

Media power and the rhetorical potential of the “hard news” report – attitudinal mechanisms in journalistic discourse

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This paper demonstrates the application of the appraisal framework (Iedema et al. 1994/2008, Martin 2000, White 2002, Martin & White 2005/2007) to analyses of the attitudinal mechanisms at work in the putatively “objective” news reports which typically occur in the English-language “broadsheet” print and online news media. While these “hard news” reports do typically employ a style which backgrounds or obscures the subjective, mediating role of the journalist author, thus coming across as “objective”, they nevertheless often favour particular value-laden perspectives on the events being described. Accordingly they have a clear potential to influence readers’ views of these events and the attitudes they adopt towards those involved. In particular, the paper attends to mechanisms by which positive or negative viewpoints are indirectly conveyed via implication and association – what the appraisal framework terms “invocations” or “tokens” of positive/negative attitude. The nature of these mechanisms is outlined and their rhetorical potential explored in the context of an analysis of an article from the British Daily Mail newspaper. The discussion outlines how these mechanisms enable news reports of this type to operate attitudinally and ultimately ideologically, even while the journalistic author refrains from any explicit evaluation or expression of view point.

Key words: journalism, news report, objectivity, subjectivity, appraisal, attitude, ideology

1 Introduction – the “hard news” report

The hard news report is a central pillar of modern, English-language news journalism and of the journalism of many other languages and cultures. It is by means of this type of text that prototypical “news” events, i.e. accidents, natural disasters, crimes, stock market crashes, election results, medical breakthroughs and acts of warfare, are reported. It is by reference to this type of text, especially as it is formulated in the “broadsheet”¹ media, that journalistic institutions assert the “objectivity” of their discourse – i.e. they claim that, in the form of the news report, journalistic texts are “factual”, “impartial”, “balanced” and free of any of the journalistic author’s own opinions and perspectives.

¹ i.e. newspapers such as *The Guardian* and the *New York Times*, broadcasters such as the BBC and wire services such as Reuters and AFP.

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The central concern of this paper is with the English language, broadsheet news report as a rhetorical device. That is to say, it is concerned with the potential of such putatively “objective” texts to influence a reader’s understandings and views of news events and trends.

I must say at the outset that, along with most other discourse analysts, I reject the notion of “objectivity” as it is typically construed in everyday discussions of media practice. That is to say, I understand all texts, news media texts included, to be in some way subjective in necessarily being conditioned by their author’s own social identity, ideological position and communicative objectives. At the same time, I do allow for the possibility that texts will differ in the degree to which they foreground or background the subjective role of the author in the text’s construction, and in, for example, the types of authorial attitude which will be in play in the text. Thus it is possible for some texts – the supposedly “objective” news report, for example – to be conditioned by a regime of strategic impersonalisation by which the author’s subjective role is backgrounded and made less salient, and hence for these texts to appear less subjective, or at least less obviously subjective, than other texts. That this is the case with a sub-set of English-language broadsheet news reports has been demonstrated in Iedema, Feez & White (1994/2008), White (1998), Martin & White (2005/2007) and White & Thomson (2008), where it has been shown that, in some broadsheet “hard news” reports (those classified as employing “reporter voice”), there are significant constraints on the use by the author of a range of evaluative meanings. Specifically, the above research has shown that, in a significant sub-set of English-language broadsheet “hard news” reports, the journalistic author does not include explicit references to his/her own emotional responses, does not command or issue directives and does not explicitly pass judgement on the behaviour of human participants.

My purpose in this paper is to outline a methodology for identifying and describing in a theoretically principled way the communicative mechanisms by which “hard news” reports of this type (i.e. those employing “reporter voice”) can operate to position the reader to favour particular attitudes and viewpoints, and to perpetuate particular understandings about the way the world is and ought to be. Thus I will demonstrate the

potential of this type of news report to function rhetorically, and ultimately ideologically (i.e. to naturalize particular world views), even while they employ a style in which the most obvious markers of authorial viewpoint and attitude are not present, or are highly circumscribed. Specifically, I will outline a methodology which attends to (1) meanings where the author, by implication or association, indirectly positions the reader to adopt a particular attitudinal orientation, and (2) meanings by which the observations and viewpoints attributed to particular quoted sources are favoured over, or presented as more credible than, the observations and/or viewpoints of other sources. In this demonstration I will be largely relying on insights made possible through the “appraisal framework”, as outlined in Iedema et al. (1994/2008), Martin (2000), Macken-Horarik & Martin (2003), White (1998), Martin (2000), White (2002) and Martin & White (2005/2007).

For the purposes of this demonstration, I will identify and describe the evaluative workings of a report from the British *Daily Mail* newspaper. The text has been chosen, essentially at random, not because of its subject matter or the political leanings of the *Daily Mail* (i. e. conservative), but because the article was found to contain a good range of the attitudinal mechanisms which are the concern of this paper. The text reports on the awarding of some £200,000 by way of compensation for work-related stress to the warden of a council “gipsy” site in Worcestershire. The text can be characterised as employing a “reporter voice” style, as the category is outlined in Iedema et al. (1994/2008), White (1998) and Martin & White (2005/2007), in that the author refrains from explicitly passing judgement on the behaviour of any the human participants involved in the incident, confining any such assessment to material attributed to outside sources. A slightly abbreviated version of the article is provided on the next page:

£200,000 STRESS PAY-OUT TO GIPSY WARDEN

The £200,000 gipsy

A GIPSY won a record £203,000 compensation for stress he suffered as the warden of a travellers' site. The payout, to be footed by the taxpayers, was more than 20 times Randy Ingram's salary. Critics denounced it as another sign of compensation culture gone mad. Mr Ingram, 41, says he suffered a catalogue of abuse, including being shot at and having a dog set on him. He and the Unison union, which backed the claim, say he has been unable to work since quitting on health grounds in September 1997, the third warden at the site to do so. His former employer, Worcestershire County Council, did not contest the case and has since completely overhauled the management of its sites. But the award angered Mr Ingram's neighbours near Worcestershire, where he lives with his wife and four children in two caravans, despite being refused planning permission for a mobile home. Paul Sparrow, chairman of the residents' association said: "This man has taken advantage of the laws of society for this massive payout, but when the laws of society are against him he won't budge." The payout is the biggest ever awarded in the British courts for stress at work. It covers the loss of past and future earnings and medical expenses. Mr Ingram says he still needs a daily cocktail of prescribed medication. Recent figures showed that unions brought 783 cases against employers for stress-related illness last year, 70 per cent up on the previous 12 months. Ruth Lea, head of the policy unit at the Institute of Directors, said. "When people see sums like this being paid out it inevitably encourages others to come forward. This is the maelstrom we are in." Stress consultant Angela Patmore said: "There is a positive incentive now to claim damages because of stress. But, in effect what they are suffering from is the fact that they lack coping skills and good support from their management. This is going for gold. It's a sort of lottery." Mr Ingram managed gipsy sites for Wychavon District Council for two years until the work was transferred to the county council in 1995. He took, over responsibility for several other caravan sites, including one at Lower Heath, Kidderminster, which had a history of problems. His union, which hailed the payout as a major triumph, accused the council of failing to back him in his £8,700 a year post and undermining his authority as a result. A former senior site officer with the council, who declined to be named, said some of Mr Ingram's problems arose because he was a gipsy himself. He said that on one occasions Mr Ingram was shot at and the shots were bouncing off gas bottles surrounding the site office. The retired officer said he had also taken time off work through stress after being physically and verbally abused by travellers and having his car damaged. After the settlement was announced at Birmingham County Court, Mr Ingram told reporters that he was taking 17 pills a day because of stress, and attending hospital twice a week for therapy sessions. He said, "The council have a lot to answer for. They have made me very ill with stress and depression and my home life has suffered as a result. "The council's admission of guilt shows how badly they have treated me. I have been in hospital twice and still need medication and painkillers to carry on. I wish I could say I will be better by tomorrow but that is just not going to happen." Worcestershire Council has carried out its own inquiry into the case and changed the way the sites are run. The total payout of £203,432 was well above the previous record, the £175,000 paid by Northumberland County Council to social worker John Walker in 1996. Mr Ingram refused to be drawn on what he planned to do with the money but said he had no plans to move into a house. "I am part of the gipsy community", he said. "I have always lived in a caravan and I don't think I will be changing my lifestyle." Mr Ingram moved into the Worcester village of Aldington, near Evesham, last summer. He set up home with his family in two caravans in a field at the end of a muddy track. The family have named the site Romero Fields. Their arrival has met fierce opposition from locals, who are upset that the first sight greeting visitors to the village is a pair of old caravans in a muddy field. Villagers say an application by Mr Ingram for planning permission to keep a mobile home in his field was rejected last year. A subsequent public inquiry again rejected his application. Residents' leader Mr Sparrow, a 63-year-old retired civil engineer, said: "The general feeling is one of astonishment that he has received this amount of money. Another thing that amazes us is that, for a man of such ill health, he has done a lot of work in the field. He has planted trees, erected fenced, painted and generally been seen doing hard physical work. Our wish is sincerely that he goes." (*Daily Mail* 2000.)

2 Analysing attitudinal meaning

Before turning to an examination of the text it is necessary to briefly outline some of the key aspects of the account of evaluative meanings provided by the appraisal framework and how the account can be applied to analyses of news reporting texts of this type.

2.1 Types of attitude

The appraisal framework identifies three broad sub-types of meanings by which attitudinal (positive or negative) assessment may be conveyed. These are outlined below.

Affect: by the description of emotional reactions and states, either those of the author him/herself (authorial affect) or those of third parties (observed affect). Examples are provided below, with instances of lexical items conveying Affect underlined and marked in bold.

The President **terrifies** me; The crowd was **happy** to be there; The speech **bored** me; I am **distressed** by the Party's decision to change its policy on uranium. (invented examples). It was, then, with **fury**, that I returned home on Saturday to find my own country rumbling with the mumbles of the peaceniks (*Daily Express* 2001).

Judgement: assessments of the human behaviour by reference to its social acceptability/unacceptability – assessments in terms of ethics, legality, honesty, etiquette, reliability, capacity, normality.

He is a highly **skilled** and **inspiring** speaker who goes about his work with great **courage** (invented example).

To see police **brutally manhandling** demonstrators was not only shocking but representative of more **repressive** regimes, such as China (*Birmingham Post* 1999).

Appreciation – assigning a social value to objects, artefacts, texts, states of affairs, i.e. by reference to aesthetics and other systems of social valuation.

(aesthetics)

The new president's speech was **elegant** and **well-woven**, sounding a panoply of themes without seeming **scattered** (*New York Post* 2001).

The brook bubbled away **pleasantly** in the background. A **glorious** sunset presented itself to our eyes. (invented examples.)

2.2 Realisations of attitude: inscribing versus invoking

Of major significance for our current concerns is the distinction the appraisal framework makes between what it terms “inscribed attitude” and “invoked attitude”. The term “inscribed” is attached to instances of attitude where there is a lexical term which explicitly conveys a positive or negative viewpoint – i.e. where there is a lexical item which has a largely stable positive or negative meaning across different texts and contexts. The examples of attitude just cited are all instances of this explicit (inscribed) attitude. In contrast, the term “invoked” is applied to formulations which do not include an explicitly positive or negative term but which, nevertheless, have the potential to activate negative or positive assessments. Thus attitude is “invoked” when the positive or negative sense is only implied – i.e. is activated through inference and association. Examples set out below provide instances which involve inscribed attitude (indicated by underlining), contrasted with instances where largely similar attitudes are involved, but where that attitude is conveyed indirectly, via invocation. Formulations which activate attitude in this indirect way (invocations) are also termed “tokens of attitude” in the appraisal framework. (The examples are invented unless otherwise indicated.)

- (1) A (explicit – inscribed)
He entered the room and the class rudely talked amongst themselves.
B (implicit – invoked/token)
Although the Principal had entered the room, the whole class kept on talking.

- (2) A (explicit – inscribed)
Without the intervention of a partisan, right-wing Supreme Court to ensure the election of a Republican, Mr Bush would now be a forgotten loser. The Observer considers his election an affront to the democratic principle with incalculable consequences for America and the world. (*The Observer* 2001.)
B (implicit – invoked/token).
George W. Bush delivered his inaugural speech as the United States President who collected 537,000 fewer votes than his opponent (*The Observer* 2001).

It needs to be noted that these attitudinal invocations are typically constrained by their co-textual context. That is to say, it is frequently only possible to be definitive as to the attitudinal value they are likely to activate once the co-text is taken into account.

It is also a feature of instances of invoked attitude that they are culturally and ideologically conditioned. That is to say, their value will typically depend on the

ideological and interpretative positions the reader brings to the text. Thus, whether or not, for example, “The government has followed the directives of the World Bank” (invented example) activates a positive or negative assessment will depend on the reader’s view of the World Bank and the kind of advice it provides to governments. Of course, it is frequently the case that the text as a whole will position the reader with respect to how such potentially “open” invocations should be read by compliant readers – i.e. by elsewhere explicitly indicating, for example, the writer’s view of the World Bank, or of the government’s performance in managing the economy.

The appraisal framework also provides for a further distinction between invocations which can be seen as essentially “factual” (e.g. “The secret service agent took a bullet for the President.”) and invocations such as “Even though the Principal had entered the room, the whole class went on talking.” (invented examples). Under the appraisal framework, this first “factual” type is said to “afford” the opportunity for an attitudinal assessment, while the second type is said to indirectly “signal” an attitudinal response. In the example just cited, this signalling is done by the terms “even though” and “went on”. These terms are not of themselves positive or negative, since they only indicate evaluations of unexpectedness.

Attitudinal invocations (tokens) can be seen as lying on a cline in terms of the freedom they allow the reader with respect to the attitudinal position into which the reader is being aligned. The more overt the signalling of the attitude, then the less freedom allowed the reader. Thus a formulation such as “Even though the Principal had entered the room, the whole class went on talking amongst themselves.” (invented example) will quite strongly flag an attitude and hence will limit the freedom of attitudinal alignment allowed the reader. In contrast, “The class members were talking amongst themselves after the Principal had entered the room.” (invented example) does not, of itself, include any signalling of attitude and hence allows the reader a greater degree of freedom with respect to any attitudinal implications.

It also needs to be noted that analyses of attitudinal invocations, as opposed to inscriptions, can be highly revealing of the underlying ideology informing a text. This is

because, in being implicit rather than explicit, invocations rely on the reader to supply particular attitudinal inferences by way of interpretation of the supplied “factual” material. In relying on reader inferences in this way, the text constructs the inference as “unavoidable”, “universally applicable”, and thus naturalizes the particular world view under which the inference operates.

Imagine, by way of example, a text which criticizes the government for what it alleges is poor economic management. In such a text the observation that “the government has not followed the directives of the World Bank” would potentially operate as an attitudinal token, invoking a negative assessment of the government’s capacity or even propriety (if ignoring the World Bank is construed as in some way wilfully perverse). The invocation relies, of course, on the reader supplying the inference that not being guided by the World Bank is bad, and thus takes for granted and naturalizes a particular view of the World Bank and the economic theories under which it operates.

3 Attitude, alignment and attribution

In the current context it is also necessary to pay particular attention to ways in which the author manages the attribution of observations and value positions to outside sources. Such attribution, through various forms of directly and indirectly reported speech, typically has a significant role to play in “hard news” reports, with this attributed material frequently comprising the major part of the text. The attributed material is often explicitly attitudinal, as the opinions, assessments, directives and/or recommendations of the quoted source are reported.

There are various ways in which this process of attribution can be handled linguistically, with various outcomes as to whether the author comes across as aligned, disaligned or neutral vis-à-vis the attributed material, and as to whether the reader is positioned to take a favourable or unfavourable view of this material.

3.1 Attribution: “neutral” framers

In the first instance, it is available to the author to employ what can be seen as “neutral” mechanisms for framing the observations and viewpoints of those being quoted. Instances include the use of reporting verbs structures such as “X says that...”, “X states that...”, “X asserts”, “X described Y as...” and adjuncts such as “according to X”, and “in X’s view”. These formulations are “neutral” in the sense that they leave it entirely open as to whether the author is favourably or unfavourably disposed towards the attributed material. Of themselves, they present the author as simply conveying what others have said, and leave it up to the reader to accept or reject that material.

It perhaps needs to be said that, while these formulations are of themselves “neutral” in this sense, it is, of course, possible they will be used in contexts where the author will otherwise indicate alignment or disalignment with the views contained in the attributed material. One such context is provided by a text in which only one side of a current debate or contested position is reported, or is given substantially more coverage than the opposing viewpoint. In certain circumstances, such disproportionality may be interpreted as authorial favouring of the one viewpoint, even while all the framing of that viewpoint in the text is “neutral”. Accordingly these “neutral” terms may be present even while the total textual context acts to indicate authorial favouring or disfavouring of an attributed viewpoint.

3.2 Attribution: Non-neutral framers – endorsing and distancing

Then it is possible for the authors to use mechanisms which imply either authorial support for, or distancing from, attributed material. Support can be indicated through the use of so-called “factive” reporting verbs such as “to prove”, “to demonstrate” and “to reveal”. For example,

The authors of the report have **demonstrated** that Saddam Hussein did intend to develop a nuclear weapons capacity (invented example).

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Such factives construe the reported proposition as true, and by their use the author thereby indicates an absolute alignment with the reported proposition.

Authorial distancing can be indicated by the use of the reporting verb “to claim” and the use of so-called “scare quotes”. The use of “claim” with this communicative effect can be illustrated through comparing differences in meaning which follow when this term is alternated with one of the “neutral” reporting verbs.

Mr Ingram, 41, **says** he suffered a catalogue of abuse, including being shot at and having a dog set on him (*Daily Mail* 2000).

Mr Ingram, 41, **claims** he suffered a catalogue of abuse, including being shot at and having a dog set on him (invented example).

By the use of “to claim” as a reporting verb, the writer does not characterise the proposition as necessarily false or even dubious, but rather actively signals that it is still open to question, or is still in need of confirmation. Thus the author more actively distances him/herself from the attributed proposition than is the case with “neutral” terms such as “to say” and “to assert”. (Of course, it is always possible that the term will occur in a context where the author does elsewhere explicitly characterise the attributed proposition as dubious or non credible.)

3.3 Attributions as attitudinal tokens

Next there is the possibility that the source of the attributed material will be designated in such a way as to invoke a positive or negative view of the proposition – i.e. the reader is indirectly positioned to regard the proposition as well-founded or otherwise credible, or as not so well-founded and credible. Mechanisms for invoking a positive view of the attributed proposition include presenting it as widely held, as held by those with expertise, or by those with high social status. For example,

According to most experts in the field, a police state with powers of control and surveillance beyond the wildest dreams of Hitler or Stalin could now be established in Britain within 24 hours (*Sunday Times Magazine* 2001).

Mechanisms for invoking a negative view of the attributed proposition include presenting it as only narrowly held or held by those without expertise. For example,

...a minority of scientists dispute the official view that greenhouse gasses have contributed to global warming and that reducing emissions and recycling could slow it down (Yates 2009).

Such mechanisms should be seen as only “affording” the opportunity for an attitudinal assessment of the proposition. Even while they may be seen, depending on what is going on elsewhere in the text, as directing the reader towards either a favourable or unfavourable view of the attributed value position, nevertheless, they cannot be read as necessarily indicative of the author’s own position – for example, it is possible for the author to attribute a position to “the majority of experts”, while elsewhere in the text rejecting that position, and ultimately not positioning the reader to regard this position favourably.

3.4 Attribution and attitudinal inscriptions

The final key mechanism for positioning author and reader vis-à-vis attributed material is the use of explicitly attitudinal terms such as “rightly/falsey”, “correctly/incorrectly”, and “convincingly/unconvincingly”. For example,

Pape rightly states that even if all these steps were taken, military intervention would remain an exceptional means of last resort (International Committee of the Red Cross 2009).

[The] biography ... unconvincingly argues that Burnside's poor military reputation was largely an undeserved product of vicious military gossip and his own naive humility (Amazon 2009).

In such cases, the author uses inscribed attitude to overtly reveal an alignment – either for or against the attributed material – and hence simultaneously positions the reader to adopt the same alignment. The research cited above into “journalistic voice” (for example Iedema et al. 1994/2008, White 1998, Martin & White 2005/2007), found “reporter voice” texts did not employ this mechanism – i.e. the conventions of broadsheet news reporting are such that explicitly appraising sources and attributed propositions in this way is not available to the journalistic author when they are operating in “reporter voice” mode. Thus, in reporter voice hard-news reports we find only the first three mechanisms employed: (1) the use of “neutral” attribution frames (e.g. “X

states that”, “According to X”), (2) the use of attribution frames which indicate either endorsement of the attributed value position by the author (e.g. “to demonstrate”, “to show”) or distancing from the attributed material (e.g. “to claim”), or (3) the designating of the source in such a way as to invoke positive or negative views of the attributed material (e.g. “The majority of experts hold the view that...”).

4 Text Analysis

I turn now to demonstrating the application of this framework to exploring attitudinal positioning in news reporting by means of an analysis of the *Daily Mail* text introduced above. This analysis will identify the communicative mechanisms by which a “reporter voice” text such as this is able to position the reader to take a negative view of the central protagonist, Mr Ingram and his compensation payment, and to naturalize a racist ideology with respect to the Roma people (here labelled as “gipsies”). Specifically, it will show that these communicative effects are achieved indirectly, by means of invocations of attitude by the author and by means of the author’s particular use of attributed material.

4.1 Authorial attitudes – invocation

As already indicated, the author’s style is compatible with what has been termed “reporter voice”. Of most importance here is the fact that the author refrains from employing any inscribed Judgement in his own words. Instead he employs indirect invocations of attitude to advance a negative viewpoint of Mr Ingram and his ethnicity.

4.1.1 The term “gipsy”

The author’s use of the term “gipsy” (“£200,000 STRESS PAY-OUT TO GIPSY WARDEN”) requires some comment. It is clear that there are some who would regard the use of this term (spelled either “gypsy” or “gipsy”) as derogatory in some way and even as an instance of inscribed attitude. Thus an article on a Canadian Romani advocacy website (Roma Community Centre 2009) states the following:

Like other minorities, the *Roma* wish to be called by a name of their own, and not one forced on them by the dominant culture. The *Roma* see the word “Gypsy” as a derogatory description. It connotes a stereotypical, mythological creature created by authors of fiction as a vehicle of escapism rather than a member of a genuine ethnic community. Today, it also carries allusions to a potentially criminal lifestyle because crimes committed by a wide variety of itinerant ethnic groups are collectively lumped under “gypsy crime” or “gypsy-type crime” by law enforcement agencies.

Against this is the fact that, at least in the United Kingdom, many *Roma* people and organisations use the term gipsy/gypsy of themselves, do not regard it as pejorative or in any other way attitudinal, and favour its use by themselves and others. Thus, for example, a prominent *Roma* website in the UK employs the multiple term “Gypsy Roma Traveller” as a self designation (Gypsy Roma Traveller 2009). It is noteworthy, as well, that the term “gipsy/gypsy” is used by all British newspapers, and that the Associated Press Stylebook authorises its use alongside “*Roma*” as a neutral description of ethnicity.

What this means is that any analysis needs to pay particular attention to how the term is being used in the text under consideration in order to decide whether derogatory associations are activated, or whether, alternatively, it is operating simply as a neutral identifier of ethnicity. With respect to the text under consideration, it is noteworthy that the term is given prominence in the article’s headline. Located as it is in pre-modifying position in front of the noun, the term acts to suggest the operation of a taxonomy of “warden” types, one of which is the “gipsy” sub-type. This certainly has the potential to foreground and to present Mr Ingram’s *Roma* ethnicity as being of substantial significance and, given the prejudicial stereotyping associated with the *Roma* community in the UK, to activate negative associations, at least for some readers.

It is noteworthy as well that this attitudinal motif is continued in the sub-head “The £200,000 gipsy”. This combination in a noun phrase of a monetary value as pre-modifier (“£200,000”) with a head noun designating a human individual of a particular ethnicity or national identity (“gipsy”) is unusual and hence marked. (It is unlikely that the sub-editor writing the headline would have come up with “The £200,000 Northumbrian” or “The £200,000 Irishman”, had circumstances been different.) The potential, of course, is for this particular phraseology to invoke the sense that there is

something unnatural or untoward about a person of this ethnicity (i.e. a “gipsy”) being associated with material wealth of this order.

The potential effect, then, is to simultaneously invoke a negative view of “gipsies” (perpetuating negative stereotypes) and of Mr Ingram as the recipient of such a sum. We can say that the two formulations in play here are both down the “affording” end of the spectrum – i.e. they can be seen as essentially “factual” in that Mr Ingram unproblematically is a gipsy who unproblematically has been awarded a sum of around £200,000. In these two formulations we see how easy it is for some sense of unexpectedness to be activated through the use of constructions which are marked in some way, and hence for the text to covertly position the reader to adopt positive or negative viewpoints.

4.1.2 “Footing the payout”

This negative orientation is further developed through two observations which the author makes vis-à-vis the “pay-out”, namely that the payout is to be “footed by tax payers” and that it is more than “20 times” Mr Ingram’s annual salary. Both of these observations are apparent statements of “fact” which have the potential to activate a negative view of Mr Ingram and the compensation payment when supported by particular unstated ideological positions. Interestingly, both observations only have relevance for the reporting of these events when the text is read from the perspective of these particular ideological positions.

In considering firstly the observation that tax payers will be “footing the payout”, we note that it is, of course, generally known that tax-payer derived funds will always be called upon when the courts impose costs on public institutions for administrative failings, including when they are found to have failed in their duty of care to their employees. So why does the author include information which it can be assumed will be generally known to the reader and which has no specific relevance in the current circumstances? The material is, of course, only “relevant” for an ideology which is generally resentful of, and resistant to, the paying of income taxes, regarding these as some form of unnecessary government imposition. Tellingly, in this regard, the author

employs a formulation (“the payout to be footed by tax payers”) which presents this almost as a new impost, a new financial burden which must additionally now be borne by tax payers, who, of course, include the reader.

The observation that the pay-out is “20 times” Mr Ingram’s salary similarly raises issues or relevance. Why is the proportionality of the payment to Mr Ingram’s annual salary relevant in the current circumstances? One source of “relevance” is an ideology which operates with certain vague measures of proportionality, specifically those by which such a proportionality (i.e. 20 times) would be seen as “too much”. Another source of “relevance” would be a related ideology under which, as a result of ethnic stereotyping, “20 times” is seen as simply “too much” for a “gipsy warden”. Thus we see that this observation can act as a token of negative attitude, and hence be “relevant”, under the influence of certain vague and prejudicial assumptions about proportionality and Roma ethnicity.

4.1.3 Mr Ingram as lifestyle “eccentric”

There are two further points in the text where the author offers, in his own words, potential invocations of negative attitude towards Mr Ingram. The first of these is provided by the following:

Mr Ingram refused to be drawn on what he planned to do with the money but said he had no plans to move into a house.

The sentence contains two observations which have the potential to invoke negative attitudes towards Mr Ingram when read against particular ideologies. In the first instance, Mr Ingram is said to have “refused” to be drawn on “what he planned to do with the money”. This is potentially negative for an interpretation informed by an ideology which assumes a certain compliance with media questioning, and more specifically which assumes it would be “normal” and a sign of openness on the part of Mr Ingram for him to reveal to the media, and hence to the world, his financial plans. Tellingly the author uses the intensified term “refused” rather than, for example, “declined”.

Under the influence of this ideology, then, there is a potential for Mr Ingram to be cast as in some way aberrant and perhaps even as secretive in his dealings with the media.

The observation that Mr Ingram “said he had no plans to move into a house” has a similar attitudinal potential. Here the ideology in play is one which assumes that, of course, Mr Ingram will now be moving into a house – i.e. the observation potentially activates a negative view of Mr Ingram given assumptions re what are “normal” and “desirable” living conditions in current society, and which cast the living arrangements of Roma such as Mr Ingram as aberrant and undesirable.

Finally there is the observation that Mr Ingram and his family have chosen to live in a field at the end of a “muddy” track. It is noteworthy that the negative state of being “muddy” is here construed as a permanent characteristic of Mr Ingram’s living circumstances (which presumably cannot actually be the case, even given the year-round potential for rain in the United Kingdom). Again there is potential for negativity arising from a sense that Mr Ingram’s “gipsy” lifestyle is in some way perverse.

4.2 Attitudinal alignment and attribution

The attitudinal workings of the material attributed to quoted sources are perhaps more straightforward than those of the authorial material just discussed. Broadly it can be said that the author quotes various explicit criticisms of the payment and of Mr Ingram. While this material does include instances of inscribed attitude (for example “compensation culture gone mad”), this is entirely in keeping with the conventions of “reporter voice” in that all such inscriptions are confined to this attributed material. Tellingly all these explicitly negative criticisms go unanswered. It is possible, therefore, to read off authorial support for these assessments based on this imbalance.

4.2.1 The compensation payment

Firstly, there is the reporting of the views of various sources who are generally critical of workers' compensation payments and more specifically critical of stress-related compensation. For example, early in the text the author offers the following:

Critics denounced it [the payment to Mr Ingram] as another sign of compensation culture gone mad.

This material – both here and later in the text – is framed by reporting verbs which are “neutral” in the sense that they leave open whether or not the author supports the attributed viewpoint. However, as already mentioned, it is significant that this negative viewpoint is not balanced by the reporting of the viewpoint of other “experts” who, in contrast, would speak in favour of the workers' compensation system and payments such as this.

The author's use of “critics” as a designation of the source of this viewpoint is also significant. Interestingly one interpretation of this designation is that a significant number of experts in this field, perhaps even the majority, are of this view, even while the term “critics” of itself may, strictly speaking, designate no more than two sources. As a result, this designation potentially acts as an attitudinal token, invoking a sense of this viewpoint as being widely held and hence well-founded and credible.

This criticism of compensation payments in general potentially interacts, of course, with the earlier indirect depiction of Mr Ingram as someone who is specifically undeserving of such a payment. One potential communicative outcome is that the general criticisms of all compensation payments are read as specific criticisms of Mr Ingram by experts in the field.

4.2.2 Mr Ingram's “moral” character

Finally there is the reporting of the extremely negative view of Mr Ingram and the compensation payment attributed to his “neighbours”. This attributed material includes

the assertion that it is wrong for Mr Ingram to have been awarded such compensation because, in unconnected legal proceedings, he has been refused permission to keep his caravans on their current site. Further, there is the extremely serious charge that Mr Ingram’s claim for compensation is, in fact, fraudulent, with the charge mounted on the basis of the belief that Mr Ingram is in such good health that he is able to do “hard physical” work in improving his caravan site.

Again, there are grounds for deducing authorial support for this viewpoint based on the fact that no alternative viewpoint is presented, and specifically that Mr Ingram or his legal representative appears not to have been afforded the opportunity to respond to these very serious charges.

5 Conclusion

The analyses set out in the preceding sections provide for the following insights and conclusions. Through indirect attitudinal positioning (i.e. tokens/invocations of attitude), the journalistic author, on his own behalf, presents material which casts Mr Ingram and the payment he has been awarded in a negative light. The reader is positioned by these attitudinal tokens to view the compensation payment as inappropriate and Mr Ingram as undeserving of the compensation and more generally aberrant in his way of life. In setting up this potential communicative effect, the journalistic author relies on, and hence perpetuates, value-laden, ideologically charged, ultimately prejudicial assumptions about the paying of taxes, about what are “normal” living arrangements in contemporary society, and about the character of the Roma people.

This attitudinal positioning in the author’s own words is supported by the arrangements made for material attributed to outside sources. Specifically, various attitudinal assessments which are strongly critical of Mr Ingram and the compensation payment are presented but are not balanced or answered by any counter viewpoints. Significantly, this lack of balance operates in the context of a text where, as the analysis has demonstrated, a negative view of Mr Ingram is elsewhere advanced through the author’s own words. Thus the author’s own words can be seen as laying the groundwork for

attitudinal positions which are more overtly and more forthrightly advanced in the attributed material.

That the report is so unbalanced is noteworthy. Certainly many journalistic practitioners would see such an imbalance as unorthodox and journalistically defective, as a marker of inappropriate subjectivity not compatible with “objective” reporting. It is noteworthy that even while “unbalanced” or “biased” in this sense, the text nonetheless operates under a regime of strategic impersonalisation (i.e. “reporter voice”) by which the author’s subjective presence is still substantially backgrounded and obscured.

This is not, of course, to reach specific conclusions about the power of texts which are covertly attitudinal in this way to influence or change the beliefs, understandings and attitudes of readers. It is clear that media power is a potential effect, not of individual texts in isolation, but of accumulated texts, operating in conjunction with other relevant texts encountered by the reader, and in conjunction with influences derived from the reader’s own background and experiences. The bias of the above report, for example, is probably sufficiently obvious that the text is unlikely to influence any reader to take a negative of gypsies who wasn’t already so disposed attitudinally. The potential power of this text would seem, instead, to be to confirm and reinforce a negative view of gypsies in any reader who already operates with such a prejudiced viewpoint. What is significant here is that this potential reinforcing is carried out by material which, at least when taken at face value, presents itself as a “factual” report of court proceedings. Thus “compliant” readers (those already negatively disposed to gypsies) potentially have their negative viewpoint confirmed on the basis of what they may take to be factual evidence. The potential effect, therefore, is one in which this compliant reader’s viewpoint is naturalized, confirmed as a value position arising inevitably from observations of relevant current events.

Looking beyond this particular report, this would seem to be a potential which attaches generally to “reporter voice” texts in of this type – i.e. ones in which attitudinal positions are indirectly favoured or conveyed. At the very least, texts of this type have the potential to reinforce, in the ways just described, the views of readers who already

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support the value position or positions being favoured by the text. It seems plausible, as well, that texts of this type might also influence a reader’s understandings and attitudes when the issue or event being covered is new to the reader and outside the scope of their past experiences.

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