Multimodal discourse on online newspaper home pages:

A social-semiotic perspective

John S. Knox

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Volume II: Appendices

Department of Linguistics University of Sydney

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Appendix A:

Sample web pages from the corpus
Appendix A: Web pages from the corpus

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<tr>
<th>Bangkok Post</th>
<th>Sample pages from Period I:</th>
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<tr>
<td>Home page from home section</td>
<td>Home page from ‘News’ content section</td>
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<td>Mar 27, 2002</td>
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## Bangkok Post
Sample pages from Period II:

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<th>Home page from home section</th>
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<th>Story page</th>
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<td><img src="image2" alt="Home page from ‘News’ content section" /></td>
<td><img src="image3" alt="Story page" /></td>
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Sep 2, 2005 | Sep 15, 2005 | Oct 12, 2005
### Bangkok Post

**Sample pages from Period III:**

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Nov 1, 2005 | Oct 24, 2005 | Oct 24, 2005
### Appendix A: Web pages from the corpus

#### Bangkok Post

**Sample pages from Period IV:**

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**Dates:**
- Mar 3, 2006
- Jan 5, 2006
- Mar 27, 2006
### People’s Daily

**Sample pages from Period I:**

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Feb 14, 2002          Feb 26, 2002          Feb 26, 2002
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<td>Home page from home section</td>
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Appendix A: Web pages from the corpus
### Sydney Morning Herald
Sample pages from Period I:

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Home page from home section</th>
<th>Home page from ‘National’ content section</th>
<th>Story page</th>
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Sample pages from Period II:

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<th>Home page from home section</th>
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<th>Story page</th>
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<td>Oct 12, 2005</td>
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*Sydney Morning Herald*

Sample pages from Period III:
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<th>Story page</th>
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Appendix B:

Transcript of interview with a senior editor at the
Bangkok Post, January, 2007
Appendix B: Interview at the Bangkok Post

JK: How many years experience have you had as a journalist?

Ed: 30 years

JK: And how many years have you been at the Bangkok Post?

Ed: 29 years and six months.

JK: And how long have you been in an editorial position for?

Ed: I started as a proof reader at the Bangkok World newspaper - it was the afternoon sister paper of the Post at the time. So I started as a proof reader and I was in the proof reading room for three months and then I was promoted to the news desk and then was in charge of editing copy.

JK: So just to talk about the online version of the Bangkok Post which started in the about the mid-1990s I think.

Ed: right

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.

JK: Can you remember when you first became aware of it?

Ed: No, sorry.

JK: That’s OK. Do you know where was it first located, that you can remember? Has it always been on the 8th floor or was it ...

Ed: I think originally it was handled by the IT department - the information technology department: Khun E... and then a woman named D... She’s American and she’s married to a Thai man, and she was put in charge of the online service. She created the website for us and she asked me to contribute to the website, and I wrote a column called ‘____________’. It was a summary of the local news. I did that for about 2 years and then D... left so my column was gone - killed by the new editor - not the editor of the website but the Bangkok Post editor. He thought I spent too much time there then ...

[laughs]

JK: OK so when there was a new editor of the Post did that change the website very much or the way the relationship between the website and the ...

Ed: You have to ask S... what happened after D... left. I don’t know who was in charge, but I think there were still a number of people working for D... who just downloaded the text into the website everyday. So I think last year it became Digital Post and Khun K... was put in charge. So what you see here - the current website - is the work of Khun K...’s team.
JK: OK. And that changed on the 1st of January last year - the design of the website.

Ed: right

JK: OK. 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

JK: OK. And I remember when we met seven or eight years ago, about that time some of the sections were being put together, some of the lift-outs, and I think there was some kind of question that [your section of the Post] might be put together with another section as well.

Ed: Yeah. I think it started after the 1997 financial crisis. We tried to cut costs and [my section] was reduced from 8 pages to 6 pages. It’s still 6 pages now. And a few years after that, the editor thought, maybe to save more money, [my section] should be merged into the main newspaper, and of course we resisted. We talked among ourselves, we signed a letter and sent it to the editor that we disagreed with the idea.

JK: And now, once upon a time, on the home page for example, [your section of the 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.
JK: So in your experience, do journalists consider the online version of the newspaper an important way that their work is represented?

Ed: Yes. Young people nowadays - even my children - they don’t read the real newspaper anymore. They have their own PC and then they read. They spend more time with the computer now, and if you go abroad and talk to the Thai students they all read it online. So it’s a new - it’s a revolution to me, right, and it’s a good development I think for the newspaper. And whether the real paper will die soon or in the next decade, I think it doesn’t matter, as long as we can do our job as a journalist and people can read us.

JK: Do you think there should be more - or would you like to have more liaison between Post Digital and for example [your section of the Post]? Would you like to have more say in how [your section] is put online?

Ed: Well as I know now, they can click on [my section] now. They can read the main story and the columns. I don’t read it every Sunday so I might miss something, but as far as I understand it’s Post Digital who are responsible for presenting the content of the paper as it is so the reader can get all the sections and columns that appear in the actual newspaper. Because now they can click on the real pages and get the full pages ...

JK: Oh yeah

Ed: but I think they probably have to pay extra, I’m not sure.

JK: I think they have to pay. I think that’s an outside service, Yeah. Is that a change? In terms of the hardcopy version, how much say do you and your staff have in terms of the layout - how it’s going to look. I mean is that a part of ...

Ed: Yeah - we look at the layout and then if we don’t like it sometimes we tell the layout man, okay: “Please make the picture larger.” Maybe: “One photo is enough. You just throw that out. Make it a big picture [with] more impact.” Something like that.

JK: So this is quite a change then - in terms of putting [your section of the Post] online. That part of the process has now gone somewhere else, and out of your control? Or out of your communication, anyway.

Ed: Well I think we communicate with the layout person all the time. Friday is our busiest day. They have to finish all the pages. We look at the pages. We check, we proof read them.

JK: But I guess what I mean is comparing that to online. You have a lot of power over, or a lot of input into that decision making there, but then online you don’t. As I understand from what you’ve said, you don’t really have input into the layout, or the ...

Ed: We do - we do.
JK: Oh - OK.

Ed: Although, well, the layout people don’t like to make changes, right? But we have a good relationship with the layout team, so we try to give them early copy so they can lay it out really early. So when we want to make changes - mostly not major changes, just minor changes ...

JK: This is the hard copy version though, is that right?

Ed: Yeah, the hard copy version.

JK: But with the Post Digital version, you don’t have, you don’t ...

Ed: I don’t know. I don’t know whether - I have never checked whether they have shortened the stories or - I have never checked, so... maybe that’s a thought that I should.

JK: How much do you think that the digital version of the Bangkok Post and the hard copy of the Bangkok Post are the same thing, or that they are different things?

Ed: I don’t know actually. But I assume that it would appear on the website like what you can pick up in the morning. That’s my assumption.

JK: Do you think that the fact that Post Digital exists now and the online version exists, have you seen that lead to any changes in the newsroom, in the way that people work?

Ed: No, not at all. The news desk here, we have continued to do what we have done. I think that Post Digital, in terms of content, it doesn’t affect us at all, and I think that the idea behind Post Digital is to create more revenue for the company. And I understand it is making money - quite a profit.

JK: Is there anything else you’d like to say about the online version, or Post Digital, or ...?

Ed: Yeah, I think the online paper is the future - no doubt about it. We have to go online just like when we started the so-called pagination - doing the layout on the computer. I remember when we started using pagination there was quite strong resistance to it. A lot of people lost jobs - like the paper people. No more proof readers - which I don’t like at all. I think we do need proof readers. So now the job of proof reading is ours. Reporters and editors have to proof read. So there was a lot of resistance. I told the reporters, “We can not be left behind. When The Nation and other newspapers are using pagination, how can we not, and just say ‘no’? They are using it all over the world. It is a new technology.” So just like now, online newspapers. I think in a way it is good for the environment. We cut fewer trees probably. No more newsprint is needed - less news print is needed. I look at the brighter side, and I think it doesn’t affect the way we work. Maybe we have to work harder to update the
website every hour, and get flash news for the reader. I think that’s good. We have to compete with the television and the radio, and the computer helps us compete with them. Now you can check the Post and we can put in an update every hour, just like the television.

JK: Thank you very much.
Appendix C:

Transcript of interview with a senior editor at the *Sydney Morning Herald*, July, 2007
JK: How long have you worked in newspapers?

Ed: I’ve worked in newspapers since 1990. So I’ve been in newspapers for 17 years, and I’ve been at the SMH for 12. I’ve been in my current position for 10 weeks.

JK: OK. And how long have you been in online newspapers as opposed to traditional newspapers?

Ed: 10 weeks.

JK: When the smh online started, when did you first become aware of its existence, and what was the general feeling in the newsroom and from the senior staff and the owners of the newspaper as to what it was and what it could be?

Ed: smh.com.au started just over 10 years ago. Like most online ventures associated with print products, it started relatively small, and I don’t think at that point anyone really knew what was going to happen in the online world. And that wasn’t just in terms of newspapers and information, but really across the whole spectrum of online. And of course then we had the tech boom and the tech bust and that’s when everyone then looked again and said, ‘Well, how is all this online going to work?’ So I don’t think that we were any different in that, in looking at how do you utilise this new technology? What do readers want? And how does it impact on your traditional print product? And so I think that like any new technology there were those who absolutely raced to embrace it and wanted to get involved, there were others who were more cautious, and I suppose that it continues to be we’re looking at how that delivery of news online affects the traditional print product. And I guess that is the question that was being asked 10 years ago, and in some ways it’s still being asked now.

JK: Obviously the institution supported it to some extent from the beginning otherwise it wouldn’t have existed, but when do you think it was that the institution got behind it and thought, ‘This is worth supporting properly.’

Ed: I think from fairly early on there was a commitment, that people could see that while we weren’t necessarily exactly sure where it was going, this technology was huge and that there was a need to embrace it quite early on, and the fact that we’ve had smh.com.au for 10 years I think tells that story. Yes, it certainly was a small operation, and I think probably in very general terms maybe 5 years ago partly ..., but it’s really been continual growth over that 10 year period, and more staff and more resources and a bigger site. But really it’s been there from - I’m trying to remember I think there was a Walkley award quite early on in smh.com’s life.

JK: I might be mistaken - you seem to be making a distinction between smh.com.au and smh online?
Ed: I’m using them as interchangeable terms.

JK: OK. How many staff are now employed exclusively in the online newsroom?

Ed: There would be over 20 people employed exclusively in what we call online, and that would include our reporters, our editing team, and our night editing team. So there would be over 20 staff there. And they look after areas such as technology, entertainment, we have general news reporters, we have news editors, and at night we have people who news edit the site and also who process the copy from the paper onto the site. And then of course we have many more staff from across the paper who are also filing to us all the time. So it would be over 20 now.

JK: Looking at the physical space, the boundary between the online newsroom and the traditional newsroom seems quite fuzzy or quite fluid,

Ed: totally

JK: is that the same in terms of the news practices? Is there a rigid division, or

Ed: <<overlapping speech begins>> No,

JK: is it quite permeable? <<overlapping speech ends>>

Ed: no. And increasingly it’s an integrated operation.

JK: Looking at the day-to-day practices of the online newsroom, to what extent would you say the work of the online newsroom is repackaging content from the hardcopy newspaper, and to what extent would you say that it is producing news that is ‘unique’, whatever that might mean?

Ed: Increasingly, it is around unique - well, yes, when you say the word ‘unique’ - increasingly, it is around ‘unique’ content, because the nature of the website is around breaking news, and around providing people with a constant update of information. So obviously we have access to the stories that appear in the paper, and they will certainly be on our site in the morning when people get up and they have a look at our site, but really after that it’s a constant process of updating those stories. So it’s very much a focus on updating that content so it’s news. So that as people come to it throughout the day they’re able to find out what is happening or get an update on a story they’ve already read, or see breaking news. Breaking news is really at the centre of what we do online.

JK: So it seems to me that that’s a bit of a shift from what the website was, say, 5 years ago or 6 years ago, and maybe you disagree with that, but if there is that kind of change and it’s moving more in that direction, do you think there’s a distinction between the language of online news and the language in the traditional newspaper? I’m talking specifically about the Herald now.

Ed: About the language - no. No I don’t think there’s a difference in the language, if you mean in a purely ...
JK: I’m not being specific at all, so whatever - however you take that.

Ed: OK. No, I don’t think there’s a difference in the language. It’s about news, and it’s about writing, so the content of the story will still often have that basic news element, the ‘who’, the ‘what’, the ‘when’, the ‘how’, the ‘where’ type thing. And the writing will still be very similar. What you might find sometimes in online, because of the nature of it, in a breaking news environment, you might put up two paragraphs to say that, ‘Peter Brock’s been killed in a car accident,’ and then add to that story as you go along. So I suppose in some ways, the way we might structure a story in terms of how it’s presented will vary over a course of several hours. Whereas in the paper, that is the fixed product. Does that make sense?

JK: Yeah. So if you visit that story over a period of say, two hours, you might watch that story unfold into what it might finally become in the hardcopy.

Ed: That’s right, yes.

JK: That partially answers my next question but I’ll ask it anyway because you might have something else to say on it. If you say that the language is essentially the same between the online and traditional newspaper, do you think that the news is the same in the online version and the traditional version?

Ed: I think there are some differences there. I think newspapers have changed probably over, say, the past decade, but I’m sure others would suggest to me that it’s been evolving over a much longer period. And you could argue that that’s partly in response to radio and television, in that people come to a newspaper with slightly different expectations around analysis, comments, feature writing, those kinds of elements. And I think that if you look at the stories that appear online and the stories that are in the paper, one observation that you could certainly make about them and people often do, is that people may come to the paper for that analysis or that commentary, and that would be an expectation - they would find that there perhaps rather than online, although I think increasingly online has that. Because online often is about the story that’s happening right this minute - if I can use an example again of, say, Peter Brock’s tragic death - we would have a story saying that this happened immediately and we would be reporting those updates. The story in the paper obviously might go in a slightly different direction because by the time the paper comes out the next morning people will know that news, but they still want to read about it. So how you present that news the next day is I think perhaps different to how it might have been presented online. So in online we need to be aware that often people are hearing this news for the first time. They knew nothing about this until 5 minutes ago - it only happened 5 minutes ago perhaps. In the paper - and this isn’t a factor of having had online, it has been there for several years - people may have heard that piece of news. So now they want to know, ‘What does that mean?’ And, ‘Where is this going?’ And, ‘What’s the story behind that?’ And so that’s, I think, where you get that slightly different take on the same story.
JK: I guess, say, 10-15 years ago before there were online newspapers, newspapers competed with television and radio, in the sense that you’ve just been talking about, to bring up-to-the-minute news even though there was that time lag. So radio and television would break things first, but I guess from outside the industry people saw newspapers as an alternative to radio and television news.

Ed: Most certainly.

JK: And then you would have, say, weekly news magazines which were more reflective and monthly news magazines. Do you think that because online newspapers are now competing with radio and television, and competing on their turf (being immediate), that that’s pushing the traditional newspapers more towards that weekly reflective ..., to take up a space that wasn’t there before in news reporting?

Ed: No I don’t. I don’t because I think what we haven’t discussed is that other role that newspapers play, that while they’ve always been about covering the events of a day and reflecting them in the next day’s paper, they’re also about that traditional investigative journalism, and providing and telling people about stories that are new stories they haven’t heard about from the day before, and they’re not part of covering an event that was a public event, or something that happened. And I think that’s part of the role of the paper that we haven’t really discussed, and that’s always really been there, is about ... it might be based on a freedom of information request that a journalist has gone and made, it might be an investigation that they’ve done, it might be an exclusive story that they’ve been able to write from their contacts. So no, I don’t think that’s necessarily true.

JK: As someone in an editorial role in the online version of the newspaper, do you feel then that there’s that kind of ‘turf’ - the kind of turf you’ve just been talking about, news turf - that you would not take the online newspaper into, or would be careful about treading there because that’s the role of the traditional newspaper, the kind of freedom of information and the more investigative journalism? Or do you see that there’s no conflict there?

Ed: I think that the divide that perhaps you’re alluding to between a traditional newspaper and online is ... 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 increasingly those are the decisions that are being made rather than perhaps the way that you’ve expressed it. I don’t think that divide [that you’ve alluded to] is how I would see it. 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.

**JK:** My understanding of work in traditional newspapers is that journalists out in the field will collect stories and then they bring them back, and the sub-editor is usually responsible for writing the lead and the headline or re-writing that. How does that division of labour happen in the online newspaper? Are there the same kind of roles and responsibilities in the online newspaper as the traditional newspaper?

**Ed:** Very similar - yes. We have sub-editors who write headlines and who put captions on stories, so it is quite similar, yes.

**JK:** Who is responsible for, for example, the ordering of stories, and which story gets ... [shows print out of home page] so for example, at the moment in the Herald online you’ll have one story and then a series of headlines [indicates a section of news in left column on home page].

**Ed:** Yes.

**JK:** Who makes the choices in terms of what is going to be the story? Do you call this [indicates newsbite] a news brief?

**Ed:** We would call that the write-off, the introduction almost and then you click on that and then you go through to the more full version of the story. In online, that is the responsibility of the news editor. The editor of the online newspaper also has some input into it, although that role is a slightly overarching one. But there’s a news editor and they are making those decisions minute-by-minute in consultation with the team of people who are there. They will say, ‘What do you think? Where should we put this one?’ Someone will disagree or agree. But they’re ... ultimately the news editor’s responsible for the home page.

**JK:** Talking again about the permeable nature of the newsroom and the relationship between the online version and the hardcopy version, I assume that there’s some kind of consistency between the structure of the home page of the website [and the news room]. So for example there’s a SPORTS section and I assume there’s a sport desk, and there’s a TECHNOLOGY section and I assume there’s a technology desk, and a BUSINESS section. Do those sections have much input into the way that their work is presented online? Or do those sections primarily see their work in the traditional newspaper, and then they may have some input, but for the most part they do their work and then they hand it over to you for the website.

**Ed:** It varies. Generally, stories that first appear in the paper and then they’re placed online, an individual reporter wouldn’t necessarily say, ‘My story has to be number one or number three.’ Perhaps let me take a step back and just give you a bit of background on it. We have an online sports editor, and we have an online business editor, we have an online technology editor, an entertainment editor. So those people are the first people, within their areas, they’re making those judgements, and those people work closely with those
areas. So our online sports editor is working closely with our sports team, and is a knowledgeable sports person. So when something happens with a rugby league player or there’s an announcement of a new team, they make a news judgement working closely with them. And it’s similar with the business team as well. And those people are responsible for their section. So they can constantly move things and update them as they see necessary.

JK: And they sit with the online team - I mean physically - with the online area or do they sit with the sports section?

Ed: It varies slightly, and that’s more a factor of our geography in this building. For example the sports person actually sits with the sports team. They’re quite close to us - just around the corner. The business person sits with the online team. But it’s partly around practical, production reasons rather than anything too ...

JK: territorial.

Ed: Yeah, yeah. There’s a little bit of art, and a little bit of science there.

JK: Just to take a step back, the Herald online has been through a number of design changes over the years. I started looking at the site in early 2002, and this is I think the 4th version since I started looking at it. How does that process take place? Who’s involved, what’s the time scale, how are the decisions made about what changes will be made and how are they implemented?

Ed: I can’t really respond to that question with any confidence because I’ve only been with the site for a short period of time. If I was to give you a general response to it, we’re constantly learning about how people use the web and how they want to use it. So often it’s quite user driven. I suppose like the paper does, there’s a sense that every now and again they need to freshen that up. But I’m sorry, I can’t actually tell you how our previous design changes have come about because I’ve only been here for a short period of time.

JK: Have you ever seen the web page like this [shows print out of home page]. Is this something that the people who work with the newspaper would see - the entire page? Or do you usually just work with a screen and not see the entire page? I’m interested from the perspective of the people who design the site. Obviously, a reader never sees something like this. Do you guys work with a page as opposed to a screen, or do you always work on screen?

Ed: We work here on screen. We could print this out at any point of the day, but no, we do work on the screen.

JK: The kind of software you use, does that constrain, do you feel, the choices you make, or is the design template there and you just work to the template?

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
Appendix C: Interview at the Sydney Morning Herald

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. But generally, no. Those pictures are that size, and it needs to be three lines, because if it’s four it’ll bust and turn around the corner. So yes, those elements of it are set for us.

JK: Could I just ask some specific questions about terminology. So do you have specific terminology for elements on the page. So for example, you said that this is called a write-off. Would you call this one [indicates image-dominant newsbite in central column] a write off, or would you call it something different? And what about these over here? And what about the one-line headlines?

Ed: Our terminology would be very similar to the terminology you would come across in any newspaper. It varies ever so slightly. I always find it interesting when you talk to someone from another newspaper, and you’ll say, ‘What did the w-off say?’ And they’ll say, ‘What do you mean, “a w-off”? Oh no, we call that the stand-first.’ So we use very similar terminology to what the paper would use, and that’s where the term ‘the write-off’ comes from, the bit at the beginning of the story. So you don’t have it on news stories so much, but you’ll have a headline and maybe a, you know, ‘John Knox has decided he was going to tackle dah dah dah ... . [writes]’ And then, all that bit. We would call it a w-off, some other newspapers would call it a stand-first. And some British papers have different terms for these things. Our terminology comes largely from the paper’s terminology, so we have headlines, and we have write-offs. Some of the terminology that we use around our page is purely geographical, navigational. So we will talk about: ‘It’s the right-hand side image [indicates image in image-dominant centre-column newsbite] on the page.’ ‘It’s the top-image [indicates image in leading image-dominant newsbite] on the page.’ ‘It’s in the top three [indicates first three newsbites in ‘top’ stories at top of page].’ So it’s very straightforward like that. Once again, quite similar to the paper, we would describe these small pictures [indicates images in hard newsbites in left-hand column] as thumbnails, describing their size. That’s really the main things I think - we’ve got headlines, we’ve got a write-off, we have pictures. We’d call that [indicates headline in image-dominant newsbite in centre column] a headline, blog [indicates image-dominant newsbite in centre column linking to blog], frame [indicates framed ‘what’s on’ coloured content frame in left-hand column], top-spot [indicates first hard newsbite in left-hand column] and that’s the headline. There’s some technical terminology that we use on the site that’s perhaps not applicable to the paper, but that more describes how our publishing system works. We’re publishing online, so it’s a different content management system that allows us to publish. So you might come across a
word like a strap, which refers to something that might contain a number of different stories - it kinds of holds it. So there’s some technology terms there that we wouldn’t use on the paper.

JK: The images here [indicates images in image-dominant newsbites in centre column], obviously they’re larger so they give you the opportunity to have something more like an image that you’d find in a traditional newspaper. In today’s site, there’s one image of a boy behind a globe for Earth Hour. And the same image is in the hard copy but it’s expanded and there are three little kids in the background, so it’s obviously been cropped. But these images [indicates same space again] let you do more. These images [indicates thumbnails in left column] obviously stop you from doing nearly as much because they’re thumbnails and they’re so small. How do you feel about the role of images in online newspapers? How do you feel that it’s similar to and different from the use of images in hardcopy news?

Ed: Well, there’s a lot of research that’s been done around pictures online, and people who have looked at this in detail - you might have looked at the Poynter Institute, they’ve done some work on the use of pictures online. The view from that research seems to be, and you can disagree or not but the view of that research seems to be that people don’t necessarily come to online with that expectation of seeing those larger kind of images that perhaps they expect in the paper. And people don’t necessarily come to online for that reason. They come to online for breaking news stories, and they want to read about what’s happened. Having said that, 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, and as I said the research seems to suggest, that’s not necessarily an expectation that people come to online newspapers with, and they actually do want to come and read those stories, and obviously the pictures allow you to highlight stories and visually make the page interesting, those pictorial elements of the site and obviously videos are very popular. So I think how pictures work and their role in online is changing.

JK: The Herald is a very good example of this: the images that predominate on the home page are close-ups of faces, and you can see here [indicates smh online home page], this one is from the other day. One of the exceptions to that is in the BUSINESS, you typically get the kind of ‘face’ of the company, if you like, their logo. Why ... why?

Ed: The nature of them being close-ups is partly a factor of the size of the picture, so it allows you to give that picture greater impact by having it close up. 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. So I guess 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.

JK: You mentioned the story of Peter Brock’s death, and that that might go up as a couple of paragraphs and then a little longer and a little longer, and even though with the write-off I might click on that and then go somewhere else (and you probably have far knowledge of this than I do), but I think a lot of people read the home page and might click once or twice and that’s it, and they use the home page as their source of news. Do you feel that this kind of shorter text, which is now more common in online news, affects firstly the way journalists work, and secondly the roles that news has in people’s lives and the way that people read the news?

Ed: That’s a very interesting debating point and obviously a large one in online. I think that there has been a view that people don’t want to read longer articles online, that they come to online for short snappy bites of news and that’s been a view that’s been held. And I’m sure that’s true, they do come to see quickly what was the problem on the harbour bridge, or catch a bit more information about a story that’s happened. But that’s not to say that longer stories don’t work online. I would point to the fact that this morning one of our leading stories online was Ross Gittins’ column from the paper. It often rates very well. We’ve had large pieces written by Paul McGeough, one of our leading reporters, and he’s written a number of stories from Afghanistan and Iraq over the years which have been extremely long pieces, and they’ve been very very popular. So I don’t think necessarily that the two can’t co-exist online. And in the same way people have always read newspapers like that. The ‘News in Brief’ column in the newspaper is always very well-read. People like that thing. It doesn’t mean they won’t read the 1500 word feature that’s on the inside page. So papers have always had that mix of stories and that mix of length of stories in the paper, as I think we do online. So where the story requires it, I think we can have longer pieces, and I don’t think it’s necessarily true to say that people won’t read longer pieces online. That’s not necessarily the case. Now that’s not to say that every story needs to be told in 1500, 2000 words, but that’s always been the case. We’ve always chosen - when making news judgements about a story - how much do we write on this story? That’s always been the case and we make those decisions I think in online as well. There’s no doubt that people come to it for breaking stories, but that’s not to say that by the end of the day the story that started as two pars is not much longer. And the other pieces that we do online - there’s a slight one here [indicates Tangent] - where you might have a related story with one story and then another story. And when you click through on a story you’ll sometimes see on the right-hand side under the picture there’ll be links that are actually related to that story as well. So you might be able to bring things together in online as well, and say to the reader, ‘Well, if you’re interested in that, you might like to know that these other things have happened as well.’ So you’re actually able to sometimes have articles there that were previous articles as well in a way that you can’t have in the paper. So you’re actually able to present information ... perhaps offer more to readers when they come.
JK: What about from a journalist’s and editor’s perspective. Do you feel like the prevalence of short texts on the home page and on the - I’m not sure what you call the section pages, for example the business page ...

Ed: You can call them sections, that’s fine.

JK: Do you feel like the fact that those pages have a lot of shorter texts, does that have any impact on the production of news, the processes?

Ed: Tell me a bit more about what you mean by that one.

JK: It’s a small part of a larger question, which is: what is the impact of online news on the newsroom, on journalists, on editors. Is this changing what you do?

Ed: I think that’s one of the great challenges of what we’re doing at the moment, and not one that’s just faced by the Sydney Morning Herald but by papers everywhere with online. Certainly one of the questions that I’m asked by my colleagues and by others is, ‘How do you make sure you don’t lose anything from that print product by having the online product?’ And that can cover a range of issues like quality, or story choice, or breadth, or all of those sorts of things. And I think that’s something that we have to look at everyday, and that people in my job are looking at all the time. I don’t think it needs to mean any loss in terms of what we’re doing for the paper. But that is something that we have to look at every day, and deal with each day.

JK: I would agree that it doesn’t have to be a loss, because it seems to me that it’s just a process of evolution and something that has to come on board. Do you think, without implying any loss, is there any difference? Do you feel like it’s changing what you’re doing?

Ed: Changing what we do in the paper?

JK: Yeah - changing the role of the journalist.

Ed: In some ways I suppose you could say that it’s changed the way that we work. Obviously we have a wide range of journalists in the newsroom, and so not everyone’s doing the same tasks anyway. Yeah, I guess there are some changes to the way people might work. Traditionally on a newspaper you would go out and collect the information that you need for your story and then you would sit and write it and you would have a deadline at the end of the day. Potentially with online you might now come back and file your story straight away. You might file your story over your mobile phone to a copy taker rather than coming back to the office and filing it yourself. You might record some audio on your mp3 player or another device and download that, so that when your story goes up - you might have a story and quote various people - but there might be some audio as well. Here is actually what was said. Or here is some interesting other material that I couldn’t actually put in my story but here I present it. So yes, it does involve some changes in the way we sometimes think about ... the way we package our stories, and yes, it might involve some
different ways of working in terms of that you might file your story, or a version of your story straight away and then you might write a slightly longer piece for the paper the next day. So those kinds of things. In some ways, some people actually might say that ... for some people it’s almost a return to what newspapers used to be like when we had afternoon newspapers, where people would be out on a story and the deadlines were so tight they might file their stories over the telephone or to a copy taker and that kind of thing. So in some ways some people would see it as something of a return to what might have been perhaps more of an afternoon-newspaper type of situation 20 years ago when we had afternoon newspapers.

JK: What about the role of, say typesetters. I don’t know how much this has changed because the design of the hard copy is done on computer screens now as well. Has the online newspaper led to changes in the roles of journalists, or editors, or sub-editors, in putting together the visual design of the story? Or has the person who does that in the traditional newspaper been taken out of that process by the original designer of the template? Is there any change in that area of things?

Ed: To the extent that online is different to a newspaper, I suppose that our front page on a newspaper can look different in some ways each day, although there are still ...

JK: [gestures to indicate 4 distinct spaces on the front page, 2 top and 2 bottom]

Ed: Indeed. And we are still limited by some production issues. It would be a rare front page that didn’t have a main photo on it. Every page tends to have a main photograph on it. There are certain elements that are similar in a newspaper. Obviously the look and feel of a web page, of an online page is different to the paper. So to the extent that they are different, yes, those roles are different.

JK: I haven’t really phrased that question properly. I guess the question I’m asking is whether journalists and editors have taken on the role of typesetters.

Ed: No.

JK: So as a journalist / editor, you write the story and then the responsibility for getting that visually onto the webpage ...

Ed: Yes, is someone else’s responsibility.

JK: And that division of labour is consistent between the online and the traditional version?

Ed: Yeah. The only area where you could argue this is slightly different is with blogs, and that journalists who write blogs put them into the system where they can be subbed, and then they can put them up themselves, and then they would often moderate the comments that are going up. So if I can take blogging slightly separately, you could argue that is true of that. But no.
Generally, someone would write a story, they would file it to online, and a sub-editor would sub it, the news editor would put it up. There is one journalist who has been working in online for some time who has learned production skills, and so sometimes they will not be working as a journalist, they’ll be working as a production person and putting stories up. But they would not be putting their own stories up in the sense of, ‘I can put this up without any reference to anybody.’ No. People don’t write the story and then put it up by themselves, no.

JK: In some stories you have bylines, and in some stories you have the time given, and then in others you don’t. I guess I have two questions there. What goes into that decision - how do you decide which story has the time and which story has a byline and which doesn’t, or is that something that just comes out of the flux of the newsroom? Let me stop there first.

Ed: Do you mean in terms of these ones [indicates Byline in newsbite on home page] with people’s names?

JK: Yeah.

Ed: In terms of this section here, because it’s OPINION people come to it for the person rather than for the subject. People come to read Ross Gittins, or Richard Ackland, or any of our columnists, they would come to them to read them rather than the subject, and so we choose to put their names first. It’s purely an editorial decision: do we put them on byline? I mean, it will always be on story level. Whether or not we put it in that section will depend on space and perhaps if that person is well-known for writing in this area and that kind of thing. It’s an editorial decision - there’s no hard or fast rule around it.

JK: And once upon a time, 2002-2003, there weren’t any bylines in stories. There’s some research which reports from the States that at some stage journalists, and especially freelancers sat up and said, ‘Hang on. We’re writing once but we’re bringing income twice to the institution so we want the credit in both places.’ Did that ever come up as an issue here, or has the use of bylines in the online newspaper in addition to the hardcopy newspaper just come out of the natural process of evolution?

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.

JK: Is there anything else you’d like to say about online newspapers? Present? Future?

Ed: It’s a really exciting place to work in them. The thing that we know about them is that they’re constantly changing, and that’s driven largely by our readers and what they’re looking for.

JK: Thanks so much for your time.
Appendix D:

Ethics documentation: Participant Consent Form, and Participant Information Statement
PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

I, ..................................................... , give consent to my participation in the research project

Name (please print)

TITLE: Multimodal communication in online newspapers

In giving my consent I acknowledge that:

1. The procedures required for the project and the time involved have been explained to me, and any questions I have about the project have been answered to my satisfaction.

2. I have read the Participant Information Statement and have been given the opportunity to discuss the information and my involvement in the project with the researcher/s.

3. I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time, without affecting my relationship with the researcher(s) now or in the future.

4. I understand that my involvement is strictly confidential and no information about me will be used in any way that reveals my identity.

5. I understand that the data will be made anonymous and stored on a password protected computer for a minimum of seven years, and may be used for comparison purposes in future studies.

6. I do / do not wish to receive a copy of the transcript before it is used in the research. [PLEASE INDICATE WHICH IS APPLICABLE.]

Signed:

Name: ........................................................................................................................................

Date: ........................................................................................................................................

Any person with concerns or complaints about the conduct of a research study can contact the Senior Ethics Officer, Ethics Administration, University of Sydney on (02) 9351 4811 (Telephone); (02) 9351 6706 (Facsimile) or gbriody@mail.usyd.edu.au (Email).

This sheet is for you to keep
PARTICIPANT INFORMATION STATEMENT

Research Project

Title: Multimodal communication in online newspapers

(1) What is the study about?

The study involves analysis of language and visual communication in news reporting on the home pages of three English-language online newspapers.

(2) Who is carrying out the study?

The study is being conducted by John Knox and will form the basis for the degree of PhD in Linguistics at The University of Sydney under the supervision of Professor Jim Martin.

(3) What does the study involve?

To inform the text analysis, the researcher will interview people involved in the design of news pages and the reporting of news in online newspapers. These interviews will be audio recorded and later transcribed. If specifically requested, the relevant transcript will be made available to the interviewee before they are used. The data will be made anonymous and stored on a password protected computer for a minimum of seven years, and may be used for comparison purposes in future studies.

(4) How much time will the study take?

The interviews will take between 30 and 60 minutes.

(5) Can I withdraw from the study?

Being in this study is completely voluntary - you are not under any obligation to consent. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent at any time without prejudice by contacting the researcher, the supervisor, or the Senior Ethics Officer at the University of Sydney (see below for contact details). If you do withdraw, will have the option of having any data already collected destroyed (i.e. audio recordings and transcripts deleted in your presence). Further, if you wish, you may withdraw or amend any information anytime during or at the end of the interview.
(6) Will anyone else know the results?

All aspects of your involvement in the study, including your identity and the information you provide, will be strictly confidential and only the researcher and the supervisor will have access to information on participants. Results of the study will be reported in the PhD thesis of John Knox, and may be submitted for publication in conference papers, scholarly journals or books. The interview may be quoted directly or indirectly, but pseudonyms or blank spaces (e.g. "[name withheld]") will be used wherever necessary to ensure that no persons (the interviewee, or any individuals referred to in the interview) will be identifiable in reporting.

(7) Will the study benefit me?

No.

(8) Can I tell other people about the study?

Yes.

(9) What if I require further information?

When you have read this information, John Knox will discuss it with you further and answer any questions you may have. If you would like a summary of the results of the study, you can contact John Knox. If you would like to know more at any stage, please feel free to contact:

John Knox (PhD candidate, University of Sydney)
(ph) 02-9850-8729 (email) john.knox@mq.edu.au

Jim Martin (Professor in Linguistics, University of Sydney)
(ph) 02-9351-4227 (email) jmartin@mail.usyd.edu.au

(10) What if I have a complaint or concerns?

Any person with concerns or complaints about the conduct of a research study can contact the Senior Ethics Officer, Ethics Administration, University of Sydney on (02) 9351 4811 (Telephone); (02) 9351 6706 (Facsimile) or gbriody@mail.usyd.edu.au (Email).
Appendix E:

Submitted manuscript, published as:

Abstract
This paper is a study of visual, verbal, and visual-verbal communication on the home pages of three English-language online newspapers from different national cultures. Important similarities in the visual-verbal structure of news stories and home pages between the three newspapers are identified. Each newspaper demonstrates a similar tendency towards atomization of news texts with which readers interact over short time scales, and a tendency towards greater consistency in the visual-verbal design of news across longer timescales. A genre-specific visual grammar for online-newspaper home pages is emerging in response to the demands of the new medium and historical and social trends in news reporting.

KEY WORDS
critical discourse analysis * genre * home pages * ideology * media discourse * multimodal discourse * newsbites * online newspapers * semiotics * systemic functional linguistics

With the emergence of the internet in the late 20th century, an online form of the traditional news medium of the newspaper has evolved. While the online newspaper has not yet lead to significant changes in practices of news gathering and writing (see for e.g. Boczkowski, 2002: 274), the impact of the internet on the packaging, distribution, delivery, and reception of news in newspapers has been profound.

The shift from traditional to online newspapers is part of the rise of digital technologies. All forms of communication can now be encoded, stored, and distributed 'using the same basic digital array of zeroes and ones' (Golding and Murdock, 2000: 79). Combined with the processes of globalisation and the move towards 'free markets', this results in an increase in the ability of large mass media organizations to transcend boundaries of time and space. Golding and Murdock call this 'the era of convergence', where the power of the owners of communications infrastructure and cultural materials is concentrated and extended (ibid.).

Information storage and media ownership are not the only converging phenomena. The ideologies of social groups who have access to power are similarly afforded by globalisation. Ideology is here defined as:
the processes (viewed dynamically) and systems (viewed synoptically) of meaning whereby individuals and groups position themselves and others relative to one another and to resources (material and semiotic). It is the discursive distribution/re negotiation of power (cf. Bernstein, 1990; Fairclough, 1992; Giddens, 1984; Hall, 1982; Martin, 1992, 1997; Volosinov, 1973).


The argument presented here is that digital, discursive, and ideological convergences are contributing to the development of a grammar of visual design in English-language online newspapers which crosses national and cultural boundaries. This emerging grammar interacts with existing verbal practices in English-language newspaper reporting, and the verbal news genre which has come to dominate online newspapers - the newsbite - has emerged as part of this process.

The development of online newspapers, the evolution of verbal news genres, and the development of conventions of visual design are significant social and cultural phenomena, and have far-reaching implications. This article is an initial contribution to a critical description of these developments, and draws on data from a larger, longitudinal research project.¹ The focus of that research, and of this article, is on the visual-verbal discourse practices of three English-language online newspapers, the Bangkok Post (Thailand), the People's Daily (China), and the Sydney Morning Herald (Australia).

¹ This project is the author's PhD research at the Department of Linguistics, University of Sydney.
THE TIMESCALES OF NEWS

Each edition of a newspaper presents the institution's version of what is important to communicate 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. From this perspective, a newspaper may be seen as an ongoing discourse between the institution of the newspaper and the readership. This ongoing discourse may be viewed as a text in its own right.

The impact of a single news text on a reader, and on a given society or culture is likely to be relatively insignificant if it is viewed as an individual communicative act. Cumulatively though, individual news texts constitute the ongoing dialogue between newspaper and audience. In Bakhtin's terms, each news text may be considered one utterance, or one turn in this ongoing dialogue.

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: 92)

The argument presented in this paper is that the development of meaning in this superordinate text, the newspaper-as-dialogue, is of primary importance in analysing the discourse of online newspapers.

Audiences interact with news texts on different timescales (see Lemke, 2003). An individual news story may be scanned in less than a second or read in a matter of seconds. This is particularly the case for short news texts such as those which appear on online-newspaper home pages. The timescale of interaction between a reader and a given edition of a newspaper is likely to be measured in minutes. In contrast, if we take a Bakhtinian perspective, the timescale of interaction between a newspaper and its audience in the newspaper-as-dialogue is measured in years, even decades.

Different time scales of interaction have been conceptualised as positioned along a scale moving from logogenesis (the development of meaning in a text) towards phylogenesis (the evolution of a culture - see Halliday and Matthiessen, 1999). However, if we consider a newspaper as a text in its own right (as an encyclopaedia, or edited volume can be considered a text), then online newspapers provide a challenge for traditional notions of text and logogenesis.

Unlike traditional newspapers which are published on a (typically) daily cycle, online newspapers can be - and increasingly are - updated continuously. The text of an online newspaper is dynamic and fluid in a way that most other texts (including traditional newspapers, and many other online texts) are not. In order to understand the meaning-making processes in this new kind of text, it is necessary to consider anew the boundaries of a given news text, and whether news texts (ranging from a single headline in a list, to a 1000-word opinion piece, to a two-minute video) in an online newspaper on a given day, or as it evolves over a longer timescale, are more productively analysed as separate intertexts, or as cumulatively constituting a superordinate text. In Lemke's terms:

the web of connectivity of a hypertext activates our expectations that there will be links out from any present text unit and that there will be no single default reading sequence of a main text to return to, or against which we should be reading the content of an excursus. In hypertext, there is only excursus - trajectories and loops on different scales without a single unifying narrative or sequential development of a thesis.

Hypermodality is the conflation of multimodality and hypertextuality. Not only do we have linkages among text units of various scales, but we have linkages among text units, visual elements, and sound units. ... In hypermedia, there are more kinds of connection than those provided for in print genres. (Lemke, 2002: 301)

Lemke argues, in fact, that this new form of textuality constitutes a new mode, that of 'traversals', where meaning and meaning-making crosses traditional textual boundaries, and where 'reading' paths are far less predictable (Lemke, 2002, 2003). The implications of these developments for conceptualizing text and logogenesis in online newspapers are taken up further in the final sections of this article.
Appendix E: Visual-verbal communication on online newspaper home pages

DESCRIBING THE VISUAL-VERBAL
There is a growing body of literature on multimodal communication which draws on the fundamental principles of the systemic functional model of language developed primarily by Halliday (e.g. 1985). In particular, Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996) and O'Toole (1994) have built on this multi-functional model of language to produce frameworks for analysing visual communication (in the case of the former), and paintings, sculptures, and architecture (in the case of the latter). In this multi-functional approach, three broad kinds of meaning are identified. These three generalized meanings are termed here interpersonal, representational, and organizational (see Martin, 2002 for a comparison of the terminology used in the literature).

- **Interpersonal meanings** position the content of a text in relation to the receiver, and in doing so construct a relationship between the producer and receiver of the text.
- **Representational meanings** function to portray experience, or a version of ‘the way things are’.
- **Organizational meanings** form interpersonal and representational meanings into whole texts which are cohesive and coherent.

A number of studies have drawn on this approach to critically investigate multimodal communication in traditional hard-copy newspapers (e.g. Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1998; Macken-Horarik, 2003) and web sites (e.g. Kok, 2004; Lemke, 1999a, 2002). Research into the design of online newspapers, however, has drawn on different paradigms, focussing primarily on useability and attractiveness as affected by graphics, visual presentation, and the structuring of news, using methodologies such as content analysis (e.g. Greer and Mensing, 2004; Li, 2002) and interviews and surveys of news producers and receivers (e.g. Lowrey, 1999, 2004; Utt and Pasternack, 2003). A number of critical studies of online newspapers have used similar methodologies (e.g. Barnhurst, 2002; Dimitrova et al., 2003; Singer, 2003).

Overall, the impact of the visual demands of the computer screen on verbal newspaper discourse, and the visual design of online newspapers, remain relatively unresearched from a critical perspective (though see Boczkowski, 2004; Cooke, 2003; Engebresten, 2000), and have yet to be described from a systemic-functional perspective. In this paper, descriptions of verbal news genres developed by Iedema, Feez and White (1994; see also White, 1997, 2003), and the visual grammar developed by Kress and Van Leeuwen (e.g. 1996, 1998) are used as points of departure. It is argued that in order to provide a satisfactory account of visual-verbal communication on online-newspaper home pages, it is necessary to extend these frameworks.

DESCRIBING THE VERBAL: NEWSBITES
The entry point to an online newspaper is the **home page**, which functions to orient the reader to the newspaper. Organizationally, home pages provide navigational information and links. Interpersonally, they establish the authority of the voice of the newspaper, value the content presented visually and verbally, and establish communality among the authors and readers of the newspaper by building familiarity. Representationally, online-newspaper home pages orient the reader by providing an overview of the news of the day from various news categories, and in particular that news valued by the authors of the newspaper as being most important (see Cooke, 2003; Kok, 2004; Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996, 1998; Nielsen and Tahir, 2002; Thurstun, 2004). Figures 1, 2, and 3 show the ‘first screen’ of the home page of the Bangkok Post, the People’s Daily, and the Sydney Morning Herald respectively, all from 26 February 2002.
Appendix E: Visual-verbal communication on online newspaper home pages

Figure 1: ‘First screen’ of Bangkok Post home page, 26 February 2002

Figure 2: ‘First screen’ of People's Daily home page, 26 February 2002
Appendix E: Visual-verbal communication on online newspaper home pages

In addition to the home page, online newspapers have section pages, such as the 'domestic news' page, the 'international news' page, and the 'sport news' page (however named in individual newspapers). Section pages function to brief the reader about the news classified as relevant to (and significant enough to appear in) the particular section of the newspaper (domestic, sport, commentary, and so on). Home pages and section pages offer links to story pages, which are typically dominated by the text of one and only one news story, which may instantiate any of a variety of news genres (e.g. editorial, hard news story, feature - see Iedema, et al., 1994). The text of a story page may be primarily verbal-visual ('traditional' written news stories) or aural-visual (sound clips, or video clips). This article focuses primarily on the interaction between the visual and the verbal on home pages.

Each home page is a complex sign, consisting of a range of visual and visual-verbal signs which function as coherent structural elements. These signs employ resources such as colour, sound, image, animation, video, and verbal text as afforded by hypertext; interact with other comparable units on the page; and perform communicative (and therefore social) acts.

One of the central visual-verbal elements on a home page is a particular kind of news story, the newsbite. The newsbite is a relatively new genre of news story, which has evolved as a result of social and technological developments associated with newspapers in general and online newspapers in particular. Newsbites are found on home and section pages, but not typically on story pages. Examples of newsbites from the home pages under discussion are given in Figure 4 below.

Superficially, newsbites resemble 'newsbriefs' (Iedema et al., 1994), or 'single-sentence news stories' used to fill odd corners of traditional newspaper pages (Bell, 1998), and at first glance they appear to be little more than an excerpt from a 'complete story' appearing elsewhere in the newspaper.
Appendix E: Visual-verbal communication on online newspaper home pages

However, newsbites differ from newsbriefs functionally, structurally, and intertextually, and also function very differently from news texts on story pages, operating as independent texts in their unique co-textual environment to construe actors and events according to the institutional goals and ideologies of the newspaper.

Collectively (and they only appear collectively), newsbites function to highlight the stories valued by the institution of the newspaper as most important on a given day. Their social purpose is to present the focal point of a news story with immediacy and impact. They afford the institutional authors of the newspaper the means by which to visually evaluate stories in terms of their comparative importance (including by size, relative positioning, headline font size and colour, and inclusion of optional structural elements such as images), and are designed to attract readers to navigate to story pages in order to access longer (and/or modally different) versions of the same story. Every reader’s click on a newsbite provides another advertising opportunity for the newspaper.

Where a newsbite is linked to a video or audio story, it clearly cannot be considered an 'extract'. When linked to a written verbal news story, the wording of newsbites differs sometimes from that story. Particular newsbites also 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, and this leads in some cases to different wordings and different visual presentation of the ‘same' newsbite.

The relatively recent emergence of the online newspaper and the newsbite mean that the this new genre is relatively unstable at this stage of its development. Among the three newspapers, it is possible to identify three essential structural elements of a newsbite. The first two, the headline and the lead, are given the functional labels of Focus and Event respectively. The third obligatory functional element is the Link, which is typically realised by a separate hyperlink. Often, the headline also functions as an additional hyperlink, as with increasing frequency does an image (see following). Figure 5 shows two newsbites with these three obligatory structural elements identified.

In addition to these obligatory structural elements, newsbites also may feature an Illustration (realised by an image and used in the People’s Daily and the Sydney Morning Herald). Another optional structural element is a heading placed above the headline, typically in a smaller and different coloured font, which functions to place the newsbite in a wider social context and is given the functional label of Issue. Issues appear in the Sydney Morning Herald and on section pages in the Bangkok Post. In addition, Tangents - headline-only hyperlinks appearing with a newsbite - expand the potential for readers to follow one or more links to stories which are related to a given newsbite. Tangents are used the Sydney Morning Herald, and more recently in the People's Daily. Figure 6 shows the same two newsbites with these optional structural elements identified.

I offer four reasons for the emergence of the newsbite. The first is the historical development of the news story as a media genre in English-language newspapers over the 19th and 20th centuries,
Appendix E: Visual-verbal communication on online newspaper home pages

which has been discussed by Iedema et al. (1994: 90-106) whose account is summarised below (see also Bell, 1991; and Iedema, 1995). In the early 19th century, news stories were presented as chronological accounts of relatively unimportant events. Throughout that century, news increasingly became a commodity. As the audience for it grew, it became necessary to indicate the relevance of a given story to a larger audience whose values and interests could no longer be assumed. 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.

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, et al., 1994: 107). Additionally, by this time, visual devices of font and layout were used to indicate this nucleus of headline and lead. The remaining paragraphs each functioned as a satellite expanding on the nucleus, but textually independent of the other satellites. This text structure results in a news story which presents events in an order highlighting importance rather than chronological order, reflecting an increasing tendency to report stories that may not be resolved at the time of publication (or that may never be resolved). Although there were further developments over the 20th century, this nucleus-satellite structure has remained as the common rhetorical structure of hard news stories in English-language newspapers.

Iedema et al. (1994) comment:
[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 et al., 1994: 115, italics in original)

In the visual-verbal environment of home pages and section pages, this property of the nucleus makes it possible for the institutional authors of the newspaper to present news stories without expanding on the 'essential' elements, or the nucleus. Longer news stories (nucleus plus satellites) are relegated to story pages. As a newsbite, the nucleus is expanded not with satellites, but with a Link, and potentially with Tangents, Illustration, and Issue.

The second reason I offer for the emergence of the newsbite is, like the first, social. In addition to the historical development of the nucleus-satellite structure, there has been a move away from providing extensive information in news in general, and towards packaging it in shorter and shorter texts. The tendency towards shorter, and more sensational texts, or 'soundbite news', represents a fundamental change in the social practice of information distribution by news institutions. As news becomes increasingly commoditised, and is increasingly blended with entertainment, the textual products of news must compete in what Gauntlett (2000) calls 'the attention economy'. Soundbite news signifies an institutional tendency towards attracting attention rather than maintaining it. Though often associated with television broadcast and so-called 'tabloid' news, in a market place 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; Sparks, 2000).

Thirdly, text presented on a computer screen requires unique reading practices (Kalantzis, 2001; Thurston, 2000). It is not possible to scan large tracts of text quickly on-screen, and any long text requires the reader to scroll down the page. Newsbites allow the reader of the online newspaper to scan the news, and 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.

The final reason I offer is an extension of the practice of splitting news stories in hardcopy print in response to the values of immediacy and salience in the macrogenre of the traditional newspaper. Often, only a small part of a news story appears on the front page, in some cases only the headline (and perhaps an image), with the remainder of the story appearing on an inside page: so that the [front] 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 and Van Leeuwen, 1998: 205)
A similar practice is common in online publishing. Longer texts are divided into smaller chunks, which are then hyperlinked together due to the demands of screen reading (cf. Thurston, 2000). Thus, the practice of putting important news 'up-front' in hardcopy newspapers combines neatly with verbal practices used in other genres appearing in the online medium.

These factors - the social development of the nucleus-satellite structure in English-language newspaper reports; the social movement to shorter news stories across the mass media; the visual constraints on home and story pages necessitated by reading practices associated with the medium of the computer screen; and the existing predilection to split texts in newspapers to reconcile the demands of immediacy and salience on one hand and space on the other - dovetail in the newsbite. Newsbites dominate the 'news space' on the home pages and section pages of the Bangkok Post, the People's Daily, and the Sydney Morning Herald. Socially, the emergence of the newsbite is likely to have significant implications for news reporting and reading in the long term, as has the development of the nucleus-satellite structure and soundbite news. Textually, the impact of newsbites on other news genres is at this stage unpredictable. Scollon and Scollon have found that written Chinese news reports (both Chinese-language and English-language) commonly use the traditional qi-cheng-zhuang-he Chinese rhetorical structure or a variation of it, and put 'the significant point toward a position just past the middle of the story' (1997: 85). Also, a number of other common English-language newspaper genres (e.g. exemplum, exposition, review) do not have a nucleus-satellite structure (see Iedema et al., 1994: 198-200). Whether newsbites lead, then, to changes in the rhetorical structure of such genres remains to be seen.

At the time of writing, different forms of newsbite are emerging in particular in the Sydney Morning Herald. In one variation (see Figure 7), the newsbite is framed with a border and has less verbiage than is typical, the Focus becomes merged with the Illustration, and this dominates the newsbite visually. Across the three newspapers, there are changes over time in the use of Issues, Illustrations, and Tangents in newsbites, but further discussion of these developments is beyond the scope of this article.

![Figure 7: Variation in newsbites: Sydney Morning Herald home page, 15 September 2005](image)

The ways in which newsbites function as elements within the visual structure of home pages are considered in the next section.

**DESCRIPTING THE VISUAL: HOME PAGES**

While verbal news stories are presented as 'objective' accounts of important events, the subjectivity of the mass media's linguistic construal of events has been documented from a wide range of perspectives (e.g. Bell, 1991; Fang, 2001; Fowler, 1991; Hall, 1982; Herman and Chomsky, 1988; White, 2003). This tension between the mass media's institutional claims to objectivity on one hand, and the inevitability of presenting an institutional perspective in reconstruing events on the other, is reflected in the visual design of the home pages of the three newspapers under discussion. In this section, I present a brief discussion of the interpersonal visual meanings, which communicate a stance of objectivity. Following this, I move to a discussion of the representational meanings on these pages and the way content is classified visually, and then finally consider organizational meanings of framing, salience, and composition. At various points in the discussion, I refer to the structure of the online newspaper as a whole in order to provide an adequate description of the visual systems operating on the page. Throughout, the Bangkok Post, People's Daily, and Sydney Morning Herald of 26 February 2002 are used for illustration.

**Interpersonal meanings**

The interpersonal design of home pages contributes to the appearance of objectivity in news reporting in a number of ways which are consistent across all three newspapers. When one considers the potential for innovative design on websites (as demonstrated even in much of the advertising carried on
Appendix E: Visual-verbal communication on online newspaper home pages

online newspaper pages), and how they could choose to present the news, the conservativeness of the three home pages under discussion is remarkable (see Figures 1-3). 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: 146)

Visual elements on the pages are all squared - there are no circles or curves, no tangential lines, and no oblique angles, presenting a two-dimensional view to the reader. This squared, componential construction represents a factual, objective stance and a rational, Cartesian world view (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996). Further, this approach to layout presents a page which has a front-on, direct gaze at the viewer, demanding attention in a way similar to the traditional visual presentation of a newreader on a television screen (cf. ibid.).

The black text on white background of news texts on the page draws on the tradition of hard copy newspapers and the familiar world of print (see Boczkowski, 2004; Cooke, 2003). Coloured text in news stories on these home pages is reserved exclusively for hyperlinks. Traditional news, 'in black-and-white', is framed by colour in columns and bars, and interacts with the coloured font of hyperlinks and colour images. When pages are viewed as a whole, the white background and black text of the centre column of 'news space' of each page is clearly contrasted with other sections of each page, and signifies a modality of factuality, or what Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996: 169) term a 'Galilean reality' (see Figures 13, 14, and 15 below).

These visual features operate in harmony with the verbal grammar of headlines, whereby events are construed 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: 393; Martin et al., 1997: 70-71). Similarly, news texts are typically in past simple tense and presented as unmodalized, factual accounts. Those clauses which are modalized are generally projected by an unmodalized clause with a reporting verb, so that any subjectivity rests grammatically with important persons or witnesses to newsworthy events, and not the author of the news story.

The black text on white background of the news stories links the online newspaper to its tradition, and works with the colour scheme of each newspaper to establish the identity and authority of the web site, and to build a relationship over time of familiarity and trust between the institution and its audience. A detailed discussion of the colour scheme and choices of each newspaper is beyond the scope of this paper, but colour plays an important interpersonal and organizational semiotic role on these pages as described below (see Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2002).

Overall, across all three newspaper home pages, a factual and objective stance is communicated visual-verbally. While the 'hard' reality of the printed word in news reporting is maintained, the affordability of using colour in screen (as opposed to hardcopy) publishing means that colour also plays an important role in establishing an ongoing relationship between the newspaper and its readers.

Representational meanings

Representational meanings present a version of 'the way things are', and the verbal reporting of news continues to carry a large part of the semiotic burden of construing representational meanings in online newspapers. One important visual means by which representational meanings are construed is visual classification. In visual classification, visual objects of approximately the same size and shape are consistently spaced against a plain background, and are overtly or covertly connected in a taxonomical relationship (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996).

2 The masthead of the Sydney Morning Herald incorporates a circle in its logo, and advertisements in each newspaper sometimes use circular or tangential designs.

3 Issues in the Sydney Morning Herald appear in a grey font. In the Bangkok Post red font is used, but as mentioned earlier, Issues appear only on section pages and not on the home page of the Bangkok Post.
Newsbites on each of the home pages under discussion are approximately of the same size and shape, or where there are consistent differences (for example, in the *Sydney Morning Herald* as discussed below) they are grouped with others of the same size and shape. They are visually identified as members of the same class of item. The 'vertical elongation' of home pages interacts with this classification to emphasize a top-bottom hierarchy of importance.

Visual classification is perhaps best illustrated by the *Bangkok Post*'s home page, 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 8).

![Figure 8: Visual-verbal classification, Bangkok Post home page, 26 February 2002](image)

The use of coloured horizontal bars and narrow vertical borders (i.e. framing - see following section) clearly indicates this visual organization - 'General News' is headed by a blue bar, 'Business News' by brown, 'Entertainment' by purple - and the interaction between visual framing, and verbal headings provides a visual-verbal taxonomy of news (cf. Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996: 79-88; Unsworth, 2001: 78-85), or a representational structure as indicated in Figure 9.

![Figure 9: Visual-verbal taxonomy of newsbites from the Bangkok Post home page](image)

In importance, these classifications move from top to bottom and left to right in the taxonomy, with *General News* as highest in the hierarchy of importance (and most salient - see below), and *Real Time* as lowest due to its positioning beneath the other sections.

Similar, but more covert classification is used on the *Sydney Morning Herald* home page (see Figure 10). In the Herald, both the middle and right columns are occupied primarily by newsbites, with primarily black text on white background. Lists of headline-only hyperlinks in the centre column are also roughly the same size as newsbites. The two columns are separated by white space (another framing device), and differentiated by column width, by the colour of headlines ('harder' and more traditional black font in the centre column, the blue font and underlining of hyperlinks in the right), and by headline font size.
Appendix E: Visual-verbal communication on online newspaper home pages

Readers are presented with a visual taxonomy of news realised by different visual devices than that in the *Bangkok Post*, and also realising a different system of classification. In the *Herald*, 'hard' news appears in the centre column, and 'light' news appears in the right hand column. This classification is illustrated in Figure 11.

![Figure 11: Taxonomy of newsbites from the Sydney Morning Herald home page](image)

Classification in the *Sydney Morning Herald* is signified by the visual placement and presentation of newsbites, regardless of their linguistic content. For example, the *Herald* classifies a story on a conference presentation of urban design ('Brick venereal' homes killing town character) as hard news, whereas a story on the closing ceremony of the Winter Olympics (*Salt Lake farewells the world*) is classified as light news. These classifications do not rest on the immediacy of a story, nor are they a question of action opposed to reflection and comment (*Salt Lake* was more recent, and more recognisable as an event of interest to the media than a conference report on the historical development of urban design and architecture). It is quite feasible that the Salt Lake story could have been classified as hard news, and the town character story as light news. The institutional authors of the newspaper and the home page made a deliberate choice to construe the two stories in a particular relationship, and this relationship is signified by their positioning in relation to one other and to the other stories on the page.

Despite the visual differentiation between the two columns on the *Herald* homepage, the weak framing between them blurs the distinction between the two news categories (compare the overt and distinct framing in the *Bangkok Post*, and the clear distinctions in verbal content of stories in different classifications). That is, the framing suggests that the distinction realised in the visual taxonomy is topological rather than strictly typological (see Lemke, 1999b; Martin and Matthiessen, 1991), and this reflects the blurring of the boundary between information and entertainment in news reporting - a

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4 This is similar to Bell's (1991) 'hard' v 'soft' news distinction, but the terminology is deliberately different to indicate that the distinction here is based on visual classification and not verbal content / genre.
distinction which is becoming increasingly difficult to identify, and which the *Sydney Morning Herald* appears to have been struggling with considerably over recent years.\(^5\)

The other important way in which representational meanings are construed visually on home pages is in images functioning as Illustrations in newsbites. A detailed discussion of the use of images on home pages, and the logico-semantic relationships between image and text in newsbites is beyond the scope of this paper (cf. Martinec and Salway, 2005), but Figures 13, 14, and 15 (below) demonstrate that in February 2002, images carried a low responsibility relative to text for construing representational meanings in newsbites on the home page of all three newspapers.

*Organizational meanings*

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).

Framing is achieved by, for example, the use of borders or empty space between different elements; by consistency or disjunction in colour of backgrounds, text, 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 and Van Leeuw, 1998: 203). Framing is primarily an organizational system, but it also construes interpersonal meanings as colour and spacing contribute to the visual ‘ambiance’ particular to each newspaper’s identity, and help to signify the importance of (and therefore contribute to evaluating) elements on the page, and the relationships between them.

The system of salience creates ‘a hierarchy of importance’ among the elements on the page (Kress and Van Leeuw, 1998: 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 salient cultural figures. 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, and interacts with the representational principle of classification.

Like the visual systems of framing and salience, the organizational system of information value also construes interpersonal meanings on home pages (see below). Partly as a result of this, it is not always possible to distinguish clearly between interpersonal and organizational meanings. In the discussion that follows, framing and salience are considered primarily in terms of their interaction with the system of information value.

Turning then to information value, Kress and Van Leeuw (1996, 1998) argue that on traditional-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 and Van Leeuw, 1998: 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 and Van Leeuw, 1998: 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 and Van Leeuw, 1998: 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 12.

\(^5\) More recently, the home page of the *Sydney Morning Herald* has used a visual-verbal system of classification more similar to that of the *Bangkok Post*, with verbal headings and clearer distinctions between the content of stories in different classifications.
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The argument here is that the systems of information value operating on online-newspaper home pages differ from the framework outlined above in a number of important ways. 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 traditional 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 most important 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 and Tahir, 2002: 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 leads the news on that page, and so 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.

All three newspapers provide evidence that the visual design of their home pages recognises a Head-Tail opposition, and places content of high news value on the first screen. Each home page has a ‘default’ fold, 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 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.

In the Bangkok Post, the default fold is signified by the bottom of the frame which surrounds the category of General News. The four leading news stories comprising the most important news category on the page (see above), the newspaper's masthead, the most important navigational menus, and advertisements are valued as Head, appearing above the fold (see Figure 13, cf. also Figure 1).
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Like the Bangkok Post, the home page of the People's Daily provides a clear visual distinction between the first screen and the content below the fold, and this comes beneath the leading stories, which are presented as newsbites. The newspaper's masthead, the advertisement, and important navigational and content menus are also valued as Head. The fold is again indicated by framing, with a search tool spanning the centre column, and framing devices of background colour, font size, and font colour employed in the two side columns (see Figure 14, cf. also Figure 2). Apart from the three newsbites on the first screen, other news stories appearing on the home page are presented as hyperlinked headlines, and all are valued as Tail.\(^6\)

The vertical dynamism of each home page which gives rise to the Head-Tail opposition is balanced by horizontal consistency. In each of the three newspapers, content on the home pages is organized in three columns which remain consistent as the reader scrolls down the page. There are two horizontal compositional oppositions operating on these home pages realising two kinds of complimentary prominence.

The first opposition is between the middle column and the edge columns. On all pages (home pages, section pages, and story pages) of all three newspapers, the centre column consists of news content, is separated by spacing from narrower side columns of content, and is the widest column. The distinction here realises an information value of Primary-Secondary. Information positioned in the 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 middle column, the content valued as **Secondary** is subordinate in newsworthiness according to the newspaper's ideology.

\(^6\) The Head-Tail distinction is less marked visually in the Sydney Morning Herald than in the other two newspapers, but more recently the distinction has also become much more overt.
Appendix E: Visual-verbal communication on online newspaper home pages

The Primary-Secondary opposition is exploited differently in the three newspapers. As discussed above, the home page of the *Sydney Morning Herald* distinguishes between 'hard' and 'light' news, and this representational classification is closely related to the compositional opposition of Primary-Secondary. On the home page of the *Bangkok Post*, advertising, stock and weather information, and links to special features are included in the right column, outside the visual taxonomy of news. The right column on the home page of the *People's Daily* has similar content, and the left column has links to news articles, and to information about China.

In both the *Bangkok Post* and the *Sydney Morning Herald*, there is, in addition to the centre-edge opposition of Primary-Secondary, a left-right compositional opposition. In order to explain this adequately, it is necessary to go beyond the individual page and consider briefly the entire online newspaper.

Electronic 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, and this is not present in electronic texts.

Online newspapers, like most electronic texts, provide the reader with navigational devices to fulfil this function. Such devices realise organizational meanings - they allow the reader to traverse the online newspaper, and keep track of 'where they are'. Therefore, such organizational 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 newspaper.

In the *Bangkok Post* and the *Sydney Morning Herald*, the left column on each news page of the newspaper consists virtually entirely of navigational menus (given the functional term, *Navigators*). These Navigators are identical (and positioned identically) on all news pages (home page, section pages, story pages) of the *Bangkok Post*. The same is true of the *Sydney Morning Herald*. Additionally, each newspaper's masthead is located in the top-left corner, the so-called 'guaranteed viewing area' (see Kok, 2004; Nielsen and Tahir, 2002), and functions organizationally as the link between editions of the newspaper, and interpersonally to establish the authority of the text. Because Navigators and masthead are positioned identically no matter which page a reader accesses, the left column in each paper can be seen to function at the level of the newspaper. It is the point of departure, and signals the newspaper's orientation to the field of discourse, its approach to the 'news' (see Figure 15, cf. Figure 13). This column predicts what is to come in the newspaper and where it is to appear, rather than what is to come on the page. It is the newspaper's *MacroTheme*, which 'specifies a text's orientation to its field (its angle on its subject matter)' (Martin, 1996: 48; cf. Martin, 1992: 437).

This left-right opposition of MacroTheme-Rheme is complementary to the middle-edge opposition of Primary-Secondary, each realising a different kind of prominence. The MacroTheme-Rheme opposition signifies thematic prominence, or the entire newspaper's orientation to the field of discourse - the news. At the same time, the Primary-Secondary opposition signifies the newsworthiness of the information on the page.

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7 The masthead is of sufficient importance to extend visually beyond the confines of the left column, serving also to increase its salience.
8 See Martin (2002: 322–4) who presents Theme-Rheme as a complementary opposition to Kress & Van Leeuwen's Given-New.
In contrast to the Bangkok Post and the Sydney Morning Herald, the home page of the People's Daily places its key Navigators across the top of the page above and beneath the masthead (which is also in the top-left corner - see Figure 16, cf. Figure 14). These Navigators are identical and positioned identically on the home page and story pages of the newspaper, whereas the content of the side columns changes between home page, section pages, and story pages.9

A top-bottom opposition realises the information value of MacroTheme-Rheme in the People's Daily, which would appear to be consistent with the top-bottom organization of the traditional Chinese writing system as opposed to the left-right writing systems of Thai and English.

We expect such structures [as Given-New] to be culturally specific, and not necessarily applicable, in this form of realization, to cultures in which, for instance, writing is from top to bottom or from left to right. (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1998: 193)

9 On the 'China' section page of the People's Daily, the colouring, the positioning, and the items contained in each of the key Navigators differs from those same Navigators on the home and story pages. Additionally, one of these key Navigators is positioned at the top of the left-hand column as a vertical menu instead of horizontally across the top of the page. The top of the page is identical on the home page and story pages, and very similar on section pages. Since the re-design of the People's Daily, the visual presentation of these Navigators is consistent across all pages, with very minor variation in the linguistic items presented.
Appendix E: Visual-verbal communication on online newspaper home pages

But regardless of the expression (i.e. left-right or top-bottom) of these values, each newspaper's visual grammar includes a MacroTheme-Rheme distinction, and in each newspaper the masthead, located in the top-left corner of the page, is part of the MacroTheme.

In summary, all three newspapers pages show similar systems of visual grammar, though their realisations may vary. Compositional oppositions of Head-Tail, Primary-Secondary, and MacroTheme-Rheme are present in all three, and the principle of diminishing salience is also shared. The system of visual classification is used, though in different ways, in both the Bangkok Post and the Sydney Morning Herald, and all three newspapers employ similar interpersonal resources to construct an objective, factual stance while engendering familiarity with their readership.

TIMESCALES REVISITED: VISUAL-VERBAL LOGGENESIS

Despite being produced in different national cultures, similarities between emerging conventions of home-page and news-story design can be observed in the three online newspapers under discussion. Further, within each individual newspaper, edition to edition, the visual presentation of information remains remarkably consistent 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 interpersonally, representationally, and organizationally with a remarkable degree of consistency day-to-day. One contributing factor is that online newspapers are increasingly updated continuously rather than in 24-hour periods, so a design template which accommodates both content and reader is necessary.

On the three home pages, the verbal semiotic carries the main burden of construing representational meanings (predominately in newsbites), and interpersonal and organizational meanings as construed through the visual semiotic are closely related to each other, and to visually construed representational meaning (in the relationship between information value and visual classification, for example). This distribution of labour among modalities (verbal and visual) and functions (interpersonal, representational, and organizational) is a product of the socio-historical development of the macrogenre of the online newspaper. Ideologically, it works in tandem with approaches to understanding text that focus on representational meanings and ignore or disregard interpersonal and organizational meanings, and which therefore ‘ignore power relationships, presupposing institutional roles’; ‘ignore the limitations of genre conventions on possible new meanings’; and ‘minimize the ongoing threat to the social status quo’ (Lemke, 2002: 305-306).

This particular mix of visual-verbal semiosis has significant ramifications for news discourse at different timescales. Despite the differences in verbal content between individual news stories (however often they are updated), each newbite is positioned and read in a consistent ideological framework construed in large part through the visual semiotic. Put another way, it is possible to see the trend towards a consistent ideological mosaic in each newspaper, within which each news event is construed as a multimodal fragment incorporated into a larger whole. This has been described from a synchronic perspective in this article as a necessary first step towards understanding the visual-verbal structures which play a central role in the diachronic development of meaning in online news.

An online newspaper is a non-linear text. The reader can choose their own reading path by following links from any page to any other 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, the logic of Centre and Margin or of Given and New, for instance, but leave it to the reader to sequence and connect them. (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996: 223)

So, while the reader of an online newspaper is left to connect elements of the text (or individual news texts) syntactically, it is the institutional authors of the newspaper, not the reader, who determine the ideological paradigm and the positioning of news stories therein.

To some extent, this has also been the case in traditional newspapers. However, despite consistencies in their visual design (e.g. Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1998; Utt and Pasternack, 2003), the degree of segmentation of story length, visual presentation of stories, and page layout on hard copy newspaper pages is far less than that found in online newspapers, and the use of newsbites (and other
Appendix E: Visual-verbal communication on online newspaper home pages

short texts such as headlines which appear in lists) in online newspapers also leads to a greater atomization of news content.

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 can only be accessed initially through home pages and/or section pages, which in the three newspapers examined here are dominated by newsbites. The tendency is towards shorter news texts organized in a more 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 the genesis of this text - the extended dialogue between a news institution and its readership - which is coming to take prominence over the shorter news texts which constitute it.

This development in the practices of news production and reception can be seen in a fractal relationship 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: 147)

Viewed from this perspective, online newspapers are developing in such a way that a variety of shorter texts contribute logogenetically to a superordinate text with a much more pliable syntactic structure, and which spans a much longer timescale.

As news stories become more atomized, and the reading of news texts becomes more 'traversal', the ideological representations in a single verbal news text take on less and less significance, and the mosaic in which they are visual-verbally 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 can not 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 superordinate text. So as individual news texts become shorter and shorter, 'the instantiation of the system in text', or logogenesis (Martin & Rose, 2003: 267) by necessity traverses traditional textual boundaries. And in such hypermodal texts (Lemke, 2002), a variety of voices and viewpoints can be even more comfortably accommodated within a dominant discourse which carries what Hall (1982: 81) calls 'the warrant of "common sense"'.

CONCLUSION
Online newspapers represent new communicative and social practices which position the reader, the institution of the newspaper, and social actors construed in news stories in ways which are not immediately apparent and which are ideological. The structure of online newspapers and the visual demands of presenting news on the computer screen have combined with socio-historical trends in the production of news texts, and a new news genre - the newsbite - has emerged. A visual grammar of online newspaper home pages, distinct from that of traditional newspapers, is also identifiable.

Online newspapers are likely to grow in importance as part of an increasing trend towards non-linear texts. We are observing the slow death of logogenesis as we have come to know it - death by a thousand clicks, and the genesis of new kinds of texts which span greater timescales and which cohere in new ways. There is a pressing need to describe the evolving multimodal macrogenre of the online newspaper, not least in order that informed, resistant, and subversive reading practices can be learned and taught.

REFERENCES
Appendix E: Visual-verbal communication on online newspaper home pages


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Appendix F:

Submitted manuscript, published as:

Abstract
Despite the well-established view of language as context-bound, and the prevalent practices of teaching and learning language for communicative purposes, multimodal understandings of language have yet to become widely known or accepted in the field of second-language (L2) teaching and learning. Online newspapers provide a good example of texts with which language learners are likely to interact, and which are commonly used in many L2 classrooms. Reading these and similar texts, and learning to produce such texts effectively, requires an understanding of the relationships between language and other semiotic modalities. That is, teaching and learning language communicatively implies taking a multimodal perspective on language.

Introduction
The first generation of English learners born after the world wide web are nearing adulthood. For those who have cultural capital which gives them regular access to the internet, reading online texts on-screen is a social practice as ‘natural’ as reading print on paper. The demands made of language education as a result of this new semiotic environment are considerable, and place the onus on researchers to provide theoretically-grounded descriptions which are accessible and applicable to teachers and learners in classrooms.

This situation has led to developments in semiotic theory (e.g. Baldry & Thibault, 2006; Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996; Lemke, 2002; Martinec, 2005; O’Halloran, 1999, 2004; O’Toole, 1994), and in understandings of what it means to be literate in post-industrial societies (e.g. Alverman & Reinking, 2003; Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Jewitt & Kress, 2003; New London Group, 1997; Snyder, 1997, 2002; Snyder & Beavis, 2004; Unsworth, 2001, 2006a). Work in these fields has provided an empirical and theoretical basis on which to develop existing approaches to language pedagogy in ways that can incorporate an enhanced understanding of what it means to use language to communicate.

In order to become effective participants in emerging multiliteracies [i.e. multidimensional, multiple literacies], students need to understand how the resources of language, image and digital rhetorics can be deployed independently and interactively to construct different kinds of meanings. This means developing knowledge about linguistic, visual and digital meaning-making systems. (Unsworth, 2001, p. 8)

This chapter is intended as a contribution to bringing the discourses of second-language (L2) teaching and learning, multimodal discourse analysis (MDA), and multiliteracies closer together. The remainder of the chapter is divided into three sections. The first of these looks at the field of L2 teaching and learning, the place multimodal understandings of language and communication have held in it, and features of online newspapers which make them relevant texts for language classrooms. In the second, a single news story from an online newspaper home page is examined in terms of its text-image relations, and in terms of its potential as a classroom text for L2 learners. The subsequent section looks at the home page of the same online newspaper, and considers how stories on home pages, and home pages as texts in their own right, make meaning multimodally. The implications of this discussion for L2 classrooms is once again considered. Finally, conclusions are drawn about online multimodal texts and the field of L2 learning and teaching.

Multimodality in the language classroom
Multimodal perspectives on language and language education have only recently appeared in the literature on L2 teaching and learning. A brief consideration of the classroom practices of teachers and students shows very quickly, though, that multimodality is something that language teachers have understood intuitively for a long time. Reading skills such as skimming and scanning - mainstays of L2 reading pedagogy and textbook activities for decades now - require learners to pay explicit attention to the visual features of texts such as font size (in identifying headings and sub-headings, or interesting headlines in newspapers), font formatting (such as colour, bold, italics, and underlining in identifying entries in lists, key words in longer stretches of text, or hypertext), paragraphing (in order to locate topic sentences, or hyper Themes - see Martin & Rose, 2003), and figures and tables. In order to apply these reading skills, texts need to be understood as making meaning visually as well as linguistically.

Any language teacher who has taught a unit on job applications has spent time talking about appearance, dress, eye contact, posture, even walking into a room and shaking hands at the interview. These are not ‘add-ons’ to a successful interview performance - they are fundamental to the communicative impact of what is said, and are commonly taught along with the language of polite
greetings, talking about qualifications, and asking questions about the position. Similarly, the layout and appearance of the resume is as important to the success of the document as the linguistic content and its grammatical accuracy. In interviews, resumes, and even letters of application, meaning is made not only linguistically but multimodally, and language teachers have historically incorporated this reality into their pedagogical practices. Classroom presentations, language for guiding tourists, creative writing and the imagic use of words in poetry, the use of headings and figures in academic writing - all involve language interacting with other modalities (e.g. posture, gesture, eye contact, image, layout), something recognised and taught in many language classrooms for many years.

This is due, in part, to the rise and rise of communicative language teaching. While there is debate on what communicative language teaching actually means pedagogically and whose interests it serves (e.g. Holliday, 1994; Howatt, 1988; Li, 2001), it is axiomatic to the field that the basic aim of L2 teaching and learning is to enable learners to communicate effectively in the target language. As teachers of communicative ability, language teachers have, in many ways, incorporated the multimodal reality of authentic communication into their explanations of language use, into classroom activities and tasks, and even into assessment practices.

In this environment, newspapers have long been seen as a useful source of authentic and relevant texts to use in the classroom, giving learners access to mainstream media and public discourses which are commonly drawn on in a wide variety of social interaction (see Grundy, 1993; Krajka, 2000; Larimer & Schleicher, 1999; Olivares, 1993; Sanderson, 1999; Seedhouse, 1994). Target-language newspapers have not always been accessible in foreign-language classrooms, but the advent of the internet and the spread of online newspapers in the 1990s now means that these texts are much more available to students of a foreign language than was the case in the past. This increased accessibility has made online newspapers a particularly useful source for learners and teachers, and learners of English, for example, can read newspapers from all over the world, drawing on a variety of national and political perspectives and accessing a range of Englishes beyond the traditional ‘inner-circle’ varieties (see Kachru & Nelson, 2001; Warschauer, 2002).

Online newspapers, however, are not simply an electronic reproduction of their hardcopy counterparts. Even in those cases where online newspapers consist of ‘shovelware’ (where the verbal text is lexically and grammatically identical to the hardcopy - Boczkowski, 2004), there are important differences in the organisation of the newspaper and in page design which mean that discursively, online and hardcopy newspapers are different texts (Bateman et al., 2006; Knox, 2007a). This does not only apply to the newspaper as a whole. Viewed discursively, stories in online newspapers differ both syntagmatically and paradigmatically from stories in the hardcopy edition, even when they have identical wording.

Syntagmatically, the online news story must be accessed minimally by way of the home page of the newspaper (usually via a shorter version of the ‘same’ story on that page - see Barthelson, 2002, pp. 22-25), and possibly also from other pages which may carry hyperlinks to it. It is not possible for the online reader to reach the story in the same discursive sequence as that by which the hardcopy reader reaches it (and ipso facto vice versa). Therefore, for the reader, the online text necessarily enters into syntagmatic intertextual relations which are different from the syntagmatic relations for the reader of the hardcopy edition, and which therefore position the reader differently in relation to the text (see the following sections for an illustration of this).

Paradigmatically, the online news story is set in a network of visual, verbal, and visual-verbal relations which give each text a value. Because these paradigmatic relations are different in online and hardcopy newspapers, the value which the ‘same’ story can have in each edition is necessarily different (as illustrated below). Thus, while the same verbiage may exist in an online-newspaper story and a hardcopy-newspaper story, the text is not the same: it is not produced in the same way, it is not received in the same way. The same verbiage in different semiotic environments is not the same text.

In many cases, shorter versions of the ‘same’ story will be written for home pages and other section pages (e.g. the ‘National’ page, or the ‘Sport’ page) which carry a large number of stories. These short texts often differ significantly (both visually and verbally) from the ‘original’ story, and in fact represent new genres which have evolved with online newspapers. These genres include newsbites - the one-paragraph headline-plus-lead-plus-hyperlink stories which appear on online newspaper home pages and section pages; and newsbits - the headline-only hyperlinks which also appear on online
newspaper home pages and section pages, typically in lists (see Knox 2007a, 2007b for further discussion). Eyetracking research indicates that these new genres are central to the reading practices of online newspaper readers (Holmqvist et al., 2003; Lewenstein et al., 2000).

In fact, online newspapers themselves represent a new macrogenre (a genre which combines texts of other genres into a coherent whole, such as a newspaper, or an edited academic volume like the one in which this chapter is found - see Martin, 1994). This is hardly surprising, as macrogenres evolve with the demands of the communicative environments in which they function. The readership of the Sydney Morning Herald online is younger than that of hardcopy edition (Hartcher, 2006), and this is likely to be true of online newspapers in general for reasons discussed at the outset of this chapter. Online newspapers are read on-screen, and are likely to be part of an ensemble of communicative activities a reader is involved in at a given time (see Scollon, 1998). This is in contrast to the ways in which hard copy newspapers have been traditionally read - often on a train or over breakfast, or on a 'peaceful’ weekend morning (Holmqvist et al., 2003).

Newsbites and newsbits are short texts, and have evolved with the new medium of the internet and the practices of news production from the nineteenth to the twenty-first century (see Knox, 2007a for discussion). Part of what has driven this evolution of shorter texts is the conditions of reception of such texts. That is, reading online newspapers is a different social practice to reading hardcopy newspapers, and the consumers of such texts have different places for reading, different activities and times during which they read, and different purposes for reading. These differences are reflected in the different texts which constitute online newspapers, and the design of online newspapers as texts in their own right.

In summary, language learners who deal with online newspapers in L2 classrooms are increasingly part of a generation which has grown up with online newspapers, and with the social practices of screen reading and technology-mediated discourse (including computer-mediated communication and text-messaging). The texts found in online newspapers are not read in the same manner as hardcopy newspapers, nor are they composed in the same manner. It follows then, that if online newspapers are to be used as a resource in L2 classrooms, and if students are to learn to read, analyse, critique, and create these and similar texts in an informed and effective manner, descriptions of these multimodal texts must account for the ways in which they make meaning, in relation to their contexts of production and reception.

A crisis
The work on multiliteracies which has evolved with the educational demands of new media (including so-called ‘cyberliteracies’, Unsworth, 2001; and ‘silicon literacies’, Snyder, 2002) builds on work in the 1980s and 1990s, which saw literacy as socially situated (e.g. Freebody & Luke, 1990; Gee, 1990; Wells, 1987). One theoretical contribution to this movement was the work on genre theory that emerged from the so-called ‘Sydney school’ also in the 1980s and 1990s, and the genre-based pedagogy developed from it (e.g. Callaghan & Rothery, 1988; Christie, 1999; Derewianka, 1990; de Silva Joyce & Burns, 1999; Feez, 1998; Halliday & Martin, 1993; Joyce, 1992). This work described the linguistic features of texts, from rhetorical structure, through cohesion, to clause grammar and lexis, and described how texts function linguistically to achieve particular social goals. This section and the one following draw theoretically on the work done in these fields, and also the synergetic work in multimodal discourse analysis by scholars such as Baldray (e.g. 2000), Kress & van Leeuwen (e.g. 1996), Lemke (e.g. 2002), O’Halloran (e.g. 2004), and Martin (e.g. 2002).

The text shown in Figure 1 is from the home page of the Sydney Morning Herald online, of September 15, 2005.
This newsbite is multimodal. We can reproduce the verbal text, even with the same layout, but without the picture it is not the same - it does not have the same meaning. Figure 2 illustrates.

Figure 2: Verbal reconstruction of newsbite from Sydney Morning Herald online, September 15, 2005

Thus, to describe a text such as this communicatively, and to use it as a resource in L2 classrooms, it is necessary to describe the image, and the text-image relations, in addition to describing the linguistic features of the text.

The text in Figure 1 is in many ways typical of newsbites on online English newspaper home pages. Linguistically, it consists of headline plus lead, and it also has an overt verbal hyperlink - more - to a longer version of the ‘same’ story on another page of the same newspaper. Like many newsbites, it has an image. However, the visual structure of this particular newsbite sets it apart from many other newsbites in a number of ways. It is framed with a grey border, and polarised top-bottom. The image is merged with the headline, and the composite image-headline dominates the newsbite visually (see Knox, 2007b for further discussion). The text is very short, and this is one of the features of texts of this genre which makes them useful for the L2 classroom. Newsbites are short, usually grammatically straightforward, and report (and/or comment on) current events, which make them accessible and relevant to language learners.

A number of features of this particular newsbite make it an interesting text to examine in relation to language teaching and learning. The first is the relations between the verbiage of the headline and the story. The nominal group which forms the headline - OBESITY CRISIS - is highly charged interpersonally (a common feature of headlines), but relatively open in terms of experiential meaning. In other words, the lexical item crisis demands attention of the reader, yet the headline in its brevity tells us only that the crisis is related to obesity, and nothing more about its nature (e.g. has it to do with children? with men? with a strain on health infrastructure? with an increase in related diseases? with an increase in numbers of obese people? with the degree of obesity in those already obese?).

The story (consisting of lead only), in contrast, is less interpersonally charged (the lexical item weight is less interpersonally loaded than obesity; the lexical item ballooning in itself does not inscribe the same degree of negativity as the item crisis does). At the same time, as would be expected, the lead specifies the crisis in the headline: it further commits the experiential meaning of the text. Figure x illustrates this perspective on the instantiation of experiential and interpersonal meanings in the verbiage of the Obesity Crisis newsbite.

Figure 3: Instantiation: experiential and interpersonal commitment in verbiage

The second interesting feature of this text is the relations between the verbiage and the image. The image shows the bottoms of two obese people, and so there is also a relation between the lexical item obesity and the two obese people in the image, or what Royce (2002) calls intersemiotic repetition. Further, the image is set against a sky-blue background, and is shot from a low angle.
Appendix F: Online newspapers and TESOL classrooms

placing the viewer of the text slightly beneath the participants in the image. This gives the impression of the two bottoms being set against the sky, and combined with the visual and cultural stereotypical association between ‘roundness’ and obesity, creates a relation between the lexical item *ballooning* and the participants in the image, or what Royce (2002) calls *intersemiotic collocation*. Figure 4 illustrates these relations visually.

![Figure 4: Text-image relations in the Obesity Crisis newbite](image)

The relationship between the image and the headline is obvious. There is a correspondence between a physical/social attribute of the participants in the image and the verbiage in the headline (the lexical item *obesity*). Thus, the image provides a specific instance of the verbal abstraction in the headline - experiential co-articulation.

The relation between the image and the lead-only story adds a literal interpretation to the metaphor in the verbiage: direct semiotic association is made between the lexical metaphor *ballooning* (which instantiates the notion of increasing rapidly) and the two participants in the image (and obese people more generally). Verbally, we might say ‘like balloons’, but the point is that we cannot make the same meaning verbally - it is a pun that is not made verbally, nor visually, but *visual-verbally* (i.e. multimodally). This co-articulation of verbiage and image makes meaning in a way that neither verbiage nor image can do individually (cf. Caple, this volume, on whose work this explanation is based).

In terms of the interpersonal semantic system of *appraisal* (Martin & White, 2005; White, 2001), the subsystem of *appreciation* - where objects are evaluated in terms of their aesthetic value - is implicated, and a negative appreciation is made (technically, of composition). At the same time, the subsystem of *judgement* - where people are evaluated in terms of their character - is implicated, and a negative judgement is made (technically, of social esteem: normality - cf. Martin & Rose, 2003, pp. 35-37).

For language education, the implications are that there is more to reading this text than learning the meaning of lexical items and the rules of grammar by which they are combined. The text needs to be read as a piece of discourse, where meaning is made at a number of interacting levels - graphological, lexical, grammatical, rhetorical, and contextual - simultaneously (Gee, 1990; Halliday & Hasan, 1989; Martin & Rose, 2003; McCarthy, 1991; McCarthy & Carter, 1994). Further, meaning is made multimodally, by linguistic and non-linguistic elements (including image, layout, and colour), and their interaction. Thus, to learn how to read this text is to learn how to negotiate meaning using the resources of language in context, as they interact with other semiotic modes (see Kern & Schultz, 2005; Kress, 2000; Petrie, 2003; Royce, 2002; Stein, 2000, 2004; Stenglin & Iedema, 2001, Unsworth, 2006b).

It is important that learners are overtly aware that the wording of a news story, the image used, its composition, and the relationship between language and image are choices available to the institutional author of every online newspaper story, and aware that the combination of choices reflects institutional values of the newspaper. The particular combination of choices in this story subtly positions the reader to evaluate obesity and obese people negatively. This does not mean that readers are ‘duped’, nor that all will ‘buy into’ the implied evaluation of obesity. The point is that readers who are aware of how such meanings can be analysed and explicitly identified, and that they are a *typical* feature of texts, are likely to be more effective communicators (both receptively and productively), and better understand the language they are learning than if they had no such explicit knowledge.
Interpersonal meanings such as those described above are not immediately apparent, and are not the traditional concern of much L2 education where (like in much L1 literacy education) representational meanings have tended to dominate (cf. Lemke, 2002, pp. 305-6). The significance of understanding the role of interpersonal meaning constructed verbally and/or visually is an important dimension of reading image/language interaction. If ESL learners are also to become critical responders to texts, they need to learn how the visual and verbal construction of texts is positioning them at the same time as they are learning to access the meanings via language in English. (Unsworth, 2006b, p. 156)

Critical approaches to L2 teaching and learning are well represented in the literature (e.g. Canagarajah, 2001; Kubota, 1998; Philippson, 1992; Pennycook, 1994, 1999; Burns & Hood, 1998; Shohamy, 2001; Tollefson, 1995). The incorporation of multimodal understandings of language and communication into these discourses is less established.

Thus far, we have examined one newsbite, which represents one possible way in which the obesity story could have been construed. In the following section, the same story will be considered in terms of its function on home page of the newspaper.

**Front page home page**

As argued above, the *Obesity Crisis* newsbite represents a set of choices on the part of the institution of the newspaper as to how this particular story could be presented to the reading public. An alternate way of presenting the ‘same’ story can be seen in Figure 5.

Even seen in isolation from the rest of the front page, it is immediately apparent that this version of the story comes from a traditional, rather than an online newspaper - headline and story font and layout are clear visual indicators of the medium of the hardcopy newspaper. A number of other visual and verbal differences between the newsbite and hardcopy story are also readily apparent. The image used in the home-page newsbite is completely different from that used in the front-page story. Also, quite clearly, the front-page story is verbally much longer than the newsbite (599 words and 14 words respectively). Importantly, the verbal text in the two stories is completely different (and the word *ballooning* appears nowhere in the front page story).

Newspaper stories (hardcopy or online) do not exist in isolation - they coexist with other texts on pages - pages which themselves are ‘(complex) signs, which invite and require an initial reading as one sign’ (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1998, p. 187). Thus, we can view newspaper pages as complex visual-verbal signs, or as macrogenres which ‘position genres such as opinion, report and advertisement in relation to each other, and provide them with different degrees of salience and framing, and thereby endow them with particular valuations’ (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1998, p. 216; see also Baldry, 2000; Knox, 2007b; Martin, 1994).

On the front page of the hardcopy *Sydney Morning Herald* (see Figure 5), the obesity story is prominently paced in the top half of the page, and is visually salient on the page due to the large space it occupies, and also to the font size of the headline, by far the largest on the page (with the exception of the masthead). This places it in a paradigmatic relationship with other news stories on the page (and indeed, with other stories in the entire newspaper) whereby it is valued as both important and serious (interpersonally salient, and compositionally *Given* and *Ideal* in Kress & van Leeuwen’s 1996, 1998 terms).

Returning to the home page of the online edition of the newspaper of the same day, there are two versions of the obesity story. The newsbite discussed in the previous section appears in the middle column of content. In the ‘main’ column of content, the obesity story appears as a headline-only hyperlink, or newsbit, with identical wording to the hardcopy headline: *Obesity: the new crisis for women*. Both the newsbite and newsbit are circled and indicated by arrows in Figure 6.
Appendix F: Online newspapers and TESOL classrooms

Figure 5: Front page of Sydney Morning Herald, September 15, 2005
© Fairfax, 2005. Used with permission.
This occurrence of the ‘same’ story appearing twice on the same page is rare in the corpus of online newspaper home pages I have collected over four years, and affords an opportunity to examine the ‘same’ story construed differently, and how the different multimodal realisations of this story, and the page-level relations each version enters into, result in different meanings. In the discussion that follows, I draw on the description of the multimodal ‘grammar’ of online newspaper home pages described in Knox (2007a).

Both obesity stories on the home page under discussion (i.e. the newsbite and the newsbit) have a hyperlink to the same page elsewhere in the online newspaper. (That page is dominated by one news story - in this case, the ‘original’ obesity story, which has the same verbiage as the front page.)
Appendix F: Online newspapers and TESOL classrooms

story in Figure 5. As argued earlier, this does not mean that the hardcopy and online versions of this story are the same text.)

Focussing on the home page, the newsbit and newsbite differ verbally in a number of ways (see Table 1). Grammatically, the headline-only newsbit is a single clause (the verb to be in this clause is realised by a colon) with obesity as Token, and crisis as Head of the nominal group functioning as Value. Thus the newsbit construes the story linguistically as a relationship where the social value of obesity (i.e. the new crisis for women) is assigned. In contrast, the newsbite construes the story as a saying (a survey says) projecting an event (is ballooning) in which the average weight of young women functions as Actor. In addition to these lexical and grammatical differences, these two texts also differ significantly in the multimodal meanings they make as a function of their relations with other elements on the page.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verbiage</th>
<th>Newsbit (main content column)</th>
<th>Newsbite (centre content column)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Obeseity: the new crisis for</td>
<td>OBESITY CRISIS The average weight of young women</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>women</td>
<td>is ballooning, a survey says. more</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word count</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Obesity: newsbit and newsbite

Each story is positioned in a different column. The columns on the home page are a visual classification device (Knox, 2007a; Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996). The wider, ‘main’ column of content (next to the left-hand navigational column - see Figure 6) carries so-called ‘hard’ news - the main concern of traditional newspapers. This column is separated from the other content columns by white spacing, and is also visually distinguished by the horizontal lines which, together with verbal section headings, sub-classify hard news into WORLD, NATIONAL, BUSINESS, TECHNOLOGY, ENTERTAINMENT, and SPORT (in addition to the unnamed ‘top’ news at the top of the page - see Figure 6).

The middle content column includes, features and commentary, traditionally termed ‘soft’ news. Each newsbite in this column is individually framed with a grey border (or with a grey background in the case of the initial, image-dominant newsbite - see Figure 6).

The newsbites in the right column carry stories which are primarily ‘tabloid’ in nature, and are termed here ‘light’ news (see Knox 2007b for further discussion). These three columns (and headings) represent a visual-verbal taxonomy of news content as illustrated in Figure 7 (compare Figure 6 above).

Figure 7: Taxonomy of news, Sydney Morning Herald online home page, September 15, 2005

The headline-only Obesity newsbit is classified as ‘hard’ news, and sub-classified as ‘National’, while the Obesity Crisis newsbite (as discussed in the previous section) is classified as ‘soft’ news (see Figure 6). Normally, a story appears in only one place on a home page, and the authors of a home page have a clear choice to make. On the home page of this newspaper at this time, the choice is: Is a given story to be classified as:

- hard news (and valued as serious)
- soft news (and valued as less immediately important)
- light 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 layout of the story, the use (or not) of an image, the choice (and cropping) of the image where used, and the wording of the story, as the two obesity stories in Figure 6 show.
The use of visual and verbal devices to classify content is commonplace on online newspaper home pages (see Knox, 2007a), and explicit knowledge of this can benefit language learners in their reading of home pages. Understanding such multimodal classification is important in understanding the intertextual relations between the different news stories home pages carry, and in understanding the semiotic and ideological framework the newspaper constructs in order to represent the events and social actors it chooses to portray.

By paying explicit attention to the devices of categorisation (such as horizontal bars and lines, colour, verbal headings, frames around individual news stories and sections of content, white spacing, the presence/absence of images, and column width), learners can consider the ways in which taxonomies of content are construed, and the extent to which they are:

- made overt (through naming, such as NATIONAL)
- left covert (or un-named, as in the hard / soft / light categorisation)
- made explicit (e.g. by the use of borders around sections of content on some newspaper home pages - see an earlier design of the Bangkok Post online in Knox, 2007a)
- left implicit with fuzzy semiotic boundaries (e.g. by the use of white space and column width in some newspapers - see an earlier design of the Sydney Morning Herald online in Knox, 2007a).

Social and institutional reasons for such choices - such as the blurring of ‘news’ and ‘entertainment’, and the division of labour in newsrooms including business and sports desks and the like - and their relationship with the way language is used in stories can then be considered in an informed and systematic manner.

Because home pages are read on-screen, readers never see the entire page. From this perspective, taxonomies of news content are always covert to some extent, whether or not they involve the naming of categories, as the reader never sees the entire page and the entire visual classification. The taxonomy underlies the reader’s experience of the page. Therefore, drawing taxonomies is a simple but powerful classroom activity which can raise awareness of the page behind the screen. It can enable learners to identify categorisation and the verbal and visual means by which it is realised, to question it, to consider how else content could be categorised (and by what other visual and verbal devices), and to apply this knowledge to reading the news online, and to writing their own web pages.

The two obesity stories on the home page are not only valued according to their positioning in the page-level taxonomy - factors such as column width and the use of verbiage and image also play important roles. The column of hard news is the widest column on the page, and is dominated by verbiage. Each of the named sub-sections of content (WORLD, NATIONAL, BUSINESS ...) has one or two newsbites, followed by a list of headline-only newsbits. This way of presenting news content provides the reader an opportunity to see an overview of the news valued as important by the newspaper, and to follow hyperlinks to stories about which they wish to read more. Clearly, the stories reported as newsbites in this column have more verbal information and greater visual salience than those reported as newsbits, and consequently are bestowed greater value by the institutional author of the home page. It is not only the number of words in a story though - the fact that verbiage dominates in this column signifies that these stories are valued highly by the newspaper, which as an institution has a long history of valuing the written word. The reading behaviour of readers of online newspapers as measured in eye tracking studies indicates that they may also place a higher value on verbiage than image (Barthelson, 2002; Lewenstein et al., 2000).

The soft-news column, narrower than the hard-news column, has less visual ‘weight’ (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996); this also signifies visually that soft news carries less importance in the value system of the newspaper than hard news. The visual salience of soft news stories lies primarily in the use of image (particularly in those stories close to the top of the page), and the fact that image dominates text in these stories again signifies visually that these stories are ‘less serious’ than those which are dominated by written text which, as stated above, has been the mainstay of serious print journalism for centuries.

The fact that the degree of seriousness of a story is signified in part by the visual dominance of text or image is reflected in the ‘playful’ nature of the verbiage in the Obesity Crisis newsbite discussed in the previous section, and can be contrasted with the Obesity newsbit which uses identical wording to the ‘serious’ headline of the front-page story in the hardcopy edition of the newspaper.
In summary, there are verbal and visual differences in these two short texts - one newsbite and one newsbit - which report on the ‘same’ story. These differences in the wording, layout, and positioning of these texts are consistent with the visual organisation of content on the entire page, and demonstrate that the relations between texts on homepages are realised at different levels simultaneously (see Baldry & Thibault, 2006, p. 144), and that language use is systematically related to other modalities. That is, communication is multimodal, and learning to use language communicatively is, in part, learning how language makes meaning in interaction with other semiotic systems. In fact, as news stories become shorter, readers must look increasingly to the multimodal meanings made in individual texts and on the pages which carry them. Likewise, language teachers and learners need to attend to the multimodal aspects of communication in online newspapers and other contemporary texts, written and spoken.

Conclusion
The multimodal design of online newspapers impacts not only on the meanings which are made in the news, but on the ways in which meaning can be made. This has implications for how people learn to read the news, and for how such reading can be taught in L2 classrooms. Home pages (like online newspapers more broadly) are non-linear texts (Knox, 2007a), and the news texts which appear on them are extremely brief, and communicate in novel ways. Thus, in addition to the reading skills needed for more traditional news texts, language learners need to develop multiliteracies in their second language if they are to become effective communicators in these and similar genres.

By approaching language as discourse, and meaning making 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. In addition, they 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 (cf. Chandler-Olcott & Mahar, 2003; Kimber & Wyatt-Smith, 2006; Lam, 2000; Wyatt-Smith & Kimber, 2005; Zammit & Downes, 2002).

By approaching language as discourse, and meaning making 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. In addition, they 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 (cf. Chandler-Olcott & Mahar, 2003; Kimber & Wyatt-Smith, 2006; Lam, 2000; Wyatt-Smith & Kimber, 2005; Zammit & Downes, 2002).

Communicative approaches to language teaching and learning, and the essential contextual nature of language, are already axiomatic to second language teaching and learning. The adoption and adaptation of multimodal approaches to communication and pedagogy does not require a revolution in classroom practices, but rather an evolution in keeping with the evolving communicative practices in which language learners are already participating.

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References


Appendix G:

Submitted manuscript, published as:

Abstract
Between February, 2002 and April, 2006, the Sydney Morning Herald online <www.smh.com.au>, an influential Australian newspaper which went online in 1995, showed a remarkable degree of change in the design of its home page. However, over the same time period, the use of images in hard-news stories on its home page was remarkably consistent, both diachronically and synchronically. These hard-news images are small ‘thumbnails’, and are most typically close crops of faces. Their small size, their consistent and limited subject matter, and their positioning in news stories represent a new practice in hard-news reporting, and raise questions about the role they play in the multimodal storytelling practices of the newspaper, and about the discursive practices of online newspapers more generally. This paper presents an analysis of these thumbnails using tools from systemic functional semiotics, and an investigation from three socio-historical perspectives (news photography, typography, and punctuation). On this basis, I argue that in the specific discursive context of the home page of the Sydney Morning Herald online during the time period studied, thumbnails function less as images, and more as an expression of the expanding system of language in computer-mediated communication.

Keywords
emoticons; images; multimodality; news design; news discourse; newsbites; online newspapers; photographs; punctuation; semiotics; systemic functional linguistics; thumbnails; typography;

Introduction
Since the mid 19th century, images of news events, whether hand-drawn, photographed, or ‘composed’ through photographic manipulation, have come to play a central role in the discursive practices of newspapers. There is a significant body of literature on the use of images in newspapers which examines, for example, the status of news images in relation to verbal texts (e.g. Barthes, 1977; Hall, 1981), the use of photographs in emerging newspaper genres (e.g. Caple, 2007a), and historical perspectives on the evolution of the social practices of photojournalism and newspapers (e.g. Bicket & Packer 2004; Caple, forthcoming a; Hartley & Rennie, 2004; Huxford, 2001; Sontag, 1979, 2003).

The literature on the use of images in online newspapers is, however, much more limited. A number of studies have examined the content of online newspapers from a quantitative perspective, and found, variously, that of the newspapers in their respective samples, more than half use exactly the same photos as in the print edition (Arant & Anderson, 2001); the majority use a dominant photograph on their home page (Utt & Pasternack, 2003); 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).

Other more qualitative studies have found that newspapers change photographs more commonly than anything else in migrating content from print to the web in order to make them suitable for the screen and/or graphics template (Martin, 1998), and have recommended “using fewer and smaller art images (especially photos and continuous tone images), and making greater use of typography as a design element” (Lowrey, 1999: 24).

In a more reflective paper, Perlmutter (2003) looks at the instantaneous and “instantly impermanent” (p. 5) nature of online newspapers, and considers the impact of the internet on the production of news icons, photographs which achieve “worldwide recognition across peoples, cultures, and generations” (p. 2). The situation as described by Perlmutter is complex and in flux: while the internet provides more avenues to publish and view such images, the world wide web has not yet produced one, publication is ephemeral and impermanent, and the control over what is and is not valued remains, for the moment, in the hands of the traditional gatekeepers.

In all this research, the small thumbnail images which commonly appear on online newspaper home pages have evaded critical scrutiny. This is not to say their use is not recognised at all. The third Standford-Poynter eye-track study (Outing & Ruel, 2004) compares the effectiveness of images of different sizes on home pages, as measured by the eye fixations of readers of mock web pages (and finds larger images more effective by this measure). And the prevalence of thumbnail images on web pages belonging to different institutions and serving different institutional, commercial, and individual purposes shows that web designers (professional and amateur) see value in including thumbnail images on their pages (cf. de Vries, 2008). However, the kinds of meanings these images construe on online newspaper home pages, the ways in which they do so in their discursive context, and the implications
of this for our understanding of semiosis and its evolution in new media have largely escaped attention thus far (cf. Machin & Niblock, 2006: 137).

According to the design principles and practices (including page templates) employed by various news institutions, thumbnail images are used to varying degrees on online newspaper home pages: sometimes extensively, sometimes sparingly, sometimes not at all. In this article, the home page of an online newspaper which has come to use these images extensively - the *Sydney Morning Herald online* (henceforth *smh online*) - is examined, and the ways that thumbnails function both on the home page as a whole, and in individual news stories are discussed, with particular reference to their relationship to the verbal text.

The aim of the paper is to show the ways in which thumbnail images contribute to the meaning-making processes of the discourse of the *smh online*. Further, it aims to show how the use of thumbnail images in one newspaper combines with developments in typography and punctuation, and how together, these historical and cultural trajectories create a semiotic environment where the traditional commonsense and theoretical division between language and image is fundamentally challenged. That is, rather than words and image combining to produce a multimodal text which coordinates different semiotic systems (i.e. language and image) to make meaning, this specific context sees thumbnail images subsumed into the system of language, as the affordances and the emerging conventions of the online medium expand the possibilities available for the expression of linguistic meaning in written texts.

In the following section, research on image-verbiage relations is reviewed, after which the data of this study are discussed. Following that, the data are reconsidered from the perspective of three socio-historical trajectories in turn, namely:

- the historical development of photojournalism
- the rise of ‘the new typography’
- the development of punctuation in writing on different timescales.

The final section revisits the nature of the relationship between verbiage and image on the *smh online* home page, and the implications of this for the description of language in new media.

**Image-verbiage relations**

Theories of language and communication are increasingly taking into account the reality of multimodality - that is, that any act of communication is carried by more than one medium: “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: 302). Important in multimodality is the interaction between different modalities (e.g. language and image) in making meaning. Lemke (2002) has described this multimodal interaction as making ‘multiplicative meanings’. That is, in texts where the two are combined, language is not simply added to image, nor image added to language, but the two interact to produce meaning in a way not possible in a single modality.

In research into newspapers, the importance of looking at the relationship between language and other modalities (such as image, layout, typography) has been evident at least from Barthes’ (1977) discussion of anchorage, illustration, and relay. More recent work includes Kress & van Leeuwen’s (1996, 1998) investigation of the layout of newspaper front pages, Barnhurst & Nerone’s (2001) work on the form of news (also de Vries, 2008; Machin & Niblock, 2006), and also studies of the design of online newspaper home pages (e.g. Knox, 2007; Bateman, 2008; Bateman et al., 2006).

In systemic functional semiotic (SFS) theory, image-verbiage relations have been studied in a variety of contexts, including print advertisements (Cheong, 2004), websites (Baldry & Thibault, 2006; Lemke, 2002), art works (Macken-Horarik, 2004); teaching materials (Jones, 2006; Unsworth, 2001); magazines (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996; Machin & Thornborrow, 2006; Machin & van Leeuwen, 2003); and children’s picture books (Martin, forthcoming a; Painter, forthcoming).

Specifically in the area of newspaper discourse, a number of studies have examined image-verbiage relations using SFS. Macken-Horak examines a news ‘event’ in which refugees on a crowded boat bound for Australia were falsely accused of throwing their children overboard by the Australian government of the day. News stories used visual and verbal strategies to represent refugees...
negatively, despite the absence of any evidence of the government’s claims. These strategies included ‘homogenisation’ and ‘negative portrayal’ of refugees in text and image (2003a), and the use of selective ‘framing’ of images and ‘voicing’ in the verbal text (2003b). Working together, text and image constituted ‘proof’ of an event that never took place.

Economou (2006) examines the evaluative meanings in headlines and their accompanying images in news features in an Australian and Greek newspaper. In a subsequent paper (Economou, 2008), she extends this work, and examines the way that press photographs instantiate different evaluative ‘voices’ or ‘keys’ (according to whether they are recording or interpreting events), in addition to describing the interplay in news features between large images, and headlines which reference culturally salient objects, events, or issues intertextually.

Caple identifies a relatively new news genre - the image-nuclear news story. These stories consist of a large, aesthetically engaging image, with a playful headline and a caption which may include both playful language, and story details. She argues that this genre functions to build a committed readership (forthcoming a), in part by providing a more engaging path for the reader from the front page to the editorial pages (forthcoming b).

Studies such as these work, with obvious justification, from the assumption that the verbiage in the news is language, and the images are not. That is, images and words have been viewed as interacting meaning-making phenomena which instantiate different semiotic systems (i.e. image and language) in a single, combined act of meaning-making. But this is not the only way that meaning can be made multimodally. To explain, some context must first be provided.

News texts on home pages have become, without exception, verbally short, and many stories are typically included on a single home page. This necessitates giving less information in each individual story on the home page, while at the same time engaging the potential reader and encouraging them to follow links to longer (or modally different) versions of these stories on pages ‘deeper’ in the website’s hierarchy.10 Just as a shorter verbal news story tells us less of ‘what happened’ than a longer story, thumbnail images are ‘brief’ by nature, and represent less of the human experience of a given news event than is possible with a larger image. Similarly, thumbnails can construe a relatively small range of the interpersonal values larger images can signify (see following section).

These limitations in the potential of thumbnails to mean limit the possibilities for home pages and newsbites (the short headline-plus-lead-plus-hyperlink stories typical on online newspaper home pages - Knox, 2007) to combine image and verbiage in the ways described by the studies discussed above. In the multimodal texts (i.e. both online newspaper home pages and the newsbites appearing on them) in the corpus described here, a number of the discursive functions of news texts which are typically performed by language are being expressed by thumbnails. In this way, they are not making multiplicative meanings in the sense discussed by Lemke above. Rather, thumbnail images are functioning as a kind of expanded graphology, extending the potential of language rather than interacting with it as a separate semiotic.

How this operates is explored in subsequent sections.

**Thumbnails on the smh online home page**

The corpus used in this study was collected using a version of the constructed week methodology, working on a five day week (Bell, 1991; Riffe et al., 1993). Five days worth of home pages were collected over three separate periods: February - April, 2002; September - November, 2005; and January - April, 2006 (a total of 15 home pages). These three collection periods spanned four home-page designs (Figure 1).

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10 Thumbnail images on the smh online home page are at once a product of, and a contributor to these changes in the institutional packaging of news (Knox, forthcoming c).
As Figure 1 illustrates, the use of thumbnail images on the *smh online* home page increased over time. In this corpus of home pages, there are 250 images in total, 94 of which appear in the widest, most salient column on the page which carries the most important news on the page (Knox, 2007). All of these 94 images are thumbnails, and it is these images, and their role in newsbites that this paper examines.

As Figure 1 illustrates, the use of thumbnail images on the *smh online* home page increased over time. In this corpus of home pages, there are 250 images in total, 94 of which appear in the widest, most salient column on the page which carries the most important news on the page (Knox, 2007). All of these 94 images are thumbnails, and it is these images, and their role in newsbites that this paper examines.

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11 From [www.smh.com.au](http://www.smh.com.au) and used with permission. All figures are in black and white, but original web pages and the vast majority of images appearing on them are in colour.
Appendix G: Punctuating the home page

The thumbnail images in the newsbites under discussion typically (i.e. in 93.5% of cases) depict a social actor identified in the verbiage of the story. In many cases, this is a human actor (Figure 2). In other stories, other social actors are depicted visually. These include social groups or classes (e.g. workers); corporations (e.g. Google, Telstra); elements in the urban environment (e.g. housing, water); elements in the natural environment (e.g. cyclones, bushfires); animals (e.g. sharks, jellyfish); and social institutions (e.g. stock exchanges, churches - Figure 3).

GUN CRIME

**Brogden to give police killers mandatory life sentence**

Mandatory life sentences for people who murdered police officers would become law under the coalition, NSW Opposition Leader John Brogden pledged today. [Full report](#)

**London bomber video: 'I am a soldier'**

(5:47am) One of the four London suicide bombers, in a posthumous message, said his actions were in response to the “atrocities” committed against Muslims. [more](#)

**Not Aussie enough: why John Laws is out**

[TrueJames] John Laws is set to lose over a third of his regional network to 60 Minutes presenter Charles Wooley, who is to become a talkback presenter. [more](#)

**Falconio and Lees spotted at diner, court told**

[5:09pm] Peter Falconio was with Joanne Lees at an outback roadhouse hours before he disappeared, a court heard today, contradicting evidence she gave last week. [more](#)

- NT judge demands apology over Darwin article
- Lindsay Murdoch [Latest evidence](#)

**Hussey gets call, MacGill hopes rise**

[Trevor Marshalled] It seems the best way to Mike Hussey’s heart is not through the stomach but through a neatly broken rib. [more](#)

- India’s Dhoni blasts Sri Lanka away
- Trapattoni’s century help England

**Reese carries off Gash**

Reese Witherspoon is named best actress for portraying Johnny Cash’s wife. [more](#)

- Looks can kill Oscars
- The Oscars of porn

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Figure 2: Newsbites with thumbnails depicting a human social actor identified in the verbiage

These images were analysed using tools developed in systemic functional theory. As discussed above, Figures 2 and 3 demonstrate that thumbnails visually represent an actor from the verbal story. In Martinec & Salway’s (2005) terms, there is a relationship of componential cohesion - “which relates participants, processes, and circumstances, or ‘components’ in images and texts” (p. 347; cf. Royce, 2002) - between headline and image (86 of 94 newsbites, or 91.5%) and/or between lead and image (93 of 94 newsbites, or 99%).

To exemplify, the image in the first newsbite in Figure 2 is related to the grammatical participant **Brogden** in the headline, and the grammatical participant **NSW Opposition Leader John Brogden** in the lead. Similarly, in the second newsbite in Figure 2, the image is related to the

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12 Most of the remaining 6.5% of thumbnails construe a social actor which personifies an actor in the verbiage, such as an image of a chicken for bird flu; an image of a balaclava-clad anti-terrorism officer for anti-terrorism bill; and an image of a female model for Fashion Festival.
grammatical participants *London Bomber*, *I*, and *a soldier* in the headline, and *One of the four London suicide bombers, his, and Muslims* in the verbiage.\(^{13}\) Thus, the thumbnails do not function to convey information that is not provided in the verbal story, but rather to visually represent a central element and bring it to the ‘front’ of the story, as a way of orienting readers to the newsbite (cf. Martin, 2002: 322).

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\(^{13}\) The kind of semantic relation between the image and each mention in the verbiage may differ - see Martinec & Salway (2005) and Royce (2002). Such differences are obviously important to the way these texts function as coherent wholes, but a full consideration is beyond the scope of this paper.
News images represent aspects of human experience. They do so by construing participants (human and non-human), the processes and relations in which they play a role, and the circumstances in which these processes and relations are situated (see Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996). The thumbnails in this corpus typically construe a single social actor. They do not have vectors (which construe actions, events, or processes of change) nor do they represent participants in terms of their class membership, their analytic structure, or their symbolic attributes (cf. Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996). They are in almost every case completely decontextualised, which gives them a generic quality (see Machin 2004), allowing the same thumbnail image to be used in different stories, which sometimes occurs. In short, they do not tell what happened; nor do they tell where, when, why, or how it happened (with few exceptions). Their focus in all but 6 of the 94 images (6.5%) is on a social actor in the story, on who. Thus, these thumbnails are less a visual medium for telling (some aspect of) a story than they are a participant in the verbal text (cf. Hall, 1981: 242).

In addition to portraying human experience, photographs construe a range of interpersonal meanings. For example, extreme close-up shots 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). In almost every case, the thumbnails on the smh online home page, due in part to their small size, are close-up shots. Even the images of a bushfire and a stock exchange (Figure 3) fill the viewer’s field of vision (as construed by the boundaries of the image) signifying an intimate relationship between viewer and object depicted.

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 (high shots looking down on the object construe power on the part of the viewer; low shots looking up construe power on the part of the object viewed - Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996) has less effect in intimate shots (Figure 4). Theoretically, intimacy (distance of shot) and power (vertical axis) are independent variables, but in practice they are related, and the intimacy signified in an extreme close-up ‘spills’ into other interpersonal meanings. Therefore, the overwhelming choice to construe social actors at an intimate distance (80 of 94 images, or 85%) limits the impact of other choices typically available, and typically manipulated for meaningful effect in newspaper images.

As well as representing experience and construing interpersonal meanings, 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, 2007b). Of the 94 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 online home page when using thumbnails are, again, limited when compared to the choices available with larger photographs.

In summary, the argument presented in this section is that the choices available to photo editors, page editors, and page designers when using thumbnails are limited. Firstly, almost every thumbnail portrays a social actor (human, social, environmental). An image not immediately and overtly connected to the verbiage will generally not suffice, negating the possibility of rhetorical effects such as juxtaposition and visual irony (cf. Caple, forthcoming b; Economou, 2008). Further, all images are decontextualised, so the choice of visually situating actors in relation to different contexts is not available: all context is provided by the verbiage. Due to the thumbnails’ extreme close-up nature, the effects of vertical positioning in relation to the camera are minimised. And compositionally, thumbnails restrict photo editors for the most part to centred, single-object images.

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14 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.
To explain the significance of the relative ‘lack of choice’ thumbnails provide news authors, systemic functional semiotic theory (SFS) can be brought into service. In SFS, typical patterns of structure (meaningful combinations of functional elements) are identified, and common structures/combinations can be grouped together and contrasted with structures which differ. In the semiotic system of language for example, different structural/combinational patterns can occur on the syntagmatic axis (e.g. Subject + Finite versus Finite + Subject in clause structure; or at a different level of abstraction, Orientation + Complication + Resolution versus Position + Arguments + Re-statement of Position in text structure). The contrasts or oppositions which such structures realise (respectively, in this case: declarative clause versus interrogative clause, and narrative versus exposition) occur on the paradigmatic axis (de Saussure, 1959; Firth, 1968; Halliday, 1976; Martin, 1992 - see Figure 6). This approach to the semiotic system of language has been applied to other semiotic systems, including visual design (e.g. Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996), news photography (e.g. Caple, 2007b), and to online news texts combining visual and verbal elements (e.g. Knox, forthcoming a).

By reducing the structural choices available in images (e.g. actors but not scenes, close-ups but not long-shots, centred but not juxtaposed), and also their possible combinations, thumbnails as used on the home page of the *smh online* effectively reduce the possibilities usually available in the ‘grammar’ of news photographs (on the syntagmatic axis), and therefore the potential meanings, or range of choices available to the authors of the *smh online* home page (on the paradigmatic axis). Martin (forthcoming b) has explored a similar phenomenon in verbal texts, where different but similar texts take up the paradigmatic possibilities of the system of language to different degrees. He terms this commitment, and describes it as “the degree to which meanings in optional systems are taken up and, within systems, the degree of delicacy selected”.

In the context of the *smh online*, the paradigmatic choices in thumbnails are so limited in comparison to other news images (see following section), that there is a question as to whether thumbnails share a ‘grammar’ with other news images, or whether their potential to make visual meaning has been reduced (or ‘under-committed’) to the point where their signification draws on the paradigms of the verbal co-text.

To this point, the discussion has treated the thumbnails on the home page of the *smh online* as images in order to demonstrate, from a theoretical perspective, the limits in their potential to make meaning. The following three sections trace historical trajectories which suggest that the interpretation posited immediately above - that thumbnails make meaning in the semiotic system of language - has historical as well as theoretical justification.
Appendix G: Punctuating the home page

Figure 6: Simple systems (read left-to-right) showing the relationship between the paradigmatic and syntagmatic axes in SFS\textsuperscript{15}

**Trajectory one: News images**

The origins of images in newspapers have been traced to the illustrated broadsides in the late 16th century (Bicket & Packer, 2004), but it was the mid 19th century that saw a significant increase in the use of hand-drawn illustrations in newspapers, a practice which continued even as photographic technology improved and became more widespread in the second half of the 19th, and early into the 20th century (Barnhurst & Nerone, 2001; Caple, forthcoming a).

Throughout the first half of the 20th century, photographic images became more common in the popular tabloids of the day (Bicket & Packer, 2004; Huxford, 2001; Schwartz, 2003; Wheeler, 2002). Grudgingly, the ‘high-brow’ newspapers of the time used photographs more and more as they competed with the tabloids for the same audience and ideological space (Bicket & Packer, 2004). Over time, photojournalism became a valued social practice in news institutions (Bicket & Packer, 2004; Caple, forthcoming a), providing ‘evidence’ in the form of ‘objective’ news photographs (Barnhurst & Nerone, 2001; Schwartz, 2003; Sontag, 1979; Zelizer, 2005). Photojournalists provided many of the iconic images of the 20th (and early 21st) centuries, or “big pictures” in Perlmutter’s (2003) terms (see Table 1).

<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 execution 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 1: Examples of iconic hard-news images

Images such as these, together with the broader body of work produced by photojournalists ‘documenting’ newsworthy events,\textsuperscript{16} had a significant social impact throughout the 20th century, and

\textsuperscript{15} There are more clause types (see Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004) and genre types (see Martin & Rose, forthcoming) than shown in this simplified diagram.
photojournalism has evolved into a central element in the economic, discursive, and ideological practices of newspapers.

In the print newspapers of the first decade of the 21st century, the evolution of photojournalism’s role continues in the emergence of ‘image-nuclear news stories’, which “make use of a dominant news photograph with a heading and only a short caption” (Caple, 2007a: 120). In online newspapers, it continues in the typical inclusion of a large, dominant image on the ‘first-screen’ of the home page of many newspapers, and in the practice on many newspaper websites of presenting photos on a single story, theme, or issue in galleries, and/or as slide shows.

These developments in the use of images in 21st-century newspapers (print and online) exploit the affordances of their respective media, and demonstrate the continuing potential of the photographic news image to expand the possibilities for story-telling (see also de Vries, 2008). But thumbnails appear to be a departure from the historical trajectory of the news illustrations of the 19th century, the news photographs from the mature photojournalism tradition of the 20th century, and these more recent developments in the use of images in print and online newspapers.

This can be illustrated by considering the discursive features and functions typically performed by press photographs, a number of which are listed in Table 2. Thumbnail images as used on the home page of the smh online do not perform these functions (see earlier section, titled: Thumbnails on the smh online home page), and can be contrasted with news images on the basis of this socio-historical perspective.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Features and functions</th>
<th>References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>carry aesthetic value</td>
<td>Caple (2007a, forthcoming a)</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 (2007b)</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 2: Some typical features and functions of photojournalistic images not shared by thumbnails

There is, however, one discursive function typical of press photographs which thumbnails do perform particularly well. Like the ‘mug shots’ which have long been used in newspapers (e.g. Barnhurst, 2002; Hall, 1981), thumbnails foreground the interpersonal aspect of a story with immediacy and impact (Knox, forthcoming b). In this way, the emergence of thumbnails on the smh online home page is perhaps more consistent with the verbal evolution of hard news stories in English-

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16 Caple (2007b) has described this as ‘capturing the critical moment’. Others have characterised it more as the definition and construction of the critical moment (see Barthes, 1977; Hall, 1981; Sontag, 1979: 18-19).
Appendix G: Punctuating the home page

language newspapers, where the interpersonal ‘peak’ of information has come to be located at the beginning of the story in the headline and lead (Iedema et al., 1994; White, 2003; cf. Knox, 2007).

To summarise this section, through the 19th and 20th centuries, and into the 21st, the use of photographs in the visual presentation of news has developed in relation to prevailing social and institutional circumstances. One of the most recent developments is the use of thumbnail images on the home page of the smh online. Compared with the photojournalistic practices of the 20th and early 21st centuries, thumbnails on the home page of the smh online highlight and foreground the interpersonal aspect of news stories to the exclusion of many other typical functions of press photographs.

Trajectory two: The new typography

Language has been written for at least 5,500 years (Crystal, 1987; Halliday, 1985), 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, 1985).

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, 1985, 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 Halliday, 1985; 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: 1) discusses the manuscripts of Homer and Euripides, explaining how illustrations served a textual (or organisational) 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: 1; cf. Bland, 1958: 29; Caple, forthcoming b; Martin, 2002: 318-324)

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 (Nordenfalk, 1992: 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: 55-57). “In the historiated initial text is intimately combined with illustration and the fusion of text, illustration and decoration is complete” (Bland, 1958: 57; cf. Alexander, 1978: 9).

Decorated and historiated initials continued to be used in manuscripts, until Gutenberg’s printing press in the 15th century signalled the beginning of 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 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 (van Leeuwen, 2005a). The most well-known challenge to the status quo in typography came in the early twentieth century with the Bahaus school, which eliminated many of the variations typically found between letter forms, 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. Existing mass media organisations 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, 2004).

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)

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. In contrast to this approach, van Leeuwen identifies distinctive features of typography (such as weight, slope, and curvature), and organises them into a system network of paradigmatic oppositions (cf. Figure 6), which "opens up a potential for 'grammar', for formulating syntagmatic rules, rules of inclusion ('both...and') and exclusion ('either...or')" (van Leeuwen, 2006: 153; cf. Crystal, 1998).

The significance of van Leeuwen’s (2006) paper for the argument presented here is as follows. Typography now exists in an environment where the visual potential of writing (once pushed to the edge of image in the decorated and historiated initials of illuminated manuscripts) is once again expanding. It is now possible to model typography as a mode with its own grammar (i.e. meaningful structural elements and combinations) because its potential to make meaning is currently developing in ways not seen since the rise of the printing press.

Together, the expansion of possibilities in new typography, and the emergence of thumbnails with their small size and limited paradigmatic choices open the possibility that, given the right discursive environment, the two may converge as letter and image once did in historiated initials. In the following section, a third trajectory is discussed which contributes to the creation of a semiotic environment suitable for the convergence of thumbnail images and written language.

**Trajectory three: 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, 1985: 32)

Halliday argues that over centuries, punctuation evolved (beginning with Greek alphabetic writing) 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.
Appendix G: Punctuating the home page

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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 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 three hundred years later, 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: 2)

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 7).

Figure 7: 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,  

17 Other developments in punctuation, such as the development of the semi-colon, parentheses, and quotation marks, are not discussed here for reasons of space and relevance to the current argument.

18 Wikipedia (Emoticon, 2007) traces the history of emoticons to the 19th century.
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.

![Figure 8: Examples of emoticons which can be automatically generated from keystrokes](http://www.msnhiddenemoticons.com/)

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 9), 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 9: Examples of emoticons construing attitude and identity](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.

This third trajectory in many ways parallels the second, 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.

**Convergence and collision: Image as language**

Graphology is the visual aspect of written language. The argument of this paper is that the three semiotic trajectories charted above - news image, typography, and punctuation - converge in the thumbnail images used in the corpus of online newspaper home pages described earlier, and that these thumbnails function not as ‘reduced’ news images, but as expanded graphology. 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” (1985: 14, emphasis in original). This suggests, then, that in order to sustain an argument that the thumbnails on the *smh online* 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 hard-news thumbnail images construe on the *smh online* home page, one at the ‘level’ of the home page as a whole text, and the second at the ‘level’ of each newsbite as an individual story. Each is explained below.

As written texts in their own right, online newspaper home pages combine visual and verbal modalities in meaningful ways (Knox, 2007; cf. Kress & van Leeuwen, 1998). The extent to which the multimodal potential of online newspaper home pages is actually realised has been questioned, and these pages are often described as featuring ‘lists’ of stories (e.g. Barnhurst, 2002; Bateman, 2008).

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19 The animation of these emoticons is not possible to demonstrate in static media. All emoticons downloaded freely from: [http://www.msnhiddenemoticons.com/](http://www.msnhiddenemoticons.com/)
On the smh online 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, and also in a way not totally divorced from the use of decorated initial letters in illuminated manuscripts, and the use of large initial letters in contemporary print-newspaper feature stories. Figure 1 illustrates how, over a relatively short period of time, the use of thumbnails has changed from being relatively random, to being a systematic feature of the organisation of verbal text on the smh online home page. The affordances of computer-mediated communication and the evolving practices of online news discourse are combining with evolving features of written language - typography and punctuation - to organise information on the home page.

In addition to this organising (or textual) function, the nature of the thumbnail images and their relation to the verbiage of the news stories creates an interpersonal texture on the page, whereby the news is ‘personalised’ (at the same time as being organised) visually. Part of the job of the home page is to attract and retain a readership, and the interpersonal exchange between the institution of the newspaper and its readership (largely mediated by the home page) is one to which thumbnails are particularly well-suited (Knox, forthcoming b). This graphological construal of ‘interpersonal texture’, then, is the first linguistic function of thumbnails: they play a textual role in the visual organisation of information on the smh online home page, while simultaneously punctuating the page interpersonally.

Like home pages, individual news stories clearly function as texts in their own right, at the same time as playing a role in the entire ‘newspaper-as-text’. In individual news stories, thumbnail images perform a second linguistic function: interpersonal Hyper-Theme (Martin 1992; Martin & Rose 2003). 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” (Martin & Rose, 2003: 181). Hyper-Themes work at different levels in text. In a single paragraph, the so-called ‘topic sentence’ familiar to all English-language teachers and learners functions as a Hyper-Theme, predicting what is to come, as in Text A (with Hyper-Theme underlined).

The Second World War further encouraged the restructuring of the Australian economy towards a manufacturing basis. Between 1937 and 1945 the value of industrial production almost doubled. This increase was faster than otherwise would have occurred. The momentum was maintained in the post-war years and by 1954-5 the value of manufacturing output was three times that of 1944-5. The enlargement of Australia’s steel-making capacity, and of chemicals, rubber, metal goods and motor vehicles all owed something to the demands of war. The war had acted as something of a hot-house for technological progress and economic change.

Text A (from Martin & Rose, 2003: 183)

In a similar way, the headlines in the short newsbites common on online newspaper home pages function as Hyper-Themes, establishing for the reader expectations about the text. Texts B and C illustrate (with Hyper-Themes underlined).

Girl's agonising death 'preventable'
The death of a seven-year-old girl who was stung on the legs and chest by a box jelly fish near Bamaga on Cape York Peninsula was swift.

Text B (smh online - January 5, 2006)
These examples show how verbal texts use Hyper-Themes to orient readers to the content of the text that is to follow. Martin (2002) demonstrates how, in multimodal texts, images can function as a visual Hyper-Theme which orients readers interpersonally to the text. In examining the Australian government’s *Bringing Them Home* report (among other texts), he looks at the use of images, and the way they evoke emotions and align readers to a set of interpersonal values that set up a preferred reading of the sections of text which they precede.

Economou (2006) and Caple (forthcoming b) draw on Martin’s work, and similarly identify large press photographs as Hyper-Theme in newspaper feature stories and ‘image-nuclear news stories’ respectively. Like the images discussed by Martin (2002), Economou (2006), and Caple (forthcoming b), the thumbnails on the *smh online* home page function as interpersonal Hyper-Theme in their stories. Figures 10 and 11 shows Texts B and C as they appeared on their respective home pages. By visually highlighting a central participant in the verbal story, the reader is oriented interpersonally to the participant and to the news story in a way not possible using words alone (see Knox, forthcoming b). The thumbnails work together with the headlines as a visually salient Hyper-Theme, with the thumbnail foregrounding the interpersonal aspect of the story in particular.

Despite the similarities discussed above, newsbites on the homepage of the *smh online* are unlike the texts discussed by Martin, Economou, and Caple in a number of important ways. Firstly, the thumbnails in the *smh online* do not function like other images in newspapers, nor like the images in the *Bringing them home* report. Rather, as discussed above, they are ‘under-committed’ to the point where they genuinely explore the boundary of ‘what counts’ as an image. A related but separate point is that 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. In contrast, the thumbnail images on the *smh online* 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. Compositionally, the thumbnails are embedded within their newsbites rather than standing separately from them or dominating them (as is the case in the texts described by Martin, Economou, and Caple), suggesting that thumbnails are related to their verbal text in a way similar to the historiated initials of illuminated manuscripts and the emoticons of computer-mediated texts, and in a way that the larger images are not.
Finally, 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 (cf. Knox, 2007). And as a webpage, the *smh online* home page uses typographic features such as font type, font size, and font colour in ways not afforded by the (predominately) black-and-white printed page of the *Bringing them Home* report.

For all these reasons, the nature of the multimodal relation between thumbnail images and accompanying text on the *smh online* home page differs from that between the larger images and their accompanying verbal text in the genres analysed by Martin, Economou and Caple. The former exploits the expanding boundaries of graphology and punctuation in language, and extends the possibilities for the expression of linguistic meaning in written text. The latter draw on the semiotic systems of both language and image in a way that thumbnail images do not readily afford.

**Conclusion**

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 icons and images (as emoticons) which perform linguistic functions. At the same time, in the new genre of the online newspaper, and in particular on the home page of the *smh online*, we find small images on the scale of print, which function differently from the way press images have functioned throughout their history. This raises a question: has the meaning potential of the news image contracted, or has the meaning potential of graphology expanded? The crossing of the common-sense 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, in historiated initials, and more recently in the use of emoticons in CMC as discussed above). From this perspective, the thumbnails on the home page of the *smh online* appear to be a return to the future.

Thumbnails are a relatively minor element in the macro-genre of the online newspaper, but they are an increasingly ubiquitous presence on the world wide web. They appear in online newspapers, in the often static genres found on institutional web pages, and in texts instantiating what Martinec (2007) has called the nascent systems of new media, including social networking sites such as Facebook and MySpace. It would seem that thumbnails afford new kinds of alignment between author and reader, and therefore contribute to the development of new reader identities (see Knox, forthcoming b). Undoubtedly their roles will continue to vary according to the communicative demands of the humans enacting the multimodal genres in which they are found.

As new media continue to afford human interaction in ways not previously possible, and as new social contexts and new ways of communicating continue to emerge, it is not surprising that language (as Lévi-Strauss’s semiotic system *par excellence* - Chandler, 2007) is moving with the times, just as it has always done. And in the particular context described in this paper - the home page of the *smh online* - different historical trajectories have led to language finding a ‘natural’ way to extend its capacity for expression. In short, the web has fostered the thumbnail, and in this instance at least, language has adopted it.

When viewed from the perspective of systemic functional theory, through the lens of the practices and conventions of photojournalism, and from the viewpoint of the historical development of typography and punctuation, the thumbnail images on the home page of the *smh online* represent an expansion of graphology rather than a reduction in the potential of image. This claim is not intended to be generalisable to all online newspapers, nor to websites in general, nor to thumbnail images in general. The extent to which the functions described here apply to thumbnails and other images in other genres is a question for empirical investigation. Rather, what is observed here is one instance of the rapid and varied evolution of semiosis in new media, a process in which new meaning-making practices will continue to challenge our understandings of language, and of multimodal semiosis more generally.

**Acknowledgement**

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**References**

Appendix G: Punctuating the home page


Appendix G: Punctuating the home page


Appendix H:

Submitted manuscript, published as:

Appendix H: Visual minimalism in hard news

Keywords:
news discourse; newsbites; online newspapers; photographs; systemic functional semiotics; thumbnails

Abstract
Thumbnail images depicting the face of a social actor were the most common type of image used in hard-news stories on the home page of the Sydney Morning Herald online (smh online), a high-circulation Australian daily broadsheet, between 2002 and 2006. While not all online newspapers use such images to the same extent as the smh online, close-up thumbnails of faces are commonplace on online newspaper home pages in general. This paper examines the use of these ‘thumbnail faces’ on the smh online home page. Over four years (and across four page-design periods), these images were used more frequently, despite the fact that they function in a very different way to traditional hard-news images. Thumbnail faces can not ‘tell stories’, nor ‘provide evidence’, but they play an important interpersonal role in individual news stories, collectively on the home page, and over time in the discursive relationship between the smh online and its readership.

Introduction
Online newspapers have come to play an important role in the global mass media, extending the potential audience of individual newspapers beyond the limits imposed by physical distribution of print on paper (e.g. Thurman 2007), and adding to the number of local and international voices available to media audiences (cf. Sreberny 2000). The hype surrounding online newspapers and the trumpeted death of the traditional newspaper are, to some extent at least, justified: online newspapers are undoubtedly changing the way that many news institutions operate. To a large extent, though, they draw on the discursive traditions and social practices of print newspapers, and online newspapers represent an evolution rather than a revolution in newspapers (Boczkowski 2004; Knox 2007).

Like their traditional counterparts, online newspapers are published on pages, though they have moved from paper pages (which have carried news images since at least the mid-19th century - see below) to web pages. Like any semiotic product, pages are historical artefacts, and the socially situated ways in which their semiotic potential has been employed have evolved over time (see Kress and van Leeuwen 1996, 185-6). In the late 20th and early 21st century, pages dominated by ‘densely printed text’ (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996) have lost ground to pages which have greater variety in their visual organization. Newspapers, text books, even academic journals and books demonstrate the ‘rise of the multimodal page’, or more accurately, the rise of the ‘more obviously multimodal’ page (Baldry and Thibault 2006, 58). This is not to suggest that considerations of visual design are something new to the newspaper industry. Rather, recent social and technological developments have led both to changes in the visual design of newspapers, and to greater academic attention being drawn to them (Barnhurst and Nerone 2001; Bicket and Packer 2004; de Vries 2008; Kress and van Leeuwen 1998; Machin and Niblock 2006; Utt and Pasternack 2003).

It is in this context of change in both print and online newspapers that this article is placed, though with a particular focus on online newspaper home pages and a visual feature common to many of them - thumbnail images depicting the face of a social actor, or thumbnail faces. Just as online newspapers play different roles in media story-telling and consumption from those played by traditional newspapers (see below), so too the stories on their home pages (and the images within them) play unique roles (Knox 2007, forthcoming a). The argument presented in this paper is that, in the specific case of the Sydney Morning Herald online (henceforth, smh online20), a large, established Australian daily newspaper which went online in 1995, the thumbnail images on the home faces represent a distinct, and largely new communicative practice. This article explores this new practice in this specific context.

The visual design of the page and its role in the construction of the news in online newspapers has been studied from a number of perspectives (e.g. Bateman forthcoming; Bateman, Delin and Henschel 2006; Cooke 2003; Knox 2007; Li 2002; Utt and Pasternack 2003). At the same time, the role of photographs in newspaper reporting more generally has generated a rich body of literature (e.g. Barthes 1977; Caple forthcoming; Hall 1981; Hartley 2007; Huxford 2001; Sontag 2003; Trivundza 2004). To date though, there has been little or no published work devoted specifically to the role of news images on online newspaper home pages (see Arant and Anderson 2001; Lowrey 1999; Martin 1998; Perlmutter 2003; Utt and Pasternack 2003).

20 http://www.smh.com.au
Appendix H: Visual minimalism in hard news

It is not possible to give a ‘complete’ description of news images - online or otherwise - without considering their interaction with the text of news stories, and the account given here of the meaning of images is, therefore, partial. The perspective taken in this paper is not multimodal; it is deliberately delimited to examining thumbnail faces in hard-news stories without any systematic account of their interaction with the accompanying text, and is intended as one step towards addressing the broader issue of multimodal communication in online newspaper discourse. Further, this article focuses on one particular newspaper, though the study from which the corpus and analysis are taken examines three established, online newspapers from three nations (see Knox 2007, in preparation). The concentration on this narrowed data set is due to the extensive use of thumbnail faces in the smh online in comparison with the other two newspapers in the study. Such a delimited description is a necessary element in a more encompassing account of intermodal interaction between image and text, and of visual design practices generalizable across online newspapers, both of which are long-term projects requiring a range of methodological perspectives in a variety of discursive contexts, and beyond the scope of a single paper.

In order to situate the current paper within a broader social and historical perspective, the following sections discuss news on home pages, the notion of hard news, and the use of images in news reporting over time. Following that, a description of the hard-news images on the home page of the smh online during the four-year period outlined above is given. The subsequent section looks at the semiotic affordances of the online medium, the institutional practices of newspapers, and why thumbnail faces are more likely to be favoured in the institutional authoring process. The functions of these images in the news within individual news stories, on the home page as a semiotic unit in its own right, and in the newspaper over time are discussed in the final sections.

The status and function of news on home pages

As online newspapers have grown in popularity, so has their importance to news institutions. For instance, in a public forum, the International Editor of the Sydney Morning Herald reported that the smh.com.au website generated AUD$24,000,000 in 2005, and in the same year enjoyed a 13% increase in readership (Hartcher 2006). The reading practices of this growing online audience are different from those of traditional newspapers. Online readers are more likely to read the newspaper as one of a number of communicative activities (on- and off-screen), and in different locations (e.g. at work rather than at the breakfast table - Barthelson 2002; see also Scollon 1998).

In the new macro-genre of online newspaper, the short news stories on the home page take on a greater importance than their small size and textual brevity would suggest. Headline-plus-lead-plus-hyperlink newsbites, and headline-only newsbits which dominate online newspaper home pages are an important part of readers’ experience of reading online newspapers. Eye scanning research suggests that readers typically scan the home page to search for the relatively few stories they read in greater depth, and then continually return to it in order to repeat the process (e.g. Holmqvist et al. 2003).

The short stories found on home pages have emerged as genres in their own right, distinct both visually and verbally from longer news stories appearing on a dedicated web page ‘lower down’ in the website hierarchy, and from the short ‘news briefs’ common in traditional newspapers which newsbites superficially resemble (Knox 2007). Newsbites often re-word the headline and/or lead from the longer version of the ‘same’ story (Knox 2007), including print versions of the ‘same’ story (Knox forthcoming a), as:

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 [traditional] newspaper. (Holmqvist et al. 2003, 669)

In order to compensate for the relative lack of representational information (i.e. information about events), these short 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, colour, and importantly thumbnail faces) and verbally (for example, through the use of more intensified

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21 The other two newspapers are the Bangkok Post online published in Thailand, and the People’s Daily online English version, published in China.
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language in headlines and leads - cf. White 1997). Figure 1 shows two newsbites from the *smh online*, each of which features a ‘thumbnail face’.

**Figure 1: Hard news stories from the *smh online* with thumbnail faces:**
April 8, 2002 (top) and January 10, 2006 (bottom) - originals in colour (copyright: *smh.com.au*)

Just as the wording of newsbites often differs from the text of the longer stories to which they are hyperlinked, the image in thumbnail faces on the home page of the *smh online* cannot be taken to indicate that a ‘more complete’ version of the ‘same’ image will be found with the hyperlinked story. In the *smh online* corpus of thumbnail images (including non-face images - see below) used for this study, just over half of the ‘more complete’ stories (i.e. those which were hyperlinked from a newsbite with a thumbnail on the home page) had no image; over 10% had a completely different image (i.e. with no relation to the thumbnail on the home page); and only approximately one third had an ‘expanded’ version of the thumbnail accompanying the ‘longer’ story.22

On the basis of the findings of their eyetracking study, Outing and Ruel (2004) argue that thumbnail faces draw little attention from readers. Importantly, on the five mock home page designs used in their study, only two featured thumbnail faces. One of these designs had two thumbnail faces, both of which appeared in advertisements at the bottom and right-hand side of the page respectively; the other design featured one thumbnail face positioned towards the right of the page. In contrast, the ‘heatmap’ data from the same study demonstrates that readers’ eyes fixate longest on newsbites in the position that thumbnails are located on the *smh online* home page (i.e. at the left of the newsbites in the main column), suggesting that the thumbnail faces on the *smh online* home page may play a greater role in communication than the findings of their study suggest. More fundamentally, eye tracking studies complement, rather than replace semiotic approaches such as that taken here. They are - and should remain - one important means of examining mediated communication in newspapers, but the timing of eye fixations on page and screen cannot tell us everything we need to know about semiosis and newspaper discourse.

In conclusion to this section, home pages and the newsbites appearing on them are central to readers’ experience of online newspapers. Newsbites can and do differ in their text, image, and visual design from the longer, hyperlinked versions of the ‘same’ story in the online newspaper; and also from ‘same’ story in the print edition of the newspaper (Knox forthcoming a). Together, these factors indicate that the communicative practices involved in authoring and reading the home page are genuinely distinct from those involved in traditional newspapers, and that they deserve critical investigation.

**Hard news and images**

Hard news is a commonly-used term, but can be defined in different ways. Bell (1991) identifies different kinds of news, including hard (or spot) news, soft news (incorporating commentary, features,
etc.), and special-topic news. In contrast, Iedema, Feez and White (1994) classify print news stories according to whether they chronicle, argue, interpret, or enable.

These different classification systems use different criteria to classify news: Bell’s categories ‘are generally the categories newsworkers themselves use’ (1991, 14), whereas Iedema, Feez and White base their classification on the linguistic realisations of media stories.

A complementary view of hard news is based on the visual-verbal taxonomies used on online newspaper home pages to classify news content, and draws on the work of Kress and van Leeuwen (1996), and of Bell (1991) and Iedema, Feez and White (1994) as cited above (Knox 2007). In the case of the smh online, hard news (defined here as the ‘mainstay’ of print journalism, chronicling potentially destabilising events which are as ‘up-to-the-minute’ as the news cycle allows) is visually distinguished from ‘lite’ news (defined as news which focuses on the ‘private sphere’ of events relevant to individuals’ lives and circumstances), and/or ‘soft’ news (which reflects on or interprets events, and in which immediacy is less crucial than in hard news - Knox forthcoming b; see also Bell 1991; Iedema, Feez and White 1994). This visual 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 Knox 2007, forthcoming b). In these ways, the visual design of the smh online forces the authors of the home page to choose explicitly (by the positioning of stories and the design choices that positioning entails) whether a story will be classified as ‘hard’, ‘lite’, or ‘soft’.

Across the four design periods relevant to this paper, hard news is consistently positioned in the widest, most visually salient column on the home page. Figure 2 shows one home page of the smh online from each of the four design periods relevant to the current paper, with the hard news area of each of the four page designs indicated with a border.

*Figure 2: Home pages from four periods of the smh online with hard news indicated - originals in colour (copyright: smh.com.au)*
Appendix H: Visual minimalism in hard news

As Figure 2 shows, hard news stories in these four design periods may or may not include an image. In those cases where an image is used, it is without exception a thumbnail (both thumbnails and other kinds of images are used in other news stories on the home pages). The majority of these thumbnail images are tightly cropped close-ups of faces (see below), a situation different from the traditional use of images in hard news in newspapers, which dates back at least to the mid 19th century.

On May 14, 1842, the first edition of The Illustrated London News published one of the first ever hard-news images to appear in a newspaper. The image shows a fire in Hamburg on May 5th, 1842, as depicted by an artist.

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, 16). But 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, 15).

Despite the technological developments which made possible the mass production of photographic images in newspapers, illustrations were still favoured over photographs, and newspapers continued to use woodcuts at the close of the century (Bicket and Packer 2004). While the use of photographs in newspapers grew slowly in the early decades of the 20th century, they were still resisted by some quarters in the newspaper industry even in the 1920s and 1930s (Bicket and Packer 2004; Caple forthcoming).

Despite this slow take-up of photography, the technological ‘autonomy’ of the camera gave the early 20th century newspapers a claim to objectivity that hand-drawn illustrations and text had been unable to impress upon audiences in quite the same way (Bicket and 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, 29)

This privileged status 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, 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: ‘pursuers of journalism have increasingly relied upon the camera to promote news presentations as unproblematic reflections of events occurring beyond viewers’ direct experience’ (Griffin 2004, 381; see also Hall 1981; Hartley and 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 main verbal text 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, 384). Yet this is a function thumbnail faces do not perform, as discussed further below.

Like the text 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 and Marvin 2003; Wardle 2007; cf. Bell 1991), and as part of the discourse of the

23 In periods three and four, the page template allowed for a large, dominant image to be used across the top of the home page and dominate the first screen, or Head of the page. This marked design was used to report exceptional news events, such as Hurricane Katrina, and the death of Australian film maker, conservationist, and media figure Steve Irwin.
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).

As the visual design of newspapers has changed, so too have the roles of photographs in newspapers (Barnhurst and Nerone 2001). 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 and Davidson 2002; cf. Bicket and Packer 2004). More fundamentally though, as the distinction between information and entertainment in newspapers (and between broadsheet and tabloid) has become increasingly blurred (cf. Ursell 2001), 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, forthcoming), in addition to the more flexible practices in image construction and use already common in broadsheet feature stories (e.g. Economou 2006, 2008; Trivundza 2004, 284) and in tabloids (e.g. Bicket and Packer 2004; Huxford 2001; Schwarz 2003; Time-Life Books 1971).

Indeed, the boundaries between press photography and photography in other fields have been challenged by Hartley (2007), and by Hartley and 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 and Rennie 2004, 461)

This questioning of the fundamental boundaries of photojournalism is particularly important given the thumbnail faces under discussion in this paper, which would hardly be identified as examples of hard-news ‘photojournalism’ by any press photographer, nor any journalist for that matter.

**Hard-news images on the home page: smh online**

The images under analysis were taken from the home page of the *smh online*. The data were collected using a five-day version of the ‘constructed week’ method, a principled sampling technique which ‘involves selecting days by a random process from several weeks to make up a composite week of days from five (for a Monday to Friday universe) or six (Monday-Saturday) different weeks’ (Bell 1991, 23). One seven-day constructed week is representative of six months’ of news content from a given newspaper (Riffe, Aust and Lacy 1993: 193; cf. Bell 1991: 23).

There were three data collection periods: early 2002 (February 14 - April 8), late 2005 (September 2 - November 1), and early 2006 (January 5 - April 5). These data collection periods span four design periods in the newspaper. To elaborate, the *smh online* (like many online newspapers) changes its visual design periodically. As a senior editor in the *smh online* explained when asked about changing the design of the home page:

we’re constantly learning about how people use the web and how they want to use it. So often it’s quite user driven. I suppose like the [print] paper does, there’s a sense that every now and again they need to freshen that up. (interview with author, July, 2007)

Because this study is focussed on the design of news, the three data collection periods in this case can be seen as representative not only of the content of the images at the times they were collected, but also of the visual design of stories and home pages during each of the four design periods. Figure 3 maps the three data collection periods onto the four design periods. The actual page design during each of the four periods is shown in Figure 2, above.
Appendix H: Visual minimalism in hard news

Figure 3: Data collection timeline

In the 15 days’ (or three constructed weeks’) data collected, a total of 250 news images appeared on the home page of the smh online, 183 (or 73%) of which were close-ups of faces (human and non-human) or company logos. Company logos are considered here as the face of a human collective, and therefore 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). Of the 250 news images, 94 were hard-news images, and of these 94, 73 (78%) were close-ups of faces or company logos. These figures (in which percentages are rounded) are presented in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period 1</th>
<th>Period 2</th>
<th>Period 3</th>
<th>Period 4</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st data collection</td>
<td>2nd data collection</td>
<td>3rd data collection</td>
<td>4th data collection</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<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>

Table 1: Images on home pages: smh online 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). These images share a number of similarities with thumbnail faces. They do not tell stories, and in most cases can be used with any story where these elements feature in the verbal text. Like thumbnail faces, when separated from text, they do not for the most part adhere to the typical ‘conventions of photojournalism, with the criterion of newsworthiness and its inherent emphasis on time and place’ (Trivundza 2004, 491). A case can be made for treating most of the non-face thumbnails in the same way as thumbnail faces - i.e. as a reduced visual representation of the most accessible and recognisable aspect of the featured social actor in a given news story (cf. Knox forthcoming c). Due to constraints of space, this line of argumentation cannot be done justice here, and these non-face images are therefore excluded from the discussion and treated as beyond the scope of this paper.

While the corpus is relatively small in size, the author has tracked the website closely and consistently since February 2002, and the overwhelmingly consistent pattern of the use of thumbnail faces in hard-news stories can be seen at http://www.archive.org where home pages from the data collection period can be readily and freely viewed. The general trend across the four periods was an increasing average number of hard-news stories which included images on each home page (cf. Figure 2). This is in line with commonsense expectations, as the institutional authors of the home page have developed 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’, or the ‘reproduction’ of hardcopy news online.24 In addition, and also in line with commonsense expectations, image use in hard news became more systematic with each re-design of the home page, in line with greater regimentation of content sections and the number and pattern of stories within each section.

In the first design period, images did not function as hyperlinks; in the latter periods they did. As discussed above, the hyperlinked images take readers not to a ‘more complete’ image, but to a longer verbal version of the ‘same’ news story. This verbal story may include a completely different image, an ‘expanded’ version of the thumbnail image on the home page, or (in the majority of cases)

24 See Knox (forthcoming a) for a discussion of publishing the ‘same’ story in different media.
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A number of factors contributing to the extensive use of thumbnail faces on the **smh online** home page are considered in the next section.

**Affordances and practices: medium and institution**

A selection of hard news stories with images from the corpus is shown in Figure 4. This collection of newsbites, which spans the four-year data collection period, demonstrates that the use of thumbnail faces in hard-news stories on the home page of the **smh online** is remarkably consistent from story to story over time. This consistency is a significantly different social practice from the visual documentation and portrayal of newsworthy events which has traditionally been understood as photojournalism, and raises the question of why these images have become so consistent and prevalent in this discursive context. The answer to this question is complex, but related to a number of factors, including the affordances of the online medium, and the institutional practices of newspapers.

**The medium of the web page has different affordances from those of the traditional newspaper page** (see Bateman, Delin and Henschel 2006; Knox 2007; cf. Kress and van Leeuwen 1998). The first is that the web page must be viewed by means of a screen, thus the scrolling web page cannot be viewed all at one time, and can extend almost indefinitely. This means that information on web pages must be visually ‘packaged’ for the screen. Many online newspapers design their home pages in such a way that sections of news content (or a group of sections) approximate to a screen, and most or all online newspapers design their home pages in such a way that the ‘first screen’ of the page is distinguished from the remainder of the page, creating a Head-Tail page structure with the ‘information valued as of the most immediate relevance and importance’ placed ‘above the fold’ (Knox 2007, 38).

Clearly then, news designers work with the constraints and affordances of the screen when designing home pages.

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. It is partly for this reason that verbal texts on online newspaper home pages are short: typically headline-plus-lead-plus-hyperlink newsbites, or headline-only newsbits (as discussed above). These short texts allow stories to be grouped together on home pages, and to be viewed simultaneously on the same screen. When the verbal text of a story is designed to occupy a small space, it is not surprising that the images that accompany that text are also spatially small. While there are exceptions to this principle, it is nonetheless the case that thumbnail images are commonplace 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 and Davidson 2002, 65), so images which can be quickly perceived are
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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, 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 online home page. Size is one important element in the relative salience of objects on the page (Kress and 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, 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 text 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 (Barthelson 2002; Lewenstein et al. 2000; Outing and Ruel 2004).

The relative importance of verbal text over image in news is also shown by the use of captions in traditional newspapers. Images are almost never given the status (commonly enjoyed by text) 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 (Fishman and Marvin 2003, 34; see also Griffin 2004; Trivundza 2004; Wardle 2007) either explicitly or by default. The fact that the images under discussion in this paper do not have captions (because there is no ‘story’ in the image to be ‘translated’ for the audience) is one of the features which sets them apart discursively from hard-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 and White 1994, 112). This discursive practice is the driving factor behind the rhetorical structure of hard-news stories in English-language newspapers (Iedema, Feez and White 1994; White 1997). Because the interpersonal aspect of news stories has been ‘distilled’ to the top of the story over time, and because the verbal text 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 thumbnail faces in hard-news stories on the home page of the smh online also communicate a highly interpersonal semiotic value visually, and allow the story to do so in a way that text alone cannot (cf. Hall 1981, 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 (shooting, submitting, selecting, editing, and publishing) can 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, 484; Zavoina and Davidson 2002, 62). Similarly, the economic imperatives of news organisations and the enormous demand for images has contributed to the rise of photo agencies, and the strong trend toward freelancing in photojournalism (Hartley 2007, 556-7; cf. Machin 2004). While the smh online 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 text 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 online*.

It would be possible to consider the affordances discussed above as the ‘causes’ of thumbnail faces, and the implications discussed in the following sections as ‘effects’. Such a linear cause-and-effect view fails to capture the complexity of the relations and processes by which semiotic phenomena emerge, and how they work. Institutional factors (such as the need for rapid publication, and financial pressures leading to the use of image banks as discussed above) are related to other factors (such as the need to provide entry points which draw readers into the newspaper, and the imperative to create a community of readers as discussed below) in complex ways. These complex relations extend to the semiotic products of the institution such as verbal news stories, thumbnail faces, and entire print and online newspaper editions.

In this article, particular institutional practices are not viewed as causes, leading to thumbnails, leading to other practices, or effects. Such a view would oversimplify the nature of meaning-making in institutions, and the inherent relations among texts (visual, verbal, and multimodal) and their contexts of production and reception. Rather, the view taken here is that thumbnail faces have come to be used extensively in a particular discursive context in relation to a range of existing factors, and also due to their ability to achieve a range of important institutional purposes. The discussion in the following sections considers, from this perspective, the roles of thumbnail faces in individual stories, on home pages, and in the discourse of the newspaper over time.

**Interpersonal imaging**

Thumbnail faces are not a radically new phenomenon - a number of studies have pointed out that newspapers regularly use close-up shots of faces - ‘mug shots’ as they are sometimes called (e.g. Barnhurst 2002, 484; Darling-Wolf 2001, 407; Hall 1981, 242; Kress and van Leeuwen 1996, 131; Wardle 2007) - and that personalising news stories is an important function of news images (e.g. Hall 1981; Trivundza 2004; Wardle 2007). What is unique in this discursive environment is that faces are used so overwhelmingly, that they are exclusively thumbnail-sized, and that these images appear without captions.

Thumbnail faces clearly draw on a very restricted sub-set of the visual resources available for photographers and photo editors in telling stories. The overwhelming choice is to represent a single face (in some cases two) in close up. The question to be addressed in this section is: what and how do these images mean? In order to answer this question, it is necessary to give a brief description of the different kinds of meaning images can make. Drawing on Kress and van Leeuwen’s (1996) work on visual communication (see also O’Toole 1994), it is possible identify three broad kinds of meaning that images (i.e. visual texts) construe:

- **Interpersonal meanings** position the content of a text in relation to the producer and receiver, and in doing so construct a relationship between them.
- **Representational meanings** function to portray experience, or a version of ‘the way things are’.
- **Organizational meanings** form interpersonal and representational meanings into whole texts which are cohesive and coherent.

(Кnox 2007, 22)

These three kinds of meaning are exemplified in the following sub-sections, where the argument is presented that in line with the foregrounding of interpersonal meanings in the verbal text of news stories, the hard-news images on the home page of the *smh online* foreground interpersonal meanings visually. Thumbnail faces do make representational and organizational meanings, but the point here is that the interpersonal is foregrounded, and it is on the interpersonal meanings that the following subsections primarily focus.

In addition to the three broad kinds of meaning outlined above, semiosis can be viewed from the perspective of different timescales. Readers’ interaction with newspapers can be viewed from at least three temporal perspectives.

[First, an] individual news story may be scanned in less than a second or read in a matter of seconds. This is particularly the case for short news texts such as those which appear on online newspaper home pages. [Second, the] timescale of
interaction between a reader and a given edition of a newspaper is likely to be measured in minutes. [Third], if we take a Bakhtinian perspective, the timescale of interaction between a newspaper and its audience in the newspaper-as-dialogue is measured in years, even decades. (Knox 2007, 21)

This temporal refraction of meaning applies also to thumbnail faces, which function within individual news stories, collectively on the home page as it orients the reader to each edition of the newspaper, and over time in the ‘newspaper-as-dialogue’ as each edition of the newspaper constitutes a turn in an ongoing dialogic interaction between the institution of the newspaper and its readers (see Knox 2007). Specifically, the interpersonal function of thumbnail faces over each of these three timescales is considered in the following sub-sections.

**Image and story**

This sub-section explores the role of thumbnail faces in individual stories. Looking first at representational meanings - how images portray a version of events or experience - thumbnail faces add little or no content to the verbal text of the story in the hard-news stories on the home page of the *smh online*. They do not provide evidence for the events of the story, they do not illustrate any aspect of ‘what happened’, and except in rare instances they do not give any information which is not also provided verbally.25 These images are almost always completely de-circumstantialized (see Machin 2004), and therefore genericized. That is, the image of the specified individual can be used with any story in which that individual 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.

Examining the two thumbnail faces in Figure 1, for instance, the images of John Brogden and Kim Beazley are a visual repetition of the verbal naming of these people in the story (see Martinec and Salway 2005; Royce 2002). 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 same is true of every thumbnail face in the corpus, with one exception.26

Thus, the representational 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. As texts in their own right, they construe neither narrative processes (which ‘present unfolding actions and events, processes of change, transitory spatial arrangements’ - Kress and van Leeuwen 1996, 56), nor conceptual structures (which ‘represent participants in terms of their class, structure or meaning’ - Kress and van Leeuwen 1996, 56). Rather, they appear to represent a single participant (i.e. ‘the subject of the communication’ - Kress and van Leeuwen 1996, 46), which cannot ‘tell a story’ on its own, but can be read as participating in the story told by the verbal co-text.

Turning to organizational meanings - how images organize their messages into a coherent whole - 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.27 The choices in organizational meanings (e.g. placement and salience of elements in the image) construed by these images when considered as texts in their own right (as opposed to considering their interaction with the text they accompany) are relatively consistent collectively, and are rarely manipulated for communicative effect. That is, the faces are almost always the only object in the image (69 of 73 images or 94.5% - the remaining four images have two faces) and almost always centre-frame (65 of the 69 single-face images, or 94.2%).

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25 This is not to say that information can be ‘translated’ completely between verbal and visual modes. Rather, the point is that the image can be deleted without any significant loss in the representational meaning of the story.
26 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.
27 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 and van Leeuwen, 1996).
In terms of interpersonal meanings - how images construct the relationship between the viewer, subject matter, and author of the image - the ‘extreme close-up’ nature of these images corresponds to the field-of-vision perception we would have of these social actors if we were at a physically ‘intimate distance’ (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996, 130-1). The interaction between the reader of the image and the social actor pictured is more personal than if they were visually depicted at a distance in a ‘long shot’, or not pictured at all. In this way, each hard-news story which includes a thumbnail face is ‘personalized’ to an extent that would not be possible without the image, and without the shot being framed in close-up.

To summarize, in individual news stories, these images neither ‘tell a story’ nor ‘provide evidence’, but visually represent a single participant in the story. They are rarely if ever composed in a way that distinguishes one face from another compositionally. Rather, their primary function is to personalize the story (with which the reader will engage for a matter of seconds), and to position the reader interpersonally in a way which is not possible with verbal text alone.

Image and home page

In considering the collective function of thumbnail faces on home pages, Fishman and Marvin’s description of the front page of a traditional newspaper is a useful starting point. The front page is:

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 and Marvin 2003, 33)

This description also applies to the home page of an online newspaper, and discursive practices played out on each home page play a significant role in the orientation of the reader to each reading of the online newspaper as a whole text (Knox 2007). In this sub-section, thumbnail faces are considered in terms of their contribution not to stories, but to the home page as a visual-verbal sign in its own right.

Representationally, the home page relies on verbal text to present hard news - thumbnail faces (and other thumbnail images) play almost no role in ‘presenting the news’. Figure 5 shows the column of hard news on one home page from each of the four design periods (the area denoted by a border on each home page in Figure 2). At the top of Figure 5, 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 only the images remain. This illustrates the extent to which each modality contributes to providing the content of hard news on the home page.

Organizationally, the positioning and distribution of thumbnails on the home page becomes increasingly regulated over the four page-design periods, and collectively they resemble the bullet-points used in bulleted lists. As the reader scrolls down the page, thumbnails punctuate the page, providing salient entry points for the reader’s eye (see Figure 5; see Knox forthcoming c).

Interpersonally, the thumbnail faces on the home page of the smh online contribute collectively to the interpersonal stance of the entire newspaper. Readers of the online edition are positioned differently in relation to a given edition’s news content than readers of the print edition, and this is achieved, in part, by the extensive use of thumbnail faces on the home page. As discussed above, individual news stories are personalized by the use of thumbnail faces. Cumulatively, their impact on the home page is one of personification. 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, 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, 359, italics in original).

Home pages represent a relatively new public sphere. At the same time, they carry the long institutional history of newspapers, where ‘the spatial structure’ of the ‘simple 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, 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 \textit{smh online}, 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 hierarchy of the website are offered to the reader, and a greater number of hits on a wider variety of pages can be recorded.

\textit{Image and dialogue}

Thus far, we have considered the impact of thumbnail faces on two timescales: that of the individual story, and of a given edition of the newspaper as readers are oriented by the home page. The third timescale is the ongoing dialogue between the institution of the newspaper and its readers over months, years, and even decades.

Over time, the use of thumbnail faces contributes to a particular kind of discursive relationship that regular readers come to expect from the \textit{smh online}, and go to for that experience. Kress and van Leeuwen (1996, 28-9) contrast the visual design of the front page of \textit{The Sun} (published in the UK) and the \textit{Frankfurter Allgemeine} (published in Germany). The difference between the design of each page is stark, and Kress and 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 and van Leeuwen 1996, 30)

In the act of reading (as in any other semiotic act), the readers of the \textit{smh online} 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 \textit{smh online} in the newspaper-as-dialogue 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 forthcoming). On this broader timescale then, the shorter-timescale functions of thumbnail faces (i.e. personalizing individual stories, and personifying the public sphere of the home page and newspaper) contribute to establishing and maintaining complex affiliations among the community of \textit{smh online} readers. And it is this bonding function of news discourse that thumbnail faces are particularly well suited to contribute to on the timescale of the ‘newspaper-as-dialogue’.

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)\textsuperscript{28}

While Stenglin’s (2004) research is on the semiotics of three-dimensional space (with particular reference to museums), her arguments regarding bonding apply equally to the semiotics of online newspaper home pages, and the argument here is that bonding occurs not on the timescale of a single, personalized 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 practice through their role in the online reading practices of \textit{smh online} 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

\textsuperscript{28} The original quote from Stenglin discusses museums and their visitors: in the quote, ‘newspapers’ and ‘readers’ are substituted for ‘museums’ and ‘visitors’.
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audience (Thurman 2007, 301). Caple (forthcoming) discusses the different discursive events in which readers of the print edition of the *Sydney Morning Herald* 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 sense of togetherness, inclusiveness and affiliation, and it is around these shared feelings that we bond’ (Caple forthcoming).

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 online* readers. As a senior editor at the *smh online* 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)

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.

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 Media)

Thumbnail faces play an important role in the relatively new and evolving discursive practices of presenting hard news online. 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, over time, these images contribute to both the ideological and commercial objectives of the online newspaper.

**Conclusion**

Thumbnail faces are not the only discursive practice of the *smh online* that foregrounds the interpersonal aspect of stories, orients the newspaper interpersonally, and bonds the reading community of *smh online* readers. There are other verbal, visual, and multimodal discursive practices which contribute to these interpersonal functions on different timescales. The focus on thumbnail faces to the exclusion of other elements of the *smh online* in this article should not be read as meaning that these images are being attributed sole responsibility for achieving these social-semiotic functions. Rather, the argument presented here is that these are the discursive practices and meanings to which thumbnail faces most ‘naturally’ contribute.

The other major omission from this paper is any real consideration of the role of thumbnail faces in intermodal meaning. These images interact with the text of stories in which they appear, and this multimodal interaction is a fundamental aspect of any text, particularly when two modalities are so obviously used together. Their meanings are multiplicative (Lemke 2002), but an important part of understanding such multiplicative meanings is the description of text and image as semiotic acts in their own right.

The history of hard-news images began with hand-drawn illustrations in the mid-19th century, and the use of photographs from the early 20th century. Tabloids have exploited the possibilities of ‘authoring’ photographs from the earliest times, including the use of ‘composographs’ and more recently the image authoring tools which digital photography and publishing have made possible. Concurrently, the news practices and discourse of ‘serious’ broadsheet newspapers have turned photojournalism into an esteemed communicative practice in which ‘objectivity’ and aesthetics are valued in equal degrees (see Perlmutter 2003). But these photojournalistic values - so important to news photography and print newspapers for decades - are not the drivers of thumbnail faces.
As online newspapers play an increasing role in the social practices of news institutions and their readers, existing news practices adapt and evolve in line with the affordances and constraints of the new medium of the web page. The prevalence of thumbnail faces in hard news on the home page of the *smh online* is one such practice, in which the aesthetics of composition in press photography lose their institutional value, the documentation and evidential functions of photojournalism disappear, and the minimalist boundaries of representational meaning in the news image are explored. At the same time, these images instantiate interpersonal meanings in new ways, and on different timescales, as afforded by their new semiotic environment.

References


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Appendix I:

Submitted manuscript, to be published as:

1. Introduction

In this chapter, I take one genre - the newsbite - from the home page of one online newspaper - the Sydney Morning Herald (SMH) online - and examine the ways in which newsbites on the same home page differ in their visual-verbal design. Newsbites (defined in section 1.1 below) have emerged as a fundamental genre in online newspapers, which first appeared in the mid-1990s (Boczkowski, 2004: 8). Despite their relatively recent appearance, online newspapers are already established in the landscape of the global mass media, and represent an important new macrogenre by which large and powerful institutions communicate with very large numbers of people across national boundaries.

The home page of an online newspaper is the reader's way in, and functions to orient the reader to the content of the entire text (Knox, 2007). It constitutes a complex visual-verbal sign, and is itself a macrogenre, or a genre consisting of a principled combination of other, more 'elemental' genres or 'mini-genres' (see respectively Martin, 1994; Baldry, 2000c). Thus, we can view online newspaper home pages as multimodal texts in their own right, whose visual-verbal design is functional, or meaningful (Knox, 2007; cf. Kress, Van Leeuwen, 1998).

Taking such a functional perspective on multimodal texts more generally, a number of researchers have applied the principles of Halliday's (e.g. 1994 [1985]) model of language - systemic functional linguistics - to developing approaches to the study of modalities other than language. These include O'Toole (1994), Kress, Van Leeuwen (1996), Martin (2002), O'Halloran (2004), Stenglin (2004), and Baldry, Thibault (2006a). A number of scholars who have taken such a systemic-functional semiotic (SFS) approach to multimodal discourse analysis have studied web pages and web sites (e.g. Baldry, Thibault, 2006a; Djonov, 2005; Kok, 2004; Lemke, 2002) and newspaper texts (e.g. Kress, Van Leeuwen, 1998; Macken Horarik, 2003). However, there have been very few SFS studies of online newspapers (Bateman et al., 2006; Knox, 2007; see also Martinec, Salway, 2005), and relatively few critical studies of online newspapers published beyond SFS (though see Barnhurst, 2002; Boczkowski, 2004; Cooke, 2003; Dimitrova et al., 2003; Engebresten, 2000; Singer, 2003).

The analysis in this chapter uses descriptive tools from systemic-functional theory, and integrates them with a colour scheme which is intended to show consistencies and changes in the patterns of choices in newsbite design over a short period of time. In this colour scheme, choices associated with hard newsbites are signified by the use of green; light newsbites by the use of gold; soft newsbites by the use of orange; illustrated/unillustrated newsbites by the use of rose; and tangenting/non-tangenting newsbites by the use of turquoise. Structural realisations of these categories, when shown in system networks, appear in blue. The categories of newsbite (and their subtypes) are explained in subsequent sections.

In providing these descriptions, I aim to demonstrate that there is a fractal resonance between the visual-verbal design of newsbites, the visual-verbal design of the home page which operates at a higher 'scalar level' (see Baldry, Thibault, 2006: 144), and social and institutional news practices. Concurrently, I aim to show that these distinctions in newsbite design can be described systemically. That is, consistent structural differences between newsbites can be seen to realise systemic oppositions (paradigmatic meanings in Saussurean terms) between different newsbites. Mapping the systemic oppositions among newsbites gives us one analytical perspective on the meanings realised by the structural configuration of this genre and its subtypes, and allows us to observe the rapid evolution of meaning potential afforded by this genre over a relatively short period of time. This rapid evolution is possible because the visual-verbal design of newsbites encodes meaning, and the verbiage of news stories on online newspaper home pages is read in conjunction with a reading of the visual design of these stories.

1.1. Newsbites

As described in Knox (2007), newsbites are short news stories which appear on home pages of online newspapers, and on other similar pages which group stories according to content (or section pages). They present the focal point of a given story (according to the values of the news institution), and afford readers the opportunity to follow a hyperlink to a page in the newspaper where another version of the ‘same’ story appears (a story page). An example of a newsbite is shown in Figure 1.
Appendix I: Designing the news in an online newspaper

Figure 1: Newsbite with structural features indicated

Newsbites have a number of structural elements as Figure 1 illustrates. Some of these structural features have subtypes, and Table 2 lists and defines the various structural elements discussed in this article according to their function.

Throughout this chapter, I describe the design of newsbites using examples from one home page published on February 26, 2002 (representative of home pages of the SMH online from mid-1999 to March 2002), and one published on September 15, 2005 (representative of home pages of the SMH online from May 2004 to November 2005). The temporal relation between the two home-page designs represented in this chapter is shown in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First period</th>
<th>Second period</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>2006</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Time periods of SMH home-page design as described in this chapter

1.2 Hard news, soft news, and light news
The terms ‘hard news’ and ‘soft news’ are common currency among media practitioners and researchers, and the public more broadly. However, Bell (1991: 14) notes: “For both newsworkers and researchers, the boundaries between hard news and soft news are unclear”. The archetypal hard news story is so-called ‘spot news’ that chronicles an event such as an accident, disaster, or violent crime (Bell, 1991: 14), and which has the potential to stabilise or destabilise ‘the material and moral status quo’ (Iedema et al., 1994: 107). Soft news stories, on the other hand, are ‘not time-bound to immediacy’ (Bell, 1991: 14), and this category is used to cover news stories such as features, commentary, and human interest stories (see Bell, 1991: 14; Iedema et al., 1994: 138-54). It is possible then 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 et al., 1994: 88).

Another distinction discussed by Iedema et al. (1994: 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 (i.e. ‘lowbrow’ or ‘tabloid’) 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 (i.e. ‘highbrow’ or ‘broadsheet’) 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 et al., 1994: 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 3.

The boundaries between hard, soft, and light news are fuzzy, and are traditionally grounded in the verbal analysis of news content. The visual and verbal semiotic modalities, 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 SMH home page does not afford the construal of fuzzy boundaries between hard, light, and soft news, so the authors of the page are forced to classify each story visually according to their placement.
2. SMH online home page: mid-1999 - March 2002

The discussion in this section uses the *Sydney Morning Herald* online home page of March 15, 2002 to exemplify the analysis. The description and analysis in this section applies to the design of the SMH home page between mid-1999 and March 2002 (or Period 1 in Table 1).

2.1. Hard and light newsbites

Between mid-1999 and March 2002, the home page of the *Sydney Morning Herald* online presents news in two columns, one ‘heavier’ and more salient than the other. Following Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996: 79-88), it is possible to read the page as presenting a visual taxonomy, which classifies news in two basic categories (see Figure 2). These two categories are named here hard (grounded in the left space of the topology in Figure 3) and light (grounded in the lower space of the topology). The category of light news overlaps with, but can be distinguished from the traditional category of soft news (see Figure 3).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>hard newsbite</th>
<th>light newsbite</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Dead voters, stolen ballots: Mugabe’s dirty win**  
*Zimbabwean media reports Robert Mugabe’s dishonesty.*  
> It was in the countryside that Robert Mugabe stole the Zimbabwe presidential election.  
> Away from prying eyes, his loyal party henchmen executed a sleight of hand that was as crude as it was ambitious.  
> *Full report*  
> - Zimbabwe's ballot election free and fair, African states claim  
> - Why the Commonwealth can do nothing about the victory |
| **Quest for ultimate camouflage**  
*The US Army is hunting for a new military uniform that can make soldiers nearly invisible, grant superhuman strength and provide instant medical care.* |

Table 3: Hard and light newsbites from SMH home page, March 15, 2002

In addition to the page-level distinction between hard and light newsbites, there are a number of structural elements of newsbite design which provide justification for a systemic distinction between them. The first is the size and colour of the font of headlines (which function as the Focus of a story). Hard newsbite headlines are in a larger font than the remainder of the newsbite, and are black. They draw on the conventions of the traditional newspaper with large headlines and predominately black text on white background, and they are not hyperlinks. In contrast, the headlines of light newsbites appear in the same font size and type as the remainder of the newsbite, but appear underlined and blue, drawing on the more recent conventions of the world wide web to signify that they are also hyperlinks.
Appendix I: Designing the news in an online newspaper

So in light newsbites, the Focus is conflated with a Link to a story page. This distinction is exemplified in Table 3.

The visual form of a headline in light newsbites draws not on the discursive conventions of the news, but on those of the world wide web. Intertextually then, the visual design of hard newsbite headlines references traditional news discourses and genres, while that of light newsbite headlines references the discourses and genres of hypertext and the web. These distinctions in visual-verbal intertextuality contribute to the different ideological valuation of hard and light 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.

Hard and light newsbites are also distinguishable in terms of the presence and absence of certain structural elements. Hard newsbites on the SMH home page always have an Issue (a heading above the headline which places the newsbite in a wider social context); light newsbites never do (see Table 3 where the Issue is worded: ZIMBABWE POLL).

Hard news stories in Period I always have a separate hyperlink functioning as a Link, which is worded: Full report. This is a linguistic declaration that the reader can navigate beyond the newsbite to a story page. This explicit verbal hyperlink is a particular type of Link - an Invitation. In contrast, there is no Invitation in light newsbites - as stated above the Link is conflated with the Focus.

Thus, in addition to the page-level justification for identifying hard and light newsbites, there is also structural motivation in the visual-verbal design of these newsbites for a systemic opposition between the two (i.e. difference in headline design, and the presence/absence of an Issue and an Invitation). Figure 4 illustrates this systemic opposition in terms of a system, which is a complementary way of representing the distinction exemplified in Table 3.

**Figure 4: Basic system of hard and light newsbites: SMH home page, mid-1999 to March 2002**

Reading the system in Figure 4 from the left, a newsbite is the ‘entry condition’ for the system, and requires us to make a choice of either ‘hard’ or ‘light’ (the square bracket signifies an ‘either/or’ choice). The blue diagonal arrows indicate the structural realisation of each feature. A newsbite is realised by a Focus followed by an Event (‘Focus^Event’) and the presence of a Link (‘+Link’). Both hard and light newsbites (being subtypes of a newsbite) share these features. Additionally, hard newsbites are realised by an Issue followed by a Tradition-Focus (‘Issue^Tradition-Focus’), and the presence of an Invitation (‘+Invitation’). In contrast, light newsbites are realised by a Hyper-Focus conflated with a Link (‘Hyper-Focus/Link’).

Representing the structural choices in this way allows us to see the both the structural similarities and the differences between different kinds of newsbite, and the systemic oppositions (or paradigmatic meanings) such choices realise (in this case, hard and light).

### 2.1.1. Hard newsbites: more delicate distinctions

We have seen the distinction between hard and light newsbites in section 2.1 above. Within the category of hard newsbites, a more delicate distinction can be made. The first newsbite on the page always has larger headline than all other newsbites on the page. This difference in font size is consistent in every edition of the newspaper - it is systematic and functional, and is exemplified in Table 4. The larger-sized headline is aligned with so-called ‘screamer’ headlines in hard-copy newspaper, so it is here given the functional label Scream-Focus.

This structural feature distinguishes the first hard newsbite from all others, realising a systemic opposition of the first hard newsbite versus following hard newsbites, a distinction which is also represented systemically in the dark green section of the system network in Figure 5.
Appendix I: Designing the news in an online newspaper

### Table 4: Hard: first and hard: following newsbites from SMH home page, March 15, 2002

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Newsbite Type</th>
<th>Newsbite Content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Hard: first   | *Children Overboard* Lie  
Reith fingers bungling bureaucrats  
Former defence minister Peter Reith today fingered bungling by defence bureaucrats for the government’s failure to correct claims that asylum seekers threw their children *overboard*. Read report  
- *The great* Children overboard lie  
- Manas Wikarow: New Australia was fed a lie that grew into a gross detection  
- Ministers lie in any case report  
- *Children overboard*: the main players: Are you satisfied with the government’s explanation? Here your say | ECONOMY  
Unemployment up to 7 per cent  
A surge in new jobseekers pushed Australia’s unemployment rate to seven per cent in January despite the creation of more than 300,000 new jobs, official figures showed today. Read report |

## 2.1.2. Light newsbites: more delicate distinctions

Among light newsbites in Period 1, it is possible to identify three distinct subtypes. The first subtype is the one which, visually, most closely resembles hard newsbites, and is called here the *standard* light newsbite. As explained in section 2.1 above, it is differentiated from hard newsbites by the presence of a Hyper-Focus conflated with a Link. Table 5 shows two examples of this subtype, 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.

The second subtype - the *cataloguing* light newsbite - has a graphic combining verbiage with one or more icons as a heading across the top of the newsbite. This heading (note, it is not a headline) functions as the Focus (and is a Hyper-Focus - drawing as it does on the visual conventions of the worldwide web rather than those of traditional newspapers - see section 2.1 above). As a Hyper-Focus, it is conflated with a Link. In this case, it is a *Section-Link* because it takes the reader to a section page (a page which presents a selection of stories as newsbites and/or headline-only hyperlinks grouped according to content). The main text of these newsbites presents a selection of stories with Links, and has verbal characteristics in common with newsbites on one hand, and navigational menus on the other. Table 5 also provides two examples of cataloguing light newsbites.

The third subtype of light newsbite is called the *leading* light newsbite, and it is the first light newsbite on each home page. These newsbites have a top-bottom division, with the Illustration at the top dominating the newsbite visually. Unlike images in other newsbites, the Illustration in the leading light newsbite appears above all verbiage, with Focus and Event below. Its large size (the image in this newsbite is the largest on the home page) and positioning above the verbiage signifies this image as a particular subtype of Illustration, and it is given the functional label of *Lure*. Table 5 also shows an example of a leading light newsbite.

The distinctions between the three kinds of light newsbite illustrated in Table 5 are also represented systemically in the *gold* section of the system network in Figure 5.

## 2.2. Illustrations and Tangents

Alongside the hard/light distinction and the more delicate distinctions within each of these two categories, there are other features which distinguish between newsbites. These other features are the presence or absence of images (which function as *Illustrations*), and the presence or absence of hyperlinks to different but related stories (which function as *Tangents* - see section 2.2.2 below). The choice to include Illustrations and/or Tangents operates independently of whether newsbites are hard or soft. In systemic terms, these independent choices are modelled as *simultaneous systems*, and this is explained and illustrated in the following sections.

### 2.2.1. Illustrated and unillustrated newsbites

Illustrations appear in both hard and light newsbites. There are few (typically two or three) hard newsbites with images on each home page in Period 1, and a similar number of light newsbites, but order or place of appearance on the page is not a predictor of whether or not a newsbite will have an Illustration (see Figure 2 above). We can make a distinction in all newsbites (hard and light) between those that are *illustrated* (and have an image), and those that are *unillustrated* (and do not). This choice is shown as a system in the *rose* section of the system network in Figure 5.
2.2.2. Tangenting and non-tangentng newsbites

A feature of both hard and light newsbites is that they may or may not include Tangents. In hard newsbites with Tangents, they typically occur below the Event and the Link. In light newsbites, Tangents (when present) may be positioned below the Event, or within the main verbal text of the newsbite. (Examples of Tangents can be seen in the first hard newsbite in Table 5, and the leading light newsbite in Table 6.) It is not possible to predict whether a newsbite will or will not have Tangents on the basis of whether it is hard or light, nor whether it is illustrated or unillustrated.

A systemic opposition can be made between tangentng newsbites (those that have one or more Tangents - wherever positioned in the story) and non-tangentng newsbites (those with no Tangent). This choice is shown as a system in the turquoise section of the system network in Figure 5.

2.3. Summary

The systems of hard/light, illustrated/unillustrated, and tangentng/non-tangentng all have the same entry condition - the newsbite. As described above, they are therefore simultaneous systems. This is shown by the use of a curly bracket in the system network in Figure 5, which means that each sub-system is chosen from simultaneously. Thus, all newsbites select one feature from each of the three sub-systems, and are either hard or light, at the same time as being illustrated or unillustrated, at the same time as being tangentng or non-tangentng.

All the systemic oppositions in the visual-verbal design of newsbites on the home page of the Sydney Morning Herald from mid-1999 to March 2002, as discussed above, can be represented in a...
single system network, as presented in Figure 5. The timeline below the system network (from Figure 1 above) indicates the time period to which this systemic description of newsbites on the SMH home page applies.

Because a Lure (one type of Illustration) is an obligatory element in a leading light newsbite, it follows that in the system network, if the feature ‘leading’ is selected, 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).

In the next section, the design of newsbites between May 2004 and November 2005 is described.

![System network of newsbites and timeline: SMH home page, mid-1999 to March 2002](image)

**Figure 5:** System network of newsbites and timeline: SMH home page, mid-1999 to March 2002

3. SMH online home page: May 2004 - November 2005

From March 2002 - May 2004, the design of the home page of the *Sydney Morning Herald* online was largely consistent with the design in Period 1. In May 2004, however, a significant change in the design of the home page was made, and this new design was used during the period from May 2004 to November 2005 (or Period 2 - see Table 1). The home page from September 15, 2005, which is representative of home pages during Period 2, is shown in Figure 6.

The hard/light classification from Period 1 (see Figure 2) is still relevant in the Period 2 design, but newsbites more closely aligned with reflecting on events and interpretation (i.e. ‘soft news’ - see section 1.2 above) are included in the middle of the three content columns on the page. By adding this column of soft news on the home page, the newspaper gives readers more (and more varied) entry paths into the content of the newspaper, and gives traditional ‘soft’ news stories a presence on the home page and therefore a greater value than attributed in the earlier home page design.

These changes in page design are also reflected in newsbite design in Period 2, as discussed in the following sub-sections. There is also one important difference in all newsbites. Unlike in Period 1, in Period 2 the headline in every newsbite is also a hyperlink.
3.1. Hard, light, and soft newsbites

As discussed above, the first thing evident in the new design of the home page in Period 2 is the new column of soft news. The representational taxonomy construed in the home page design (see Figure 6) is once again reflected in systemic oppositions in the design of newsbites. The structural elements shared by all newsbites are a Focus conflated with a Link, and an Event.

Hard newsbites during this period (which have two primary subtypes) have an Invitation (worded: *more*), as can be seen in Table 6. Light newsbites during this period have no Invitation, and their Focus is always a Hyper-Focus, as is also exemplified in Table 6. Soft newsbites (which have three primary subtypes) all share the structural features of a Border (realised by shading or a frame) and an Invitation. This can also be seen in Table 6. These three categories are represented systemically in Figure 7.

More delicate distinctions can be described within the categories of hard and soft newsbite. Each of the three categories - hard, light, soft - are now considered in turn.
Appendix I: Designing the news in an online newspaper

3.1.1. Hard newsbites: more delicate distinctions

As readers and institutional authors have become more comfortable with the new macrogenre of the online newspaper, there has been an increasing tendency away from mimicry of hardcopy newspapers, and towards a greater incorporation of the conventions of the world wide web and the affordances of hypertext in online news practices. One realisation of this tendency in the SMH which has been mentioned in section 3.1 above is the practice of making all headlines hyperlinks (i.e. conflating the Focus with the Link). But this is not the only indication of this trend to be found in hard-newsbite headlines in Period 2.

Hard-newsbite headlines (which function as the Focus of the newsbite) are systematically differentiated according to a number of visual features. Headlines in hard newsbites appearing near the top of the page are dark blue in colour - somewhere between the traditional black headline of the Tradition-Focus, and the underlined blue of the Hyper-Focus, and are therefore named Modern-Focus. These headlines are not underlined (in contrast with Hyper-Foci on the same page), and they are in a larger font size than the hard newsbite headlines in stories further down the page. These three visual criteria - colour, presence/absence of underlining, and size of headline - systematically distinguish the hard newsbites at the top of the page from those further down.

On this basis, it is possible to identify a structural distinction between top hard newsbites (so named because they are identified by the newspaper as ‘top’ stories) which have a headline functioning as a Modern-Focus, and other hard newsbites which are structurally differentiated from top hard newsbites by their Hyper-Focus. Table 7 exemplifies this distinction.
Appendix I: Designing the news in an online newspaper

Table 7: Hard: top and hard: other newsbites from SMH home page distinguished by headline design, September 15, 2005

Among top hard newsbites, a more delicate distinction can be made on the basis of headline size between the first top hard newsbite (with the Scream-Focus - see section 2.1.1 above for explanation), and the following top newsbites. This is exemplified in Table 8. These more delicate distinctions in hard newsbites (top/other, and then if top is selected, first/following) are represented systemically in the dark green section of the system network in Figure 8.

Table 8: Hard: top: first and hard: top: following newsbites from SMH home page, September 15, 2005

In the 1990s, stories were typically written for the hardcopy edition of a paper and ‘shovelled’ into the online edition, but this is changing as more stories are written for both hardcopy and online editions, and written or re-written specifically for the online edition. Further, as online editions have grown in importance in newspaper institutions around the world, journalists have an increasing stake in having their work recognised when it is published in the online medium (Boczkowski, 2004).

In the SMH during Period 2, this development is reflected in the inclusion of Bylines in hard newsbites. Where they are included, Bylines appear in square brackets and in small, grey font beneath the Focus and immediately before the Event. Newsbites with Bylines belong to the category of signed hard newsbites; those without a Byline are unsigned (see Table 9 for examples).

Another institutional change brought about by online newspapers is the erosion of the 24 hour news cycle, and a greater focus on (literally) up-to-the-minute news reporting. Once again, this is reflected in the fact that hard newsbites in Period 2 may or may not include the time of publication (the Time) in red font in the same position as the Byline (see Table 9 for examples). Those which include the Time belong to the category of timed hard newsbites; those which do not belong to the category of untimed hard newsbites.

Table 9: Hard newsbites (signed/unsigned, timed/untimed) from SMH home page, September 15, 2005

All hard newsbites must select simultaneously from the choices of signed/unsigned and timed/untimed (also illustrated in Table 9). Further, these choices occur in hard newsbites, but not light or soft newsbites. Systemically then, within the category of hard newsbites they represent simultaneous choices. Thus all hard newsbites are top or other, at the same time as being signed or unsigned, at the
same time as being **timed** or **untimed**. These simultaneous choices are represented systemically in the green sections (i.e. **dark green**, **light green**, and **time green**) of the system network in Figure 8.

### 3.1.2. Light newsbites in Period 2
Light newsbites in Period 2 share the same systemic features as standard light newsbites in Period 1 (see section 2.1.2 above). There are no subtypes of light newsbites in this period, so no further discussion is pursued here.

### 3.1.3. Soft newsbites: more delicate distinctions
There are three distinct subtypes of soft newsbite in the newly-introduced column of soft news in Period 2 (see Figure 6). Each is described in turn.

The first soft newsbite on the page is the **leading** soft newsbite (exemplified in Table 10). Obviously, the image in the leading soft newsbite - the Lure (see section 2.1.2 above) - is designed to have a visual impact on the ‘first screen’ of the page (see Knox, 2007). As in Period 1, it remains the only newsbite on the home page where the image is above all text in the newsbite. The background of the text area of the newsbite is shaded grey (denoting the Border). Tangents are an optional feature in leading light newsbites, but an Illustration is obligatory.

The fact that leading light newsbites have been visually reclassified on the home page as soft (from light in Period 1) demonstrates that the boundaries between these categories are fuzzy, and that classification realised in the visual semiotic can not be expected to always map neatly on to verbal meanings. Rather, intertextual relationships between news stories and the meanings they construe are realised visual-verbally.

Scrolling down the page, the next type of soft newsbite the reader meets is the **feature** (also exemplified in Table 10). Features are polarised top-bottom. The Illustration dominates the newsbite visually, and appears at the top of the newsbite. It therefore functions as a Lure. At the same time, image and text are combined, so the Lure is conflated with the Focus of the story. Like leading soft

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32 Following the convention of Systemic Functional Linguistics, function labels (e.g. Hyper-Theme) are indicated by using Initial Capitals, whereas class labels (e.g. nominal group) appear in lower-case.
newsbites, features have an Invitation worded: *more*. The Border is realised by a grey frame. Features are always *illustrated*, and always *non-tangentened* (see section 3.2 below).

The third type of soft newsbite is the *special* soft newsbite (again exemplified in Table 10). Above the Hyper-Focus, special soft newsbites have a Section-Link (see section 2.1.2 above), worded variously: *OPINION, VIDEO, STRANGE BUT TRUE, TRAVEL, MOTORING, BLOGS*. Like other soft newsbites, specials always have an Invitation worded: *more*. Illustrations and Tangents are optional. Specials are framed with a grey border and have a white background. In contrast to all other newsbites, the optional Illustration in special newsbites appears on the right-hand side of the newsbite.

The three categories of soft newsbite as shown in Table 10 - leading, feature, and special - are represented systemically in the orange section of the system network in Figure 8.

### 3.2. Illustrations and Tangents

As in Period 1, the choice of whether to include an Illustration in a newsbite (i.e. the choice of *illustrated/unillustrated*) and/or one or more Tangents (i.e. the choice of *tangentening/non-tangentening*) combine freely with the three basic categories of newsbite (i.e. hard, light, and soft). Therefore, the three systems are simultaneous, a relation signified by the black curly bracket in the system network in Figure 8.

### 3.3. Summary

All the systemic oppositions in the visual-verbal design of newsbites on the home page of the *Sydney Morning Herald* in Period 2, as discussed above, can be represented in a single system network, as presented in Figure 8. The timeline below the system network in Figure 8 indicates the time period to which this network applies.

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, a Lure (one type of Illustration) is an obligatory element in a leading soft newsbite and a feature, 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-tangentening’. This is indicated by the use of superscript $I_2$ with ‘feature’ and superscript $T_2$ with ‘non-tangentening’ (i.e. IF ‘feature’ is selected, THEN ‘non-tangentening’ must be selected).

In the next section, the implications of the above descriptions are discussed.

### 4. Conclusions

Online newspapers consist of web pages, but readers read web pages on-screen. Thus, the view of pages shown in Figures 2 and 6 above give the perspective of the designer and the analyst, but not the reader.

An online newspaper home page, then, is a complex visual-verbal sign that the reader never sees as a whole, but views a screen at a time. This has ramifications for the consumers of news texts, and forces the designers of the news to consider the limitations and affordances of the screen when designing the home page and its elements.
Verbally, this has contributed to the use of short news texts such as newsbites and headline-only hyperlinks (or ‘newsbits’) on home pages (see Knox, 2007 for a historical perspective on the evolution of the newsbite). Visually, it forces the most important news genre on the home page - the newsbite - to shoulder a share of the semiotic burden which, in traditional newspapers, is carried by the design of the page (see Kress, Van Leeuwen, 1998; cf. Bateman, et al., 2006).

In the Sydney Morning Herald online, the design of newsbites does share this semiotic load, and visual-verbal resources are employed systemically to differentiate between newsbites, and therefore to value them relative to each other - i.e. their structural differences realise paradigmatic meanings. Institutional values and practices resonate in home page design resonates in the design of newsbites, and more delicate distinctions - distinctions that go beyond those which the design of the page can signify (such as the top/other and leading/feature/special distinctions) - are also realised in the design of newsbites.

The argument presented here then, and summarised in the system networks presented in Figures 5 and 8 above, is twofold. Firstly, newsbites on the SMH home page have identifiable visual-verbal conventions which are unlikely to be consciously ‘read’, but which are fundamental to understanding the nature of communication in this new kind of social practice. Viewed synchronically, the structural resources realise a rich and varied paradigm within which the institutional author of the news can position stories and the social actors construed therein.

Secondly, from a diachronic perspective, it is apparent also that the conventions of visual-verbal communication are evolving rapidly at the relatively micro scalar level of the newsbite (see Table 1, Figure 5, and Figure 8), a phenomenon which is taking place in response to institutional practices and values which are themselves emerging with the move from print to the online medium in
newspaper. This is to say nothing of rapid change and development in the conventions of the macrogenres of the home page and the online newspaper.

The tools of systemic functional theory as employed in this chapter, then, can help illuminate the relationship between the synchronic and diachronic perspectives on semiosis. This becomes particularly important when describing meaning-making in arenas of rapid change, which emergent web genres (and more specifically online newspapers, their home pages, and their newsbites) exemplify.

Elsewhere, I have argued that the multimodal discursive practices of online newspapers and online newspaper home pages can be viewed as being in a fractal relationship with broader social developments: developments such as the digitisation of information; the gradual shift in the mass media to capturing attention rather than maintaining it; and the increasing alignment between social power and control over the value of information rather than control over access to it (Knox, 2007).

This fractal relationship extends down to newsbites, little texts which in their brevity lose the meaning-making power that comes with the extended verbiage traditionally associated with newspaper stories, but which continue to expand our meaning potential by other semiotic means.

5. Acknowledgements
This chapter reports on the author’s PhD research, conducted in the Department of Linguistics at the University of Sydney.

6. References
(a) Primary sources for text analyses
Website:
(d) Scientific works
Printed works:
Appendix I: Designing the news in an online newspaper


Online works:

http://journals.tdl.org/jodi/article/view/jodi-26/27


Appendix J:

Submitted manuscript, to be published as:

News texts are becoming shorter. In addition to the phenomenon of ‘soundbite news’ in broadcast media (Hallin 1997), the rapid rise of online newspapers has delivered home pages dominated by short texts consisting of a headline and lead, or headline only. Online newspapers engage readers for very short periods of time (Thurman 2007), and results of eyetracking research suggest that home pages play a central role in the reading practices of online newspaper readers (Barthelson 2002; Holmqvist et al. 2003).

Because online newspapers have quickly developed into a central element in the economic and discursive practices of individual news institutions and the mass media generally, the short texts which feature on their home pages pose problems for critical analysts of language and the media. How is it possible to analyse the ideological positioning of readers, the unfolding of an argument, and the development of meaning in a text of fewer than 25 words? What is the social significance of such short texts, with which readers engage on a timescale of seconds? And how can learners read such brief, ‘factual’ texts critically?

In order to address such questions, it is necessary to work with a theory that accounts for the relations between social processes and structures on the one hand, and the multimodal discursive activities by which they are played out on the other. One such theory is Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), the principles and tools of which have been applied to studying a range of semiotic systems other than language (e.g. O’Halloran 2004; O’Toole 1994; Kress & van Leeuwen 1996; van Leeuwen 2005) and to online newspapers (Bateman 2008; Bateman et al. 2006; Knox 2007).

O’Halloran (2008) makes the important and useful distinction between multimodal (combining different modalities such as visual, aural, olfactory) and multi-semiotic (combining different semiotic resources such as language, image, and music). In this chapter, multimodal (including its derivatives) is used as a cover term which includes the notion of multi-semiotic, as is common in the literature.

One aspect of SF theory which has been widely drawn on in examining multimodal discourse is the notion of genre (e.g. Baldry & Thibault 2006; Bateman 2008; Martin & Rose 2008; van Leeuwen 2005). Genre can be defined as the relatively predictable patterns of language and other semiotic resources (e.g. image, layout) observable across texts which are consistently used to achieve social goals. Individual texts can be identified as belonging to a particular genre, or as instantiating a mix of two or more genres (so-called hybrid texts).

Newspapers have always been multimodal, but the newsbites (headline-plus-lead-plus-hyperlink stories) and newsbits (headline-only stories) that feature on home pages are very, very short texts, and are all that a reader sees of a given story in many cases. Investigating the home pages and newsbites of online newspapers from a genre perspective allows us to consider their multimodal structure in relation to their social purposes. This is productive from two important perspectives: theoretical and professional.

Theoretically, new media pose fundamental challenges for existing theories of communication and language. The idea that language exists in a semiotic vacuum and makes meaning independently of other semiotic resources is no longer tenable. This means that description and theory need to evolve, just as new ways of communication are evolving.

Professionally, new media are an important site of social change: change in institutional practices of text production; change in the kinds of texts produced; and change in the social practices of text reception and use. Online media texts permeate personal, educational, and professional contexts, and educators need functional descriptions of how new media texts work in order to develop informed explanations and effective pedagogy. Professionals also need adequate descriptions to understand the roles that new kinds of text play in professional contexts, and the impact they have on professional practice.

The following sections of this chapter examine two newsbites which combine a number of semiotic resources, including language, image, and layout. The aim is to demonstrate what different tools from SF theory can tell us about these texts, and also how the texts raise questions for our understandings of what a text is, and how texts mean. Finally, the ways in which SF theory is evolving to account for new media are considered.
Newsbites: a linguistic perspective
The two texts discussed here were collected as part of a larger research project investigating the multimodal discourse of online newspaper home pages (see Knox 2007). Each is discussed in turn.

Text A: Verbal text of a newbite from the Bangkok Post

Perspective
Arrest of the ‘ultimate mastermind’
Three years ago, terrorist suspect, Hambali was captured in his apartment near Bangkok.

Text A is taken from the home page of the Bangkok Post online <www.bangkokpost.com> from August 11, 2006. Examining Text A from a purely linguistic perspective, we can see that it has two headings. The first of these, Perspective, suggests that the story is more reflective than other texts which might typically be found on a newspaper home page or front page. The second (which is a headline), Arrest of the ‘ultimate mastermind’, consists of a nominal group, and functions to predict for the reader what is to follow in the text. In SFL, the element of a text that performs this textual function (such as the classic ‘topic sentence’ in essay paragraphs) is known as the Hyper-Theme (Martin & Rose 2007). The main verbal text of the news story - commonly known as the lead - is situated in past time (Three years ago) and in space (in his apartment near Bangkok), and it is construed as an event (Hambali was captured).

Taking a critical perspective on the text, we can say that the Agent of this event - the one who did the capturing and arresting - is omitted by the use of nominalisation in the headline, and passive voice in the lead (cf. Fairclough 1995; Fowler 1991; Trew 1979). We can also say that Hambali is appraised negatively by implication. He has been labelled as the ‘ultimate mastermind’, denoting high levels of intelligence and/or skill. However, the fact that he has been arrested, and has been identified by the newspaper as a terror suspect have a cumulative effect of portraying him negatively, and construing him not only as a suspected terrorist mastermind, but as the suspected ‘ultimate (terrorist) mastermind’.

In this way, the reader is positioned by the text to view Hambali negatively. Texts vary in the extent to which they are ambiguous and allow for alternate readings, but it is common that a ‘default’, or ‘naturalised’ reading position is created in a text, whereby a reader who agrees with the position of the author can read the text as commonsense, while a reader who holds a different position can read the same text as biased. So the existence of a naturalised reading position in which Hambali is viewed negatively does not preclude readers from reading ‘against’ the text (see Martin & White 2005, pp. 95-7).

In summary, the brief, ‘factual’ reporting of the time, location, and the event of Hambali’s capture can also be seen as a vehicle for the newspaper to evaluate him, and this reflects another important element of media discourse - evaluating what happened and appraising who did it (or to whom it was done).

Text B: Verbal text of a newbite from the People’s Daily

China’s Peaceful Rise
After 26 years of reform and opening-up, China has blazed a path of development suited to its own conditions.

Text B is taken from the home page of the People’s Daily online, English version <english.peopledaily.com.cn> from September 2, 2005. The headline of this text also consists of a nominal group, China’s Peaceful Rise, which again functions as a Hyper-Theme orienting the reader to the text. The lead of this story is also construed as an event (China has blazed a path) which is positioned temporally (After 26 years of reform and opening-up).

33 One possible alternative would have been to construe it as a saying: authorities announced Hambali’s capture. For detailed discussion of the representation of experience in language, see Halliday & Matthiessen (2004) and Martin & Rose (2007).

34 One possible alternative would have been to construe it as a relation between China’s development and the attributes of that development: China’s development is suited to its own conditions.
China is construed as a social actor in this text: it possesses the Peaceful Rise in the headline, and is the ‘path blazer’ (and Agent) in the lead. By implication, it is peaceful, reforming, open, and trail-blazing, and as with Text A, the cumulative effect of these associations (particularly in the absence of any negative appraisal) is to naturalise a reading position: China is viewed positively.

A purely linguistic analysis of these two newsbites can tell us about how they work to construct a particular version of ‘who did what, when, where and how’: how they construe certain value positions on the part of the authors; and how language is used to position readers in relation to the actors and events in the texts. Yet in isolation, these texts each present something of a puzzle. Why would anyone write 19 words on the arrest of someone three years ago, or 22 words to tell a reader that China has developed in a manner of its own choosing? And why would anyone be interested to read these texts?

Newsbites: a historical perspective
Questions such as those posed immediately above go to the notion of genre - the social purposes of a given text, and the way it is structured in order to achieve those purposes. As with any text, Text A and Text B make meaning in part according to how similar and different they are to other texts. These intertextual relations are historical, and the verbal structure of Texts A and B is one which has evolved over time (cf. Iedema et al. 1994).

Texts A and B are news stories, and like all texts they reflect the practices and interests of the individuals, or in these cases the institutions, which produce them. Since the 19th century, news institutions have become more commercialised, the audiences of newspapers have broadened, and the nature of the social events typically reported on their pages have also changed. These social changes have contributed to a general move away from presenting chronological accounts of events written for a relatively limited audience, to writing stories which foreground the climax of the report both verbally and visually (Barnhurst & Nerone 2001; Iedema et al. 1994; White 1997), and a set of conventions has emerged whereby English-language news stories are structured in terms of importance rather than chronology. This structure is often termed the ‘inverted pyramid’, but has been described in SFL as an orbital, Nucleus-Satellite structure, which contrasts with linear, stage-by-stage approaches to modelling text structure (see Iedema et al. 1994; White 1997).

In the Nucleus-Satellite structure, the headline and lead (Nucleus) present the key elements of a story, and the subsequent sections (Satellites) expand on the information given in the Nucleus. Each Satellite refers back to the Nucleus, and does not depend on the other Satellites (Iedema et al. 1994; White 1997). This can be illustrated by what White (1997) calls ‘radical editability’, or the ability to re-arrange the order of the Satellites “without damaging the functionality of the text” (p. 116). In Figure 1, the three Satellites can be read in any order, because each refers back to the Nucleus, rather than to preceding Satellites.

![Figure 1: Extracts from a news story appearing in The Nation, October 26, 2004 (cf. Knox & Patpong, 2008)](image-url)
Appendix J: Online newspapers: Evolving genres, evolving theory

The ‘distilling’ of the climax of the news story into the Nucleus of print newspaper stories has contributed to the emergence of the newsbite as one of the primary news genres of online newspaper home pages. That is, by the time newspapers began to be published on the world wide web in the 1990s, the structure of hard news stories was already such that their purpose (i.e. to communicate the potential of an event to destabilise or consolidate the social order - Iedema et al. 1994, pp. 107) was largely achieved in the headline and lead. This meant that the Nucleus of a story could appear on an online newspaper home page, and function as a complete text in its own right.

There are other factors which have contributed to the emergence of newsbites. Those related to the historical development of news institutions include the trend towards ‘soundbite news’, which has contributed to an acceptance (and perhaps expectation) of shorter texts by mass media consumers. In addition, it is common practice in print newspapers to split front-page stories in order to provide a number of entry-points for the reader, and to take maximum advantage of the ‘prime real estate’ of the front page. Thus, print newspaper readers coming to the web in the early days of online newspapers were already accustomed to ‘following’ stories past the front page when their interests so dictated.

Affordances of the medium of the world wide web have also played a role in the emergence of newsbites. For example, the need to make a number of elements of the home page visible on a single screen (and particularly the first screen) means that short news stories are suited to the home page. The reading practices associated with online texts - including the tendency for readers to scan the home page in search of stories to read in greater depth (Holmqvist et al 2003) - are another related factor, as are the social contexts in which online newspaper reading takes place (Barthelson 2002).

As a result of factors such as these, many online newspaper home pages feature newsbites, and these short news texts differ in a number of ways from longer versions of the ‘same’ news story which may appear on a page ‘lower down’ in the website hierarchy.

Firstly, newsbites differ verbally from stories to which they hyperlink. For example, they sometimes include a superordinate heading - or **Verbal Frame** - not included in the longer story to which they hyperlink; and the wording of the headline and/or lead can differ from that in the longer story, sometimes completely. In the case of Text A above, the wording of the lead in the newsbite is completely different to the wording of the lead of the longer story to which the newsbite links. In the case of Text B, there is, in fact, no ‘longer story’ as such - the newsbite hyperlinks to a **section page** (a page which acts as a kind of home page for a single section of an online newspaper), on which links to a range of stories on China’s ‘peaceful development’ can be accessed.

Secondly, newsbites differ visually from longer stories. For example, they are obviously smaller; they may be positioned in a different column on their respective page; their image is typically much smaller and often completely different; and graphological features such as the size and colour of headlines often differ. Newsbites and longer texts also enter into different visual relations with the other elements on their respective pages, a point which is explored in following sections.

These verbal and visual differences are related to the third distinction offered here: the different purposes of newsbites on home pages on the one hand, and ‘full-length’ news stories appearing on dedicated web pages on the other. The purpose of a newsbite is to deliver the focus of a news story with both immediacy and impact, and to provide an entry point to the content of the newspaper for readers. Longer stories lower down in the website hierarchy ‘unpack’ the stories told in newsbites, and function more as ‘terminal points’ (from which readers often return to the home page) rather than entry points.

Their distinctive social purposes, and visual and verbal features identify newsbites as a distinct genre operating in online newspapers. Newspapers, in turn, are a macro-genre, or a genre of longer, more complex texts which combine a number of more ‘elemental’ genres (Martin & Rose 2008). The widespread use of newsbites on online newspaper home pages suggests that the demands of the news institutions and the readers of online newspapers are being addressed by the evolving genre of newsbites.
Newsbites: a multi-modal perspective

The preceding discussion argues that newsbites are visual-verbal texts, yet the earlier discussion of Text A and Text B considered them only as verbal texts. In this section, these two texts are considered from a multimodal perspective.

Figure 2: The ‘Hambali newsbite’ from the Bangkok Post online, August 11, 2006

Figure 2 shows the ‘Hambali newsbite’ from the Bangkok Post, the verbal text of which has already been provided in Text A above. The use of the light-blue coloured bar across the top of the newsbite presents the Perspective heading as a banner. This, its larger font, and its centred alignment visually sets the heading apart from the rest of the text. Both this heading and the headline are hypertext. The banner heading links to a section page where the reader can access different stories from the Perspective section of the newspaper, and the headline links to a single page featuring a longer version of the ‘same’ story. The image presents a close-up shot of the face of Hambali, an instance of what Royce (2002) calls intersemiotic repetition (see Figure 3), where a text includes two or more representations of the same thing using different semiotic resources (e.g. language and image). The use of the definite article in the nominal group the ‘ultimate mastermind’ can also be read as reference from the verbal text to the image.

Figure 3: Intersemiotic repetition in the ‘Hambali newsbite’

Clearly, there is also interpersonal work happening intersemiotically, and Hambali’s image is associated with the interpersonal values expressed verbally as described earlier (cf. Knox 2008). The extreme close-up nature of the thumbnail portrait presents Hambali to the reader at an intimate distance (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996) construing a personal relation between Hambali and the reader not possible with words alone (Knox forthcoming a). In addition to this, the positioning of the image, its high visual salience, and the interaction between the image and the verbal text contribute to bringing Hambali to ‘the front of the story’, orienting the reader interpersonally to the story, and functioning as a visual Hyper-Theme (cf. Knox forthcoming b; Martin 2002).

Figure 4: The ‘China newsbite’ from the People’s Daily online, English version, September 2, 2005

35 For complementary accounts of image-text relations, see Martinec & Salway (2005), and van Leeuwen (2005).
Figure 4 shows the ‘China newsbite’ from the *People’s Daily*, the verbal text of which has already been presented in Text B above. The headline is visually offset from the lead, and appears in bold, blue font, the conventional colour of hyperlinks on the world wide web. Both headline and image are clickable hyperlinks which take the reader to the same section page, where a number of stories on the development of China can be accessed as discussed earlier.

Drawing on Caple’s (e.g. 2007) work on press images, the photograph uses the compositional technique of *serialising*, where an element in the image (in this case, the soldiers) is repeated a number of times. The edge of the red flag against the blue sky draws a vector between the soldiers in the image and the headline, *China’s Peaceful Rise*. There is *intersemiotic meronymy* (i.e. part-whole relations between elements construed by different semiotic resources - Royce 2002) between the visual depiction of the Chinese military in the image (i.e. three soldiers standing beneath the flag of the People’s Liberation Army) and the lexical item *China*: the People’s Liberation Army is a part of the ‘whole’ that is China (Figure 5).

![Figure 5: Intersemiotic meronymy in the ‘China newsbite’](image)

While there is no mention of the military in the verbal text, image and text are presented to the reader as a single unit. Read as a single text, the newsbite presents the Chinese military as an integral element (arguably the key element) in China’s ‘peaceful’ practices of *reform and opening-up*, a meaning completely absent from Text B as presented earlier.

As with the Hambali newsbite, there are interpersonal meanings construed in the visual-verbal interaction in the China newsbite. The positive appraisal of China discussed in the linguistic analysis of Text B affects our reading of the image. That is, the Chinese military is evaluated positively in this newsbite, and this is perhaps best illustrated by considering how the meaning of the image would change if the accompanying verbal text read, for example, *China Invades The Falklands*.

As discussed earlier, readers can always ‘read against’ a text. So while the China newsbite evaluates the Chinese military positively, a reader who has personal views contrary to this can, of course, read the relation between the image and the verbal text as ironic or flatly contradictory.

To summarise this section, newsbites do not make meaning verbally, nor visually. Rather, they make meaning multimodally, combining different semiotic resources (such as language, image, and layout) to mean in ways not possible using any single resource.

**Newsbites: a page perspective**

Online newspapers are non-linear texts - there is no ‘default’ order in which they are intended to be read. This is in contrast to linear texts such as films, which are created to be viewed (or ‘read’) from beginning to end. Likewise, pages of densely printed text:

must be read the way they are designed to be read - from left to right and from top to bottom, line by line. Any other form of reading (skipping, looking at the last page to see how the plot will be resolved or what the conclusion will be) is a form of cheating and produces a slight sense of guilt in the reader (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996, p. 218).

The linear / non-linear distinction is a cline, not a dichotomy, and home pages sit somewhere between the two extremes. On the one hand, they must be viewed a screen at a time - the bottom of the page cannot be seen before the top of the page. At the same time, each individual screen is a non-linear configuration, and it is possible to scroll down and up.
Newsbites contribute to the non-linearity of home pages and online newspapers. As multimodal texts, they make meaning by combining language, image and layout into cohesive wholes, and their verbal brevity accommodates non-linear readings of them. At the same time, as individual visual units on the page, they can also make meaning ‘with’ and ‘against’ other visual units on the page. That is, each newsbite on a home page is positioned relative to other newsbites, and texts of other genres (e.g. newsbits, advertisements, menus, mastheads). The positioning of texts on the home page of online newspapers is consistent over time; the page template is an ideological framework, within which individual stories are ‘slotted’ on a day-by-day, hour-by-hour, and even minute-by-minute basis. In this way, the values of the news institution are ‘designed into’ the home page template, and stories are crafted to meet the design strictures imposed upon individual newsbites according to where they are positioned on the page.37 In the remainder of this section, the structures of the home pages of the Bangkok Post and the People’s Daily are considered from this perspective.

The home page of the Bangkok Post online shown in Figure 6 is representative of the design of this page between August, 2006 and August, 2007. In the central column carrying the main news, the primary colour scheme is black text on white background, with large red font for hyperlinked headlines. Visually, this ‘news column’ (see further discussion below) blends the colour scheme of print newspapers (black text on white background) with the visual conventions of the world wide web (coloured font signifying hyperlinks). The overall design of the page also draws on other conventions of print newspaper page design, with the use of a masthead (which brings to the online publication the tradition and authority of the institution of the Bangkok Post), and the visual prominence of headlines in large font.

Consistent with what Kress & van Leeuwen (1996) describe as an ‘objective perspective’, the page is visually compartmentalised, and the use of a square, componential design presents a factual and analytical stance visually. It would be possible to use an animated, circular design on the page with headlines and images rotating around the newspaper’s logo, and/or with the use of sound and animation to highlight each story when rolled over with the mouse. Yet online newspapers consistently choose not to use such design features, and the squared, black-on-white design is widely used because visually it conveys a more ‘serious’ and authoritative stance, and draws in part on the tradition of print newspaper design.

The authoritative, serious stance of the home page visually construes a particular kind of interpersonal relationship between the institution of the newspaper and the reader. The newspaper reports ‘the facts’, and the stories appearing on the home page are presented as impartial accounts of events and the actors involved in them (for discussion of the construal of ‘objectivity’ in the language of news stories, see Martin & White 2005). This contributes to creating a semiotic environment in which the stories on the page - including the Hambali newsbite - can be read as factual, objective accounts, and therefore where the alignment of the reader with the negative appraisal of Hambali (as discussed earlier) can be more readily achieved.

In addition to construing an objective and authoritative stance on the part of the newspaper, the design of the home page also constructs and categorises the ‘world of the news’ in a way particular to the Bangkok Post.

The main, centre column of news is broken visually by three pink horizontal bars with verbal headings: General News, Business, and Sports. Each of the newsbites in this column are roughly the same size and shape, and contrast visually with the newsbites across the bottom of the page, which are headed visually by blue horizontal bars, and verbally with the headings: Outlook, Database, RealTime, Motoring, Horizons, and Perspective. Drawing again on the work of Kress & van Leeuwen (1996), we can identify a visual-verbal taxonomy of newsbites as shown in Figure 7. The italicised categories in Figure 7 (namely news, hard, and soft) are covert categories, in that they are not explicitly named. In contrast, the categories on the lowest level of the tree are overt categories and explicitly named on the home page.

37 Like newsbites, the meaning potential of newsbits has been expanding recently, with some online newspapers using different font sizes, font colours, and also images with newsbits. The choices as to whether a story appears on the home page; and if so whether as a newsbite or a newsbit are value-laden in themselves (Knox, 2008, forthcoming c).
Figure 6: Home page from the Bangkok Post online, August 11, 2006
The taxonomy of news represented in Figure 7 is not obvious to the reader, as the home page is only ever viewed a screen at a time. Nonetheless, readers are presented the Hambali newsbite within this taxonomy (within the category *Perspective*), which is the way that the *Bangkok Post* online classified the world of news during the time period of this page design (cf. Knox 2008).

This way of categorising the events of the world is closely related to the organisation of the news institution, with different news desks (e.g. the Business desk, the Sports desk, the Outlook desk, the Perspective desk) having their own editor and staff, and therefore their own ‘slice of real estate’ on the home page. But the way the visual-verbal classification system works on the home page also goes beyond this. For example, Sport news is classified together with General and Business news, while Perspective (which includes commentary, analysis and investigative pieces) is classified together with Motoring and Horizons (the travel section) as ‘soft news’, despite the topical similarity between the content of the *Perspective* and *General News* sections of the newspaper. Further, the choice to position the Hambali newsbite on the home page as the ‘Perspective newsbite’ means that it must meet the particular visual and verbal design parameters which come with this choice.

In addition to construing the stance and authority of the newspaper, and the ‘categorisation of the world of news’, online newspaper home pages are composed in such a way that they function as cohesive wholes, taking into account the affordances and constraints of the scrolling screen. That part of the *Bangkok Post*’s home page which is visible when the reader first accesses the site - known as the first screen, features the masthead, a large banner advertisement, the main navigational menu, a large news image, and a table of breaking news. What is actually seen on different readers’ computer screens varies according to factors beyond the control of the newspaper, such as screen size and browser settings. Nonetheless, the visual structure of the page takes account of the fact that the first screen - or Head of the page - needs to have visual impact in a way that is less important for the remainder of the page.

On some home pages, the difference is marked; on others like the *Bangkok Post* at this time, the difference is less marked. Figure 6 shows that a line can be drawn across the page roughly at the bottom of the first newsbite (which is also roughly the bottom of the first navigation menu, and the table of ‘Breaking News’). It is common (if not universal) that online newspaper home pages are designed in this way, with a Head-Tail compositional structure (Knox 2007).

This Head-Tail structure works together with the simple principle that stories closer to the top of the page are ranked as more important than those below them. The soft news on the *Bangkok Post* home page is compositionally valued as ‘last in line’, at the bottom of the Tail of the page.

Online newspaper home pages also typically have a horizontal composition pattern where a visually salient column of content (often the middle or left column) carries the Primary information on the page, and narrower columns carry Secondary information. Positioned as it is in the centre column at the bottom of the page, the Hambali newsbite is valued as Primary information (contrasting with navigational menus, advertisements, breaking news, and stock news positioned in peripheral columns).38

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38 The soft newsbites on this page actually break the main column boundaries, and it could be argued that this position at the very bottom of the Tail is actually outside the Primary-Secondary paradigm.
Figure 8: Home page from the People’s Daily online, English version, September 2, 2005

The home page of the People’s Daily can be analysed using the same theoretical tools as applied to the home page of the Bangkok Post as described above. Figure 8 represents the home page design of the People’s Daily between early 2004 and June 2007, and shows that similar to the Bangkok Post, it also

The subsequent design of the Bangkok Post home page addressed this anomaly, and moved the soft-news newsbits to a Secondary column to the right of the page.
construes a ‘factual’, ‘objective’, and ‘authoritative’ stance; constructs a visual-verbal taxonomy of news (which includes both overt and covert categories); and uses a Head-Tail and Primary-Secondary compositional structure.

As discussed above, the design of an online newspaper home page is an act of communication, and what is communicated includes the stance of the newspaper, the representation of ‘the world of news’, and the compositional value of the information on the page. This ‘level of communication’ is closely related to the way in which news is reported in newsbites at a ‘lower level’ (cf. Baldry & Thibault 2006, p. 144). As stated earlier, the wording of the Hambali newsbite and the China newsbite are unique: each newsbite has been written specifically for the home page. But more than this, each newsbite has been written for a particular position in the ideological framework construed by the home page template.

It is not a new phenomenon that the stories appearing on newspaper pages are valued by the visual design of the story and the page (Barnhurst & Nerone 2001; Kress & van Leeuwen 1998). However, the degree of regimentation in online newspaper pages is much higher than in their print counterparts, in part because the materiality of the print newspaper serves also as a navigational device, and the virtual nature of online newspapers means that a range of techniques - including page templates which are consistent across pages and over time - are necessary to aid navigation.

Overall, the discussion to this point has aimed to show that newsbites are short texts which can be analysed verbally, visually, and multimodally, and that they make meaning as individual texts, and in relation to other stories. Further, institutional structures and practices are realised in the multimodal structure of home pages and newsbites. In the next section, another dimension of online newspaper discourse will be considered: the dimension of time.

**Newsbites: a temporal perspective**

Online newspapers include many stories and many genres. There are extended 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. The home page of an online newspaper is, however, a crucial site where the news valued as most important in the value system of the news institution is carefully packaged for the reader, and therefore where the values of the newspaper are most prominently on display (cf. Fishman & Marvin 2003).

Newsbites are short texts, and may be read in seconds, or less. Online newspapers are typically read on a timescale of minutes. Yet one of the key functions of a newspaper is to build a loyal audience (Thurman 2007), and like their print counterparts, online newspapers depend for their survival on readers returning.

Letters pages, feedback through other media, blogs, 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).

All newspapers are heteroglossic - the voice of the institution accommodates many voices, including the readers whose comments are published, the wire agencies whose stories are sourced, the photographers whose images appear, the sources quoted in stories, and the journalists, sub-editors, and editors who share authorship of news stories (Bell 1991). The audience is multifarious too, so features such as many-to-many interaction, the increasingly common updating of online newspapers on a minute-by-minute basis, the non-linear nature of online newspapers, and the attendant unpredictable nature of readers’ pathways through the text at any given time, all combine to make the ‘newspaper-as-dialogue’ a complex, dynamic text.

Within this complex interaction, the structure of the home page allows the news institution to focus on actors and events they value as current and immediate, while keeping other issues valued as important simmering in the background of the readership’s collective consciousness. This has long been a feature of print newspapers, but with the long-term tendency towards shorter texts and the Nucleus-Satellite structure, and the move to the medium of the world wide web, online newspapers have developed in such a way that news content (or experiential meanings) can be kept to a minimum on the home page,
while the evaluation of actors and events (or interpersonal meanings) can be maintained. Newsbites are well suited to this semiotic environment, where readers are kept well informed interpersonally on a range of issues, but well informed experientially only with regard to those stories they follow to pages ‘lower down’ in the website.

Therefore, in addition to considering newsbites from the perspective of linguistics, multimodal discourse analysis, and page design, their role in the unfolding discourse of the newspaper-as-dialogue also needs to be understood. In order to do so, theoretical tools are needed that can account for texts with the features described above, and which unfold over a timescale of years.

Theory: a newsbite-inspired perspective

Two newsbites have been examined using a range of tools from SF theory. Aspects examined have included choices in lexis and grammar such as nominalisation, passive voice, and agent deletion; choices in discourse-semantics (or meaning ‘beyond the clause’) such as Hyper-Theme and appraisal; choices in text-image relations; and choices in page design. One analytical perspective not explored here, but which is crucial, is the overall design of the website, including the relations between pages, and between elements on one page and elements on another (see Djonov 2007). Accounts of other genres in online newspapers are also needed.

In addition to these tools, researchers and professionals will benefit from applying tools which can account for texts such as the newspaper-as-dialogue which unfold over longer timescales. Issues such as terrorism (which features in the Hambali newsbite) are likely to feature prominently on home pages at some times, and trail off in others. This is also likely to be the case for stories dealing with national development. For example, at times when China is criticised internationally, we might predict that Xinhua (the government news agency which publishes the People’s Daily) is more likely to include stories of China’s development as hard news on the home page. At other times, ‘News Features’ and ‘Highlights’ allow the institution to keep such stories ‘ticking over’ in the discourse of the newspaper. Thus, the way that individual newsbites are written, and the configuration of values realised by the design of the home page template, are both less significant than the longer, constantly shifting mosaic of which they are part (see Lemke 2003).

SF theorists have long recognised the importance of texts unfolding over longer timescales. Examples include Fowler’s (1991) account of the ‘salmonella-in-eggs affair’ in the British press; Christie’s (e.g. 1997) descriptions of curriculum macro-genres; Coffin and O’Halloran’s (this volume) analysis of the run up to European Union Expansion; 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. Martin & Rose (2008) describe similar work by Jordens (2002), and Muntigl (2004) in other institutional contexts.

Such work is consistent with Lemke’s observation, that:

There is a need for CDA [i.e. critical discourse analysis] to enquire into [the] functional differentiation [of texts] with regard to timescales, and an important start on such enquiries is investigating the extent to which, say, shorter vs longer texts carry different functions and mediate different kinds of social organization across scales. (Lemke 2003, p. 141)

In order to understand texts as complex, dynamic and data-intensive as the ‘newspaper-as-dialogue’, and to be able to analyse and recognise the patterns which occur across longer timescales and which relate, therefore, to higher scales of social organization (Lemke 2003), mathematical modelling and visualisation of data are likely to become increasingly important (see O’Halloran 2005).

Conclusion

Home pages and newsbites provide the ‘bare bones’ of news stories, but at the same time their multimodal structure allows them to meet the institutional demands of the newspaper (to report on events; to evaluate events, people and institutions; to act as entry points to the newspaper) and the demands of readers (to be informed of current events; to navigate to those parts of the newspaper which draw their interest; to be engaged and entertained). For so-called ‘digital natives’, these hypermedia texts are as ‘natural’ as casual conversations, text books, television commercials, and comics. But new media genres challenge existing notions of text and communication, and are evolving rapidly.
This creates challenges for researchers and teachers working to develop informed descriptions of such texts, and pedagogical approaches that can teach learners to read and write them effectively. The pressure falls not only on the descriptions, but also on the theories informing them.

In such an environment, theoretical consistency and strength is vital if we are to avoid re-inventing the wheel at every new genre, in every new context. SF theory is one theory which has proved adaptable and useful in describing a variety of semiotic systems, and incorporating insights from different disciplinary fields. Building on solid theory which can explain texts systematically in relation to their social contexts of production and reception provides us with the best chance of developing sound and applicable explanations which can feed into pedagogy, and allow our work to remain relevant to current and future generations.

References

Appendix J: Online newspapers: Evolving genres, evolving theory


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Appendix K: A systemic approach to analysing home page design

Abstract

This paper was one of three presented in a colloquium entitled Dimensions of Hypermedia Discourse Analysis. As the first of the three papers, it offers a systemic functional perspective on online newspaper home page design, showing how, by ‘privileging the paradigmatic’, systemic descriptions can provide an empirical, theory-based description of page design which complements other perspectives, and which can contribute to an account of semiosis in the emerging macrogenre of the online newspaper. The ‘two-dimensional’ perspective (i.e. limited to the web page) taken in this paper is complementary to the ‘three-dimensional’ perspective taken by Djonov (this volume) which accounts for horizontal and vertical hierarchical distance relations between web pages, and to the perspective taken by Zhao (this volume) which accounts for the ‘fourth dimension’ of time in the unfolding of a user’s traversal through a hypermedia text.

Introduction

Page design has been an important factor in the mass mediation of information on print newspaper pages for over 200 years (Barnhurst & Nerone, 2001; Machin & Niblock, 2006). As newspaper institutions have expanded beyond print and onto web pages, the affordances of the new medium have led to changes in the way stories are told, both visually and verbally (Bateman, 2008; Bateman et al., 2006; Knox, 2007; cf. Zhao, 2008).

Descriptions of developments in online newspaper page design have been made from a range of perspectives, including grounded theory (Cooke, 2003), document design (Bateman, 2008), the design profession (de Vries, 2008), and a number of more quantitative approaches to content and its presentation from within media studies (Barnhurst, 2002; Li, 2002; Lin & Jeffres, 2001; Massey, 2004; Utt & Pasternack, 2003). This paper focuses on the design of online newspaper home pages, those pages where “the most important news of the day appears, and news values and practices are most sharply drawn” (Fishman & Marvin, 2003, p. 33) 39. In particular, it describes aspects of the home page of the Sydney Morning Herald online (henceforth smh online) between May, 2004 and November, 2005.

Because home pages are mediated by the computer screen, many of the design practices which have evolved over centuries of producing print on page are changing, and the affordances of the web page differ significantly from those of print on paper.

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)

This paper aims to show, by taking a systemic perspective on web page design, that online newspapers are evolving to maintain the kind of multidimensional possibilities that news authors and readers have become accustomed to in print. The constraints and affordances of the medium, the institutional and historical demands on the product of news, and the evolving nature of online newspaper discourse mean that home pages employ the visual semiotic to do more than present categorised lists.

Home pages - a metafunctional perspective

Home pages are complex, multimodal signs. Ideationally, they provide an overview of what is deemed the most important news of the day (increasingly, of the hour). In doing so, they classify the content into named news categories such as ‘national’, ‘business’, and ‘sport’, and unnamed categories such as ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ news.

Interpersonally, home pages establish the authority of the voice of the newspaper with a masthead and ‘serious’ squared, componental design. They value the content on the page both verbally and visually, and establish ‘communality’ of experience by building familiarity with news actors and events.

Textually, they provide navigational information and links, and act as a Macro-Theme for the entire online newspaper - an “orientation to what is to come: our frame of reference as it were” (Martin

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39 Fishman & Marvin are referring to the front pages of print newspapers in this passage, but their description applies equally well to online newspaper home pages.
Appendix K: A systemic approach to analysing home page design

& Rose, 2003, p. 181; see Djonov, 2005, 2007). The visual design of the home page of the *smh online* is illustrated in Figure 1.

![Figure 1: Sketch representing the layout of smh online home page: May, 2004 - Nov, 2005](image)

When viewed this way, the four columns of the page separate the content into navigational and news content, and the news content is also visually classified into:

- ‘hard’ news - concerned with reporting events of social significance
- ‘soft’ news - concerned with interpreting or reflecting on events or issues
- ‘lite’ news - concerned with the ‘private’ sphere of the lives of social actors (Knox, forthcoming a)

Different areas of the page also have greater salience, or ‘visual weight’ (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996) than others. And the use of images (represented in grey in Figure 1), particularly close shots of faces, contributes to maintaining the newspaper’s audience (Knox, forthcoming b).

Online newspaper pages are not viewed in their totality by readers as the page is mediated by the screen. This means that readers see the page one screen at a time, and that the overall page design cannot be relied upon to communicate in the same way that the design of print pages can. The institutional authors of online newspapers must employ visual design in such a way that the work done by pages in print newspapers can be done in a much smaller space, screen-by-screen in online newspaper home pages. And this is particularly important on home pages, which play such an important role in the ideological stance of the newspaper (as discussed above), and in the reading practices of online newspaper readers (Holmqvist et al, 2003).

For online newspaper home pages, it is not only page design that communicates visually, but also the design of the short, headline-plus-lead-plus-hyperlink news stories which feature on them - newsbites.

**Newsbites**

Newsbites on the home page of the *smh online* are designed in such a way that the page-level distinction of hard, soft, and lite news is reiterated, regardless of what area of the page is visible on-screen. That is, the structural features of newsbites realise the meanings ‘designed into’ the page. In addition, they allow for more detailed and delicate paradigmatic oppositions. Due to constraints of space, only hard newsbites are described further in this paper.

All newsbites (hard, soft, and lite) on the home page of the *smh online* from May, 2004 to November, 2005 share the structural features of an Event (realised by a lead), and a Focus (realised by a headline) which is conflated with a Link (realised by a hyperlink). In addition, hard newsbites have a hyperlink which readers can click to get a longer or modally different version of the ‘same’ story, an Invitation (worded more).
Appendix K: A systemic approach to analysing home page design

Hard newsbites appearing near the top of the page are distinguished from those appearing lower down by headline design. The hard-news headlines near the top of the page draw on the visual conventions of both print newspapers (large, dark font) and the world wide web (blue not black, changing when rolled over with the cursor). This is distinct from the headlines of newsbites further down the page in named news categories (such as World and Business), which draw more overtly on the visual conventions of the world wide web (light-blue font, underlined). This visual-design distinction separates top hard newsbites from topical hard newsbites 40. Figure 2 illustrates.

![Figure 2: Basic top/topical system and visual approximation of newsbites from smh online home page, November 1, 2005](image)

Online newspapers are tending towards a publication schedule where news is updated as it happens, rather than working on a 24 hour news cycle. This is reflected in the possibility of including the time of publication in hard-news newsbites on the smh online home page, as illustrated in Figure 3.

![Figure 3: Basic timed/untimed system and visual approximation of newsbites from smh online home page, November 1, 2005](image)

At the same time, hard-news newsbites sometimes include a byline in order to market the news commodity (Figure 4):

![Figure 4: Newsbites with bylines](image)

40 Top because they are at the top of the page; topical following Bell’s (1991) category of ‘special topic news’.
Appendix K: A systemic approach to analysing home page design

Figure 4: Basic signed/unsigned system and visual approximation of newsbites from smh online home page, November 1, 2005

Finally, newsbites on the home page may also include an image, and therefore be illustrated, and may include a Tangent, or hyperlinks to different, but related stories (see the untimed newsbite in Figure 3, which is both illustrated and tangenting).

The systemic possibilities for hard newsbites as discussed above and summarised in Figure 5 mean that the authors of the smh online home page during this time had at their disposal 32 possible systemic choices by which they could value hard news relative to other hard news, in addition to valuing it relative to other content on the home page. After the home page was re-designed in November, 2005, additional design choices became available, and there were 96 possible systemic choices for hard newsbites alone.

Similar, but far fewer choices were available in the design of soft and lite newsbites, implying firstly that the institution places importance on the ability to distinguish news in ways more subtle and complex than is possible with page-level classification (or providing ‘multidimensional access’ in Bateman’s terms), and secondly that hard news remains the ‘core product’ of the smh online.

Figure 5: System network of hard newsbites, smh online home page: May, 2004 - Nov, 2005

Conclusion

The analysis presented here shows that the potential for valuing news has not necessarily diminished in the move from print to online newspapers. In the smh online at least, meanings we might expect to be conveyed visually by page design are conveyed (additionally, and/or alternatively) by the design of newsbites. Following Bateman (2008), the factors which bear on the evolution of the design possibilities discussed above include affordances and constraints of:

- the ‘canvas’ of the web page, which is viewed one screen at a time
- production, such as the rigidity of page templates, the ease and economy with which colour and images can be used, the ability to link to multiple texts with hypertext, and the ability to update information rapidly
- consumption, such as the need for newsbites to be quickly accessible and distinguishable to readers both verbally and visually
- generic modes of expression (verbal and visual), such as the long-term trend towards soundbite news in the mass media, and the evolution of the nucleus-satellite structure of hard news stories (Iedema, Feez, & White, 1994).

41 One more delicate option has not been introduced here due to space limitations. Therefore, the system network in Figure 5 is partial, and the total number of systemic choices available was actually 48.
Taking a systemic approach to analysing the design of online newspaper home pages can help unpack the institutional practices and values ‘built-in’ to the architecture of home pages and the design of newsbites, and show that even texts as brief as newsbites carry the ideology of the news institution.

References


