Chapter 6: Home pages

6.1 Introduction

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

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

(Fishman & Marvin, 2003, p. 33)

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

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

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

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

6.2 Home page design

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

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

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

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

6.2.1 Home page design and ideational meanings

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

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

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

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

visual structures of representation can either be

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

![Diagram](image)

*Figure 6.3: A topological perspective on overt and covert visual classification*

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

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42 On home pages functioning as Orientation in home sections, the Superordinate (typically *News*) is never named in this corpus. On home pages functioning as Briefing in content sections, the Superordinate (e.g. *National, Business, Sport*) is often named at the top of the News Coverage.
Figure 6.4: Covert visual classification, SMH home page, 26 February 2002

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

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

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

*Is a given story to be classified as:*

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

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

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

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

Figure 6.7: Elements in the news taxonomy on the BKP home page, 26 February, 2002
choice is a cline, and home pages tend to differ according to the extent to which they represent the visual elements in the news taxonomy as homogeneous and heterogeneous.

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

![Figure 6.8: A topological perspective on homogeneous and heterogeneous visual classification: Extracts from BKP home page (BKP Period I - left) and SMH home page (SMH Period IV - right)](image)

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

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

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

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

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

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

![Figure 6.11: System network of news taxonomies](image)

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

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

**6.2.1.1 Sydney Morning Herald**

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

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

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

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

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

In SMH Periods III and IV, there are significant changes to the news taxonomy on the SMH home page. Beginning with Period III, a new column is introduced. Hard news remains in the widest, most salient column on the page, and lite news remains in the right column, but between the two, a column of newsbites which includes feature stories on a range of topics is added (Figure 6.14). Like the hard and lite classifications, this column is un-named, and is labelled here as soft news. The news taxonomy on the SMH home page during this design period can be represented in a tree structure as shown in Figure 6.15.
Figure 6.14: Home page of SMH, 12 October, 2005 (SMH Period III)

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

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

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

The repetition between the menus in the navigation zone and the Subordinate headings in the news taxonomy down the page raises two design issues. The first is redundancy, and whether the redundancy in navigation menus and news taxonomies is managed efficiently on the page or not (cf. Djonov, 2005). The second issue is the space at the bottom of the Navigator, where approximately half of the left column on the page is completely empty (Figure 6.14), a situation that would not be acceptable on the front page of a print newspaper.
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Figure 6.16: SMH home page (SMH Period IV) and basic news taxonomy
These issues are dealt with in the design of the home page in Period IV.

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

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

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

Figure 6.18: TECHNOLOGY section of SMH home page, 10 January, 2006

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

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

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

6.2.1.2 People’s Daily

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

6.2.1.3 Bangkok Post

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

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bangkok Post Period I</th>
<th>Bangkok Post Period II</th>
<th>Bangkok Post Period III</th>
<th>Bangkok Post Period IV</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

### Table 6.5: Subordinate categories of newsbites on the BKP home page over three page designs: August, 2001 - December, 2005

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Breaking News</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General News</td>
<td>General News</td>
<td>General News</td>
<td>Business News</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entertainment</td>
<td>Entertainment</td>
<td>Entertainment</td>
<td>Entertainment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outlook</td>
<td>Outlook</td>
<td>Outlook</td>
<td>Outlook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horizons Travel</td>
<td>Horizons Travel</td>
<td>Horizons Travel</td>
<td>Horizons Travel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Real.Time</td>
<td>Real.Time</td>
<td>Real.Time</td>
<td>Real.Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IT News</td>
<td>IT News</td>
<td>IT News</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Figure 6.23: Visual-verbal classification and simplified taxonomies of newsbites, BKP home page, October 24, 2005 (BKP Period III) top & April 5, 2005 (BKP Period IV) bottom

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

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

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

### 6.2.1.4 News taxonomies and news institutions

As Kress & van Leeuwen point out: “Classification processes do not, of course, simply reflect ‘real’, ‘natural’ classifications” (1996, p. 81). The design of the page constructs (or re-presents) an institutional version of the ‘real world’ (see van Leeuwen, 1993), and such constructions inevitably represent some relations at the expense of others. For instance, on the BKP home page after July 2006 (Figure 6.24), the hard news category included General news, Sports, and Business (among others). At the same time, soft news included Perspective (which includes commentary, analysis and investigative pieces), Horizons (the travel section), and Motoring among others. Topically, the content of the Perspective section of the newspaper is closely related to the content of the General news section, but not to Motoring or Horizons.48 Yet institutionally, Perspective is one of the weekly lift-out sections of the print newspaper with its own desk and staff, and presumably therefore, grouped with other lift-out sections from the print edition and represented differently to General News on the home page.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

6.2.1.5 News taxonomies: Conclusion

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

6.2.2 Home page design and interpersonal meanings

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

- communicate the stance of the newspaper (e.g. authoritative or speculative; reporting or entertaining; objective or subjective; factual or creative)
- value actors and actions in the news
- mediate relations between the newspaper and the audience in a way that engages readers.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

6.2.2.1 Attitude

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

*Figure 6.25: Subjective image in advertisement (source: Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, p. 138)*

In objective visual design, the viewer perspective is not ‘designed into’ the text. On the home pages in this corpus, for example, the squared, compartmental design of the page does not encode a viewpoint whereby the reader is positioned at an oblique horizontal angle to the page (e.g. ‘viewing from the sidelines’), nor one which manipulates the vertical angle (viewing ‘from above’ or ‘from below’). Instead, the home pages appear without perspective: they are abstract visualisations that show “what is objectively there, rather than what we would see if we were looking at them in reality, rather than what is subjectively there” (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, p. 137).
To illustrate, Figure 6.26 shows the home page from the *PD* of September 15, 2005 on the left, and another, manipulated version of the same page on the right. By skewing the side columns and making the page appear three-dimensional, the viewer has a spatial relation to the manipulated page which is absent from the unaltered home page. The reader views the centre column, the Brand, and the Signature of the manipulated page ‘front on’, while the side columns appear at an oblique angle. This places the reader directly in front of the page: the reader is subjected visually to a given perspective by the page’s design. (If the reader were ‘side-on’ to the page, one of the side columns would appear flat, the centre column would be oblique, and the ‘closest’ side column would almost disappear.)
Similarly in Figure 6.27, the front page of the print edition of the Thai-language daily *Matichon* is shown at an angle and meant to resemble a door, which presumably is ‘welcoming’ the reader to ‘enter’ this part of the site and read the annual report. This design construes a subjective perspective, and the ‘reader’ of the image views it as though we are positioned at an angle in relation to the page, the door frame, and the report ‘behind it’, an angle specified by the image itself.

This kind of reader perspective, or ‘subjectivity’, is not designed into the unaltered home page of the *PD* in Figure 6.26, nor in the front page of the *Matichon*
as it is published everyday. Both ‘normal’ pages are designed with a perspective that is ‘objectively’ ‘just like this’ regardless of the reader’s position. In this way, objectivity is a feature of the visual design of all home pages in this corpus: they “neutralize the distortions that usually come with perspective, because they neutralize perspective itself” (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, p. 149).

Figure 6.28: Mr.News.Mx home page from 19 August, 2006

Perspective can be illustrated further with the home page design of Mr.News.Mx, an online English-language newspaper from Mexico, accessed in August, 2006. In this case, it is not the design of the individual page that encodes subjectivity, but the visual design of the navigation menu and the virtual pages (construed visually as material pages) the navigation menu represents (Figure 6.28). By making the web pages appear visually as material pages, the reader is positioned literally ‘at arm’s length’, as a newspaper reader, not a web surfer. A particular kind of relation between the author, the newspaper reader, and the content - one which draws on the conventional values of these social constructs - is construed visually. As Kress & van Leeuwen comment in relation to different kinds of text, the choice to
include a subjective perspective in visual design “adds nothing to the representational meaning of these [texts]; but it does add attitudinal meanings” (1996, p. 152).

Figure 6.29: Objective perspective: Home pages of BKP (BKP Period I); PD, (PD Period I); and SMH, (SMH Period III)

Regardless of other aspects of interpersonal meaning construed in the visual design of the home pages in the corpus (see following sub-section), all have an objective perspective (Figure 6.29). In terms of ATTITUDE, then, the visual design construes a stance of objectivity on the part of each home page, a stance consistent with the social role of broadsheet newspapers which are expected to provide objective reports of newsworthy events.
6.2.2.2 Modality

Turning to the visual system of MODALITY, Kress & van Leeuwen’s MODALITY is a borrowed term “from linguistics [which] refers to the truth value or credibility of (linguistically realized) statements about the world” (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, p. 160). Applying the visual system of MODALITY to online newspaper home pages, the interpersonal visual design of home pages contributes to the creation of an ‘objective’ and ‘factual’ stance on the part of the newspaper by employing a number of design principles which are ‘at play’ in all three newspapers.

On the home pages in question, there are three primary means by which MODALITY is realised. The first is the use of hypertext resources (the more simple / static, the higher the MODALITY); the second is the use of space and shape in page design (the more squared and ordered, the higher the MODALITY); and the third is the use of colour (the more ‘black and white’, the higher the MODALITY). Each of these parameters is discussed in turn.

6.2.2.2.1 Stasis and MODALITY

When one considers the potential for innovative design on websites (as demonstrated even in much of the advertising carried on online newspaper pages), and how they could choose to present the news, the home pages of the three newspapers under discussion are relatively conservative (even when compared with, for example, the home pages of children’s websites, and tabloid newspaper websites). The home pages in the corpus of this study are static, with animation only used to ‘unfold’ navigation menus, and to expand the space of newsbites by rotating them (see discussion of SMH...
As Kok (2004) found with the Singaporean Ministry of Education website, the newspaper home pages:

foreground credibility and background ‘playfulness’ ... [foregoing] the creativity that different semiotic resources and hypertext facilities afford, making the website relatively ‘conservative’ compared with other webpages. (Kok, 2004, p. 146)

With the exception of advertisements, ‘eye- and ear-catching’ design features such as animation, pop-ups, coloured backgrounds, non-standard coloured fonts, oversized fonts, block-letters, flashing elements, elements which change or make sound when ‘rolled over’ with the mouse, and music are either not used at all, or used in a conservative manner on the home pages in the corpus.

This relative ‘non-playfulness’ tends to focus attention towards the content of the newspaper, rather than towards the hypertext resources used to present it. This is not unlike traditional perspectives on the presentation of information in print, in which typography was seen as “a humble craft in service of the written word” (van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 142). The social value of accessing these online newspapers is not in experiencing hypertext (which is used relatively ‘humbly’, ‘in service of the message’), but in reading the ‘news’. In this way the online newspapers in this corpus align themselves socially with the tradition of the printing press, and present themselves as a complementary medium to print, radio, and television, and as a credible source rather than something that is ‘too new’, ‘too different’, or ‘too flash’ for broadsheet readers to engage with.

In many other traditional publishing media, most strongly in books, but with echoes in the other media forms, there is a sense of them

49 The animation of newsbites has become more common on online newspaper home pages since the data collection for this research ended, but choices in what is animated (image, text, or both), how it is animated (how often and in what way transitions unfold), and the size of what is animated (large versus small) signify different modality values.
being definitive statements, once made fixed for all time. Hypermedia, on the other hand, tends to be experienced in a different way. It is more provisional, more open to modification and change, more firmly embedded in a “cut and paste” culture, where nothing is permanent and all is process. (Cotton & Oliver, 1997, p. 51)

The relatively ‘traditional’ identity favoured by most of the home pages in the corpus, and the modality value it bestows on the content of the home pages, is also strengthened by the Masthead on each page, which provides an overt connection between the print newspaper (and the authority and tradition of the institution it represents) and its online counterpart. Mastheads can be limited to the top left corner of the page, but the page design of all newspapers in the corpus have a header - a strip across the top of the page - which visually resembles the Masthead of print broadsheets.

6.2.2.2.2 Shape, space, and MODALITY

Visual elements on the home pages in the corpus are all squared - there are no circles or curves, no tangential lines, and no oblique angles. These design choices, consistent across all home pages, present a squared, componential, ordered page design to the reader, as illustrated in sketches placed alongside images of home pages in Figure 6.30. This contributes to the MODALITY of the page as a visual sign as explained below.

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50 The masthead of the SMH in Periods I, II and III incorporates a circle in its logo, and advertisements in each newspaper sometimes use circular or tangential designs.
Figure 6.30: Squared, componential design of SMH, Period III (top), and BKP, Period I (bottom)

The squared, componential approach to page design contributes to representing a reality where visual objects (many of which in this case, are also verbal
reports of ‘actual’, ‘real-world’ events) can be identified, classified, and grouped (cf. section 6.2.1 above). The world of news as construed visually is consistent with a model of the world where events are subject to measurement, classification, and deliberate arrangement. Visually, news stories on the home page, and the events they represent, are delineated and ordered.

It is not the categories (which are ideational) that are relevant to MODALITY (which is interpersonal), but the shared understanding that the visual act of separation and ordering is valid and rational, and therefore factual:

modality is a system of social deixis which ‘addresses’ a particular kind of viewer, or a particular social/cultural group, and provides through its system of modality markers an image of the cultural, conceptual and cognitive position of the addressee. (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, p. 178)

We live in a world where events and actors can be measured, defined, and evaluated. Elements on the page are fixed and ordered, and in a clear relationship to one another. The ordered, compartmentalised presentation of ‘news’ presents the information visually as though it is ordered, logical, and factual, regardless of the actual content.

Compare, for example, the relative ‘chaos’ in the design of Thai print newspaper front pages as described by Knox, Patpong & Piriyasilpa (2010) and shown in Figure 6.31. Visual elements on these print front pages are squared, but font sizes and colours vary, background colours vary, the size of elements (images and text blocks) vary, and the configuration of elements, including the position of the Masthead, changes from day to day. Without recourse to language, it is not possible to ‘read’ which elements of the page go together to make stories. This is in stark contrast to the ordered design on the home pages in the current corpus, as illustrated in Figure 259.
6.30. Compare also the home pages from children’s websites in Figure 6.32, both of which present visual taxonomies, but not in the rational, neatly ordered manner of the home pages in Figure 6.30 as illustrated above.

![Figure 6.31: Front page of the Thairath (left) and the Matichon (right) of 15 March, 2007](image)

Some home page designs in the corpus are less overtly squared and compartmentalised than those illustrated in Figure 6.30. These pages can be viewed as having, in relative terms, a lower MODALITY than pages where the visual compartmentalisation of the news is more overtly expressed. But even on these pages, a squared, componential page design is evident to some extent, as shown by the red lines in Figure 6.33.
Chapter Six: Home pages

Figure 6.32: ABC Kids’ The Playground home page (left - source: Djonov, 2005, p. 202) and try science home page (right - accessed November 19, 2008; cf. Djonov, 2005)

Figure 6.33: Implicit componential design of BKP Period IV (left), and SMH Period I (right)

The design of the home pages in the corpus implies a stance towards events whereby they have been viewed, analysed, and presented in a factual, ordered manner. Thus, we can conceive of a cline whereby the more componential and ordered an
online newspaper home page is, the higher its MODALITY on this parameter. Figure 6.34 illustrates.

Figure 6.34: The relative MODALITY of pages on the parameter of shapes in space: Squared, componential, and ordered page design of home pages from (left to right) SMH (March 15, 2002), BKP (April 5, 2006), SMH (April 5, 2006), PD (October 24, 2005), and BKP (September 2, 2005)

This componential aspect of home page design is due, in large part, to the design templates of these pages. In comparison, the home pages in Table 6.6 use a range of visual design features that challenge the order imposed by design grids. Home pages such as those in Table 6.6 work ‘against’ or around design templates,
construing a different kind of relationship between author, reader, and content than the relationship construed by the online newspaper home pages in the current corpus. They have different MODALITY values.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Home page</th>
<th>Design features construing a non-ordered, non-componential view of reality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **ABC Kids’ The Playground** home page (source: Djonov, 2005, p. 202) | - unframed illustrations  
- coloured splashes blurring boundaries between objects  
- objects of different shapes  
- nuclear design motif  
- curved/wavy edge signifying border between navigation and content |
| **National Museum of Singapore** home page (accessed November 19, 2008) | - visually dominant empty space  
- animation (orange letters of various sizes move randomly around the white space, crossing the three faint vertical lines which divide the main space of the page)  
- shading (shadows above the “Highlights” headings, and to the left and right of the main space) suggests a 3-dimensional page which is not completely flat  
- ‘border crossing’ (boundaries created by vertical lines are crossed by the floating letters, by the grey shading in the bottom third of the page, and by the brown strip at the bottom of the page) |
| **try science** home page (accessed November 19, 2008; cf. Djonov, 2005) | - nuclear design motif  
- use of circles and rounded corners  
- contrast between main elements on page in shape (squared vs circular) and orientation (skewed vs upright)  
- elements in skewed orange space overlap to create ‘haphazard’ effect |

Table 6.6: Home pages using design features to construe a less-ordered reality
Figure 6.35 compares home pages from the corpus with the home pages in Table 6.6, and illustrates the use of shape and space on home pages, and how diversity in the use of shapes and space contrasts with a more ordered and componential design, and that the greater the diversity on this parameter, the lower the modality of ‘factuality’.51

6.2.2.2.3 Colour and MODALITY

Another aspect of page design which contributes to modality values is the use of colour. As stated earlier, modality is “a system of social deixis which ‘addresses’ ... a particular social/cultural group” (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, p. 178). For the scientific community, and those who put their trust (perhaps implicitly) in it:

51 ‘Factuality’ is not necessarily opposed with ‘fiction’. It may be opposed with ‘fantasy’, ‘fun’, ‘imagination’, ‘creativity’, or other values (cf. Bednarek, 2006).
‘real’ means ‘what can be known by means of the methods of science’, that is by means of counting, weighing and measuring. By this standard of what is real, a technical line drawing, without colour or texture, without light or shade, and without perspective, can have higher modality than a photograph. (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996, p. 169)

In a similar way, the visual history of news print (black ink on white paper) carries a historical value of authority, factuality and objectivity (cf. Bicket & Packer, 2004), so the historical visual conventions of print newspapers contribute to the modality values of online newspaper home pages.

This can be seen in the consistent use of white background in the text-dominated news taxonomies of many of the homes page in the corpus (while side columns or other zones on the page often have a coloured background). On this white background, the text of news stories on the home pages of all three papers is black. This obviously draws on the visual tradition of print newspapers (see Boczkowski, 2004a; Cooke, 2003); there is no technical reason why fonts could not be brown, or green for instance, nor white on a dark background.

In contrast to the text of news stories on the home pages, headlines in the corpus most commonly appear in the conventional underlined blue of hyperlinks on the world wide web (Figure 6.36). Exceptions to this include the use of hyperlink blue without underlining (SMH Period IV); dark-blue font without underlining (SMH Period III); black font with underlining (PD Periods I and II); black font without underlining (SMH, Periods I and II); and red font without underlining (BKP Period IV) (Figure 6.37).

52 In relation to news discourse, we might add ‘by observing’.

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Figure 6.36: Text-dominated news taxonomy featuring underlined blue headlines on the home pages of the BKP (left), the bottom and right of the PD (centre), and the SMH (right) of September 15, 2005.

The PD and SMH home pages also include ‘non-standard’ headlines.
Figure 6.37: Text-dominated ‘main’ columns featuring ‘non-standard’ headlines on the home pages of the BKP of 3 March, 2006 (left) the PD of 27 March, 2002 (centre), the SMH of 27 March, 2002 (right)
One clear reason for the difference in typography between headlines and story text is the need to distinguish hyperlinks from ordinary text. In headline design, the newspapers in the corpus follow the following conventions:

1. **UNDERLINED BLUE IS THE NEW BLACK**
   Underlined blue font, as the conventional colour/format of hyperlinked text on the world wide web, is an acceptable substitute for black in headlines.

2. **ANY COLOUR GOES**
   Colours other than blue or black are acceptable for headlines, providing they are consistent with the colour scheme employed on the page and conform with convention 3 (below).

3. **HYPERTEXT OR ROLLOVER**
   Any headline on white background that is not the conventional underlined blue of hyperlinks on the world wide web (including black headlines) must change when rolled over with the mouse.

On the parameter of colour, the closer the page is to black text on white background the higher the modality. With ‘blue as the new black’, pages move away from a high modality value if there is a large number of hyperlinks, as the page comes to look more like a web page than a print newspaper page. Apart from the ratio of words (and therefore space) devoted to hyperlinks against those devoted to ‘plain’ news text, factors that can contribute to a lower modality value include the use of coloured bars and backgrounds, images, and the amount of advertising space (which tends to use many features which signify a ‘lower’ modality in favour of attracting

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54 In *SMH* Period I, headlines of ‘hard news’ stories were not hyperlinks, and were in black font without underlining. This is discussed in Chapter 7.
attention). There is no precise formula to calculate the relative impact of these different features on modality (cf. Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, pp. 618-9; Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, pp. 176-80), but Figure 6.38 illustrates how different combinations of choices can result in different modality values being communicated visually by online newspaper home pages.

Figure 6.38: The relative modality of pages on the parameter of colour versus black on white: Home pages from (left to right) News of the World (July 9, 2007), The Daily Telegraph (July 9, 2007), BKP (September 2, 2005), SMH (April 5, 2006), PD (September 15, 2005), and SMH (March 15, 2002)

6.2.2.2.4 ‘Reading’ MODALITY values

The three ‘parameters’ of MODALITY (stasis, shape and space, and colour) as discussed above interact with one another, and the modality of each home page is a complex of these values. So how do we ‘read’ modality on online newspaper home pages?
If we take the design of *PD* Period II and *BKP* Period II (Figure 6.39), we can observe that there is no use of animation, sound, pop-ups, or other features of hypertext which would contrast dramatically with the possibilities of print. That is, both are relatively conservative in their use of hypertext resources, presenting a largely static page to the readers, and therefore they have a relatively high modality on this parameter.

*Figure 6.39: Home page of BKP of September 2, 2005 (left) representing the design of BKP Period II, and PD of September 15, 2005 (right) representing the design of PD Period II*

In terms of their use of shape and space, both are clearly squared and compartmentalised, with the *BKP* making overt use of coloured horizontal bars to visually separate areas of the page, and therefore arguably having a slightly higher modality value than the *PD* on this parameter.
In terms of colour, the *BKP* is dominated visually by the strong background colours of the side columns, the footer, the header, and the advertisements positioned in those areas. The underlined blue of the headlines and the thick coloured horizontal bars also add colour to the predominately black-on-white main column of news, and the overall effect is one of dominance of colour on the page. This gives the *BKP* home page a relatively low modality value on this parameter. In contrast, the *PD* uses some light, coloured background in peripheral areas of the page, and includes three colour images (two of which are small thumbnails). Large headlines at the top of the page are black, and the headlines dominating the bottom half of the page are the conventional underlined blue of hyperlinks. Overall the page is largely black-on-white, and has a relatively high modality value on this parameter. Figure 6.40 illustrates.

![Diagram](image)

*Figure 6.40: Modality configuration of BKP Period II, and PD Period II (cf. Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, p. 176)*

In language, interpersonal structure is typically prosodic, which lends itself to being represented in clines (i.e. topologically rather than typologically). An alternate representation of Figure 6.40 would be to construe the different valeurs in the system of MODALITY in a system network, as shown in Figure 6.41.
As with art (see Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, pp. 176ff.), the modality configuration of online newspaper home pages can be complex, and the visual communication of modality draws on a range of features which may or may not be consistent with one another (cf. Barnhurst, 1991).

The modality of home pages in the corpus interacts with the ‘factual’ and ‘non-negotiable’ language typical of the headlines which appear on them. Headlines are constructed linguistically in a way which is either grammatically unarguable (e.g. use of a non-finite clause; omission of a verbal group; use of nominal group only) or factual (e.g. use of present simple tense) (see Halliday, 1994, Appendix 2; Martin, Matthiessen & Painter, 1997, pp. 70-71). To illustrate, Table 6.7 shows headlines from a number of newsbites appearing in the corpus, and shows how the conventional language of headlines can take the grammar of negotiability away by omitting
elements of the clause such as Subject and/or Finite, the entire verbal group, Deictics in nominal groups, or by presenting nominal groups on their own.55

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Newspaper</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Headline</th>
<th>Grammatical feature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bangkok Post</td>
<td>Feb 14, 2002</td>
<td>Verdict on Chalor due</td>
<td>Verbal group omitted; Deictic in nominal group omitted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>September 15, 2005</td>
<td>Trekking in the drizzling rain</td>
<td>Mood element (Subject and Finite) absent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nov 1, 2005</td>
<td>Southern fish plants hit by lack of labour</td>
<td>Finite omitted; Deictic in nominal group omitted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People’s Daily</td>
<td>Mar 27, 2002</td>
<td>Actions Obstructing Peaceful Reunification</td>
<td>Finite omitted; Deictic in nominal group omitted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>September 15, 2005</td>
<td>UNSC’s role “irreplaceable”, Chinese President</td>
<td>Verbal groups (verb ‘to be’; reporting verb) ommitted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nov 1, 2005</td>
<td>China’s foreign trade to exceed $1.4 trillion this year</td>
<td>Finite omitted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sydney Morning Herald</td>
<td>Mar 27, 2002</td>
<td>Porn going upwardly mobile</td>
<td>Finite omitted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>October 12, 2005</td>
<td>23,000 dead, 2.5 million homeless after quake</td>
<td>Verbal group (verb ‘to be’) omitted; Head of nominal group omitted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>September 15, 2005</td>
<td>Obesity crisis</td>
<td>Unattached nominal group</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.7: ‘Unarguable’ headlines from the corpus

Together, language and visual design tend to realise a relatively high value of modality on the home pages in this corpus, construing a stance of objectivity and factuality, though as already shown, this varies according to a number of design factors.

6.2.2.3 Interpersonal meanings: Conclusion

In conclusion to this section, the discussion above has considered a number of factors in the visual communication of interpersonal meanings on online newspaper home pages. In terms of the system of ATTITUDE, the home pages present an objective

55 Not all headlines share these grammatical features.
perspective. In terms of the system of MODALITY, the pages vary in the way their
designs use stasis, shape and space, and colour. Combining the semiotic resources of
visual design and language, all the pages tend towards presenting a factual and
objective stance to the reader, but there is variation between them.

This gives rise to questions of home page design and the intended
interpersonal stance of the newspaper. There is a need for audience research which
examines interpersonal communication in addition to traditional areas of investigation
such as information recall, content analysis, agenda setting, and eye tracking. There is
also a need to work with newspaper authors and designers to investigate how they see
the stance of their newspaper, and the extent to which this is consistent with how
audiences read the interpersonal meanings of the home page, and the design factors
discussed above.

In the Japan Australia Forum on the Responsibility of Media Reporting held in
Sydney in 2006, the (then) foreign editor of the Sydney Morning Herald, Peter
Hartcher, commented that the home page of the online version of the SMH was more	abloid-like than the front page of the print edition (Hartcher, 2006), suggesting that
he preferred the interpersonal stance of the front page of the print edition to the home
page of the online edition. Anecdotally, other readers of the SMH have commented to
me that they feel that the online edition is not ‘written to them’, and that they read the
print edition but not the online edition for this reason.

The interpersonal meanings communicated by the home page are crucial in
building and maintaining the readership of a newspaper, and there is much scope for
further research which can explicitly identify the design factors which mediate the newspaper-audience relationship (see also Chapter 8).

6.2.3 Home page design and textual meanings

Thus far in this chapter, we have considered the ideational meanings conveyed in the visual design of news on the page (primarily through the use of news taxonomies), and the interpersonal construal of the relationship between the newspaper and its readers (through the construal of attitude and modality in page design). In this section, we look at the textual meanings on the page: the way that layout and composition of elements (i.e. their relative positioning on the page) is meaningful.

6.2.3.1 Framing, salience, and information value

Kress and van Leeuwen (1998) describe the layout of traditional-newspaper front pages in terms of three organizational systems of meaning: framing (the use of various visual devices to connect or separate different elements on the page), salience (assigning visual ‘weight’ to elements on the page), and information value (the meaningful positioning of content). This sub-section outlines Kress & van Leeuwen’s framework for analysing textual meanings, and the following sub-section (6.2.3.2) presents analyses which illustrate where this framework needs to be adapted to account for the home pages in this study.

Framing contributes to the organisation of elements on the page, and signifies their compositional (or textual) relationship to one another. This is achieved by, for example, the use of borders or empty space between different elements; by consistency or disjunction in background colours, font size and colour, or images; by
the use of shapes; and by the use of vectors where, for example, lines or gaze from images point to other elements on the page (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1998, p. 203).

Turning to salience, the system of salience creates ‘a hierarchy of importance’ among the elements on the page visible on-screen at any given time (cf. Kress & van Leeuwen, 1998, p. 200). A range of visual variables interact in order to assign different ‘weight’ to different elements on the page, including size, contrast, colour, balance, and the use of visual elements (e.g. religious figures or symbols; sexually suggestive images) which are salient in a given cultural context. Underlying the combination of such variables on online newspaper home pages is a simple principle which has developed with the vertically scrolling web page. This principle is that, all other things being equal, a greater proximity to the top of the home page of an online newspaper means greater salience. This is a particularly important principle in the positioning of newsbites (Bateman, 2008).

After framing and salience, the third system considered here is the system of information value. The notion of information value is taken from Kress & van Leeuwen (1996, 1998), who argue that on print newspaper front pages, information value is signified by compositional choices based on three primary oppositions: top-bottom, left-right, and centre-margin. A top-bottom opposition of different or contrasting elements represents a distinction between Ideal and Real. Positioning at the top signifies Ideal, “the idealized or generalized essence of the information” (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1998, p. 193). Being positioned at the bottom signifies Real, or more specific, factual, and/or practical information such as details, tables, graphs and so on (ibid.). In contrast, the left-right opposition of content signifies Given-New.
**Given** is “something the reader already knows, ... a familiar and agreed departure point for the message” (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1998, p. 189). **New** signifies “something which is not yet know to the reader, ... the crucial point of the message” (ibid.).

Some newspaper pages are composed in such a way to oppose content positioned in the centre of the page against that which appears around the periphery. That is, content positioned in the central position of the page is signified as **Centre**, “the nucleus of the information to which all the other elements are in some sense subservient” (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1998, p. 196). Content positioned in peripheral areas, in opposition to the Centre, is signified as **Margin**, ancillary to, and/or dependent upon, the Centre (ibid.). These systems of information value are summarised visually in Figure 6.42.

![Figure 6.42: Kress & van Leeuwen’s (1996, p. 209) ‘dimensions of visual space’](image-url)
6.2.3.2 Information value on home pages

In the discussion that follows, framing and salience are considered primarily in terms of their interaction with the system of information value. Information value, as it operates on the online newspaper home pages in the current corpus, differs from the framework of Kress & van Leeuwen outlined above in a number of important ways (cf. Bateman, 2008). The information values identified here are **Head / Tail** (realised by top-bottom opposition), **Primary / Secondary** (realised by left - right opposition), and **Macro-Theme / Rheme** (realised orthogonally or top-bottom, and recursively across news pages on the website). Each is outlined in the following sub-sections.

6.2.3.2.1 Head / Tail

To begin with, readers are required to scroll home pages vertically, and can only view a portion of the page at any given time. This feature of home pages means that the top-bottom distinction which does operate on the home page of all three newspapers does not afford an Ideal-Real contrast. In fact, the top-bottom opposition operating on a home page is not only spatial (as it is with print newspaper pages where the whole page can be viewed at once), but also temporal, as the reader must move through time in order to see the bottom of the page. This temporal feature of scrolling pages exists despite the fact that it is the reader, and not the author, who controls the timing of the scroll.

The top-bottom *opposition* on online newspaper home pages is the distinction between the *first screen* of a page, or that portion of the page ‘above the fold’ (Nielsen & Tahir, 2002, p. 23), and the *remainder* of the page to which a reader must
scroll in order to access. This operates in harmony with the principle of diminishing salience (which is continual rather than oppositional in nature) as discussed above.

The top-bottom distinction realises a binary information-value opposition not of idealisation (Ideal-Real), but of initiality. That content which appears above the fold on online newspaper home pages heads the news on that page; it can be said to be valued as the **Head** of the content (information valued as of the most immediate relevance and importance). The content below the fold appears subsequently to the Head, and decreases in impact and immediacy as the reader scrolls down. This principal of progressive atrophy of information value as one scrolls below the Head is signified by assigning the label of **Tail** to that information below the fold, whose impact on the reader is by necessity less immediate, and subsequent to the Head.

The Head of the page includes the Masthead of the newspaper, the main navigation menu, the major or ‘leading’ news story of the day (often with a larger headline), and often a large image (typically the largest image on the page) and ‘breaking news’.\(^\text{56}\) Where such elements are positioned in the Tail rather than the Head, there is a good case to argue for poor design (see below).

Most home page designs in the corpus have a ‘default’ fold indicated in the design of the page, though it is not possible to specify the location of the ‘actual’ fold as viewed by readers of the newspaper (i.e. the bottom of the first visible screen on

\(^{56}\) In Australia, *masthead* refers to “the written name of the publication in a distinctive style, design and lettering that appears on the front page and in reduced size on the editorial page” (*SMH* glossary, last accessed February 10, 2010 at: http://www.heraldeducation.com.au/view_page.asp?intpageid=6). This is known in newsrooms in some other countries (including the UK and US) as the *nameplate*. See also the glossary on the website of *The News Manual* (last accessed February 10, 2010 at: http://www.thenewsmanual.net/Resources/glossary.html).
readers’ actual computer screens) as this varies from computer screen to computer screen according to a range of factors, including but not limited to screen size and browser settings. There is also variation in the extent to which the ‘fold’ is explicitly indicated, and where indicated in the visual devices by which this is done.

In the first two periods of the Bangkok Post, the default fold is signified by the bottom of the frame which surrounds the category of General News. The Head includes the Masthead, the main navigation menu (left column), and the four leading news stories (Figure 6.43).

![Figure 6.43: Head-Tail structure of BKP home page (BKP Periods I and II)]
In the third design of the BKP home page, a ‘Breaking News’ section is moved into the Head, but to the exclusion of the main news stories of the page. This leads to a number of problems (Figure 6.44). First, the most important stories in the value system of the newspaper are pushed from the Head and into the Tail by the most recent stories, regardless of importance. This puts the most highly valued news space in the newspaper at the mercy of ‘what comes off the wire’, rather than in the hands of the editors. Second, while the Masthead and navigation menus remain unchanged, the change in the appearance of that part of the news taxonomy that appears in the Head means that readers are presented with ideational changes to the news taxonomy (i.e. a different categorisation, and also the Subordinates in the Breaking News category are realised by newsbits instead of newsbites). Third, the use of blue hyperlinks against a split background (grey, then white) in the Breaking News category gives the Head of the page a lower modality value (blue text on grey instead of black text on white with blue headlines), as well as making this section internally visually inconsistent. Fourth, this change in colour (including the use of a blue bar with white and yellow text, and green circles) also changes the visual identity of the newspaper, until the reader
scrolls down past the Head to where the familiar visual design of the BKP home page is still used. Thus, readers cannot adjust to the new visual design, but rather must scroll past the Head to ‘return’ to the home page ‘as they know it’.

In the redesigned page in BKP Period IV, the Head includes Breaking News, but also includes the main news stories as newsbites. A large image (illustrating either the first or second newbite on the page) has been added to the design, and the modality of the news taxonomy as visible on the Head of the page is consistent with the Tail of the page. The demarcation of the Head and Tail is not explicit in this design, though the practice of ‘pushing’ information towards the Head of the page is (Figure 6.45).

![Figure 6.45: Screen shot of BKP home page, 10 January, 2006 (BKP Period IV)](image-url)
Like the *Bangkok Post*, the home page of the *People's Daily* in both Periods I and II provides a clear visual distinction between the first screen and the content below the fold. The newspaper’s masthead, the advertisement, and important navigational and content menus are also valued as Head. The fold is clearly indicated by framing in both page designs. In *PD* Period I, a search tool spans the centre column, and framing devices of background colour, font size, and font colour employed in the two side columns. In *PD* Period II, the two *news features* newsbites across the centre column mark the Head / Tail boundary (Figure 6.46). Both design periods include the Masthead, the main navigation menu, newsbites, and a large image in the Head.

*Figure 6.46: Head-Tail structure of PD home page (PD Periods I and II)*
The design of the SMH home page moves progressively from an implicit Head/Tail boundary towards a more explicit one. In SMH Periods I and II, the Masthead, main navigation menu, large image, and main story (signified by a large headline) appear in the Head, but there is not a clear indication of where the Tail begins. In SMH Period III, The heading and horizontal line indicating the beginning of the WORLD category of news in the main column appears near the bottom of the newsbite with the large image in the adjacent column, and indicates the Head / Tail boundary. In SMH Period IV, the TIME OUT newsbites in the main column appear near the bottom of THE PLANNER newsbites in the adjacent column, indicating the Head / Tail boundary. Figure 6.47 indicates the Head / Tail textual structure of the SMH home pages.

Figure 6.47: Head-Tail structure of SMH home page (SMH Period I, II, III and IV)

In summary, all three newspapers ‘design for’ the first screen of the page. Typical elements include the Masthead, ‘breaking news’, the main stories of the day, the main navigational menu, and a large image. While the Head / Tail boundary is not
always clearly indicated by the design of the home page, in many cases it is (e.g. BKP Periods I - III; PD Periods I - II; SMH Periods III - IV). This can also be observed in the design of the home page of many online newspapers beyond the current corpus.

6.2.3.2.2 Primary / Secondary

The vertical dynamism of each home page which gives rise to the Head-Tail opposition is balanced by horizontal consistency in the home pages in the corpus. In each of the three newspapers, content on the home pages is organized in columns which remain consistent as the reader scrolls down the page.

On all home pages of all three newspapers, the widest column consists of news content, and is visually distinct from one or more narrower side columns of content. The distinction here realises an information value of Primary / Secondary. Information positioned in the larger (left or middle) column is signified as being of primary importance in the ideological value system of the newspaper. It is invariably news content, and is signified as Primary because it provides the raison d'être of the newspaper. Relative to the content of the wider column, the content valued as Secondary (which may be navigational, promotional, or less-valued news content) is subordinate in newsworthiness according to the newspaper's ideology.

This compositional feature of the home pages in the corpus is clearly related to the ideational news taxonomies discussed above. The most important category or categories in the taxonomy are positioned textually as Primary information, a different value from being positioned in the Head of the page (as discussed above). In this way, soft and lite news on the SMH home page, for example, can be valued highly in terms...
of initiality by being place in the Head of the page (creating a greater impact on the first screen). But by virtue of being positioned textually as Secondary information, their information value relative to stories positioned textually as Primary is signified by the left-right compositional distinction.

![Figure 6.48: Primary-secondary structure of BKP home page (Period I, II and IV)](image)

The Primary-Secondary opposition is exploited differently in the three newspapers, though navigation columns are consistently valued as Secondary when they are vertical. On the home page of the BKP Periods I-IV, advertising, stock and weather information, and links to special features are included in the right, Secondary column (see Figure 6.48). And on the home page of the PD Period II, the right, Secondary column has similar content (Figure 6.49). The home page of the SMH Period III has two columns of news content valued as Secondary (Figure 6.50), while
the home page of Period IV has a Primary / Secondary opposition, with a second Primary / Secondary opposition within the main Primary column (Figure 6.50).

In summary, the home pages in the corpus are designed in columns, and each home page is composed with a wider column of information which signifies an information value of Primary, while narrower columns of navigation, news, advertisements, and other content are signified as Secondary.

Figure 6.49: Primary-secondary structure of PD home page (PD Period I and II)
6.2.3.2.3 Macro-Theme / Rheme

There is another information value opposition on the home pages in the corpus which can be realised orthogonally (top and left), or as a top-bottom opposition. The information value is **Macro-Theme / Rheme**. In order to explain this adequately, it is necessary to go beyond the individual page and consider briefly the entire online newspaper.

*Figure 6.50: Primary-Secondary structure of SMH home page (SMH Period I, III and IV)*
Online texts have a different materiality to paper texts. A reader who holds a letter, a book, or a newspaper in their hand can see and feel where they are positioned in the text. There is a physical relationship between reader and hard copy which allows the reader to navigate; navigation is embodied within the material artefact in a way which is typically completely absent from online texts.

Online newspapers, like most online texts, provide the reader with navigational devices to fulfil this function, and create cohesion and coherence across pages. Cohesive textual devices do not function solely at the level of the page - they allow readers to keep track of their location and progression across the entire text.

In the newspapers in the corpus, certain zones are repeated across all news pages: the header (realising the Brand function, and including the Masthead), and the main navigation zone (realising all or part of the Navigation function). The Brand is always a header across the top of the page. The main navigation menu may appear beneath this, and in such cases together Brand and Navigation combine as Macro-Theme of the page (Figure 6.51). In other cases, the main navigation menu is positioned in the left column, and the Macro-Theme of the home page is realised orthogonally (Figure 6.52). This consistent point of departure, mirrored on each news page of the online newspaper, provides a consistency of branding, of reading experience, and an ability for the reader to navigate the website. In this way, the Macro-Theme of each page contributes to cohesion and coherence across the website, and as the ‘point of departure’ for each page.
Note that in Djonov’s analysis of home pages as Macro-Theme (Chapter 5), the entire home page is functioning as Macro-Theme at the rank of website (and home pages in content sections are thematic at the rank of section). Here, the analysis is of the Macro-Theme at the rank of page.

Figure 6.51: MacroTheme-Rheme structure of PD home page (PD Period I) and SMH home page (SMH Period IV)
Figure 6.52: MacroTheme-Rheme structure of PD home page (PD Period II) and BKP home page (BKP Period V)

In summary, the masthead and main navigational menu are the Macro-Theme of the page, which is to say that they act as the point of departure for the message of the page (cf. Bateman, 2008, p. 65, n. 8), and are the locus of textual and interpersonal orientation for the reader. This does not mean that they are the first thing the reader ‘reads’, but that they function textually as the starting point for the message of each page.
6.2.3.3 Textual meanings: Conclusion

The home pages in this corpus display systems of information value distinct from those identified by Kress & van Leeuwen (1996, 1998). This is, perhaps, not surprising given Bateman’s (2008) critique of applications of Kress & van Leeuwen’s notion of information value, in which he suggests that such analyses are likely to be far more genre-specific than Kress & van Leeuwen suggest.

Textually, it appears that there are three different oppositions operating on the home pages in the corpus, each complementary to the others, and each realising a different kind of prominence: the Head / Tail opposition (realised by design which takes account of the ‘first screen’); the Primary / Secondary opposition (realised by design which sets the ‘main viewing area’ apart from other parts of the page); and the Macro-Theme / Rheme opposition (realised by design which repeats the same identifying and navigational elements across all pages to establish a consistent ‘point of departure’).

6.3 Home pages: Conclusion

In summary, the home pages in the corpus show similar functional patterns of visual design, though their realisations vary. Ideationally, all pages use news taxonomies, and these range from being largely covert to largely overt, and also vary in the way they classify the ‘world of news’ for the reader. These classificational differences are related to institutional factors in news production.
Interpersonally, all home pages in the corpus present an objective perspective in the visual system of ATTITUDE, but vary in terms of the three variables - stasis, shape and space, and colour - in the visual system of MODALITY.

Textually, compositional oppositions of Head / Tail, Primary / Secondary, and Macro-Theme / Rheme are present in all newspapers in the corpus, but again their realisations differ.

The argument, then, is that the visual design of the home pages in the corpus demonstrates that the same design choices are ‘at play’ in all three newspapers during their different design periods. The choices as set out above are meaningful, and the ways in which home pages classify news, construe their relationship with their readers, and compose the content on their pages indicates that the online newspaper home pages share a number of functions in terms of their visual design, yet these shared patterns allow for a wide range of flexibility.

The design features identified in this chapter can be applied to analysing online newspaper home pages beyond the corpus, and help with the teaching of reading the news online (for first- and second-language learners), and the critical analysis of such texts.

Considering the experiential meanings realised in page design to begin with, pedagogical tasks requiring learners to identify news taxonomies and the extent to which they are covert or overt can assist in developing the ability to read the page, which can only be viewed one screen at a time. Such activities can be extended to
comparing classification schemes in different newspapers, comparing the classification of the same story in different newspapers, or even the critical analysis of the classification of groups based on gender, ethnicity, and other variables over time.

One illustration of such an approach can be shown by looking at the representation of Australians on drug charges overseas on the home page of the SMH during Period III. There are three such stories in the corpus, which are reproduced in Table 6.8.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2 Sep, 2005</th>
<th>12 Oct, 2005</th>
<th>24 Oct, 2005</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Newsbite</strong></td>
<td><strong>Verbal Text</strong></td>
<td><strong>Newsbite</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bali bribe claim probed</td>
<td>Bali nine briefings</td>
<td>Bali nine briefings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bribery claims in the Michelle Leslie case are investigated.</td>
<td>A mother weeps as her son faces his drug accusers [Mark Forbes in Denpasar] Parallel courts began hearing parallel cases in the first of the Bali nine trials, but the contrast between the two defendants was palpable. more * Chan the key organiser, court told * Feeling the heat in court * Bali nine briefing * First hearings for the Bali nine</td>
<td>The Australian Government says it will make another appeal to save a 25-year-old drug trafficker on death row in Singapore. more * Condemed Australian 'is valuable drug witness' * Mother's desperate plea to save son</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 6.8**: Stories representing Australians on drug charges overseas on the SMH home page: L-R, September 2, 2005; October 12, 2005; October 24, 2005

While there are linguistic differences between the stories, perhaps more revealing is their classification on the page. As presented in the news taxonomy, the story involving the accused woman is classified as lite news, whereas the other stories are classified as hard news. The classification of these stories on the home page raises questions, about the representation of social actors, and the extent to which their gender, occupation (Michelle Leslie was a model), and/or physical appearance influences how they are represented.
On home pages where taxonomies are covert and/or heterogeneous, the advantages to the newspaper and/or reader of avoiding overt homogeneous classification in the design of the page can be explored. Does covert, heterogeneous classification encourage readers to ‘browse’ the home page in a way more similar to the way print newspapers are browsed? Is this an effective method in encouraging readers to enter sections of the website they might not otherwise access? Does it position the reader as a more sophisticated, media-literate consumer of the news? Research examining reader behaviour and its interaction with page design could be usefully informed by a social semiotic perspective on ideational meanings in page design, such as that outlined in this chapter.

In terms of interpersonal meanings, an explicit pedagogical focus on the design features which realise different modality values can assist learners in understanding how home pages can construe different relationships with their readers. This can allow them to compare newspapers based on specific analysis, rather than impressionistic and imprecise arguments, and decide on the extent to which their visual design is tabloid or broadsheet in orientation independent of the language of the newspaper. The consistency / inconsistency between visual design choices and the language of newspapers can also be identified, which can inform understandings about the target audience of the newspaper, and the ways in which readers are positioned.

Such an approach could also empower readers in critiquing the practices of newspapers which ‘declare’ themselves as broadsheet, but which may share tabloid characteristics. Taking the Michelle Leslie story (Table 6.8), the modality of the SMH
home page during this design period (SMH Period III) is relatively high, presenting a relatively factual stance to the reader. Learners could investigate the extent to which the representation of women in this newspaper is similar to tabloid home pages with a much lower modality, and the extent to which the depiction of woman in language, image, layout, and in their multisemiotic combinations differ between ‘broadsheets’ and ‘tabloids’. The analytical approach outlined in this chapter provides the means by which such a question can be examined, and a pedagogy based on this approach could provide learners the knowledge, and the terminology to compare the portrayal of women in the *Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Sun*; to distinguish between *The New York Times* and *The News of the World* in such a way that (for example) content analysis alone cannot. Such explicit knowledge can be applied in informed and critical discussions about the media, their functions, and their roles in society. It can also prepare learners for authoring home pages, whether they are in the role of web designer, editor, or in any other personal or institutional role where they are involved in authoring on the world wide web.

Turning finally to textual meanings and page design, understanding what is typically positioned in the Head or in the Primary column of the page, and how page-rank Macro-Themes contribute to cohesion across the website, can likewise develop explicit knowledge in learners that they can apply in reading and writing web pages.

In conclusion, compared with print, the world wide web is a new medium, and online newspapers are a new macro-genre. A range of relatively predictable functional structures realised in the visual design of home pages have been proposed in this chapter. Some of these may be readily generalisable beyond the corpus, some may
require adaptation, and some may be replaced as home pages continue to evolve and analysis of a wider sample yields different results. The findings provide a starting point for the social-semiotic investigation of the visual design of news on home pages, for the development of accounts of the multi-semiotic interaction between language and visual design on home pages, and for the continuing development of pedagogical approaches to reading and writing in new media.