. Bland, 1958, p. 29)
Though they functioned in harmony, image and script were generally kept separate in Western manuscripts until the mid-seventh century. But around this time, the decorated initial emerged as a standard feature of illuminated manuscripts (Nordernfalk, 1992, pp. 78-9). The use of decorated initials - elaborately drawn initial letters integrating letter and decoration artistically - increased in the manuscripts of 11th century Western Europe, and by the 12th century, they had developed from decorated into ‘historiated’ initials, which incorporated illustrations in addition to decoration (Bland, 1958, pp. 55-57). “In the historiated initial text is intimately combined with illustration and the fusion of text, illustration and decoration is complete” (Bland, 1958, p. 57; cf. Alexander, 1978, p. 9).

Decorated and historiated initials continued to be used in manuscripts, until Gutenberg’s printing press in the 15th century signalled the demise of the manuscript and decorated letters (Alexander, 1978), and the birth of typography. It is worth noting though, that enlarged, decorated letters were used in the Gutenberg bible, and that these enlarged letters survive in a more conservative form in many current English-language newspapers, where feature articles (and sometimes their sections) are often introduced with an enlarged initial (see Lester, 2006).

In contrast to the artistic values which led to the decorated letter, precision, and even ‘invisibility’ have been considered the hallmarks of good typography, which has been viewed as a ‘vehicle’ for text, something which ‘carries’ the meaning from the writer to the reader in the cleanest, most efficient, and most unobtrusive way possible: “typography was considered a self-effacing art which should not get in the way of the words themselves” (van Leeuwen, 2005a, p. 27).
Chapter Eight: Images

The most well-known challenge to the status quo in typography came in the early twentieth century with the Bahaus school.

Our age, with its very different aims, its often different ways and means and highly developed techniques, must dictate new and different visual forms. Though its significance remains undeniable, to think today that the Gutenberg Bible represents an achievement that can never again be reached is both naïve and romantic rubbish. (Tschichold, 2001, p. 116)

Tschichold and his contemporaries eliminated many of the variations typically found between letter forms, and in so doing fundamentally changed typography and won the ire of traditional typographers (Sandusky, 2001; van Leeuwen, 2006).

In the late twentieth century, the widespread use of personal computers and developments in word processing software put the tool of typography in the hands of almost anyone with a personal computer (van Leeuwen, 2005b). As isolated computers became increasingly networked at the turn of the twenty-first century and the world wide web continued its development, individuals and organisations used the web to achieve their social objectives in this new semiotic environment. This included online newspapers, who found in the web a medium well suited to many of their institutional imperatives (such as wide audience reach, and cheap, rapid delivery - see Boczkowski, 2004a).

The internet has transcended the boundaries of time and space in a way hitherto unseen, and new communities have formed and continue to develop, placing new demands on the semiotic resources of (for example) language, design, colour, image, video, sound, and music: stretching and testing their limits and the boundaries between them. These new forms of semiosis impact also upon typography.
Interactive media have introduced a new visual language, one that is no longer bound to traditional definitions of word and image, form and place. Typography, in an environment that offers such diverse riches, must redefine its goals, its purpose, its very identity. It must reinvent itself. And soon. (Helfand, 2001, p. 106)

The traditional boundaries of typography are being explored from a number of (trans-)disciplinary perspectives. Designers are pushing the visual boundaries of typography and blurring the distinction between image and word (Pescatore Frisk & van Middelkoop, 2005; van Leeuwen, 2006); similarly investigation into ‘kinetic typography’ explores how typographic movement interacts with the semiotic environment, and what this means for (and tells us about) evolving processes of communication (Hillner, 2005). More generally Crow (2005, p. 198) argues for an “undeniable pattern amongst young designers of using text-based software to enable image-based language systems”. These approaches are complemented by work being done in the field of Human-Computer Interaction (HCI) where research into graphical user interfaces and iconic communication can be seen as approaching the boundary between typography and icon/image from ‘the other direction’ (e.g. Yazdani & Barker, 2000).

In this environment, van Leeuwen (2006) argues that typography is advancing through a process of change. He points out that traditionally, typefaces have been seen to have their own irreducible character or identity, and are described and classified either on this basis and/or in historical terms (cf. Dabner, 2004; Lester, 2006, p. 139).

By providing a series of examples where typography is stretching its traditional limits, van Leeuwen provides evidence for Hefland’s assertion that:

We need to look at screen-based typography as a new language, with its own grammar, its own syntax, and its own rules. What we need are new and better
models that go beyond language or typography *per se*, and that reinforce rather than restrict our understanding of what it is to design with electronic media. (Helfand, 2001, p. 107)

Further, van Leeuwen looks at the distinctive features of typography (such as weight, slope, and curvature), and organises these into a system network of paradigmatic oppositions, which “opens up a potential for ‘grammar’, for formulating syntagmatic rules, rules of inclusion (‘both...and’) and exclusion (‘either...or’)” (van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 153; cf. Crystal, 1998).

The significance of van Leeuwen’s (2006) paper for the argument presented here is as follows. Typography has developed to the point where the visual potential of type (once pushed to the edge of image in the decorated and historiated initials of illuminated manuscripts) is once again expanding. It is now possible (and even necessary according to many working in the field) to model it as a mode with its own grammar (i.e. meaningful structural elements and combinations) and therefore potential to make meaning in ways not possible since the rise of the printing press.

This ‘opening up’ of the possibilities of typography is in direct contrast to the emergence of thumbnail images on home pages, where the meaningful choices possible in news images have, in the thumbnail, been narrowed to the point where they construe the “irreducible character or identity” of one of the participants in a newsbite. These two trajectories then, news photography and new typography, appear to be converging, but from different directions.
8.4.3 Historical perspective III: Punctuation

As language expanded to perform new functions in the written mode, inevitably written and spoken language came to differ. These two modes are suited to different contexts and different purposes, but despite this:

the omission of prosodic features from written language is, in some respects and under certain circumstances, a genuine deficiency. There is, on the other hand, a device that is used in order to partially overcome this deficiency; this is the device of punctuation. (Halliday, 1985b, p. 32)

Halliday argues that, beginning with Greek alphabetic writing, punctuation evolved over centuries to serve a number of functions (see also Robertson, 1969). In historical sequence, these began with boundary markers (initially to indicate pauses when reading texts aloud) such as the current full stop, comma, and colon. Subsequently, marks denoting pauses came also to contrast with other status markers which evolved to indicate questions, where information is demanded (the current question mark, dating to the 8th century - Parkes, 1992); and a number of speech functions all marked currently by an exclamation mark (dating to the 14th century - Parkes, 1992) including exchanges of goods and services (e.g. commands, offers), expression of attitude (exclamations), or establishing social contact (calls and greetings - Halliday, 1985b). These can all be opposed to statements where information is given (marked with a full stop - see also Crystal, 1987; Robertson, 1969; Salmon, 1992).82

As with the development of orthography, the long process of codification and standardisation of English punctuation was intensified with the technology of the printing press (Parkes, 1992; Salmon, 1992). Attempts to codify punctuation in

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82 Of course there were other developments in punctuation not discussed here, such as the development of the semi-colon, parentheses, and quotation marks.
English date back at least to the 16th century (Salmon, 1992), and by the 17th or 18th century most of the conventions we recognise today in English punctuation were fairly well established (Robertson, 1969; Salmon, 1992).

But at 11:44am on September 19, 1982, a new technology, a new social context, and a new form of communication had led to new demands being placed on English. In an electronic bulletin board discussion on how to designate humour in online fora, Professor Scott E. Fahlman suggested the key stroke sequence colon + dash + close-parentheses, i.e. :-) be used “to denote comments meant to be taken lightly” (Digital smiley, 2007). This represents an important development in punctuation, as the emotional attitude of a writer in relation to an extended stretch of written text could be encoded, and the use of such emoticons in computer-mediated communication has now been studied from a variety of perspectives in a range of settings (e.g. Kim et al., 2007; Krohn, 2004; Nastri et al., 2006; Walther & D’Addario, 2001; Westbrook, 2007; Witmer & Katzman, 1997).

In the broader history of punctuation, the emergence of emoticons can be seen as a continuation of a long process. Punctuation was developed by stages which coincided with changing patterns of literacy, whereby new generations of readers in different historical situations imposed new demands on the written medium itself. In order to perform new functions symbols from different systems of aids to the reader, including annotation marks as well as features of layout and display, were gradually combined into a general repertory of punctuation, which came to be accepted everywhere. (Parkes, 1992, p. 2)

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83 Wikipedia (Emoticon, 2007) traces the history of emoticons to the 19th century.
Thus, over centuries, punctuation has evolved in the visual resources it deploys, and the meanings it can convey, from ‘pointing’ textual boundaries, to indicating more interpersonal meanings such as speech functions and attitude (Figure 8.13).

Figure 8.13: Truncated visual summary of the evolution of punctuation

On a much shorter timescale, since the introduction of the smiley emoticon, the potential to punctuate attitude and emotion has expanded, and a wide range of keystroke sequences - some language-specific and some more universal - now exist as emoticons (Nishimura, 2003). Further, the affordances of computer-mediated communication have led to the use of icons in place of keystrokes. It is now common in online communication environments (e.g. IRC, web fora), email software packages, and word processing software packages, that keystroke sequences typically used to
denote an emoticon can be automatically converted into icons such as those in Figure 8.14.

In fact, there are now thousands (perhaps hundreds of thousands) of icons freely available on the internet which can be directly inserted into messages. These not only provide a greater array of possible attitudinal expression (Huffaker & Calvert, 2005), but at the same time exploit the affordances of colour, visual art, animation, and even photography to allow writers to express and/or construct (aspects of) identity such as gender and appearance (Figure 8.15), to the point where we are now witnessing an expansion in the meaning potential of punctuation (in the potential to express interpersonal meanings) unlike anything seen in the history of writing.

![Figure 8.15: Examples of emoticons construing attitude and identity (originals in colour)](http://www.msnhiddenemoticons.com/)

The trajectory for interpersonal punctuation as charted in this section begins with boundary marking, moves to punctuating speech function, and then to punctuating attitude and identity. At the same time, the prosody of punctuation spans (potentially) longer stretches of text, with the punctuation of attitude and identity through emoticons now able to spread over entire messages.

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84 The animation of these emoticons is not possible to demonstrate in a static document. All emoticons downloaded freely from: [http://www.msnhiddenemoticons.com/](http://www.msnhiddenemoticons.com/)
The textual and social developments in punctuation in many ways parallel those in the development of the new typography. Written communication in CMC environments is exploiting the imagic potential of writing in ways which were not technically feasible on the printed page, and were not socially necessary in the communicative contexts most readily mediated by the printed page. In using ‘the new punctuation’ of emoticons, writers are able to punctuate their texts in ways not formerly possible, and therefore to mean in ways not formerly possible. And in the process, the boundaries of image and language are fundamentally challenged.

8.4.4 Thumbnails: Convergence of image and language

The argument of this section is that the three semiotic trajectories charted above - news image, typography, and punctuation - converge in the thumbnail images used on the home page of the SMH, and therefore that image and language converge. According to Halliday, writing “evolved from the coming together of two independent semiotic systems: language, on the one hand, and visual imagery on the other. Writing begins when pictures are interpreted in language” (1985b, p. 14, emphasis in original). This suggests, then, that in order to sustain an argument that the thumbnails on the SMH home page straddle the boundaries of image and language, they must be shown to realise some aspect of the system of language, or perform some linguistic function.

There are two specific elements of the system of language that these images construe, and these are discussed in section 8.3 above. First, thumbnails on the SMH home page function as Hyper-Theme in newsbites. And second, they function as punctuation on the SMH home page.
In the previous section, it was mentioned that Martin (2002), Economou (2006), and Caple (2008) identify images which function as interpersonal Hyper-Theme. This raises a key question. If other images can function as Hyper-Theme, why interpret thumbnails on the *SMH* home page as language? Why are they not images functioning as Hyper-Theme?

The homepage of the *SMH* is unlike the texts discussed by Martin, Economou, and Caple in a number of important ways. As a webpage, the *SMH* home page uses typographic features such as font-size, -colour, and -type in ways not afforded by the (predominately) black-and-white printed page. Individual texts on the home page are much shorter, and the verbiage is much more fragmented than the extended discussion and argumentation in the *Bringing them Home* report and in the news features described by Economou. Similarly, while the images in the report analysed by Martin and the news texts analysed by Economou and Caple are large and visually dominant on the page, the thumbnail images on the *SMH* home page are of such a small size that they are on the same scale as the text in the headlines with which they appear. Visually, they are embedded within their newsbites rather than standing separately from them or dominating them, suggesting that they are related in a way that larger images and accompanying text are not. For instance, the Lures in other newsbites on the *SMH* home page feature close-up shots of faces as regularly as the thumbnails in hard-news newsbites (section 8.2 above), but they have the potential to construe meaning in ways that thumbnails cannot do effectively. Thumbnail images are paradigmatically different from larger images (see the introduction to this section, 8.4).
Historically, typography and punctuation have developed along with the semiotic environments they have come to inhabit. In CMC environments, we find typography occupying new domains of meaning, and visual icons (emoticons) which perform linguistic functions. At the same time, in the new genre of the online newspaper, and specifically on the home page of the SMH, we find small images on the scale of print, which function differently from the way press photographs have functioned over the last 100 years (as explained in the previous section). This raises a question: has the meaning potential of the news image contracted, or has the meaning potential of typography expanded? The crossing of the commonsense boundary between image and text has historical precedent (e.g. in the very beginnings of writing, in the use of images as tables of contents in ancient manuscripts, and in historiated initials as discussed above). From this perspective, like the new typography, like emoticons, and like mathematical symbolism (O’Halloran, 2005, 2008), the thumbnails on the home page of the SMH, appear to be a challenge to notions of where language ends, and where images begin.

8.4.5 Thumbnails as language: Conclusion

In summary, when viewed as images from a photojournalistic perspective, the hard-news thumbnail images on the home page of the SMH represent a reduction in the potential of image, and a departure from many of the valued functions of journalistic images. These thumbnails, in their specific discursive environment, instantiate paradigmatic choices from linguistic systems, whereas their paradigmatic possibilities in relation to image systems are very limited. When viewed from other historical perspectives, they parallel the use of decorated and historiated initials in illuminated
manuscripts, and the emerging and expanding practices of typography and punctuation in new media. And when viewed from a functional perspective, they perform the textual function of bulleting, and the interpersonal function of Hyper-Theme, suggesting we can view these thumbnails as an expanded graphology of the home page, i.e. as language, rather than image.

8.5 Images: Conclusion

The home pages of all three newspapers in the corpus of this study use images, though the ways in which they use them vary. The BKP uses no images at all in BKP Periods I-III, and then only one relatively large image on the Head of the page in BKP Period IV. The PD uses a large image in the Head of the home page in both PD Periods I and II, and also thumbnails in PD Period II. The SMH demonstrates a much greater use of image on its home page than the other two newspapers, with thumbnails and larger images used extensively.

The large images used on all three newspapers’ home pages have similarities with news images used in print newspapers, though further research comparing such images in print and online newspapers (and especially on print front pages and online newspaper home pages) using the analytical tools of SF theory may indicate differences in the kinds of image used in these different media. Other areas deserving of attention and not covered here include the use of images on story pages, and also emerging image-based genres which are now commonplace in online newspapers, such as image galleries and slide shows.
The thumbnails in hard news stories on the home page of the *SMH* online represent a kind of visual discourse quite different from the historical use of images in hard news in print newspapers. These differences can be explained in part by technological and institutional factors relevant to the authoring of these images. But when analysed more closely, and considered in light of historical trends in typography and punctuation, thumbnail images can be seen as an instance of expansion of meaning on the expression plane of language, rather than a contraction of meaning on the content plane of image.

The discussion of thumbnail images in this chapter concentrates on the home page of the *SMH*, and the claims are not intended to be generalisable to all online newspapers, nor to websites in general, nor to thumbnail images in general. What is observed here is an instance of the rapid and varied evolution of semiosis in new media, one of the many form/function conflations that has rapidly appeared in online newspapers and elsewhere on the world wide web. Such configurations will continue to emerge and evolve, and some will fall by the wayside as new genres such as online newspapers evolve and adapt to their rapidly changing institutional and discursive environments.
Chapter 9: Conclusion

9.1 Introduction

This thesis has examined the home pages of three online newspapers: the Bangkok Post (BKP), the People’s Daily (PD), and the Sydney Morning Herald (SMH). The three newspapers have been examined from a social-semiotic perspective, employing theoretical approaches from systemic functional theory (SF theory), particularly as developed for multimodal discourse analysis (MDA).

The corpus which forms the basis of this study consists primarily of 45 online newspaper home pages: 15 from each newspaper, collected over three periods (early 2002, late 2005, and early 2006), each constituting a 5-day constructed week.

The findings of this thesis have implications for SF theory and for approaches to MDA. The purpose of this thesis is, however, broader than making a contribution to SF-MDA. There are implications also for:

- the critical study of online newspapers and the mass media more broadly, and the analysis of websites and web-pages
- pedagogy in the areas of literacy, and media discourse.

The current research also has, inevitably, a number of important limitations.

In this chapter, the findings of the research project are summarised in section 9.2, and the limitations considered in section 9.3. Then, in section 9.4, the
implications in the areas outline above are considered in turn. Finally, in section 9.5, overall conclusions and final comments are made.

9.2 Summary of findings

Based on the current corpus, this thesis has examined the overall structure of online newspapers, the design of home pages, the historical development of newsbites (with particular focus on the home page of the *SMH*), and the use of news images on home pages (with a particular focus on the use of thumbnails on the *SMH* home page). In this section, the findings are summarised.

In Chapter 5, the newspapers are examined using the analytical tool of a rank scale. Online newspapers are posited to have five ranks: online newspaper, section, page, zone, and text, and a class-function cycle at each rank is identified. Systems at each rank are either generated on the basis of the data (such as at the ranks of page and text), or (partly) hypothesized where data is insufficient (such as at the rank of online newspaper). Constituency, the structural principle of parts combining to make wholes, is the basis of a rank scale, and provides one useful perspective on the relations between home pages, the texts appearing on them, and other pages and structural elements within online newspapers.

Over time, technological advances have seen online newspaper publishers introduce semiotic resources such as animation, audio, and video, as well as hypertext tools such as pop-ups. As these are integrated on pages, the ability of a rank scale to account for the ways in which meaning is made in online newspapers - limited as it is
to the structural principle of constituency - is fundamentally challenged. Nonetheless, semiotic phenomena such as rankshift (where a class element from the same or higher rank realises a structural element at a lower rank) are useful for explaining certain patterns of structure in online newspapers, and the notion of constituency also remains useful, if limited.

The rank scale proposed in Chapter 5 complements the description of the periodic structure of websites given by Djonov (2005). This complementarity, and also the ability of the rank scale to account for certain aspects of the website with theoretical elegance (such as rankshifted websites realising the functional element of Content; and the identification of the home section, and the role of the Splash and the Orientation therein) suggest that rank scale is a useful tool for examining the structure of online newspapers and websites more generally, providing its limitations are recognised.

Chapter 6 describes the home pages of the corpus from a metafunctional perspective. These home pages have the structural elements of Brand, Navigation, News Coverage, Signature, and Marketing. Each of these is realised by a class element at the rank of zone, and the News Coverage (realised by news taxonomies in the corpus) is examined in more detail. News taxonomies can be described as either:

- overt or covert, according to the presence or absence of features such as named or un-named categories, and the different visual devices used to frame categories (e.g. background colour, white space, borders, and horizontal bars)
- homogeneous or heterogeneous, according to the extent to which the different elements in the taxonomy resemble each other visually (by similarities or
differences in, for example, size, shape, colour, and font features where elements include or consist of text).

Depending on the combination of the various visual devices on the page, news taxonomies can be characterised as laying along these two clines, which in principle function independently of one another.

News taxonomies classify the content of the home page, and an explicit awareness of their existence, and of the visual and verbal devices used in constructing them is of benefit to readers, and to (prospective) authors of web pages and media workers.

Chapter 6 also examines the interpersonal meanings realised in the design of the home pages in the corpus. All pages are found to have an objective perspective: there is no specific viewing perspective ‘designed into’ the page, so the reader is not ‘subjected’ to a viewing position by the pages’ authors. In terms of the modality (or visual construal of the ‘factuality’) of the home pages, three aspects of design are identified as particularly important in modality. The first is stasis, and the degree to which pages employ hypertext tools such as animation, sound, and other so-called ‘bells and whistles’. The more static (and therefore conservative) the page on this measure, the higher the modality. The second measure of modality is the use of shape and space on the page. The more order in the page design (typically realised by a squared design and consistency in the size of objects and spaces on the page), the higher the modality. The third aspect of design which impacts on the modality of the page is the use of colour. Pages which are predominately black-text-on-white-background in the manner of traditional print broadsheets have a higher modality, and
a greater use of colour on the page leads to a lower modality on this measure. The overall modality of the page is a complex of values on at least these three measures, all of which operate independently of one another in principle.

Textual meanings of the home pages in the corpus are also examined in Chapter 6, and the composition of the home pages in the corpus was found to work with a number of oppositions. The ‘first screen’ of the page contrasts with the remainder of the page, and includes the Masthead, main navigation menu, and when they are include on the page the largest image and ‘breaking news’. Many pages design a horizontal break of some sort at the bottom of the ‘first screen’. This top-bottom opposition on the page realises a Head / Tail compositional structure. Left-right, pages are designed in columns, and the wider column always includes the major news stories, whereas narrower columns carry news which is secondary in importance in the value system of the newspaper, and/or navigational menus. Thus, the left-right composition realises an opposition of Primary / Secondary. And finally, all home pages in the corpus include a Masthead at the top of the page, and navigation menus either in the left column or across the bottom of the page header. These elements are repeated across the news pages of the newspaper, creating cohesion between pages and serving as a consistent point of departure for the reader, page by page. In terms of their compositional role on each page, these elements realise a Macro-Theme / Rheme structure.

Chapter 7 examines newsbites, the small headline-plus-lead-plus-hyperlink news stories which feature on the home pages of the corpus, and on online newspaper home pages more broadly. The focus in this chapter is on the home page of the *SMH*. 
and the ways in which newsbites develop over the data collection period (which spans four page-design periods for the SMH home page). Newsbites are ‘little’ texts, yet play a prominent role on online newspaper home pages and therefore in readers’ experience of the online newspaper. A detailed system network for newsbites is provided in Chapter 7, and the changes in this system network over the four SMH page-design periods demonstrates the remarkable expansion in the meaning potential of newsbites (i.e. the paradigmatic meanings available to newbite authors) over the data collection period. This expansion in systemic choices is realised by changes in the structure of newsbites, and these are shown to relate to social, institutional, and textual factors.

Despite their small size and verbal brevity, these news texts can function independently of the longer texts to which they hyperlink. They play an important role in valuing the news on the home page, and allowing the institution to achieve its commercial and ideological objectives, all while working within the constraints of page templates.

Chapter 8 explores the use of news images on home pages. Each newspaper uses a large image in the Head (or ‘first screen’) of its page, and the SMH also uses thumbnails extensively, especially in later page design periods. The larger news images on home pages share many of the features of news images as used in print newspapers, though in their new discursive environment it is likely that these images will develop in ways increasingly distinct from their print counterparts. This development is likely to occur in the visual grammar by which they are authored as texts in their own right, in the ways they function in newsbites and texts of other
genres on the home page (such as newsbits, standalones, and other genres which may emerge), and in their role on the home page as a unified, multi-semiotic text.

The thumbnail images on the SMH home page function in very different ways from news images in print newspapers. Their ‘authors’ work with a much more limited set of choices (i.e. paradigmatic meanings), ideationally, interpersonally, and textually. In newsbites, thumbnails function as an integral element of the news story, working closely with the verbal text, engaging the reader interpersonally with the story, and bringing a participant in the verbal story ‘to the front’ of the story as Hyper-Theme. Thumbnails also play an important role in the overall design of the home page, personifying the news on the home page, and punctuating the news of the home page textually. When viewed historically, they share little with news images which have become both familiar and valued in the institutional practices of photojournalism as represented in print newspapers. However, they do share much with typography and punctuation, which are elements of language. Thumbnails can be seen as a kind of elaborated graphology, fulfilling linguistic functions and therefore, arguably, an expansion of the expression plane of language.

In light of these findings, we can return to the framing questions posed in the first chapter and consider what answers might be offered. Here, the more specific framing questions are dealt with before returning to the initial, overarching question.

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What can the analytical tool of rank scale tell us about relations between home pages and their elements, and other elements of the online newspaper?

What are the limitations of rank scale in describing the structure of online newspapers?

Home pages in this corpus realise the function of Orientation in the home section of online newspapers, and are therefore particularly important in readers’ experience of the newspaper on each reading. As class elements, home pages also realise the function of Briefing in content sections of the newspaper. Home pages consist of zones, which in turn consist of texts. This constituency perspective on online newspaper structure must be seen in relation to other perspectives on structure (e.g. periodic, and potentially prosodic structure). A rank scale is one useful perspective, but as technology continues to evolve this analytical tool may be less able to account for the different elements that constitute a home page and online newspaper, and the relations between them.

How do home pages - as unified visual signs in their own right:

- represent the human experience of events which are deemed newsworthy enough to appear on the page?
- construe a relationship between the readers of the newspaper, the institution of the newspaper, and the actors and events reported?
- construct coherent and cohesive messages?

Home pages in this corpus use news taxonomies in their visual design of the page. Interpersonally, they present an objective perspective and vary in their modality according to the use of static or dynamic design features, colour, and the degree of order in the use of shapes and space on the page. Textually, information is structured
in a Head/Tail top-bottom structure, a Primary/Secondary left-right structure, and a Macro-Theme/Rheme structure whereby the Masthead and main navigational menus are positioned consistently page by page.

**How do newsbites communicate visually? How important is visual design in such verbally short texts?**

Newsbites in this corpus are designed in such a way that their significance in relation to each other can be judged visually in a way that does not rely solely on their positioning on the page. (While this is not true of the design of newsbites on the *BKP* home page in the corpus, since the data collection period ended the *BKP* also designs newsbites in this way.). Features which contribute to this visual communication include the presence and absence of features such as images, hyperlinks, and superheadings, the use of colour in headlines and hyperlinks, and the relative size and positioning of different elements. These visual choices in design can realise elaborate systems of choices whereby newsbites, and the actors, events, and issues they report, can be valued relative to one another. In such verbally short texts, this visual design plays an important role in achieving the communicative purposes of newsbites and home pages.

**How are news images used on online newspaper home pages? What role do thumbnail images play on online newspaper home pages?**

News images are used sparingly on the home pages of this corpus, with the general trend being that one relatively large image is used on the first screen of the home page, with the possibility of other images being used elsewhere on the page. Smaller
thumbnail images are used to varying degrees (from not at all to being used extensively) further down the page.

The larger images are used in ways which resemble the conventions of photography in print newspapers, though ‘head shots’ may be more common on home pages than in print newspapers. Thumbnail images tend strongly towards being close-up shots of faces, or other ‘easy-to-read’, iconic images, and can be seen on the SMH home page as punctuating newsbites, and the home page more generally.

**How, then, is meaning communicated by the visual design of online newspaper home pages?**

The online newspaper home pages in this corpus are complex, multi-semiotic signs that are mediated by the computer screen. Their visual design is a fundamental part of each newspaper’s construal of the news events of the day. Visually, meaning is made:

- in relation to other pages (e.g. by the consistency of the Macro-Theme from page-to-page, which creates cohesion between the home page and other pages in the newspaper; by the harmony between news taxonomies on the home page and the different content sections that make up the functional element of Content at the rank of online newspaper)
- across the entire page (by the organisation of different elements in news taxonomies; by the construal of an objective stance and the visual modality of the page; by the composition of the page)
- and in the design of individual elements such as newsbites, and the thumbnail images which sometimes appear in them.
Each level is important, and the complex relations between each level contributes to the multi-semiotic construal of the news on each home page.

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In summary, a range of findings have been made in this thesis, contributing to our knowledge and understanding of the applicability of rank scale to analysing online newspapers, of the design of online newspaper home pages, and of the ways in which ‘little’ texts such as newsbites and thumbnail images function on online newspaper home pages. Inevitably, the research reported here has limitations, limitations which also open research opportunities, and these are considered in the following section.

9.3 Limitations and opportunities

In this section, limitations and opportunities are grouped and discussed in relation to the data set, the analysis, and the generalisability of the findings.

9.3.1 Data

Beginning with the data, this sub-section considers the number of newspapers sampled, the kinds of website studied, the nature of the data collected, the time span of the data collection, the hypertext resources used on the pages in the corpus, the limited number of interviews, and the information obtained in the interviews.

First considered is the number of newspapers sampled. The corpus of this study includes the home pages of three newspapers. Clearly this represents a small
proportion of the multitude of English-language online newspapers published globally, and so the extent to which this corpus is representative of online newspaper home pages can certainly be questioned (compare, for example, the extent to which thumbnails are used on the SMH home page in comparison to those of the BKP and the PD). At two stages during the project (August, 2006, and July, 2007), home pages from 30 and 29 newspapers (respectively) from around the world were downloaded and briefly inspected to ‘test’ the emerging findings against a broader sample. Though a detailed analysis of each home page was not conducted, the framework developed in Chapter 6 can be employed to effectively describe the home pages downloaded, and many of the home pages also demonstrate diversity in the design of newsbites which realised paradigmatic meanings in a way similar to the home page of the SMH. Nonetheless, detailed study of home pages from a large number of online newspapers and from a large number of countries is still required to determine the extent to which the findings presented in this thesis need to be adapted as they move away from the instance (or ‘weather’) pole of the cline of instantiation, and more towards the system (or ‘climate’) pole. Additionally, an investigation of online newspapers in languages other than English, and the extent to which the visual design of home pages is related (or not) to language of publication is an area particularly worthy of investigation.

Second, limiting the data to the websites of news institutions who have their origins as print newspapers could be representative of bringing an ‘old mindset’ to a new phenomenon. On the web, news institutions which publish newspapers, broadcast on radio, or broadcast on television are represented in the same medium. The comparison made in the current study, though, gives a theoretically grounded and empirical basis on which to make a semiotic comparison with other news websites.
such as agency websites (e.g. AP, AFP, Reuters), television-origin websites (e.g. CNN, Fox), online news aggregators, (e.g. Fark, Google News, Drudge Report), and broadcasting corporations who have a history of working across media (e.g. the British BBC, and the Australian ABC), and to examine the extent to which the institutional history of the website is predictive of the design of the news (see Chapter 2).

Similarly, the role of personal blogs, social networking sites (e.g. MySpace, Facebook, and Twitter), and other user-generated-content sites (e.g. YouTube) in the reporting and dissemination of breaking news is expanding at the time of writing this chapter. This is a significant change from the way in which news was disseminated on the web when this research project began, and serious study of the reporting of news in these fora, the genres by which this is done, and their relation (if any) to other web-based news genres and other traditional news genres is an area in need of study. The ramifications of this for our understandings of what news is, and who decides, also require investigation.

Third, the corpus of this study consists primarily of 15 home pages from each online newspaper. Also collected from each newspaper on each day were the home page of one content section (the ‘domestic news’ content section - however named in each newspaper) and a number of story pages linked from the home page and/or the content-section home page. These were saved as html files using a web browser, and software was also used to save the entire page as an image. Saving pages as images was particularly important in later data collection periods, as in some cases the html files looked nothing like the original pages when re-opened at a later date.
collection method was used because of the focus of this study, but also due to technological limitations in downloading whole websites (including access to software, processing speed, bandwidth at reception, and periodical problems in accessing the websites).

Downloading the entire domain of each newspaper on each data collection day would have facilitated the current research, and would also have made the corpus more useful for subsequent research. However, the collection and maintenance of such data poses problems not only in collection, but also in terms of browser and file compatibility (especially over time).

The technological issues in compiling such a corpus represent not only a practical problem, but also a broader social issue. As Perlmutter observes:

... unless one has printed the entire Web page as an integrated unit, it no longer exists at all. As the Times’s Bernard Gwertzman (1999) explained to me, “We save the individual pictures and stories but not the page.” Unless that page has been systematically copied, downloaded, or printed, it may be lost forever as a text for analysis, clarification, introspection, comparison, or simply a refreshing of memory. That updating is one of the great benefits of the Internet - a capability that most proponents of the medium cite as a positive tool for enhancing individuals’ interaction with the news - is a contradiction. (Permlutter, 2003, p. 18; see also Barnhurst, 2002, p. 487; Puijk, 2008)

Online newspapers are influential, and therefore powerful texts in a globalised society. They have the power of writing, and the impermanence of speech. For their authors, this lack of permanence can mean a lack of accountability, and can conceal a lack of responsibility if there is one. This alone provides sufficient justification for collecting comprehensive corpora of online newspaper discourse (see www.archive.org).
Keeping permanent (or at least long-lasting) and accessible records of impermanent phenomena and rendering them in a form suitable for analysis is not a new problem for discourse analysis, which has long dealt with recordings and transcripts of speech. Many of the shortcomings of audio recordings and transcripts are well recognised, but the potential pitfalls of saved web pages (which can differ according to the format in which they are saved, as already mentioned) are probably still largely unknown. Further, the challenges in collecting and processing such data are likely to develop as quickly as the genres and the technologies that realise them. Thus, while the corpus of the current study is sufficient to address the questions posed, it is not immune from the limitations inherent in the conversion of discourse into data which are amenable to our methods of analysis. Looking forward, it would seem prudent to exercise caution in equating our data sets of texts like online newspapers with the actual phenomena they represent (cf. Latour, 1999).

The research reported in this thesis is a multi-year study, with the three data collection periods spanning four years. The collection periods are not evenly spaced, and there is a period of three years and five months between the first and second collections, and only of two months between the second and third. This irregularity is not as problematic as it may seem, though, because the data are representative of the page design periods during which they were collected. In fact, the third data collection period was motivated by a simultaneous change in design in two of the newspapers (BKP and SMH) as explained in Chapter 4.
Chapter Nine: Conclusion

A four-year study, as it happens, appears to have generated useful data in examining the development of the newspapers over time, with the PD having two design periods, the BKP four, and the SMH also four over the data collection period. Even so, social-semiotic studies of news websites over longer time scales such as those used by Cooke (2003), and Utt & Pasternack (2003) would clearly be informative.

Three years on from the last data collection, online newspapers are commonly embedding video on their home pages, animation is a staple resource of many home pages, the meaning potential of newsbits (let alone newsbites) has expanded considerably on many home pages, and other changes (possibly relating to the challenges posed by social networking sites as mentioned above) will no doubt be emerging as this paragraph is read. In a sense then, the rapid evolution of web-based news genres as illustrated in this research project means that the findings reported in this thesis are historical, and that the design of news on online newspaper home pages has already moved beyond what is reported here. While the descriptions outlined in the previous chapters do still account for the much of the design of news on current home pages, the speed of evolution of these genres as documented in this thesis nonetheless means that the current findings are a starting point, and that future social-semiotic studies of online newspapers will need to account for phenomena that do not appear in the corpus of this study for historical reasons. There is, then, much scope for future investigation building on the findings of the current study.

Additionally, the innovative practices used in advertising texts on the web pages of the corpus (including the use of animation, pop-ups, sound, and video)
appear to be moving ahead of the news texts. The relation between advertising and news (including relations of content and design) is also an area deserving of further attention.

Moving from the corpus to the interviews, one voice from the BKP, one voice from the SMH, and no voice from the PD is heard in this thesis. The information gathered in the interviews is useful in providing an understanding of the way the newsrooms of the SMH and BKP operate, and the way in which the print and online editions are related in each news institution. Unfortunately, each provides limited information on the historical development of the online edition, and also of the decision-making processes by which online news design is enacted in each institution. A number of attempts were made to arrange an interview with staff from Digital Post at the BKP by telephone, email, and in person, but were unsuccessful. (Attempts to establish contact with the PD by email were also unsuccessful.) Regardless, the interviews are very useful in providing context for the discourse analysis, and the generosity of each of the interviewees is greatly appreciated.

‘Insider’ accounts of semiotic practices are an important contribution to our understanding of the nature of discourse, and the ways in which specific discursive events ‘work’. The research presented here draws on an understanding of news practices based in part on the interviews represented in Appendices B and C, but also on published accounts of the practices of news producers, such as those by Boczkowski (2004a, 2004b), Bell (1991), de Vries (2008), Iedema, Feez & White (1994), McCargo (2000), and Paterson & Domingo (2008).85 Research which

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85 The ‘Ask an Editor’ forum of the New York Times is another valuable, public resource.
combines rich ethnographic data with large, well-designed corpora of texts will continue to be important in providing insights into the social practices of news production and dissemination.

In summary, there are a number of limitations in the data set of this research, each of which raises issues for the ways in which research into online newspaper discourse is conducted, and indicates directions for future research.

9.3.2 Analysis

The SF-MDA approach to analysis taken in this research project is a particular theoretical approach to analysing, understanding, and communicating knowledge about semiosis. There are, of course, other approaches which could have been taken (and which have been elsewhere), even in conjunction with an SF-MDA approach. SF theory is applied by nature: Halliday’s (e.g. 1978) rejection of the separation of applied and theoretical linguistics has become a defining feature of SFL. This means that as SF theory is applied in new domains and to evolving communicative situations, the theory itself evolves to account for the data, a feature particularly relevant to SF-MDA (e.g. Bateman 2008; Caple, 2009; Djonov, 2005; Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996; Martinec, 2005; Martin, 2008; O’Halloran 2005; van Leeuwen, 1999).

Thus, the social-semiotic approach adopted in this thesis is intended as a complementary contribution to other approaches used in studying online newspapers, such as Barnhurst’s (2002) content analysis; Boczkowski’s (2004a, 2004b) ethnography; Cooke’s (2003) use of grounded theory, Lowrey’s (1999) use of
interviews; Perlmutter’s (2003) reflective approach, Utt & Pasternack’s (2003) use of questionnaires; Bateman (2008) and colleagues’ (Bateman, Delin & Henschel, 2007) document design approach, and Stark Adam, Quinn & Edmonds’ (2007) eyetracking research. No single research approach can tell us all we need to know, and no single research project can employ every worthwhile approach. What is required is for each approach to move forward with some knowledge and understanding of the others, so that we can complement each other’s strengths and cover each other’s weaknesses. The current research is intended to contribute to such a broad, co-operative approach to understanding online newspapers.

In terms of object of analysis, this project focuses primarily on analysing pages and their elements. A rank scale is proposed in Chapter 5 in order to contextualise Chapters 6, 7, and 8 (structurally and theoretically) and to explore the applicability of rank in MDA, but detailed analysis of the relations between pages, so important to the ways in which hypertexts mean, has not been undertaken in this study. Djonov’s (2005) account of website navigation provides a foundation for developing the frameworks developed in this study in such a way that they can take account of this aspect of meaning. Additionally, work by Zhao (2010) on integrating time into theoretical accounts of hypertexts re-defines units of meaning in terms of readers’ different paths through hypertext. These approaches highlight an analytical limitation of the current study: the treatment of the texts analysed as ‘independent’ units of meaning. This is a useful construct for making analysis manageable and providing a ‘foothold’ on which more extensive analysis can build, but is also an important limitation which must be acknowledged and, in future research, overcome.
Building on the current study, an obvious direction for further research is the evolving genres in online newspapers, such as image galleries which sometimes also employ written language, slide shows which integrate written and/or spoken language with images, and the ‘videobites’ which are now commonplace in online newspapers and on their home pages. These ‘videobites’ presumably draw in part on the conventions of television news reporting, but may or may not also draw on the conventions of newspaper reporting.

In summary, the analysis conducted in this thesis draws on one theoretical approach, and analyses texts as ‘independent’ units. These delimitations of the research have made the project manageable, and provided a basis on which future research following a similar approach can build.

9.3.3 Limitations and opportunities: Conclusion

In summary then, the current study, like all research, has a number of limitations. These relate to the data set and to the analysis employed. Each of the limitations points to useful directions for further research, and each can be understood in relation to the inevitable process of making choices in the course of designing and conducting research, choices which create limitations and deficits in some areas, while allowing investigation to proceed and produce knowledge in others. The findings provide opportunities for related studies using similar and/or complementary approaches to build upon the tools and descriptions developed here.
9.4 Implications

Having considered the limitations of the current research project in the previous section, the implications of the research are now considered. The implications of the findings are considered in terms of their relevance for SF theory; for the critical study of the world wide web, the mass media, and in particular online newspapers; and for pedagogy in the areas of literacy and media discourse.

9.4.1 Implications for SF theory

The research reported here is an application of systemic functional (SF) theory, rather than an attempt to develop the theory. For this reason, its ramifications for the theory are relatively minor, though there are a number of contributions worthy of mention. These are the ability of Kress & van Leeuwen’s (1996) visual grammar to account for many aspects of the visual design of news on online newspaper home pages; the theoretically (though not descriptively) comprehensive rank scale for online newspapers; the multi-semiotic realisation statements in the systemic description of newsbites; and the identification of thumbnail images as an instance of the expanding expression plane of language.

To begin with the application of Kress & van Leeuwen’s (1996) visual grammar to online newspaper home pages, aspects of the framework developed by Kress & van Leeuwen do account for the data in this study. As an attempt to account for visual texts which vary widely in both design and use, it is not surprising that some adaptations have been made to account for online newspaper home pages. These include:
• the development of visual taxonomies, in which the covert / overt distinction has been modified, and the homogeneous / heterogeneous cline introduced

• the identification of modality variables specific to online newspapers, including stasis, and order in the use of shapes and space

• the identification of information-value variables generated specifically from online newspaper homepages.

It is likely that adaptations such as these are, in many cases, genre-specific (see Bateman, 2008).

Turning to the development of a rank scale for online newspapers, as discussed in Chapters 3 and 5, rank scales have been developed for a range of non-linguistic and multi-semiotic genres. In the published literature on SF-MDA, however, class-function cycles have not, in general, been explicated, and systems at various ranks have not been elaborated (Zhao, forthcoming).

The rank scale developed in Chapter 5 shows that rank is more than just a heuristic for multimodal texts, and that it can be applied in a theoretically thorough manner. Nonetheless, it is worth highlighting that online newspapers, while inherently multimodal and multi-semiotic, are texts which belong to a macro-genre which historically is very much based on language, containing texts of genres in which the semiotic resource of language plays a central role. It may not, then, be surprising that the structural principle of constituency as developed and used in linguistics is also applicable to this macro-genre.
At face value, rank is easy to apply to analysing online newspapers. It is clear that texts combine on pages, pages combine into website sections which combine to make up a website. But the shortcomings of rank as an analytical tool are revealed in the detailed development of the rank scale, and the elaboration of class-function cycles and systems at each rank. This illustrates the need for SF-MDA studies using rank to develop rank scales in a theoretically comprehensive manner, making explicit the class-function cycles and systems at each rank. This is time-consuming, and the volume of metalanguage required in generating both class and function labels is challenging, and often frustrating. Nonetheless, the process of distinguishing functions from classes, and developing an understanding of where the systemic oppositions (and therefore the ranks) lie is a theoretically important one, making the description both empirically and theoretically accountable in a way not otherwise possible. Without such an approach, the value of proposed rank scales, and their ability to account for the data they are intended to describe, are much harder to evaluate.

Turning now to the systemic description of newsbites in Chapter 7, each of the systems in Chapter 7 set out the paradigmatic choices in newsbites at the rank of text, and give realisation statements, or statements of the structures that realise the paradigmatic choices (see Chapter 3). The realisation statements in Chapter 7 are multi-semiotic, involving language (e.g. Focus, Event), colour (e.g. Hyper-Focus, Tradition-Focus), hyper-textual distance relations (e.g. Link, Tangent, Navigator), image (e.g. Illustration, Lure), and layout (e.g. Verbal Frame, Border).
It is axiomatic to SF-MDA that genres are multi-semiotic (see Chapter 3). The multi-semiotic realisation statements in Chapter 7 illustrate that newsbites instantiate a genre that is systemically multi-semiotic. That is, these texts are not only multi-semiotic in their structure, but the meaning potential they instantiate can also be mapped multi-semiotically. To reiterate, newsbites are systemically, as well as structurally multi-semiotic.

Newsbites are obviously not unique in this regard. Most written texts combine a range of semiotic resources. There are generic patterns observable across the semiotic resources of language, layout, and image in written texts, and spoken texts combine semiotic resources of language and gesture, along with proxemics and the use of space, dress, and others. This suggests that the systemic choices available to writers and speakers are typically multi-semiotic, yet while this is implicit in much or all of the work in SF-MDA, system networks have not typically modelled choices in this way (though cf. Djonov, 2005; Martinec & Salway, 2005).

Finally, we turn to the description of the expanding expression plane of language and the use of thumbnail images as punctuation on the home page of the SMH. The question of how to model the expression plane of language, and where the boundaries of language lie is raised by work such as that by van Leeuwen (2005a, 2006) on typography; Matthiessen (2007) on writing; and Martinec (2004), Hood & Forey (2005), and Zappavigna et al. (2010) on gesture. The phenomenon of thumbnails functioning as punctuation on the home page of the SMH, where they realise the Hyper-Theme of newsbites and ‘point’ textual boundaries on the home page, describes another development in the meaning potential of language on the
expression plane, and a challenge for SF theory. As van Leeuwen (2006) observes in his investigation and description of developments in typography:

> The problem is, concepts and methods for analysing this new kind of writing, its coherence, and hence its potential effectiveness, lag behind the techniques we have for analysing traditional writing. (p. 141)

This means that frameworks developed for intersemiosis (e.g. O’Halloran, 2005, 2008) are likely to combine with ‘traditional’ SF approaches to describing writing to provide more useful models of the written texts of the present and the future (cf. Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001; Martin & Rose, 2008; Matthiessen, 2007; van Leeuwen, 2005).

In summary, the major contribution of this thesis is not to develop SF theory, but it nonetheless has a number of implications for the theory. It extends aspects of Kress & van Leeuwen’s (1996) visual grammar in ways specific to online newspaper home pages, and that may also be applicable to other texts. It confirms the applicability of rank scale as an analytical tool for the description of multimodal texts, and also models how such descriptions may proceed in a more detailed and thorough manner than has applied in the published literature in SF-MDA to date, while pointing to limitations in this theoretical approach. It establishes that genres can be systemically multimodal, and that the expression plane of language is developing and expanding in response to the rapid evolution of the emerging communicative contexts found in new media, such as that described in this thesis.
9.4.2 Implications for discourse analysis

Critical studies of the mass media, and in particular newspapers, have long examined the language of news reports, and SF linguistics has informed a great deal of such work. Critical studies of the use of images in news are also well established, and more recently, critical studies of the visual design of newspapers have also begun to emerge (Chapter 2). This thesis contributes to this relatively new area of study, and has implications for the ways in which texts are analysed in critical studies of the mass media, and also for our understandings of the changing nature of what a text is in new media.

Beginning with implications for analysing texts, the current research provides a framework which critical analysts can apply in examining texts and corpora. The representation of Australians on overseas drug charges on the home page of the *SMH* as discussed in Chapter 6, for instance, provides an illustration of one way in which the framework developed in this thesis can be applied. Such an approach can work together with detailed linguistic analysis and image analysis to provide a more complete understanding of the ways in which individuals and groups are construed and evaluated in online newspapers (see Appendix J).

Additionally, the current research provides for a better understanding of the relations between institutional practices and the visual design of news. Texts tell us about their producers and their conditions of production, and this is as true for the choices in their visual design as for the choices in their use of language and image. The current project informs a critical perspective on media discourse, contributing to an understanding of the ways in which meaning is made, and the kinds of meaning
that *can* be made in these texts. The ideology of a news text is not a simple matter of the political position expressed in the content of the text: it is a complex phenomenon which lies in the structures of communication, and the possibilities available to and chosen by the authors. Mapping (a portion of) the visual possibilities available to news authors on the page (Chapter 6), the multi-semiotic possibilities available in newsbites (Chapter 7), and the emerging conventions of images and their use in online news (Chapter 8) affords better understanding of the construal of ideology in news discourse, as the visual and verbal design of stories affords and constrains the choices available to online newspapers as they position actors in stories. These choices construe relations between the news institution, represented social actors, and the audience. In this way, newspapers ‘carve out’ their ideological space in the social order.

This brings us to the second point discussed in this sub-section, which is closely related to the foregoing discussion of ideology: the implications of the current study for understandings of what a text is, and of emerging genres in new media. Chapter 7 illustrates how the fragmentation of media discourse on online newspaper home pages requires the institutional authors of the newspaper to construe, and to value news in new ways. Online newspaper home pages are a new way of telling stories. In such a semiotic environment, understanding the different timescales on which texts work becomes increasingly important.

Readers interact with online news texts on three timescales: seconds, minutes, and years. Beginning with the shortest timescale, newsbites and other short texts which appear on online newspaper home pages are read on a timescale measured in
seconds. Such texts ‘fit’ relatively well with existing notions of ‘what a text is’, as do the news stories which appear on story pages in online newspapers (many of which are also read on a timescale measuring in seconds).

The verbally short texts appearing on online newspaper home pages have little or no extended argumentation. Nonetheless, they are very important texts in online newspapers. They dominate the ‘prime real estate’ of the home page, and are the first news texts that readers typically encounter on any given reading of the newspaper (in many cases they are the only ones). As media discourse becomes less ‘linear’, short news texts such as newsbites and newsbits become more pervasive, and therefore increasingly important in understanding the construal of ideology in media discourse. As a result, the ability to analyse short texts and understand the ways in which they communicate multimodally (as examined in Chapters 7 and 8) also becomes more important.

In contrast with texts of such ‘elemental’ genres (Martin & Rose, 2008) or ‘mini-genres’ (Baldry, 2000) are texts instantiating macro-genres, which organise shorter texts of elemental genres into longer texts in a principled, coherent manner (Martin, 1994; Martin & Rose, 2008; cf. Christie, 1997, 2002; Piriyasilpa, 2009). The online newspaper is one such macro-genre which includes news features, editorials, commentaries, hard news stories, video reports, audio reports, photographic essays, and slide shows, in addition to the newsbites and newsbits on home pages and section pages. For convenience, we can call an entire edition of an online newspaper, when viewed as a single text, the newspaper-as-text. Readers are likely to interact with the
newspaper-as-text on a timescale of minutes (Barthelson 2002; Thurman 2007) rather than seconds.

An online newspaper is a non-linear text. The reader can choose their own reading path on the home page, and also from the home page by following links to any section of the newspaper.

Non-linear texts impose a paradigmatics. They select the elements that can be viewed and present them according to a certain paradigmatic logic, ... but leave it to the reader to sequence and connect them. (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, p. 223)

So, while the reader of an online newspaper is left to connect elements (or individual news texts) of the newspaper-as-text syntactically, it is the institutional authors of the newspaper, not the reader, who determine the ideological paradigm and the positioning of news stories therein (Chapters 6 and 7).

This is also the case in print newspapers. However, despite consistencies in their visual design (e.g. Barnhurst & Nerone, 2001; Evans, 1976; Kress & van Leeuwen, 1998; Utt & Pasternack, 2003), the degree of regimentation of story length, visual presentation of stories, and page layout on print newspaper pages is far less than that found in online newspapers, and the extensive use of newsbites (and other short texts such newsbits) in online newspapers also leads to a greater atomisation of news content.

Home page design (on both home pages functioning as Orientation in home sections, and home pages functioning as Briefing in content sections) plays an important role on this second timescale. On home pages, newspaper authors present
actors, events and issues they value as current and immediate. At the same time, the
design of home pages allows them to present other actors, events and issues which
may be less current, but also important in the value system of the newspaper. In this
way, ‘big’ stories or issues can be kept ‘simmering in the background’ of the
readership’s collective consciousness. On home pages, the news content of each
individual story is kept to a minimum, while actors and events in those stories are
valued relative to those in other stories (Chapters 6 and 7). Home pages, through
newsbites, highlight the ‘interpersonal peak’ of each story (Chapters 7 and 8), and
readers are kept well informed interpersonally on a range of issues, but well informed
ideationally only with regard to those stories they follow to story pages in content
sections of the website (cf. Barthelson, 2002; Holmqvist et al., 2003).

Over the timescale of minutes with which a reader interacts with the
newspaper-as-text, then, the structure of newsbites and newsbits (short on content, big
on valeur) and home pages play an important role in achieving the ideological
objectives of the news institution, whatever navigational paths the reader follows.

Turning to the longest of the three timescales, each edition of the newspaper-
as-text presents the institution’s version of what is important to know on a given day.
Over time, a cumulative store of knowledge of events, of important individuals and
groups and their typical actions is shared among the writers and readers of the paper.

At the same time, letters pages, feedback through other media, social
interaction between journalists (in their personal and professional lives) with other
members of society, blogs, published reader comments on stories, and ‘citizen
journalism’ mean that there is an ongoing dialogue between the institution of the newspaper and its readership. Viewed this way, each edition of a newspaper can be seen as one turn in a dialogue between the news institution and its readership - a dialogue which spans years, even decades (cf. Bakhtin 1986, p. 92; Lemke 2003, pp. 141-146). This dialogue can be called, for convenience, the newspaper-as-dialogue.

Thus, Bakhtin's terms, each edition of the newspaper-as-text may be considered one utterance, or one turn in the newspaper-as-dialogue (cf. Bakhtin, 1986, pp. 60-61).

However monological the utterance may be (for example, a scientific or philosophical treatise), however much it may concentrate on its own object, it cannot but be, in some measure, a response to what has already been said about the given topic, on the given issue, even though this responsiveness may not have assumed a clear-cut external expression. (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 92)

One story in a newspaper is a text within a text within a text: a story within an edition of a newspaper within a dialogue between the institution of the newspaper and its readership. The dialogue is complex and heteroglossic, and it unfolds within a particular dynamic and complex context of culture and in relation to the communicative conventions of the social institution of the newspaper.

Yet despite this dynamism and complexity, within each individual newspaper, the visual presentation of information remains remarkably consistent edition to edition, given the potential which exists for dynamism. Newsbites are constructed to a predictable length and appearance, and are structured verbally to meet both the visual demands of the computer screen and the social functions of the news institution. Homepages are arranged ideationally, interpersonally, and textually with a remarkable degree of consistency day-to-day.
Regardless of the differences in verbal and visual content between individual news stories (however often they are updated), each newsbite is positioned and read in a consistent ideological paradigm construed multi-semiotically.

Readers can still navigate to story pages and read news texts which are longer than newsbites - other news genres have not disappeared from online newspapers. Even so, longer news stories are mostly accessed initially through home pages. The tendency is towards shorter news texts organized in a rigid visual template, and readers interact with all news texts on very short timescales, measured in seconds or minutes at most. As discussed above, from a Bakhtinian perspective, their interaction with the newspaper-as-dialogue can be typically measured in years or even decades, and it is this text - the extended dialogue between a news institution and its readership and the paradigmatic possibilities it encodes - which grows in importance ideologically as readers interact with other texts on shorter timescales.

This development in the practices of news production and reception can be seen in relation to broader social developments.

The higher levels of the system are now buffered against changes in text-type and text content ... . Fundamental changes in the system now take place at longer timescales. The types of change at shorter timescales which were formerly significant matter much less at higher scales of organization, if at all. (Lemke, 2003, p. 147)

Viewed from this perspective, online newspapers are developing in such a way that a variety of shorter texts contribute to the unfolding of a superordinate text with a much more pliable syntactic structure, and which spans a much longer timescale.
As news stories become shorter and more atomised, the ideological representations in a single news text take on less and less significance, and the paradigm in which they are positioned becomes increasingly important. A reader’s interaction with an online newspaper is chaotic - a particular reading path cannot be predicted, and the path and exit point cannot be determined by the entry point and the entry conditions. Over the course of time however, collective order emerges from the chaos of individual trajectories, and patterns of meaning emerge. It matters less and less what a particular news text says (and it is increasingly likely to say very little in any case), and more and more what patterns emerge across the newspaper-as-dialogue. So as individual news texts become shorter and shorter, ‘the instantiation of the system in text’, or logogenesis (Martin & Rose, 2003, p. 267) by necessity traverses traditional textual boundaries. In such hypermodal texts (Lemke, 2002), a variety of voices and viewpoints can be comfortably accommodated within a dominant ideology which carries what Hall (1982, p. 81) calls ‘the warrant of “common sense”’.

Viewed historically, print newspapers emerged in a social context where they were providers (and therefore producers) of information. Over time, they also became gatekeepers. As competition developed between newspapers, and then with other media (radio, television), the gatekeeping role was shared, but newspapers had to package their product in ways that would maintain their existence. With the emergence of the internet, mass media institutions no longer gatekeep information. Anyone who wants to learn about any news story or issue can find the information on the world wide web in a variety of fora (often even in nation states where censorship is practiced). But structures of social inequality are reproduced on the internet
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(Golding & Murdock, 2000), so mass media institutions came to the world wide web with a head start, and still command a large audience.

In this social semiotic environment, newspapers depend on developing and maintaining a loyal readership in order to achieve their economic and ideological objectives. They must compete with other online newspapers - published the world over in the case of English-language online newspapers - and also with a growing array of traditional and new media.

In line with the historical, social, and textual changes brought about by the world wide web, online newspapers have evolved in a context where the control of access to information is almost irrelevant: the control over the value of information is where social power lies. And this is where home pages and newsbites fit so neatly, providing a wealth of short stories which function as ‘entry points’ to various sections of the newspaper. These stories are valued relative to one another, and their paradigmatic meanings are opaque, and relatively inconsequential on a timescale of seconds or minutes. On a timescale of years, however, their contribution to the ideology construed in the newspaper-as-dialogue is far from inconsequential.

SF theorists have studied texts unfolding over longer timescales for a considerable time. Examples include Fowler’s (1991) account of the ‘salmonella-in-eggs affair’ in the British press; Christie’s (1997, 2002) descriptions of curriculum macro-genres; Iedema’s (2003) discussion of the resemiotization of meetings into reports into plans into a physical building; and Henderson-Brooks’ (2008) account of change in a patient over the course of psychotherapy sessions. Studies such as these,
together with those of Djonov (2005, 2007, 2008) and Zhao (2010) which provide complementary perspectives on the nature of web-based texts, provide points of contact for the current research, and directions in which studies of the newspaper-as-dialogue may be extended.

In conclusion to this sub-section, the implications of the current study for critical analysis of the mass media are that the framework developed here can be applied to the analysis of ‘short’ texts, and also of collections of such short texts over time. In addition, the current study contributes to developing an account of the ways in which ideology is construed in online newspapers over different timescales. Obviously, there is much work yet to be done in this area, as our existing understandings of what texts are and how they operate are fundamentally challenged by the emerging genres of new media (Martinec & van Leeuwen, 2009). The ways in which online newspapers can mean are changing, and our descriptive tools need to move with them.

9.4.3 Implications for pedagogy

Considerations of pedagogical applications have received little attention in this thesis. Yet developing pedagogical explanations and approaches which can be applied to teaching online newspaper discourse (and to texts instantiating related genres) is an important long-term goal of the current work. This thesis has implications for pedagogy in two areas: language education and professional development for (prospective) media practitioners. These are considered in turn.
Looking first at the implications for language education, the work of Kress & van Leeuwen and their colleagues has already had significant impact on first-language (L1) literacy education in countries such as the UK and Australia. The theoretical and descriptive findings of this study can contribute to educational work in this area. But it is the area of second-language (L2) education that has particular resonance for the author of this thesis.

L2 education, especially in foreign-language (FL) contexts, needs target-language texts, and genuine communicative contexts for both teachers and learners. Newspapers have long provided a valuable source of materials for L2 contexts, but historically, access to target-language newspapers in FL contexts has been limited at best, and more often non-existent. The rise of online newspapers has changed this, and provides a useful source of texts for teachers and students in FL contexts, giving access not only to authentic target-language texts, but also to common and current discourses in the cultures where the target language is spoken.

Critical approaches to L2 pedagogy are well-established in the relevant literature, but multimodality is still a relatively new factor in L2 education. The current study provides materials and curriculum developers with explicit tools for developing materials and tasks which combine critical and multimodal perspectives on online newspaper discourse.

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86 In the field of second language education, a common distinction is made between second-language (L2) contexts (where the target language is widely spoken in the community in which the learners are situated), and foreign-language (FL) contexts (where it is not). ‘Second language’ (or L2) is often used as a superordinate term to cover both L2 and FL contexts, and this applies here unless otherwise indicated in the text.
By approaching newspaper discourse as multimodal, the communicative practices employed in online news stories and on online news pages can be explained overtly and systematically, and language learners can be given explicit multimodal and linguistic knowledge which enables them to read, view, and listen to news genres effectively and critically (see Callow, 1999; McCabe, O’Donnell & Whittaker, 2007). In addition, learners can use this knowledge and these communicative skills in the production of their own multimodal texts in a range of genres in the communicative environments in which they use their second language.

Turning to implications for pedagogy for (prospective) media practitioners, the newspaper journalists of the future need to be able to write for the web, regardless of whether print newspapers survive in something close to their current form, evolve into something quite different, or become extinct. The genres of online newspapers are evolving rapidly. Editors and journalists have learned their craft from centuries of institutional practices which have evolved with ink and paper. After less than two decades, pixels and screens have proven that their impact on the communicative practices of individuals and institutions will be at least as profound as that of Gutenberg’s printing press, probably more so. The better understanding that journalists and other institutional authors have of the affordances and constraints of the medium of the world wide web, and the better understanding they have of the ways in which visual design means, the better they will be at their craft and the faster they will adapt to the changes they inevitably face.

For both language education and professional development of (prospective) media practitioners, the key challenge will be to translate theoretical principles and
empirical descriptions such as those outlined in this thesis, and communicate them in a way that is engaging and of continuing interest to those who might learn them. To borrow and mix metaphors from both Kress & van Leeuwen and the language education literature, this will involve the development of ‘pedagogical multimodal grammars’ of online newspapers: i.e. accessible and tailored renditions of the descriptions provided in this thesis. Such work is already well established in the area of L1 literacy, and this thesis can contribute to expanding the domains in which this ongoing work is applied (cf. Callow, 1999; de Silva Joyce & Gaudin, 2007; Martinec & van Leeuwen, 2009). This, however, is another step in a larger project, and beyond the scope of this thesis (though see Appendices F and J).

In conclusion, online newspapers are likely to grow in importance for language education and media professionals. We are witnessing the rapid genesis of new kinds of texts which operate on a number of different timescales, and which cohere in new ways. And for so-called ‘digital natives’, hypermedia texts such as online newspapers, their home pages, and newsbites are as ‘natural’ as casual conversations, text books, television commercials, and comics. In such an environment, the development of pedagogical approaches based on theoretically consistent and rigorous description is vital if we are to avoid re-inventing the wheel at every new genre, in every new context, for every group of learners.

9.4.4 Implications: Conclusion

Online newspapers provide a challenge for the theories we employ to analyse and understand texts, for the critical analysis of such texts, and for the development of pedagogical approaches by which knowledge and understanding of such texts can be
taught and learned. These challenges are significant, and meeting them will require a range of approaches, and sustained effort. The current research has implications for meeting these challenges, and is intended as a contribution towards understanding of online newspapers and the roles they play in a range of social contexts.

9.5 Conclusion

Over the centuries, newspaper institutions have become hegemonic institutions, and the multimodal design of newspapers is an enactment of the social (re-)production of power relations: the power of newspapers lies in their discourse, and this discourse is fundamentally multimodal.

In the early 21st century, newspapers face discursive competition as never before. In the commercial and ideological ‘attention economy’, online newspapers must compete not only with a much greater number of newspapers in a globalised market, but also with other fora accessed through other media, both traditional (e.g. television, radio) and emerging (e.g. mobile phones and other portable devices). The numbers of social networking and other user-generated-content sites, on which anyone with an internet connection can construct and mass-distribute information and opinion quickly and cheaply, are growing, and the scale of this growth brings innovation, failure, and success, or in short, evolution.

The meaning potential of humanity is expanding rapidly. And with this expansion comes a potential realignment of power. Some see these changes as a great democratising movement, and power relations are undoubtedly at stake in a way that
they were not before the world wide web. But hegemonic institutions such as online newspapers are not sitting idly by. Indeed, they are scrambling to stake their claim on the web in order to maintain, or extend their hegemony. This is reflected in the rapid evolution of new forms of news discourse (Chapters 7 and 8).

Newspapers have always depended for their survival on being at the edge of information construction and distribution, and the institutionalised power and adaptability of newspapers remain as strengths. The speed of the evolution of the macro-genre of the online newspaper is remarkable. New genres such as newsbites, newsbits, ‘videobites’, slide shows, blogs, and image galleries are commonplace. Not only this, but story pages often allow readers to link these pages to the very fora that may collectively threaten the newspapers’ existence (e.g. del.icio.us, Digg, Facebook, twitter), fora that represent methods of communication that literally did not exist when this research project began. In this way, newspapers become integrated in readers’ web-mediated social networks.

But whether they do it by means of print newspapers, so-called ‘digital editions’, online newspapers, or otherwise, newspaper institutions will need to do a better job than the authors who publish on user-generated-content sites, social networking sites, in personal blogs, and in whatever communicative environments evolve in the future. The *Bangkok Post, People’s Daily, Sydney Morning Herald*, and the thousands of newspapers published around the world will need to continue attracting attention.
Newspapers came to the internet with an advantage, and the established, shared position of power they have held is reflected in the consistent semiotic structures by which they construe the world and relate to their readers (Chapters 5 and 6). But the environment has changed, and continues to do so. The ‘rivers of gold’ of advertising revenue are drying up; the relative monopoly on the ability to mass-distribute information is gone; rapid evolution on surprisingly short timescales, such as that documented in this thesis, appears to be the new norm. The construal of ideology is moving from extended argumentation in ‘regulated’ texts through which readers progress from beginning to end, to shorter texts which may be accessed, compiled, read, re-read, or ignored in unpredictable sequences. Power relations between readers, news institutions, and the actors and events represented in online newspapers are in flux.

Newspapers are responding and will continue to do so, and for those of us with an interest in them, it will be fascinating to watch. But whether the next generation of potential readers are as bothered will probably determine how long this particular story unfolds. Whether they survive in some form, or are overwhelmed by competing genres, the coming decades represent interesting times, indeed, for newspapers.
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