Semiotics and Verbal Texts

*How the News Media
Construct a Crisis*

Jane Gravells

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Semiotics and Verbal Texts

How the News Media Construct a Crisis

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To Molly Schroder

Foreword

I undertook the research for this book to satisfy an interest in the ways in which language and business interconnect, and in particular to consider the language surrounding companies in crisis. Many books have been written from a business perspective on crisis communication, but my concern was about how the "lay" person came to understand crisis events. It seemed to me that major news events such as disasters and crises came and went, and that our perception of them changed over time—not just that we, or the media on our behalf, tired of them and moved on to the next big thing, although this may be true. But also that we understood them in a different *way* with the passage of time, that they came to represent something other than an agglomeration of events. I became interested in the BP Deepwater Horizon explosion of 2010 for its wide-reaching effects including business, environmental, financial and human outcomes. One of the things the book is "about" is certainly the Deepwater Horizon explosion and crisis. However, this is not a handbook about the language of crisis communication. It explores *how* we know what we think we know about crises such as the BP events. So another thing the book is about is news media representation—how is a story such as Deepwater Horizon mediated by different publications, and over time?

Exploring a phenomenon as broad and disjointed as the media representation of a crisis called for an ambitious research approach, and so the

main thing the book is about is considering ways in which we can investigate a linguistic representation and understand its way of making meaning. This book is importantly about methodology—how, practically, can we investigate such a fragmented, diverse and unbounded phenomenon as the media coverage of a crisis? In particular, I was interested in ways of looking at written coverage. Many tools and approaches were available for me to do this, and I discuss some of these in Part I, but none were fully suited to the flexible, emergent and holistic research process I had in mind. I saw this as an area where an alternative and systematic research option can be useful, and from the study of semiotics I sought to reclaim some of the concepts and terminology which have most recently (and effectively) been more the province of the study of visual and other signs. Barthes' view that communication makes meaning at different levels—the sign, the code, mythic meaning and ideology—provided a framework within which to situate a flexible analysis, and I set out such a framework in Part II. This section can be read as a "how to" guide to conducting research within a broad semiotic perspective. Using a wide range of examples from written news media texts about the BP Deepwater Horizon events, it demonstrates how to conduct a written analysis of those discursive features which are most relevant to the researcher's own particular data set. I drew, secondly, on Peirce's view that signs can be understood as having iconic, indexical and/or symbolic form, as an explanatory concept to describe and interpret the analysis findings, and this is explored in Part III.

These several strands of semiotic theory, media social practice, real-world illustration and direct linguistic application relate closely to the concerns of this book series, which takes a postdisciplinary perspective on the study of language. The work in this book relates to topics of interest in the study of applied linguistics, media studies and business communication. It sets out a relationship between theory and practice, moving from the understanding of a theoretical framework to its practical application, to the explication of results through another theoretical approach.

This book would not have been written without Judith Baxter's invaluable input and guidance and I thank her and Johannes Angermuller for the opportunity to write for this series. Thanks to Chloe Fitzsimmons at Palgrave Macmillan for her support in bringing the book to print and to Jonathan Gravells for his reading of the first drafts and his constant

encouragement. Any remaining failings in the book are my own. I am very grateful to the Spectator for allowing the use of the Bernie cartoon, which I found to my delight very early in the research process. I began my work on the BP crisis with a set of four interviews—two in London and two in New Orleans—with people who had been very close to the BP events in different ways. My informants generously shared their time and their insights about the events in the Gulf, allowing me to see the crisis from perspectives other than those of the media texts I was working with.

I would like to add a final word about the BP crisis. Over the six years I have been involved with studying the media language of this crisis, it could have become too easy to treat it as an abstract, though fascinating, case study: an example of the multifarious ways in which we use language to fulfil a social need. Indeed, my contention is that our understanding of the crisis is, in one sense, a construction of language. Yet the explosion had tragic material consequences—11 people lost their lives and 17 were injured. The spill caused significant damage to wildlife as well as to the jobs and welfare of countless working people, particularly in the industries of fishing and tourism. As part of my research I visited a senior academic in marine environmental sciences at the University of New Orleans, and a journalist who had covered the story from the first day for a New Orleans newspaper, and I was left in no doubt about the human and environmental cost of the events of April 2010. I hope I treat these stories with respect in this book.

Alrewas
2016   Jane Gravells

Bernie, The Spectator, 8th October 2011.
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Part I

Written Language and Semiotics

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Researching the Representation of a Crisis

A Semiotic Account of a News Story

In this book, I make a broad claim about news media representation. I suggest that whole sets of texts, whole representations of events, have linguistic commonalities which can be investigated. In this view, the linguistic picture constructed by the media immediately after an event is quite different from the picture we get some years later, even taking account of important variations by news genre, channel, publication style and so on. It is these large flows of social meaning that I propose we can investigate systematically using semiotic concepts. Consider these two examples of news coverage concerning the BP Deepwater Horizon oil rig explosion of 2010.

1. The oil is now about 20 miles (32 kilometres) off the coast of Venice, Louisiana, the closest it's been to land. But it's still not expected to reach the coast before Friday, if at all.
   BP, which was leasing the Deepwater Horizon, said it will begin drilling by Thursday as part of a $100 million effort to take the pressure

off the well, which is spewing 42,000 gallons (159,000 litres) of crude oil a day. (Carleton Place (Canada), 27.4.2010)

2. The ditty by the two singers included the lines: "When I hear that BP story, Green and yellow melancholy, Deepwater despair." (Coventry Evening Telegraph, 27.4.2012)

Example 1 is drawn from a Canadian newspaper (*Carleton Place)* one week after the explosion, and deals with the ongoing attempt to cap the leaking oil well. It is packed with information of a certain kind—times, places, amounts of money and volumes of oil, as well as the reported voice of BP. The second example appeared in the *Coventry Evening Telegraph* (UK) on the same date two years later. It is still of the genre "news report", but this time its topic is a protest about BP's environmental record. This extract also draws on reported voices, but in this case the commentary on the BP crisis is expressed through an artistic genre—the protest song. The phrase "green and yellow melancholy", alluding here to the BP logo colours, is taken from Shakespeare's "Twelfth Night" (Act II, Scene iv). These two news pieces make meaning of the crisis in very different ways, and in this book I will explore what these changes in meaning-making are, how and when they occur, and how we can examine the shape of media representations through systematic language analysis.

The book explores a number of connected themes. Its primary focus is the semiotic analysis of written verbal text. I will explore whether concepts common in the study of semiotics, and more usually applied to non-verbal sign systems, can be deployed as frameworks for investigating stretches of text (discourse) and shed light on how they make meaning. In this conceptualisation, collections of texts such as news media representations of a story can be regarded as signs with their own sets of characteristics. In other words, I will consider whether text 1 above has anything in common with other texts written at the same time on the same topic, and if so, what that tells us about how the press made sense of the BP events at that time. I propose that text 2 seems to me to be different in kind from text 1. What evidence can I marshal to support that instinct? How are the texts (demonstrably, analysably) different, and what does that tell us about how the view of the crisis has changed? In suggesting that semiotic frameworks have something to offer in the study

of written texts, I will be considering semiotic concepts as epistemological foundations for a practical methodology.

I take it that written text is a sign—a privileged sign no doubt—but still one type of sign system amongst many. Writing sits alongside speech, still image, film, gesture, music and so on as a resource for making meaning, and it has been the enterprise of semiotics to explore the ways by which such resources are exploited, managed, combined and systematised by their users for myriad communicative purposes in an infinite variety of contexts. Following Barthes' (1972) insights that diverse cultural phenomena can be understood as a sign or representation, scholars of multimodality have investigated the regularities (the "grammar") of a range of semiotic modes including visual images (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006), typography (van Leeuwen, 2006), music (e.g. Monelle, 1999), film (e.g. Machin & Jaworski, 2006), as well as the interaction of these modes (e.g. Iedema, 2003).

It is perhaps surprising, however, that the scholar sitting down to engage with *written* texts from a semiotic perspective—in other words, asking how does this text make social meaning?—may find that her options for analysis are constrained. In considering written text as one mode amongst many she may find that text in multimodal artefacts, such as advertising or websites, is analysed as much for its visual properties, for example, font, position and layout, as for the contribution to meaning inherent in its lexico-grammar. I call this approach the "text-as-graphic" approach, and touch on this again in the next chapter. Alternatively, Systemic Functional Grammar (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004) provides a comprehensive analysis framework within which analysts can give an account not only of verbal language but also of other modes, in particular still and moving image (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). Systemic Functional Grammar provides an account of verbal language within the clause and sentence and, and inter-sentential connections through the study of cohesion (Halliday & Hasan, 1976). However, the concerns of a semiotic account of text representations may also be broader, for example, an investigation of the role of metaphor, or intertextuality, or how writers have chosen to name events.

I argue in this book for an approach which offers an alternative to these ways of studying written text. I suggest that there are a number of

concepts in the field of semiotics which are useful as explanatory frameworks. Suppose our scholar of the preceding paragraph has a broad investigative agenda. Her need is for an account which is:

- *Emergent.* She does not wish to approach the text with a presupposition of what she might find, but rather to let the data "speak for themselves".
- *Comprehensive.* Her analysis should give a picture of the text at all its levels, from close text analysis to social meaning-making.
- *Critical* without an agenda for emancipation.
- *Flexible* in terms of analysis tools.
- *Multimodal* in that written text can be analysed within the same epistemological framework as other semiotic modes.

Using news data related to the BP Deepwater Horizon disaster spanning a two-year period, I will illustrate how a number of theoretical concepts drawn from semiotics can be useful as starting frameworks to build a comprehensive, critical, situated description of written texts. I will move from a micro-analysis of word choice to a macro-analysis of whole sets of texts, arguing that these can be construed as signs in themselves, with shared characteristics of ideological significance. I started this chapter with two quotations from the news coverage of the BP crisis. In order to show the interplay between semiotic theory and practical discourse analysis, I will apply the semiotic principles I will describe to this real-life example of a business crisis constructed through the news media.

The text extracts at the beginning of this chapter are drawn from a very particular linguistic context—news media coverage—and this is another key theme. This book is partly a story about a story: how it starts, grows, develops and changes. The lives of stories in the news media are tightly bound to the conventions and practices of news writing, and the language usages I discuss here will be very different from the discursive construction of the BP story, say, at the pub. The analysis of the story needs to be grounded in an understanding of how news media construct news. The principles in which I ground my analysis practices are, nevertheless, transferable to other contexts, genres and registers. They could equally be used to examine our pub conversation about the BP crisis, as long as

they take account of the conventions and practices of pub conversation. And while the news media are still highly influential in shaping how we understand events in the world around us, their influence is increasingly fragmented by both the proliferation of professional news outlets and the increase in "lay" interpretations of the news, particularly through the Internet. In proposing that the news media make identifiable "pictures" of news stories at given times, I also acknowledge that these pictures are multifaceted and shifting mosaics made up of different media professional and individual voices.

The next section of this chapter sets out some general observations about the characteristics of news media stories, practices and genres. My specific illustration is the explosion on the BP-leased Deepwater Horizon oil-drilling platform on 27 April 2010, and its business aftermath, and this introductory chapter concludes with a brief account of how the news story developed over the two subsequent years.

Researching News Stories

The scholarship on news stories is extensive. Recent work takes it as read that far from being a representation of an external reality, news writing is highly culturally-situated and dependent on conventional journalistic practice. Stories are mediated at every level, through selection and choice of emphasis, through journalistic practices and constraints, through their structure, format and co-text, and in terms of their language. The ways stories are presented vary considerably by type of publication (tabloid, quality/broadsheet, online), channel (print, online, TV, radio) and genre of news writing ("hard news" article, feature, editorial, financial report and so on), as well as displaying idiosyncratic features of individual writers. There is no version of a news story which can be taken as definitive, and choices made by writers about representation of a story are always ideologically grounded, in that they are a product of culturally-specific convention and are subject to influence by those groups and individuals with access to "voice" (Blommaert, 2005).

A brief review of the four areas I mention above—story selection; journalistic practice; structure/format and language—as well as overarching

conventions of genre – places the approach I discuss here into context. The semiotic approach I propose is not intended to replace but to complement this work into the language of news representation. A semiotic account of a news story only makes sense when we understand what news stories "look like" and why.

Story Selection

Given that news outlets need to select what is included in publications (they cannot cover everything), then certain characteristics make some stories far more likely to be considered newsworthy than others. Galtung and Ruge (1973) found that stories with certain criteria dominated news publications. Based on these criteria, the BP story was an obvious candidate for being reported, being of significant size and intensity, unexpected, unambiguously catastrophic and involving elite nations. The larger point is that what is considered news is not naturally predetermined, but selected and prioritised according to journalistic codes. These codes are culture-specific, and reflect the ideologies of politics, power and social agreement that are at play within large institutions like media organisations. While story-selection procedures are broadly shared by the media (a story such as the BP events would be likely to appear in most national news publications) they also vary by publication—tabloids and quality newspapers regularly choose different lead stories, or select different aspects of the stories they report on (Bignell, 2002).

Apart from the *topic* of the stories selected, certain individuals and organisations have a strong influence over which stories are prioritised. Fowler (1991) and others give accounts of the many stakeholders involved in producing news articles, from the news outlet proprietors, editors, journalists and other staff, to those routinely consulted about affairs in the public eye (politicians, business representatives, non-commercial organisations, community representatives, the police and so on) and those only consulted expediently (e.g. eyewitnesses and victims of crime). Of these, some will have greater and more regular access to representation than others, and it follows that these will have a greater influence on which stories are chosen and how they are eventually presented for public consumption. Van Dijk (1996: 86) summarises:

> Most obvious and consequential are the patterns of access to the mass *media:* who has preferential access to journalists, who will be interviewed, quoted and described in news reports, and whose opinions will thus be able to influence the public? That is, through access to the mass media, dominant groups also may have access to, and hence partial control over, the public at large. (Emphasis in original)

Accounts of influence outside and inside publications focus on money or political interest or both. Proprietors and editors of newspapers may have an overt political stance that is made more or less clear to their reading public, and is relevant to story selection and emphasis. Also less obvious is the influence of advertisers, usually a major source of income for mass-media publications. Advertisers buy space in publications whose readership and stated values already fit their own, but researchers have argued that there is evidence that their money buys a degree of influence over content (Roberts & McCombs, 1994), and it is certainly the case that the perceived behaviour of publications affects advertising spend, as the demise of the News of the World in the UK after phone-hacking scandals shows. Touching on economic factors and the priority given to advertising, Cotter (2010: 193) writes of the "news hole"—namely, "what is open to editorial content—news stories—after the advertising has been positioned". Other influence on content and language use has been shown to come from pressure groups, PR agencies and corporate communications departments, all of whom have close relationships with the media as part of their function (e.g. Burt, 2012). Examining another dimension of influence, Scollon (1998) contends that journalists largely orient their writing towards other journalists. In recent years the public has gained a voice in story selection, as "what's trending" on the Internet becomes an early indicator of likely stories of interest, and Twitter provides reaction and feedback to stories from known and unknown voices, shaping the future direction of representation.

Journalistic Practice

The language of news media texts cannot be separated from the context in which they are produced, and this study of how a particular story comes to be constructed needs to take account of the writing and editing

practices that constrain news writing, from the collection and selection of information, to the organisation of stories to meet the particular news cycles and space constraints of the publication. Such time and space considerations might range from the daily cycle of a print newspaper with its relatively regular number of pages, to a 24-hour TV channel, to a news website with regularly updated content and space considerations that are only limited by writing resources.

Far from compiling information for news stories from scratch, news organisations have at their disposal a complex, ongoing network of information sources. These include press releases from corporations and institutions, and news agencies such as Reuters and Agence France Presse which are positioned as neutral and unaffiliated in their standpoint. Agencies distribute news stories via newswires to other news organisations, mainly newspapers, television and radio. The customer publication may use the output in full or in part, so repeated forms of words in different publications are common. A large number of the BP stories in the data set derived from news agencies, and repetition, in particular of reported speech, is a notable feature of the data. Other sources include the publication's own reporters "on the ground" in various locations at home and abroad, who often initiate the coverage of breaking news, as well as contacts in business, Parliament, the police, pressure groups, universities and other groups and institutions. Bignell (2002: 88) calls these:

> "accessed voices" to whom the media have access and who expect access to the media. The discourses of these groups therefore become the raw material for the language of news stories, since news language is parasitic on their discursive codes and ideological assumptions.

As these relationships develop, some of the contacts develop considerable journalistic skills themselves, with business communications departments writing press releases in such a way that they can be used almost unaltered (Jacobs, 1999), universities developing a sense of what lies within a theoretical piece of research that makes it an item of general interest (Baxter, 2014) and the police finding ways of using media access to the public that can contribute to the effectiveness of their own work.

Some of the most interesting work in writing and editing practices has taken an ethnographic approach to tracking the life cycle of articles, and looking at what selections, deletions and other changes are made in the process and why. Cotter (2010: 88) gives a comprehensive account, including in particular the role of the story meeting in "[d]eciding what's fit to print". She argues that these meetings are a less visible, but potentially more revealing reflection of a publication's priorities and values than the editorial pages. Van Hout and Macgilchrist (2010) follow a story from press release to publication, and find that framing decisions, that is, the selection and emphasis of certain information elements at the expense of others, can be due as much to technical and space constraints as to ideological considerations.

Structure and Format

News writing is a highly recognisable "genre colony" (Bhatia, 1993), not least because of its repeated structures. For the hard news report, one typical structure is the "inverted pyramid". The use of a section at the start that summarises all key points results in a story that is not chronological, but rather has temporal shifts, and journalists learn to present information in a conventional hierarchy, through which narrative sequences are necessarily reordered. The inverted pyramid structure appears to facilitate a brief but accurate assimilation of "the facts"; however, the headline and lead do not summarise the story, but rather point to the issues of maximum societal disruption (White, 1997). Bird and Dardenne (1988: 77) point out that this structure can encourage a partial, and highly directed, reading.

Feature articles are more likely to follow a conventional narrative structure, with events often related in chronological order, which entails certain other linguistic regularities, such as a high presence of deictics and connecting words (Fulton, Huisman, Murphet, & Dunn, 2005). The typical narrative structure means that the "point of closure" (i.e. the outcome) of a feature tends to be near the end, rather than at the beginning, as it is in the hard news story. Another key news genre, the editorial, tends to be structured quite differently again, using patterns of rhetoric and argumentation such as Problem–Solution or Problem–Denial–Correction (Winter, 1994).

The language of news is organised not only by structuring strategies within the text, but graphically upon the page, and issues of medium and formatting can be relevant to how a story is construed. The traditional print medium is characterised by columnar formatting and clear framing of text items. Online news, on the other hand, generally exhibits a much looser layout and is less constrained by space, as well as having additional affordances such as hyperlinks to related stories within and outside the news website, multimodal options including still images, video clips and sound files, and opportunities for interaction between news writers and readers. The effects of these looser graphic formats on the verbal language of news include longer stories, greater access to voice by non-professional writers and deictic expressions to guide the reader to alternative information options.

News Media Language

Language choices in the news media concern how information is communicated once selected. The canonical descriptive work on the register of newspaper language is that of Biber, Johansson, Leech, Conrad and Finegan (1999). Biber et al. were able to isolate through corpus analysis a number of features which were characteristic of news texts, for example, a high use of nouns and prepositional phrases, a low use of pronouns and a high proportion of complex phrases compared with other text types. They found the present tense to be used more than the past tense, because, although news items tend to describe past events, they make use of historic present tense commentary, as well as direct quotation. However, Biber et al.'s work does not take account of the differences between newspaper types (tabloid and quality) or types of news item such as the hard news report, feature, soft news, editorial, all of which are distinctive in their language characteristics. Even within one newspaper type, the stories that are presented as "hard news" will have a different set of linguistic conventions from "soft news" stories. Because language usage by newspaper type (e.g. tabloid and quality) and by media sub-genre (e.g. hard and soft news) can be so varied, Biber et al.'s concept of a newspaper language has been challenged (e.g. Landert, 2014) for being so broad as to be unhelpful as an explanatory category.

Studies of the collection, writing and editing practices discussed above overlap with research into specific language usages within media and news writing. Most research into this topic adopts a broadly critical perspective on the language studied, and writers who work within the field of Critical Discourse Analysis have found media texts to be a particularly productive data source for the study of the exercise and maintenance of power. Key works on the language of the media from this critical perspective include Fairclough (1995b, 2000), van Dijk (1985, 1988) and Fowler (1991). A recent challenge to the assumption of manipulative intent in the press has been made by Martin (2004) and Macgilchrist (2007), who argue that some media pieces challenge and reframe dominant ideologies in a way that runs counter to expectation. They call this enterprise "Positive Discourse Analysis". Similarly, the ethnographic work mentioned above emphasises the role of writing practices as much as ideological choices in motivating the language of news stories.

Media language is usually the product of many voices. These will almost certainly be those of the journalist and sub-editor, but can, as discussed above, include interviewees, directly or indirectly quoted, and other voices that are partly or wholly unattributed, drawn from general debates, background research, and written input from interested parties. This form of intertextuality in the news media is explored in work such as Bednarek (2006), Oliveira (2004) and Macgilchrist (2007). Studies of intertextuality in news articles also indicate the extent to which journalists can converge around ways of presenting information (e.g. naming practices) partly because so many of their sources are shared, and much of their writing is drawn from others' previous work on the same news item. Ready access to global accounts both in print and on television increases the resources that are available for journalists to draw on as source texts to be either endorsed or challenged. Other work on intertexts considers the extent to which writers variously align themselves with, or distance themselves from, others' texts and voices using speech presentation strategies, modality resources (Roberts, Zuell, Landmann, & Wang, 2008) and the Appraisal System (Martin & White, 2005; White, 1997).

Despite this frequent use of shared resources, the lexis used by tabloid and broadsheet newspapers has been found to be specific not only to each format (Conboy, 2007) but also to individual publications, through the

imposition of style guides (Cameron, 1995; Cotter, 2010). Each publication will identify with a certain audience and set of values, and will select newsworthy items and language usages appropriate to this positioning. Tabloid newspapers use a more oral and conversational style (Bignell, 2002; Fowler, 1991), marked by contractions, slang, idioms, nicknames, indications of spoken emphasis such as italics or bold type and a restricted set of vocabulary, which, while not always representing its readers' own language use, is recognisable and shared. This oral style connotes familiarity, camaraderie and entertainment. Quality newspapers, on the other hand, tend to use a style that connotes authority, formality and seriousness. Vocabulary and structures belong to a more "written" and formal register, with longer sentences, no creative misspelling and a preference for metaphor over puns. Quality newspapers, through their patterns of modality and personal pronouns, are more likely to give an impression of objectivity and even-handedness in contrast to the impression of subjectivity and shared values given by tabloids.

As well as these differences by newspaper type, genres of news writing have distinctive patterns of topic, structure and language choice, which are both recognisable and constitutive of their type. These differences in news genres are an important explanatory factor for changes in the BP story, and are worth reviewing here.

The News Report

Scholars of news media regularly make a distinction between "hard news" and "soft news" (Bird & Dardenne, 1988; Fulton et al., 2005; Martin & White, 2005; White, 1997). Bird & Dardenne suggest that hard news is "important" whereas soft news is "interesting". Fulton et al. (2005: 143) further describe the difference:

> "Hard" news reports on politics, economics, the doings of the powerful and international affairs—in other words, on those aspects of a nation's public life that are considered to have the greatest influence on the lives of its citizens. It is contrasted with "soft" news, which is about "human interest", about celebrity, crime, the small scale and domestic.

It is not only the content of the story, but the discursive approach and positioning that distinguish hard and soft news reports. In the case of a disaster such as BP Deepwater Horizon, for example, the main news story might present the latest overview of events, while a soft news story still on the same topic might turn to family stories of victims, or the heroic actions of a single participant.

Large-scale events such as political, business and financial crises, as well as accidents and disasters, are generally reported as hard news, and a number of features of style and structure are associated with these types of report, for which I will use the term "news report". Although the term "hard" implies definitive, objective and factual, the news report genre cannot be considered a representation of fact—as there is no single objective reality to be reported on. Rather, news reports are one of the many discursive practices that mediate our perception of events. News writing comprises a complex set of practices, constraints and choices, all of which mitigate against a neutral representation. Fulton et al. (2005: 232) write that "objectivity is a style, a set of linguistic practices that we have learned to recognise as signifiers of factuality and impartiality". The authors draw attention to a number of these practices in factual reporting (2005: 233):

- High proportion of empirical information regarding dates, places, times, amounts of money and so on.
- Third-person narration; narrative voice externalised and elided.
- Lack of modality; preponderance of declarative (i.e. not conditional) verbs indicating certainty.

The aim of such strategies is to present an authorial (and institutional) voice which presents itself as "neutral and anonymous and thus as directly and mechanically determined by the events it portrays" (White, 1997: 129). However, suggesting that a news report places an emphasis on empirical information does not imply that opinion and evaluation play no part—on the contrary, comment from eyewitnesses and experts is an essential feature of news reporting. What is significant is that such comment is clearly positioned as being separate from the (neutral) factual report, usually through the use of direct and indirect quotation. As Martin and White explain (2005: 168, emphasis in original), in these types of text "those values of **judgement** which occur are always

mediated through attribution (the journalistic author is never their immediate source)". As judgements are overtly positioned as personal opinion through attribution, the rest of the report is, by contrast, positioned as objective and neutral. This is related to the third point above, where modality and (un)certainty are available to both the journalistic voice or reported voices but, the authors argue, are less typical of the journalistic voice in hard news. In Chap. 9 I will go on to problematise further the assumptions about the use of modality in hard news.

The "objective" strategies mentioned above are not used uniformly in news articles. White (1997: 108) finds that quality and tabloid publications alike commonly use what he calls "intensified lexis" (he cites "axed" for "dismissed", "shake-up" for "reorganisation" and "torrential rains lashed" for "heavy rain fell"). Figurative language such as metaphor can introduce "an element of modality or appraisal which enlivens (and ideologically positions) an otherwise bald account" (Fulton et al., 2005: 232). And a hard news article following the inverted pyramid structure can contain a section in narrative feature article style, which may serve not only to engage the reader, but to emphasise by contrast the claims to objectivity of the rest of the piece. One of the early BP texts tells the story of the escape of a cook from the burning rig. The article in its entirety is a hard news article, but the section which recounts the cook's story is told largely in reported speech, as a chronological narrative, adding a different dimension to the unembellished prose. Further, the impersonal, objective style is not uniformly used across types of newspaper. As mentioned earlier, tabloid discourse is typically more personal, conversational and subjective than that of quality newspapers.

These tensions between impartiality and evaluation, and neutral and subjective language reflect the challenges for news journalists in meeting the conflicting aims of representing the world "as it is", taking account of institutional interests, and engaging the reader.

The Feature Article

In rhetorical terms, news reports are positioned as primarily realising a *descriptive* act. Other types of mass media journalism are more *evaluative*, and these can include feature articles, editorials, blogs and commentary pieces as well as reviews and letters pages.

Feature articles position their information and participants in quite a different way from news stories. Features are not tied directly to the news of the day, and because of this can be "slotted in" when there is space to be filled. Unlike news stories, they do not present "just the facts", but generally present human interest stories within a much broader, less time-bound way (Cotter, 2010). Bird and Dardenne (1988) make a useful distinction between the "chronicle" that is primarily descriptive, and the "story" which follows a more subjective, narrative pattern. They point out that while the former is more aligned with journalistic values that foreground a perspective of objectivity, the latter approach is more successful in engaging readers, and suggest that media writing typically seeks a balance between the two, which can be more or less successful.

As well as the narrative structure already discussed, other generic characteristics of the feature article are that represented participants are often recognisable stereotypes brought to life by quotations, and that there can be a conflict or parable, leading to the outlining of a (shared) moral position. Landert (2014) notes a high usage of first- and second-person pronouns in soft news. Where there is a third-person narrator, the viewpoint of the writer is foregrounded, and he/she directs the attention towards the desired reading.

The Editorial, Blog, Commentary and Reviews

In considering evaluative texts, a number of issues to do with language choices are relevant. The language of judgement and evaluation is far more likely to appear in articles that analyse events than articles that report them. Martin and White (2005) propose that evaluative texts are rich in expressions that communicate judgements in the areas of affect, ethics and aesthetics. As discussed in earlier comments on the differences between the quality and popular press, emotive and judgemental lexis can be a feature of both news reports and opinion pieces in the popular press, whose concern is to reinforce values that they share with their readers, whereas the quality press tend to avoid evaluative language in news reports. Just as news reports are said to exhibit a lack of modality, in evaluative texts, the writer is more likely to indicate his/her own view

on propositions through the use of modal expressions. This applies not only to the expression of (un)certainty, (in)ability and permission/obligation, but to the degree of "modal responsibility" exhibited in the modal expressions chosen (e.g. the choice between "it seems to me that" and "I think that") (Thompson, 2004). As a final point, one of the rhetorical acts performed by editorials and blogs is to persuade the reader of the validity of a point of view, and this genre frequently exhibits rhetorical features associated with persuasive argument, such as end-focus or tricolon forms, as well as argumentation structures such as variations on Problem–Solution structures.

I mention weblogs as a particular type of commentary writing partly because they appear in a different channel from print news, and this can imply different language characteristics, and partly because their writers are less constrained by the influences and practices that are typical of journalistic writing for institutional publications. Weblog writers are not necessarily trained journalists, but can be lay individuals with a particular interest in a topic. Herring et al.'s (2004) genre analysis of weblogs identifies diverse types, from those that share similarities with editorials and/or letters to the editor, to those that have commonalities with the personal journal, and those that invite an exchange of views. The authors found overall that writers exaggerated the extent to which weblogs offered an interactive, multimodal, externally-oriented form of participation in the news. Rather, they tended to be "individualistic, intimate forms of self-expression" (Herring et al. 2004: 1). Weblogs which deal with the news enjoy easier access to a voice by non-professional writers, fewer space constraints and are typically less heavily-edited than their printed equivalents. These and other characteristics of online news affect the linguistic output, often resulting in a more informal, individual and provocative writing style, and this was clearly exhibited in the BP texts. The recent demise of the print edition of *The Independent* newspaper in favour of online only is one indicator that non-institutional voices will be increasingly present in news language given the interactivity of the digital medium.

In Summary: Difference and Sameness in News Reporting

One of the critical aspects for the study of sets of news stories is the role of these different genres and sub-genres in the overall representation. How significant a presence are news articles in relation to features, or editorial or arts reviews in the telling of the story? The choice of genre in itself has semiotic meaning (why is a story considered to be a "news story" rather than a "feature story" for example) and our analysis approach should take account of choice of genre and how this changes over time. The conventions of these genres will play a large part in shaping our understanding of how to interpret the story. When the proportion of any one news genre increases or decreases, then our overall sense of how we are to understand the story changes.

I have argued to this point that news media language and structures are highly varied by genre, challenging Biber et al.'s conception of a single newspaper register. However, there is a case for *sameness* as well as *difference* in newspaper writing, and a degree of *standardisation* of language across publications is also evident. I have already touched on the intensified lexis shared by tabloid and quality press. Conboy (2007: 108) shows how repeated forms of words activate an understanding of shared values and ideologies—he uses the example "our boys" to describe British soldiers on active duty. Cotter (2010: 71) explains how reports of ongoing news stories recycle language expressions used in previous news reports in "boilerplate" formulations. The use of press releases and newswires encourages repetition of the same, readily-available wording. For example, in my BP data I repeatedly encountered this quotation from 2010, "We've never seen anything like this magnitude" by George Crozier, "oceanographer and executive director at the Dauphin Island Sea Lab in Alabama". The quotation appears six times in my full 2010 data set, which represents only a fragment of what was written in the week following the explosion. It is credible to suggest that George Crozier's words became a resonant part of the BP story as understood by the English reading public. Cotter (2010: 192) writes:

> News discourse is rule-governed, routinized, and follows on from profession-specific norms and routines. Journalistically, standardization involves the rules of writing for the appropriate *modality* […] the news-gathering *conventions* of the profession […] and the proliferation of core journalistic *ideals* such as balance of sources, attribution of sources, and responsiveness to audience. (Emphasis in original)

It can be argued, then, that what we have termed "news media discourse" is characterised by both homogeneity and fragmentation. Different types of news item, news publication and channel entail differences in tone, framing, story selection, structure and emphasis, depending on the work each has to do and the audience each addresses. Within each specialist media output—an editorial in the online version of an English-speaking newspaper in India, say, or the financial pages of the *Mail on Sunday*—various patterns of language can be found which both reflect and construct a version of reality consistent with their social purpose and audience. Conversely, the significant (and increasing) sharing of resources, agency accounts, eyewitness accounts, press conferences, previous news texts as well as conventions of language usage constitute a move towards homogeneity.

I will draw on aspects of both sameness and difference in news media writing as I present an analysis of the BP data. The rest of this chapter introduces the BP news story: as archetype and as specific exemplar of a business crisis.

Crisis and Communications

I turn first to the BP crisis as archetype. The choice of business crises as objects for linguistic research is persistently relevant, as business crises appear regularly on both the front and business pages of news publications (and their online equivalents). Over the last 30 years our perception of global events has changed considerably: the speed of communications technology and the proliferation of online and offline media channels have allowed us virtually instant access to information about events across the world. Events such as natural disasters that were once considered entirely

out of our control are now subject to scrutiny as we become aware of our own part in environmental change. In the world of business, an awareness of unpredictability has been incorporated into the fabric of corporate strategic thinking. At a time when many organisations operate in a diverse global environment, when the pace of technological development is accelerating and when corporate actions are more visible and more deeply scrutinised than ever before, most business organisations practise some form of crisis planning. Business studies students are taught that flexibility will be a key skill in the "real" world, and that business strategies that prioritise ongoing learning are replacing the linear planned strategies of the twentieth century, as the operating environment becomes more volatile and unpredictable (Mintzberg, Ahlstrand, & Lampel, 1998).

However, even against a backdrop of chronic flux, certain business crises stand out. Over the past few years alone, there has been considerable public attention paid to, for example, the BP Deepwater Horizon oil spill, the collapse of various financial institutions, including Lehman Brothers, AIG and Northern Rock, unethical practices within some divisions of News International and fraudulent claims by Volkswagen about the emission levels in its vehicles. Crises that stand out in the media are often not only those that are significant in size or impact, but those that appear to exemplify some particular aspect of modern life. For whatever reason, certain crises are given more attention and move from controlled private setback to major public affair. It is worth noting at this point that I regard the word "crisis" as contentious. Since I take the viewpoint that social phenomena are both shaped by and shape discourse, it follows that my calling the phenomenon a "crisis" (rather than, say, "disaster", or "event" or "set of events" or any alternative descriptor) already implies a set of presuppositions. I address this point through an investigation of naming practices for the BP events.

Organisational crises are defined as events characterised by high consequence and low probability, ambiguity and decision-making time pressure.

> An organizational crisis is a low-probability, high-impact event that threatens the viability of the organization and is characterized by ambiguity of cause, effect, and means of resolution, as well as by a belief that decisions must be made swiftly. (Pearson & Clair, 2008: 3)

Within this general definition, writers have found types of crisis to be significant in determining business response. Coombs (2004) proposes typologies based on attribution of responsibility: Victim Crisis (e.g. natural disasters); Accidental Crisis (e.g. technical errors); Intentional Crisis (e.g. human error and misdeeds). In media coverage of the Deepwater Horizon oil spill, all three of these have been suggested as relevant at certain points, but the most applicable category would seem to be the "Accidental Crisis". In Accidental Crises, the organisation may be perceived as potentially negligent but not wilfully damaging.

A crisis is not viewed as a single event, but as a process, consisting of a number of phases (Hale, Dulek, & Hale, 2005; Pearson & Mitroff, 1993), most commonly characterised as crisis prevention, crisis response, and recovery from the crisis. Fink (1986) amplifies the prevention stage to propose five stages: crisis mitigation, planning, warning, response and recovery, and in keeping with business priorities the focus of attention here is on planning and prevention. My area of interest, which is media coverage, only starts at the point when the crisis is made public, and relates only to the final two of Fink's five stages—response and recovery. This view of progressive stages can imply that the set of responses to a crisis follows a linear pattern from start to finish. However, Hale et al. (2005: 123) suggest that an iterative pattern is more likely, whereby responses are made, assessed, revised and made again. It is self-evident that the language used to describe and inform stakeholders about a crisis can be critical to how it progresses. These assessment and revision stages of crisis response often relate to the success or otherwise of particular communication strategies, as well as the technical and logistical handling of crisis consequences.

With regard to communication and message strategies, it is clear that the type of crisis will affect the organisational response in terms of tone and content, as stakeholder views are generally determined by the company's perceived role in originating the crisis. These organisational responses are typically communicated to the media through press releases, press conferences, and television and press interviews. In the case of the BP events, television and press interviews were frequent and high profile. What is ultimately published in the media (our area of interest here) is of course not under the control of the organisation, although research shows the

significant presence in media writing of corporate press releases, which are often reproduced more or less verbatim. The tone of the organisational response is likely to be picked up and either endorsed or dismissed by the publication depending on its political stance and likely readership response. Response strategies are tailored to the intended audience, and Stephens, Malone, and Bailey (2005) draw on stakeholder theory to discuss the shifting importance of varying stakeholders at a time of crisis. The intended audience for crisis response communication is found to make a difference to structure and tenor, as well as content and level of detail. This is particularly crucial for crises that require technical explanation, as is the case for BP Deepwater Horizon. Just as media writing is multivoiced, so business communication is co-created by individuals, including the Chief Executive Officer, the Communications Director and other writing professionals involved, as well as by the company culture, and the norms of the industry within which it operates. The balance between the corporate and the personal in crisis communications is a potentially interesting aspect for language study. BP itself encountered well-publicised difficulties in finding an effective public communications approach.

The BP Story

As a specific exemplar of a crisis, BP Deepwater Horizon constitutes a particularly appropriate case for research in that it can be seen as a single set of events, and is therefore more manageable as a research topic than, for example, the UK's financial crisis that dates from 2007 and is still a media topic today. Both causes and consequences of the BP crisis are multidimensional—encompassing human, technical, environmental, political and business aspects. There is a great quantity of available data: much was written in the immediate aftermath of the events of 20 April 2010, as well as later with hindsight. It continues to be referenced widely today, as an example of new challenges to the PR industry (e.g. Burt, 2012), as an archetype of a multibillion dollar compensation case (e.g. in Cahalan, 2012) and, in July 2012, in an HBO television series *The Newsroom*, with a script by Aaron Sorkin and in a 2016 feature film. BP Deepwater Horizon offers an exemplar of speakers and writers competing for the right to define the history of a crisis.

The media story is as follows. On 20 April 2011 an oil-drilling rig in the Gulf of Mexico, which was operated by Transocean on behalf of BP, exploded; 11 rig workers were killed, and 17 were injured. BP's report on the crisis (BP incident investigation team, 2010), as well as a US National Commission report for the president (National Commission on the BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill and Offshore Drilling, 2011), described how a series of faults and failures contributed to the catastrophic event, each of which in isolation might have been controlled. These included the suitability of the design of the well, faults in the construction (particularly the failure of the cement fixing), the failure of various early warning systems, the failure of the blowout preventer and human error. In his book telling the story of the BP Deepwater Horizon explosion and BP's subsequent handling of the crisis, Bergin (2011) suggests that this range of direct causes can be situated within two broad background contexts—a management and organisational culture within BP that encouraged productivity improvements at the expense of health and safety, and a US regulatory system for the industry made lax by the historically strong influence of oil interests on the US government.

Heading the handling of the media story personally, Tony Hayward, the CEO of BP at the time of the explosion, had very early tried to dissociate BP from the failures leading to the disaster (Bergin, 2011) and named its partners on the rig, particularly Transocean, as being primarily to blame, while accepting BP as ultimately "responsible" in the sense defined by the US Environmental Pollution Act of 1990. The BP report names eight failures, of which seven can be attributed to sub-contractors. The National Commission report highlighted nine causal factors, which were very similar to those BP identified, but placed the blame "at BP's door" for seven or possibly eight of these.

From a media perspective, the focus of the story changed over the considerable period in which it was covered by news outlets, and these myriad aspects of the story make it of particular interest for research, as the crisis is shown in the media to have resonance from a number of socio-cultural perspectives. The search for the 11 missing men was abandoned within a few days, and Tony Hayward and his team expressed their deep condolences for the tragic loss of life. Crisis teams, both technical and communications, were assembled immediately, and work on both fronts carried

on day and night. There was significant uncertainty about controlling the oil spill; the rig was working in deeper water than had been attempted before, and there had been so many equipment failures in the lead-up to the explosion that standard options for containment were no longer available. From the onset of the crisis, Tony Hayward insisted personally on being the face and voice of BP during this crisis period (Bergin, 2011: 228). The BP communications team was trying to control speculation, but had limited information to impart, and journalists working on the story at the time recount the frustration within the media community as questions at press conferences were heavily restricted. These restrictions had the outcome that journalists sought interpretations from a range of sources. After a week of daily press releases concerning the efforts to block the oil spill, Quarter 1 financial results for BP were issued. Some of the news stories mentioned the financial results in passing, while financial reports and business pages mentioned the oil spill in terms of its likely impact on the business health of the company.

The Deepwater Horizon oil well was finally capped in July of 2010 after 12 weeks of oil spillage. In September 2010 Tony Hayward was forced to resign, owing to concerns about his management of the spill, and his handling of the media. He was replaced as CEO by American Robert Dudley, previously head of BP's joint Russian venture TNK-BP. BP accepted legal responsibility for the spill; that is, that in a specific legal sense they accepted that they were liable for clean-up and other compensation costs. With the cooperation of local agencies, they coordinated a significant clean-up operation. Compensation mechanisms were set in motion for individuals and communities affected by the spill, and compensation disputes, as well as more positive stories, were the focus of much media coverage. Compensation payments ran concurrently with legal proceedings to determine the causes of and specific responsibility for the spill. The results of BP's own investigation into the incident were published in September 2010 (BP incident investigation team, 2010), and those of the National Commission on the BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill and Offshore Drilling were published the following January (2011). Apart from their different readings of the "facts" mentioned above, the tone and presentation of the two reports are substantially different. The BP report reads something like a UK Government report, using plain language that

suggests objectivity. The National Commission Report from the USA, in contrast, is given an informal title ("Deep Water"), is illustrated with non-technical photographs and is dedicated on the first page to those who died and their families. These two texts on their own provide an early insight to how even broad agreement on the "facts" of the case can give rise to significantly different discursive constructions of the crisis.

Once clean-up operations in the Gulf were finished, the waters of the Gulf and its wildlife continued to be monitored by BP and other US agencies. The costs of the clean-up and compensation, estimated at over \$40 billion by March 2014, as well as the sale of assets to fund them, left BP in a fragile financial position, exacerbated by falling oil and gas prices in early 2012. Large legal settlements were still being made in 2015. BP entered into several high-profile sponsorships, most notably as an official partner of the London 2012 Olympic Games and as sponsor of the World Shakespeare Festival.

This overview of events indicates how, over the two years for which I examined media data, the core story of the explosion and the subsequent environmental disaster was supplemented by other related events and actions, for example, the clean-up operation and the legal process of compensation. But there were more profound changes in the story than can be accounted for by this additional content. The language used by the media to construct the story of the crisis changed in fundamental ways: in the representation of certainty, for example, in referencing the crisis and in associating it with other events. Taken together, these changes can be understood as shifts in media representation from one perspective to another. Understanding these shifts involves taking a broad and holistic view of the data and I suggest that conceptualisations from the study of semiotics can be used to provide a fresh perspective on the study of written texts.

2

Semiotic Discourse Analysis

Researching Written Text

The key concern of this book is to offer a way of looking at written verbal text through the lens of semiotics; in other words, it will consider how meaning is made in the particular sign system of writing. To illustrate this approach, it will investigate a certain event—the BP Deepwater Horizon crisis—within a particular context: written news media output. Having considered both illustration and context in Chap. 1, I turn now to the main focus of the book—a semiotic understanding of written text. It is useful to locate this proposed approach alongside other analytical approaches to written text. The diagram in Fig. 2.1 depicts some of the more widely used approaches to the analysis of written text. It is not an exhaustive account, and the approaches are not necessarily discrete. Not only do more perspectives and methods exist, but language researchers can and do make use of multiple methodological resources to answer their research questions. When researchers handle written text, they often start from a theoretical perspective or standpoint such as Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) or a semiotic perspective, and proceed to examine data using diverse "tools" (methods) for analysis, such as content
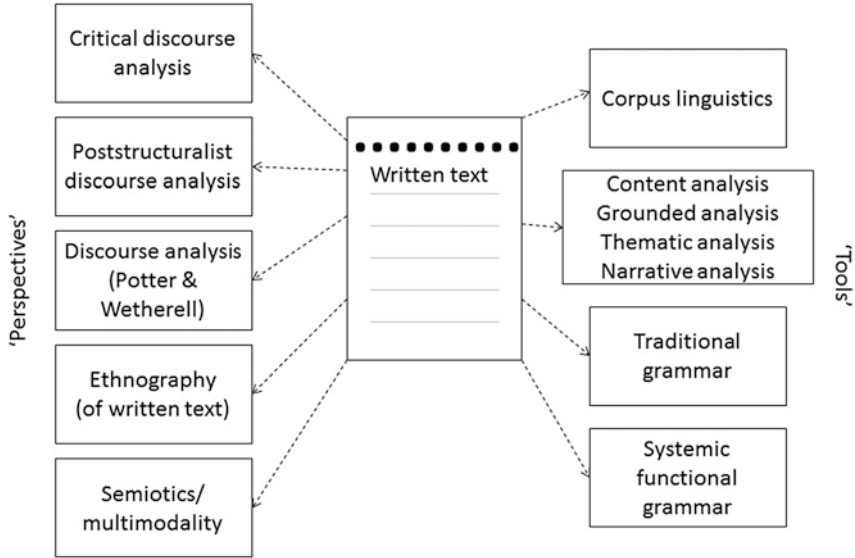
Fig. 2.1   Perspectives and tools of written text analysis

analysis or grammatical analysis. So, while I regard the "perspectives" in the diagram as being relatively discrete, the tools are not. For example, scholars working under the broad umbrella of Potter and Wetherell's Discourse Analysis have used content analysis (Potter & Reicher, 1987), Conversation Analysis (Speer, 2001) and poststructuralist approaches (Wetherell, 1998) in their work. Corpus analyses can be used in the service of critical accounts, in the analysis of computer-mediated discourse, and even to support and contextualise other "bottom-up" methods such as grounded analysis. An essential element of the approach I will outline in this book is that it has the flexibility of assembling a "toolkit" from a range of linguistic research methods.

The following brief overview of the "tools" and "perspectives" named in Fig. 2.1 is intended to locate the approach I propose in a wider view of text analysis. All of the approaches and tools mentioned have been used to examine media data and all would have been possible options for examining the BP data. None, however, fully addressed the breadth of the research questions with the degree of flexibility I sought, and I explore this position further, as I discuss alternative approaches below.

Tools

On the right-hand side of Fig. 2.1 is a set of tools or methods which can be used singly or in combination to investigate aspects of language use.

Corpus Linguistics

While corpus linguistics has always been concerned with the study of large data sets, or *corpora*, the advent of computer technology has enabled work to be carried out on millions of items quickly and accurately, and corpus analysis can now be undertaken by all researchers with computer access through accessible software programmes. The key benefit of corpus approaches to language is that large-scale analysis can uncover patterns of language use that are not easy to see with the human eye. Some of these prove to be counter-intuitive, and challenge what we believe we see from experience or instinct. In this way, quantitative studies can provide fresh insights as well as locating our qualitative observations within patterns we can demonstrate. Corpora are of three main types—general linguistic corpora (such as the British National Corpus), specific linguistic corpora which contain examples from particular genres of language (for example, journal articles or medical writing) and self-compiled corpora (of which my set of BP texts could be an example). Evidence from specific or self-compiled corpora can be compared with that from general linguistic corpora to indicate whether a particular pattern of use conforms to a general norm, or appears to be somehow different. This kind of work is often carried out to identify language differences between registers and genres, for example Biber, Johansson, Leech, Conrad and Finegan's (1999) study mentioned already of four types of language use: conversation, academic, fiction and newspaper language. Biber et al. proposed clusters of features which differentiated the four registers, placing them along six dimensions (involved vs information, primarily narrative and primarily non-narrative and so on). Biber et al.'s work highlights not only that it is *sets* of features co-occurring rather than individual features which can differentiate different text types, but also that such differences are tendential rather than binary absolutes. Common patterns of language use easily obtained using corpus tools include frequencies of words (significant

in comparison with a norm), concordance lists of words (lists which show a word of interest, or *keyword*, with a number of words either side) and collocations (the most common words which co-occur with the keyword). Such quantitative output of a corpus analysis requires qualitative interpretation of what findings are significant for the research question and why. Corpus scholars also make a distinction between research which is *corpus-driven* and *corpus-based*. In corpus-driven research the findings are emergent; for example, certain words or word classes prove to be significantly more represented than predicted by general corpus norms. In corpus-based research, particular terms, words or grammatical features are investigated according to a research question or hypothesis.

Corpus linguistics is a field of study in its own right, but such analysis is a tool which can be used in multi-method linguistic work. It has been used both in constructivist and more positivist paradigms as a robust starting point for other, qualitative, analysis. For the purposes of the BP research I chose to ground my qualitative findings in quantitative work of a different kind—a quantitative overview of the data set and feature counting by hand—but a corpus approach would have been possible and potentially effective in scoping out the broad traits of my data.

Content and Narrative Analysis Tools

Under this broad heading falls a group of largely emergent analysis methods. Content analysis, thematic analysis, grounded theory and narrative analysis have different theoretical and methodological approaches, but share a focus on *what* is communicated rather than *how* it is communicated. Content analysis can be both quantitative and qualitative: in its quantitative form, it is the systematic description of the content of often large data sets, via a set of chiefly predefined codes. Qualitative content analysis places more emphasis on the emergent and recursive derivation of coding categories, where codes are proposed, applied, tested for relevance and reapplied usually on smaller amounts of data (Bryman, 2004). Thematic analysis according to Braun and Clarke (2006: 79) is "a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data". Braun & Clarke emphasise the flexibility of thematic analysis as a tool which can be used to support research of different paradigms, and across

different research methodologies. They emphasise that it does not require the commitment to theory-building which is a pre-requisite of grounded theory, and so can be carried out in a wider range of research environments, and by researchers with greater and lesser levels of experience.

As Braun and Clarke suggest, the principles of grounded theory are more exacting than content or thematic analysis, as well as harder to define, having been revisited by a number of scholars since their inception by Glaser and Strauss (1967). Broadly, grounded theory is a qualitative method which is iterative and recursive with regard to its data, in the same way as content and thematic research. It places great emphasis on being exhaustive in its coverage; in other words, categories are built and refined until all the content of the data is accounted for. In addition, it has a declared commitment to theory-building. This can be seen as problematic—it is not always clear that a grounded analysis of data results in theory which is applicable in a wider context (Bryman, 2004). As with all recursive analysis, it can be difficult to suspend assumptions until all options are exhausted. Finally, narrative analysis places emphasis on how individuals make sense of their relationship to social phenomena. Through the collection and analysis of people's accounts of their lives, researchers build a picture of how events, organisations and other phenomena are both understood and constructed. Narrative analysis can make use of content, thematic or grounded analysis approaches.

These iterative, bottom-up approaches are particularly useful for research questions which require (at least initially) a description of the data. I shall go on to describe an "immersion" phase of my data analysis which used an emergent and recursive method to identify key language features in the items. However, my interest was in the use of language features rather than their semantic content—the "how" rather than the "what". The approaches briefly described here are adopted for descriptions of the "what".

Traditional Grammar

By the term "traditional" grammar, I refer to grammar that is not Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG). We can make distinctions between the generative grammar of Chomsky (1965) and SFG that largely concern different emphases on either form or function. Generative grammar supposes an ideal

competence which is never realised in imperfect performance. Its emphasis is on structure and form. By contrast, SFG (covered in more detail later in this chapter) works from the principle that language is always functional: "language is as it is because of what it has to do" (Halliday, 1978: 19). However, what we might call traditional grammar is no longer concerned exclusively with fixed and abstract structures. Crystal (2004: 7) writes that in the recent teaching of English grammar "the concern [is] to integrate the study of language structure with that of language use". Handbooks of grammar such as Crystal's not only address social and functional issues including context-dependent variations of language in use, and the legitimacy of non-standard Englishes, they also borrow concepts from Hallidayan grammar to explain issues of language which were not previously addressed in traditional grammars, for example the concept of "given" and "new" information to explain sentence organisation and information focus. In its turn, SFG has always drawn on many terms used in traditional grammar (parts of speech and so on) while renaming others. Both traditional grammar and SFG give us the vocabulary to refer to and the tools to identify and explain features of language. In my own analysis, concepts from both traditional grammar and SFG were used to identify and explicate features such as modality and direct/indirect speech, as well as other phenomena within the broader area of news media genres.

Perspectives

On the left-hand side of Fig. 2.1 are approaches to the study of language which start from a particular theoretical standpoint. Each approach is grounded in a particular view of language and its relationship with society, by which I mean both context (however defined) and participants. These "perspectives" lean towards using methods which support either a more descriptive or a more critical aim.

Critical Discourse Analysis

CDA is an approach to texts which uses diverse analytical tools to uncover the covert enactment of power through language. Analysts in this tradition are explicit about having an agenda (Fairclough, 1989, 1992a; van Dijk, 1985,

2008; Weiss & Wodak, 2003; Wodak, 1996, 2000). They argue, rightly in my view, that any analysis process, even one which purports to be purely descriptive, starts from a point of view, and the analyst of necessity selects an approach and a data set which reflect a particular research intent. Given this, writers in the CDA tradition find it appropriate to make this intent a principle of the approach, as an overt declaration of reflexivity. Critical work in the field of media representation has shown effectively how news stories, far from being an objective representation of "what is out there", offer a version of the world that is shaped by political, financial, institutional, personal and temporal constraints. However, it has been argued (e.g. Graham, 2005) that in following its agenda for change, much work in CDA is inclined to make its own claims to truth and objectivity. Widdowson (1995), in a frequently cited debate with Fairclough about the theoretical validity of CDA as an analytic approach, criticises Critical Discourse Analysts for bias in seeking out examples of text that support their own political viewpoint.

While CDA is characterised by its attitude to text analysis rather than by a specific method, different CDA approaches (Fairclough, 1989; van Dijk, 2008; Weiss & Wodak, 2003; Wodak & Meyer, 2001) offer fully developed analysis frameworks, which have in common that they place the individual text at the heart of a set of social practices and cultural norms that tend to both reflect and perpetuate the interests of those with power and access to voice. Writers such as Fairclough and Kress use SFG as a tool for the close analysis of written text, and I return to SFG as analysis tool and perspective later in the chapter.

For the BP research, although I started from the principle that media representation does not reflect "the truth", but is instrumental in constructing one (albeit influential) version of the truth, I did not wish to pursue an agenda for change from the outset, as is the declared aim for CDA. It was important to me that I came into the research process with as few preconceptions as possible. I fully expected to find evidence of power and convention rooted in interest in the texts I studied. However, in developing a research approach that started with the identification of patterns in the texts, however derived, I intended a necessary critical perspective to follow, rather than precede, my analysis. I agree with Coupland and Jaworski's (2001: 145) observation that "In all but its blandest forms, such as when it remains at the level of language description, discourse

analysis adopts a 'critical' perspective on language in use". The research approach I propose in this book offers a critical view of representation, but one that emerges from its descriptive aims, rather than from an emancipatory agenda. In its understanding of text and socio-cultural context, my approach owes more to the work of Barthes than of Fairclough, and I discuss in Chap. 3 a comparison of the Barthesian framework I draw on and the Faircloughian conceptualisation of discourse.

Poststructuralist Discourse Analysis

Like other perspectives on the analysis of written language, Poststructuralist Discourse Analysis (PDA) is an umbrella term to cover a range of research approaches. The work of Foucault, in particular "The Archaeology of Knowledge" (Foucault, 1972), is a significant influence for analysts in this tradition, who share an understanding of the "opacity of discourse, neither reducible to 'langue' nor to social or psychological instances" (Maingueneau & Angermuller, 2007: np). Poststructuralist Discourse Analysts problematise the view that meaning is centred in the speaking subject, rather arguing that there is no hidden meaning to be uncovered in text, but that the practice of discourse constitutes objects, institutions and identities. In Foucault's words, discourses are "practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak" (Foucault, 1972: 49). Writers in the tradition of PDA (e.g. Angermuller, 2011, 2014; Baxter, 2002, 2008; Weedon, 1987) reject the possibility of a definitive reading of a text, and the discourses that it may encode, acknowledging reflexively within their theoretical approach the situated, deferred and partial nature of the analysis of discourse(s). However, to accept this perspective is not to accept that there is an infinite number of possible interpretations of a text, and "preferred readings" (Hall, 1980) can be indicated through socially shared codes and contexts.

This centrality of discourse for Foucault did not translate into proposed methodologies for the analysis of discourse; indeed he regarded linguistics, with de Saussure, as the science of "langue" (the system of language rather than language in practice). Nevertheless, PDA researchers have drawn on a range of areas for language study to investigate discourse from a poststructuralist perspective, including deixis, modality, tense, speech acts and genre studies. For written text analysis, one recent area

of study, enunciative pragmatics, has been particularly productive for the investigation of multiple subjectivities (Angermuller, 2011, 2014; Nølke, 2006, and see the ScaPoLine project). Building on the work of Bakhtin (1984) and Ducrot (1984) on polyphony in discourse, researchers in this area propose analytical models for recovering traces of the points of view of multiple "enunciators" encoded in the linguistic output of the "locutor" (speaker/writer). In this way, myriad subjectivities can be systematically explored in naturally occurring written texts.

I note the importance of poststructuralist writers (particularly Barthes and Baudrillard) to my own semiotic perspective, and I share with PDA an understanding of representations as partial, unfixable and subject to the negotiation of writer and reader. However, in proposing a method of discourse analysis drawing on the work of Barthes, I need to clarify that I will deploy some semiotic concepts as frameworks for language investigation, rather than claim to realise his ideas as discourse analysis practice. Barthes wrote extensively on the analysis of texts of all kinds, including visual texts (1972), written fiction (1977b) and narratology (1977a). This book does not extend these methods of textual analysis, but rather uses Barthes' conceptualisation of language as a starting point for the systematic examination of written representations at different levels of meaning.

Potter & Wetherell's Discourse Analysis

An alternative approach to the investigation of written text is the form of Discourse Analysis developed by Potter and Wetherell (1987). Discourse Analysis does not adopt an overtly emancipatory agenda in the same way as CDA, but is nevertheless a critical approach, concerned as it is with repeated patterns of language which serve to entrench certain social positions. Discourse Analysis has its roots in Discursive Psychology rather than linguistics, and was developed from studies by Gilbert and Mulkay (1984) into how scientific research work has been constructed and positioned within the scientific community. Writers in the Discourse Analysis tradition have more frequently used conversations and interviews as data, but the approach has also been used in the study of written media texts (e.g. Potter & Reicher, 1987).

Linguists of this school seek to identify "interpretative repertoires", which are "broadly discernible clusters of terms, descriptions, commonplaces … and figures of speech often clustered around metaphors or vivid images and often using distinct grammatical constructions and styles" (Potter, Wetherell, Gill, & Edwards, 1990: 212). These clusters of language usages are understood to be flexible and "selectively drawn upon and reworked according to the interpersonal context" (Wooffitt, 2005: 154). Wooffitt is inclined to draw a distinction between Foucauldian discourses and interpretative repertoires based on this variability, but other writers who use this approach do not. For example, Talja (1999: 461) suggests that the two concepts of "interpretative repertoires" and "discourses" are equivalent. Potter & Wetherell's Discourse Analysis is appropriate and frequently used for media investigation. Its definition of interpretative repertoires chimes with my interest in varying language choices by writer and genre.

Ethnography of Written Text

While a key area for ethnographic study is speech (consider Hymes' (1974) "SPEAKING" model), there is still an important role for ethnographic approaches to writing, where the concern is to place writing outputs (written texts) in their social contexts. Such written texts can include traditionally "written-like" genres such as academic texts, institutional documents and newspaper writing of all kinds, but also much less formal writing product such as shopping lists and diaries, as well as the written-like/speech-like output of SMS, chat rooms, Twitter and so on. The term "ethnography" has been used simply as a shorthand for research approaches where subjects are interviewed about their practices, and certainly the approach places emphasis on the role of the investigator in the research, but ethnography can make use of a great range of methods in its quest to understand the role of written texts in the lives of their producers. As Cameron and Panović (2014: 64) point out, "Ethnography is not so much a *kind* of discourse analysis as an approach that may be *combined* with discourse analysis".

Importantly, the ethnography of written texts addresses the social practices of writing and the effect they have on the shape and content of the

text. In the area of written media texts, for example, work has been carried out on press releases (Jacobs, 1999, 2000a), showing how these are shaped by their purposes. Catenaccio et al. (2011) and Van Hout and Macgilchrist (2010) have studied the routines and practices of newsrooms in order to explain the effect these have on the final texts. Their work considers the complex intertextuality of the news writing process and makes use of diverse ethnographic methods including interviews, observation, text analysis and the use of keystroke logging software (Van Hout & Macgilchrist, 2010) to build up a rich picture of how news stories are created. My interest in this project was in the output of writing practices, the texts themselves, rather than the processes, although the work of ethnographers informed in particular my understanding of the genres of media writing.

Computer-Mediated Discourse

Not included in my diagrammatic summary, but nevertheless important, is the analysis of Computer-Mediated Discourse (CMD). I do not regard CMD analysis as either a tool or a perspective for the analysis of written text, but hold rather that the digital medium is a *context* for discourse analytical work, and in this I differ from some other scholars. Nevertheless, it is an increasingly important context.

CMD has as its unifying feature the digital medium, and computer-mediated text can be accessed on a wide range of devices (computers, tablets, smartphones and so on). Beyond this commonality of channel, CMD has become so ubiquitous as to defy description as a distinctive language variant (Androutsopoulos, 2006). Crystal's (2001) early project to define such (a) language variant(s) resulted in a tentative outlining of what he called "Netspeak", which he proposed as a hybrid of spoken and written language. The work was swiftly overtaken from two main perspectives—firstly, the exponential increase in the use of the Internet in almost every aspect of life made it almost impossible to isolate commonalities of a broad Internet language variant, and secondly, Crystal's work at that time focused primarily on linguistic form rather than function in context. Other early work focused on the speech-like qualities of written asynchronous or quasi-synchronous computer conversation, often using

Conversation Analysis to study turn-taking, interruptions and other conversational strategies. Such work has now been placed within the broader study of online communities (del Teso-Craviotto, 2006; Herring & Paolillo, 2006; Siebenhaar, 2006).

Although research work now tends to focus on social practices of CMD, the affordances of the digital medium can still be said to foster certain characteristics of language. Properties such as potential anonymity, global reach, virtual community and new linguistic freedoms all have considerable impact on language usage. However, the use of digital devices for such diverse social purposes as trade, advertising, education, social networking and personal finance, to name only a few, entails that language usages are extremely varied. Just as there is no single "newspaper register" or language variant, there is no single "computer register" or language variant. All of the tools and approaches mentioned in Fig. 2.1 have been used for the analysis of computer-mediated language. In addition, some tools and approaches have been developed and adapted for the particular context of CMC, for example Androutsopoulos' Discourse-Centred Online Ethnography (2008), which uses mixed-methods ethnographic approaches for the study of discursive identities on the Internet.

Researching Written Text in Semiotic Studies

Two analysis areas shown in Fig. 2.1 are outstanding—semiotics and multimodality, and SFG, and I come to these now to illustrate how semiotics has addressed the task of analysing written language. I will argue for an alternative to two typical approaches described below that will offer a more flexible and broader approach.

The "Text-as-Graphic" Approach

In the study of semiotics, verbal language (written and spoken) is a sign like any other, sitting alongside image, dress, gesture, music and so on as a semiotic resource for making meaning. Verbal language constitutes only a restricted part of communication. As Wilden (1987: 137) writes, "all

language is communication but very little communication is language". Verbal language has had more scholarly attention than any other sign type because of its ubiquity, complexity and relative interpretability (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). By interpretability, I mean that verbal language offers a more complex, wider and better agreed potential for meaning than other sign systems. Work in the area of multimodality (e.g. Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001, 2006; Machin, 2007; Machin & Jaworski, 2006) contrasts language with other sign systems. Reviewing the case for regularities of interpretation in visual and other modes, writers have recognised that modes such as typography (van Leeuwen, 2005), colour (Gage, 1999) and still photography (Harrison, 2003) have limitations in the extent to which they can offer agreed meanings, even taking into account cultural understanding and contextual cues. Critiquing Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) project to outline a "visual grammar", Machin (2007: 186) argues that photographs, for example, have less clear communicative intention than language, no obvious separate components (with which to form a "grammar"), an unpredictable set of rules that may or may not be activated in each viewing, and an inability to communicate, say, negatives, conditionals or questions effectively. In other areas, of course, modes other than language have different and arguably richer types of meaning potential—music, for example, communicates in quite a different way from language (Monelle, 1999).

Until relatively recently there was a neglect of academic interest in semiotic modes other than writing and speech, partly because of their fluid and contested meanings, and partly because, prior to the rise in digital communication, the role of image, sound and film in everyday texts and mediums was restricted. The situation has changed considerably, with multimodal communication becoming the norm in education, personal communication, multi-language instructional texts and many other areas in a way it had not been previously. This has meant that research into modes other than speech and writing has been "playing catch-up", which in turn has entailed that in much multimodal work based on semiotics, verbal text has been of interest primarily with respect to other elements of a text, for example its positioning, its typography and its formatting and in particular its relationship to images in terms of sense-making, an approach I call the "text-as-graphic" approach. This

approach is encapsulated in Barthes' (1977a) discussion of the relationship between written text and image in multimodal representations, primarily focusing on three relationships he terms "anchorage", "illustration" and "relay". He calls "anchorage" the relationship where the text clarifies or explains the meaning of the image, directing the reader to a particular desired reading of the image. Conversely, "illustration" is where the image "anchors" the text, directing the reader to a particular desired reading of the verbal text. The third relationship of "relay" is where the text and the image carry different (although complementary) information—both text and image are important in the understanding of the ensemble. Van Leeuwen (2005) describes and develops Barthes' taxonomy of text-image relations by analogy with two types of clause relations: elaboration and extension. He argues that Barthes' "anchorage" and "illustration" are types of elaboration, in that either text or image is performing a role of specification. On the other hand, "relay", where each mode offers complementary information, is a kind of extension.

These conceptualisations do not have as their purpose the close analysis of written verbal text. Nevertheless, they inform much work on multimodal texts in which written language—for so many years the most scrutinised semiotic system—is in this view important for its shape, font, format and relationship with the image, rather than for its own patterns and content. Works on multimodal analysis (e.g. Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001; Machin, 2007) tend to focus on visual rather than verbal modes, and handbooks of written discourse analysis which include chapters on semiotics and multimodality (for example Cameron & Panović, 2014; O'Halloran, 2004) pursue this focus. O'Halloran's overview is typical.

> For example, in addition to linguistic choices and their typographical instantiation on the printed page, multimodal analysis takes into account the functions and meaning of the visual images, together with the meaning arising from the integrated use of the two semiotic resources. (O'Halloran, 2004: 1)

This book, on the other hand, offers a different semiotic perspective on written language, which uses the concept of the written sign as a starting point for the explanation of a broader interpretation of meaning.

Systemic Functional Grammar

I have suggested that those studying multimodality can sometimes consider written text primarily for its graphic qualities, yet many scholars active in the field of multimodal studies would argue that when closer text analysis is required, there is a fully developed functional grammatical analysis framework to hand, namely the SFG proposed by Halliday (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004) and developed in work by Droga and Humphrey (2003), Martin (2000), Thompson (2004) and others. The grounding principle of SFG is that all verbal communication functions simultaneously to represent the world (the representational/ideational metafunction) and to establish and maintain relationships (the interpersonal metafunction), as well as exhibiting features which realise logical and textual relations (the textual metafunction) (Halliday & Hasan, 1985). The principle that the properties of verbal language are primarily functional, rather than formal or structural, directly connects lexico-grammar with wider contexts, and indicates that the expression of messages varies according to both the communicative situation and the wider socio-cultural context. Halliday makes these connections explicit in particular through his work on register where the significance of field (content), mode (channel, medium) and tenor (interpersonal relationships) is investigated. The relationship between the text and the communicative situation is extended further to the wider socio-cultural context by writers in the field of Social Semiotics (Hodge & Kress, 1988; van Leeuwen, 2005) and CDA (e.g. Fairclough, 1989), who use SFG to uncover how linguistic choices are instrumental in establishing and maintaining power relations which obtain in the wider socio-cultural context.

These principles have been applied effectively to modes other than speech and writing. Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) key work on the "grammar" of images uses Halliday's communicative metafunctions—ideational, interpersonal and textual—as the basis for their analysis of the social functions of imagery. As an example, one assumption for textual organisation in SFG holds that in verbal language the start of the sentence or tone unit is likely to offer "given" information, referring to what we already know, and move towards "new" information at the end. This left-to-right organisation (in Western writing) is used to explain the

tendency of images to present "given" information to the left and "new" (or disputed, or problematic) information to the right. As another example, in the discussion of the potential meanings of colour, Kress and van Leeuwen (2002) argue that colour can have a representational function (for example, the use of colour in company logos—the green and yellow of the BP logo stands for BP in the second of the two quotations which begin this book), an interpersonal function (for example, pale green as a calming colour for hospital decor) and a textual function (for example, the colour coding of headings and sub-headings in school textbooks). In this way, SFG offers unifying frameworks for the study of verbal text and other modes.

In Summary

A wide range of options exists for the analysis of written text, and I have made a distinction between perspectives or approaches to written text analysis, such as CDA or semiotic approaches, and the tools they use, such as corpus linguistics or grammar analysis. Locating my own approach in the area of semiotic and multimodal perspectives, I suggested that it offers an alternative to two main perspectives on written texts which are prevalent in the field of semiotics. The first explores written text primarily with regard to its visual properties and its relationship to other modes such as images in multimodal texts. The second is SFG, which gives an account of text at the semiotic level of the code (see Chap. 3). This book intends to explore ways in which small signs (words) are connected to large signs (sets of texts). My interest is in presenting a framework for analysis which provides linguistic evidence of these connections. This conceptualisation can make use of SFG as an analysis tool while exploring ideological implications, including notions of power, without a CDA transformative agenda. Further, it can utilise other analysis resources to investigate such linguistic phenomena as intertextuality, rhetorical tropes, naming choices and discourses. The following section sets out the theory and practice of this analysis framework.

Part II

A Barthesian Conceptualisation of Written Language

3

Theoretical Foundations

Aspects of Roland Barthes' Work

Roland Barthes' work sits within the European tradition of "semiology", which took as its starting point the theories of Ferdinand de Saussure (1959). De Saussure was concerned with identifying deep structures in language. He understood languages as arbitrary systems in which signs carry meaning only in their relation to other signs in the same system. This entails that signs themselves have no fixed meaning, but meaning derives from their differentiation from other signs. To explicate the fact that day-to-day language can show extreme variation yet remain comprehensible, de Saussure posited the existence of an underlying and complete system for each language—the *langue*—which finds varied expression in the day-to-day usages of speakers—the *parole.* In his work on signs, de Saussure proposed a dyadic model, consisting of a *signifier*, or the form taken by the sign, and the *signified* or the concept referred to by the signifier. He did not concern himself with the real-world referents that signs may represent—both signifier and signified are psychological constructs. De Saussure's own work primarily focused on language as a sign system,

although the terms *signifier* and *signified* have been appropriated by later semioticians in the discussion of visual, linguistic and other signs.

Barthes continued to explore the concept of the sign, but diverged from de Saussure's thinking in a number of respects. He did not conceive of language as fixed *langue* and imperfect *parole*, but rather as a continual process of meaning-making, where the word sign is inseparable from its social context and thus constantly shifting: he refers to a "floating chain of signifieds" (Barthes, 1977a: 39). Further, he broadened his investigations considerably from de Saussure's focus on language, to myriad other cultural phenomena and representations. In *Mythologies* (1972) he proposes that such diverse phenomena as steak and chips, soap powder and the hairstyles of Romans as depicted in films are understood as carrying more than everyday functional meaning, and that such meaning is culturally constructed.

> The starting point of these reflections was usually a feeling of impatience at the sight of the "naturalness" with which newspapers, art and common sense constantly dress up a reality which, even though it is the one we live in, is undoubtedly determined by history … I wanted to track down, in the decorative display of *what-goes-without-saying*, the ideological abuse which, in my view, is hidden there. (1972: 11, emphasis in original)

The fact that we think that the meaning of many everyday phenomena remains at a *denotative* or literal level is a concern for Barthes, as he argues that a range of additional meanings are encoded at a *connotative* level, in other words that we bring to our interpretation of signs all the social, cultural and personal associations we have collected and absorbed through our lifetimes. These are the *myths* or "mythologies" to which the title of his book refers, and he suggests that such cultural myths are commonly perpetuated in the service of particular power interests. The less evident the accumulation of associations becomes, the more ostensibly straightforward yet potentially deceptive is the sign. Barthes calls this process *naturalisation.* This thinking led Barthes in his later work (1974: 9) to suggest that there is no such thing as denotation, as it is impossible to divorce any representation, however neutral-seeming, from the cultural associations with which it has become invested.

> Denotation is not the first meaning, but pretends to be so; under this illusion, it is ultimately no more than the *last* of the connotations (the one which seems both to establish and to close the reading), the superior myth by which the text pretends to return to the nature of language, to language as nature. (Emphasis in original)

Barthes argues here that the more naturalised the meaning ("what-goes-without-saying") the more denotative it appears, and this seemingly circular process of apparently transparent to densely associative and back to apparently transparent meaning is one that is of great interest in the study of representations, particularly over time. If we accept his concept of naturalisation, we can seek evidence for the naturalisation process in the language we analyse.

At the heart of Roland Barthes' work is a concept of signs which is holistic—where signs, including words, are inseparable from meaning, and meaning is inseparable from text context and infused with social context. His was an integrated view: the sign made no sense without a knowledge of the codes or systems within which it was situated, these codes being multifarious and including social, textual and ideological codes, for example, language, dress or artistic genres. For Barthes, codes are not neutral or "given" but rather constructed and political. They naturalise—make self-evident—societal "myths", which themselves are a product of the dominant (or resistant) ideologies of the time and place in which the communication is produced. The significance of this holistic view—from individual sign to social ideology—is that, if it can be investigated through a practical analysis methodology, it has the potential to offer a comprehensive description of how text(s) work to offer representations. Barthes' terms can be used as a heuristic to organise the analysis of texts. The different semiotic levels of sign, code, myth and ideology refer to semiotic concepts at levels of increasing abstraction (from micro to macro level), and can be directly attributed to the work of Barthes.

Sign, Code, Myth, Ideology

Barthes' work, then, provides us with an epistemological starting point for the understanding of textual representation. We will assume that a discursive representation is realised at four levels of sign, code, myth and
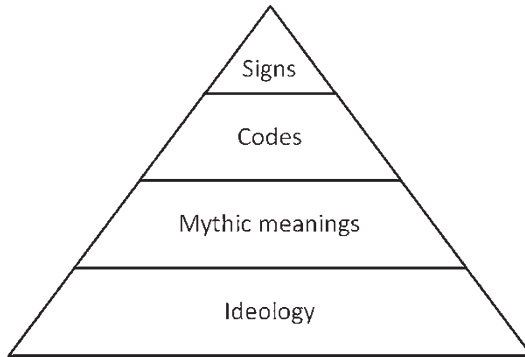
Fig. 3.1   A semiotic heuristic for considering written language

ideology. Figure 3.1 represents this idea diagrammatically, but we have noted that, crucially, each level is interdependent, so that signs can only be understood in the context of codes, signs and codes can realise myths and ideologies and so on. These four levels provide a framework within which we can eventually locate the different levels of our text analysis, which range from close examination of the text to a consideration of the discourses that run through them which are connected to the culturally-situated beliefs and attitudes that constitute ideology.

An analysis of the sort I propose does not seek to treat these different levels as entirely discrete. However, it is useful for the sake of completeness to envisage that we are building up a complete picture or "map" by addressing relevant language issues at each level—looking at choices of sign, paying attention to the codes in which they operate and moving from there to build a picture of connotation, myth and ideology.

Chapters 8, 9, 10, and 11 will demonstrate what this means in terms of the practical analysis of the BP data. This chapter gives theoretical examples of how sign, code, mythic meanings and ideology can be conceived specifically in the case of written language. Not all of the examples I give here were relevant to my data set. In the methodology I propose, an early stage consists of immersion in the data and it is at this point in the research process that relevant language features are identified. It is the data themselves that will drive the identification of relevant features at each level.

The Level of the Sign

When I look at this first semiotic level of sign, I want to consider primarily what de Saussure (1959: 128) calls the "isolated sign" or group of signs. (I will go on to argue that entire representations themselves can be regarded as "signs".) If we conceive of language signs as "building blocks", we can discuss the meaning-making potential of individual words or groups of words. This understanding of "sign" encompasses lexical choices of all kinds, and these include, importantly, naming practices. Fowler (1991) discusses how the names and attributions given to both people and events shape how these people and events are understood, and in an exploration of how crises are constructed through language, naming practices are of central interest. Such practices help us to organise our world: "We manage the world, make sense of it, by categorizing phenomena" (Fowler, 1991: 92). Srivastva and Barrett (1988: 34–35) call attention to the fact that the practice of naming entities is not simply organisation for convenience, but can affect action towards the entities:

> The process of giving language to experience is more than just sense-making. Naming also directs actions toward the object you have named because it promotes activity consistent with the related attribution it carries. To change the name of an object connotes changing your relationship to the object and how one will behave in relationship to it because when we name something, we direct anticipations, expectations, and evaluations toward it.

I have already mentioned in Chap. 1 that my referring to the BP events as a "crisis" says something about my attitude and relationship to the events, the other phenomena with which I would associate them, the theoretical constructs I might use to explicate them (the business management theories I outlined, for example) and the way in which I would wish others to understand them. In writing about crises, the importance of naming strategies directed at both the events themselves and the participants involved has been frequently explored (e.g. in Butchart, 2011; Lischinsky, 2011; McLaren-Hankin, 2007). Because of their reach, the media have an important role to play in what events and people come to

be called and this is frequently a site of struggle between the media and organisations' communications teams.

In the case of the BP data, I researched naming practices of two kinds. First of these was the naming of the BP events themselves—how did writers refer to them and did this change? This was likely to be a fruitful area for analysis for language research into any catastrophic event. The second type of naming practice concerned reference to social actors—were these identified or anonymous, individuals or part of a group, real or imagined? In both cases of naming practices, it was possible to trace changes over the span of the data, and these findings are outlined in Chap. 8.

An extension of naming practices concerns the association of an entity (in this case the BP events) with other entities, a process I term "categorisation". It can be valuable to explore the development of associative relationships through an examination of listings and groupings. Once an individual or phenomenon is named or labelled, it is much more easily placed into groups of other entities with similar characteristics, in a process of categorisation. The rhetorical device "classification", as described by Connor and Lauer (1985: 314–315), "involves putting the subject into a general class and showing the implications of the subject's membership of that class". We draw inferences about the subject based on the category in which it is placed. Fowler (1991: 58) examines the importance of categorisation in building consensus, and for organising and managing the understanding of reality.

> Experience is sorted into agreed categories in conversational exchange, and these categories are then the "taken-for-granted" background in ongoing conversation.

The point that these "taken-for-granted" categories are socially constructed is made strikingly in Foucault's The Order of Things (1970: xvi) where he cites Jorge Luis Borges' hoax classification of animals from a "Chinese Dictionary". Borges' classification of animals begins: "(1) those that belong to the emperor, (2) embalmed ones, (3) those that are trained, (4) sucking pigs, (5) mermaids, (6) fabulous ones". The sheer unexpectedness of Borges' groupings is intended to exemplify that our categorisations are not objective or natural, but rather agreed and constantly

reinforced through use. The categories commonly used in news writing become a shorthand to positioning individuals and entities, and leading the reader to understand them in particular ways.

> News reporting makes a distinction between the categories associated with hard news (politicians, experts, government representatives, business leaders) and those with soft news (celebrities, "ordinary" people, occupational groups, minority groups), implying a hierarchy of social positioning … Categorisation is therefore a powerful way of naturalising social divisions and hierarchies that are the effects of cultural and economic factors, including the institutional conventions of media reporting. (Fulton, Huisman, Murphet, & Dunn, 2005: 249)

The implication of Fulton et al.'s observation is that categories are intended to be understood as relatively homogenous. To take politicians, for example, assumptions are made about characteristics shared by the group, for example, their warrant to speak, their likely knowledge about certain topics, an assumed political agenda. Readers are expected to have a shared conception of what a "politician" is like, built up through media and other texts, and this will affect their understanding of the category "politicians".

So the processes of naming, defining and grouping are crucial to how human beings make meaning of their surroundings and communities. These processes are not neutral acts of organisation, but are socially agreed, and indicate how we choose to or are expected to respond to entities and phenomena. When we conceive of a list or group, we locate entities according to our understanding of the world. This location of a given entity alongside other entities says much about *which aspects of their being* we perceive to be important, and *in what context* we wish them to be understood. An analysis of lists, groups or categories involves considering *which aspects* of our entity are foregrounded in the process of aligning it with other group members. My intention was to explore where the BP events were located in relation to pre-existing phenomena, and whether and how this changed over time.

These three processes of naming of events, naming of participants and categorisation are important indicators of how the BP crisis is constructed

in news media language. In de Saussure's terms, analysis of these three features over time can show us one way in which changes in the *signifier* can alter our understanding of the *signified.*

The Level of the Code

Individual signs can only have meaning within a system, and the concept of "codes" in semiotics refers to the many types of system that provide the necessary framework for our understanding and interpretation of signs.

> Since the meaning of a sign depends on the code within which it is situated, codes provide a framework within which signs make sense. Indeed, we cannot grant something the status of a sign if it does not function within a code. (Chandler, 2001: np)

Codes are specific to places and times, but are widely shared within a culture. Because of this, they can appear entirely natural, and so virtually invisible. They provide a set of "rules" to aid the interpretation of signs, and in this way they can both guide and restrict the understanding of texts. In other words, although multiple interpretations of signs are available, readers are likely to find a "preferred reading" (Hall, 1980: 124) based on their knowledge of the code within which the sign is presented, as well as other contextual cues. There are not limitless possibilities for interpretation—we interpret according to the codes to which we have access. Chandler (2001: np) suggests a broad taxonomy for codes.

- *Social codes.* Language codes of all kinds, including grammar. Paralanguage, gesture, gaze. Fashion. Behaviour.
- *Textual codes.* Scientific codes, including mathematics. Genre, aesthetic and stylistic codes. Mass media codes, including those applicable to photography, film, newspaper.
- *Interpretative codes.* Perceptual codes (e.g. of visual perception). Ideological codes such as feminism, capitalism, materialism (and resistant codes: anti-feminism, anti-capitalism and so on).

Under *textual codes* are the special codes we recognise as belonging to particular genres. The understanding within newspaper publications of what constitutes a newsworthy story, which I mentioned earlier, is an example of a genre-specific code, but generic codes can be stylistic, structural or technical. We can also include under "codes" the notion of *intertextuality* or the influence of other texts upon any given text. The implications of intertextual relations are so broad that they can be considered at the levels of sign, code, myth and ideology, but we can practically place accounts of intertextuality at the level of code. This is because the network of other texts and other voices are just one of the systems or frameworks within which we locate, understand and interpret individual signs. As Chandler writes, "every text and every reading depends on prior codes" (2001: np). There is also a close relation between genre and intertextuality which justifies them being discussed as interdependent theories. One aspect of intertextuality is the concept that prior texts constitute what we recognise as genre, and created texts serve to construct and modify our future understanding of genre (Bhatia, 2002; Johnstone, 2008). Finally, under *language codes*, Chandler points to systems such as syntax, phonology, prosody and so on as interpretative frameworks. Thus the analysis of grammatical choices and systems can also be located at the semiotic level of "code". A more detailed account of genre, intertextuality and the grammatical system of modality follows.

Genre

The concept of genre in language texts has been borrowed from that of genre in literature and art. While art forms have long been readily labelled as belonging to a certain genre (cartoon, Romantic poetry, detective novel and so on) considerable recent academic attention has been paid to how institutional and other written genres might similarly be identified. I have already assumed broad agreement on the interpretation of a "genre" in my overview of news media genres in Chap. 1. Swales (1990), Bhatia (1993) and Dudley-Evans (1994) suggest that genres can be characterised by commonalities across a range of aspects, including purpose, audience, structure, content and features of style. Bhatia's (1993: 13) definition of a genre is typical:

> It is a recognisable communicative event characterised by a *set of communicative purposes* identified and mutually understood by the members of the professional or academic community in which it regularly occurs. Most often it is *highly structured and conventionalised* with constraints on allowable contributions in terms of their *intent, positioning, form and functional value.* (My emphasis)

More recent writing on genre (Bazerman, 2004; Beghtol, 2001; Bhatia, 2002, 2004; Herring et al. 2004; Kessler, Nunberg, & Schűtze, 1997) has expanded the area of scholarly interest from the relatively narrow "professional or academic" contexts referred to by Bhatia above to a much wider understanding of genre as a type of text regardless of institutional status. Commonalities of purpose are partly identified through an understanding of what type of rhetorical act or generic value (Bhatia, 2002) is realised in a text, for example, argument, narrative, description, explanation, instruction, persuasion, evaluation. In the area of news media, two particularly prominent rhetorical acts are those of *description* (in news reports, for example) and *evaluation* (in editorials and letters). Texts that are primarily evaluative might also feature the rhetorical acts of argument, persuasion or instruction. These overarching rhetorical aims will affect the kind of language choices made within texts.

Defining what counts as a genre can be complex: Yates and Orlikowski (1992: 303) point out that genres exist at various levels of abstraction, so, for example, a business letter is of a different order of genre from a letter of recommendation. Bhatia (2004: 59) proposes a comprehensive hierarchy of genre from *genre colony* (his example is promotional genres) to *genre*, defined by specific communicative purpose (e.g. advertisements, book blurbs and so on) to *sub-genres*, definable by medium (TV, print), and/or product (car, holiday) and/or participants (business travellers, holiday travellers). An equivalent for our study of news texts would be the *genre colony* of journalism or news writing, the *genres* of news story, editorial, feature and so on, with *sub-genres* by medium (print, radio, TV), "product" (travel features, movie reviews) and participants (businesspeople, non-professionals). Considering newspapers as a particular type of overarching genre, Hoey (2001) labels these as "colonies" with embedded "sub-colonies". According to Hoey, colonies have the characteristics that

they are not in order and do not form continuous prose. They need a framing context (e.g. a title), they tend to acknowledge either no or multiple authors and have components that may be accessed separately, with many components serving the same function.

Despite varying positions on the study of genre, writers tend to agree that genres are fluid and permeable. There may be prototypical characteristics, and these are isolated and foregrounded in texts such as template letters or CVs, or in spoofs or parodies of film or television genres. However, most texts exhibit some generic characteristics while remaining unique. Genres are subject to continuous change. Not only does each instance of a text written in a certain genre serve to construct an ever-changing interpretation of that genre, but new communication needs, new technologies and creative play with generic texts all play a part in redefining the generic landscape. The fact that the boundaries of genres are permeable is shown in the prevalence of "genre-mixing" and "genre-blending": respectively, the former being the overlap between genres (e.g. business leader reports that have both an informative and a motivational function) and the latter being the deliberate use of two or more genres to create a different kind of text. This is common in many areas, for example, film (the comedy-western, the sci-fi thriller), and advertising and business, for example, advertorials (Cook, 2001; Fairclough, 1995b), and most recently "advergames" (BBC, 2014). Forms arising from new technologies, such as web pages or blogs, may draw on prior genres, such as newspapers, posters or personal journals, but introduce new characteristics that are appropriate to the medium, the audience and the purpose of the text (Herring et al. 2004; Johnstone, 2008).

The importance of an understanding of genre in studies of representation cannot be overstated, and there are two overriding considerations for analysis. Firstly, an analysis of language cannot be divorced from context, be it media language, academic language, business, private, healthcare discourse and so on. The job writers are doing with language and for whom shapes the language in every way. It is an invaluable first step for us to know, as discourse analysts, whether the text we are studying is typical or not of its genre and why it is or is not. This consideration feeds into the synchronic analysis of texts, as the relative dominance of any one genre will imbue the overall data set with its particular characteristics.

The second consideration becomes clear in a diachronic analysis. If a set of texts (a representation) consists of a number of genres (in the BP case, say, news articles, financial reports, editorials, features) then any change in the relative importance of the genres over time *will* bring with it a change in the language profile. To take an example, editorials are characterised by various linguistic markers constructing a personal and subjective perspective. Hard news articles typically exhibit markers constructing an impersonal and objective stance. An increase in the frequency of subjective markers at the expense of objective markers is likely to be due to a *generic shift* from hard news articles to editorials, rather than to a *shift in perspective* on the part of any given writer. Thus text genre in the data set will need to be named and identified at a broad level, as well as explored at text level.

Intertextuality

The study of intertextuality explores the relationship of texts with other texts that inform and shape them, and texts that they will in turn influence and shape. As Allen (2011: 1) explains:

> Meaning becomes something which exists between a text and all the other texts to which it refers and relates, moving out from the independent text into a network of textual relations. The text becomes the intertext.

The term "intertextuality" and the foundation of the area of study are the work of Kristeva (1980) following principles set out by Bakhtin (1981). Bakhtin proposed that all utterances (and writings) are infused with the traces of previous utterances, as well as with the anticipation of a response from the audience. Both writers suggest that all texts are dialogic, responding to and being shaped by multiple previous texts of all kinds, and anticipating the response of either a present or an imagined receiver.

This view of intertextuality suggests that all the texts read, spoken or written by the writer, as well as conventions of genre, and the constraints of social practices are potential influences on any given text. For the purposes of our analytical work, this means finding ways in which to

acknowledge the role of any past (and potential) text on our researched texts. Seen in this way, the notion of intertextuality is so diffuse as potentially to defy analysis. Allen (2011: 59) raises the problem of definition and understanding: "Is intertextuality a manageable term, or is it essentially unmanageable, concerned with finite or infinite and overwhelming dimensions of meaning?"

Research into analysis of intertextuality must account for the fact that textual influence can be taken to exist in myriad forms: from the most overt and specific (e.g. an exact sourced quotation in an academic essay) to the virtually untraceable, for example, general shared language resources, a 50-year-old conversation, or a commonly held belief. At this very nonspecific end of the spectrum we can see the role that these almost unconscious usages play in constituting Barthes' "what-goes-without-saying". Conceptual frameworks for intertextuality have frequently reflected the fact that the majority of input from other texts will be irretrievable. Bazerman (2004: 83) uses the metaphor of a "sea of words".

> We create our texts out of the sea of former texts that surround us, the sea of language we live in. And we understand the texts of others within that same sea. Sometimes as writers we want to point to where we got those words from and sometimes we don't. Sometimes as readers we consciously recognize where the words and ways of using words come from and at other times the origin just provides an unconsciously sensed undercurrent. And sometimes the words are so mixed and dispersed within the sea, that they can no longer be associated with a particular time, place, group, or writer.

Expanding on this final observation, Bazerman (2004: 87) refers to "[b]eliefs, issues, ideas, statements generally circulated". The concept of texts that cannot be pinned down was articulated by Riffaterre (1980: 239), who acknowledged that not all intertexts would be identifiable, but that it would be sufficient for analysis that we recognise that they exist: he calls this "the presupposition of the intertext".

Studies of intertextuality have offered diverse perspectives and classification frameworks which have aimed to identify this most elusive of language phenomena. Kristeva (1980: 65–66) envisaged two axes, one running from subject to addressee and the other from text to context.

The coincidence of these axes shows, according to Kristeva, that "each word (text) is an intersection of word (texts) where at least one other word (text) can be read". Unlike Kristeva, whose work was mainly set within a poststructuralist paradigm, Genette (1997) pursued the study of intertextuality from the structuralist perspective that texts are part of a (closed) system, and that it is the job of the analyst to uncover their place in the system. Genette's five types of "transtextuality" related primarily to literary texts. More recently, Bazerman's (2004) work is directed towards the practice of discourse analysis of a broad range of texts, including media discourse. He outlines six types of intertextuality, proposing them as points along a cline, moving from an extremely explicit to an extremely broad understanding of the phenomenon.

I discuss here finally Fairclough's (1992a, b) taxonomy of intertextuality, which is broader than those mentioned so far. Fairclough makes a distinction between "manifest intertextuality", which encompasses more or less explicit allusion to other texts, and "constitutive intertextuality", which draws upon conventions of different genres and discourses.

> I shall draw a distinction between "manifest intertextuality", where specific other texts are overtly drawn upon within a text, and "interdiscursivity" or "constitutive intertextuality" … On the one hand, we have the heterogeneous constitution of texts out of specific other texts (manifest intertextuality); on the other hand, the heterogeneous constitution of texts out of elements (types of convention) of orders of discourse (interdiscursivity). (Fairclough, 1992a: 85)

Fairclough's approach is more consolidated than either Genette's or Bazerman's, and points to a fundamental difference between what might perhaps be termed "conscious" and "unconscious" borrowing. Fairclough writes that certain types of "manifest intertextuality" are also a feature of certain types of "interdiscursivity". To take an example from news media, we might assume a directly quoted witness statement in a news report to be a clear case of manifest intertextuality—as it is a "specific other text […] overtly drawn upon within a text". Indeed, Fairclough cites "discourse representation" (or "speech reportage") as an instance of manifest intertextuality. However, the witness statement is so common in the news

report genre as to be considered an interdiscursive feature—a marker of this particular type of writing—and so is also in some way constitutive. Both of Fairclough's categories refer to intertextual relations that are relatively retrievable, either as recognisable prior texts or as identifiable characteristics of genre or discourses, and he does not move beyond this to general characteristics of language. Fairclough's notion of "interdiscursivity", referring to *discourses* as well as to conventions of genre, relies upon his belief that discourses can be retrieved and identified systematically (1989, 1995a), even if not always linked with specific texts.

The approaches above, summarised and simplified, indicate three broad areas of intertextuality:

- *Intertextuality as irretrievable texts.* Historical and current language resources, beliefs, issues ideas, "presupposed intertext".
- *Intertextuality as identifiable style/register/genre.* Generic and stylistic characteristics of both form and content.
- *Intertextuality as retrievable texts.* Reported voices, quotations, allusions, parody.

These categories considerably simplify the complexity of intertextual research, but provide a starting point from which to consider a framework for media text analysis, which I will expand on in a later chapter. I have already discussed the second category of generic characteristics, noting that genre and intertextuality are closely interconnected. Retrievable texts (the third category above) that regularly appear in the mass media include reported voices, which have been explored in depth in work by Fairclough (1995b), Fowler (1991) and van Dijk (1988). Jacobs (1999, 2000a) has written extensively about the role of press releases as contributing texts. The role of images in news reporting has been explored in the work of Bignell (2002), van Leeuwen (2005), Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) and Machin and Jaworski (2006). Other retrievable texts include official reports of all kinds, previous news reports and the idiosyncratic use of cultural quotation and allusion by individual journalists.

Grammatical Codes: Modality and the Appraisal System

One of the most pertinent types of code for the study of written verbal text is that of grammatical systems. The organisation of language signs into grammar systems has been conceptualised in many diverse ways, and Chap. 2 mentions two—the formal approach characterised in the work of Chomsky (1965) and others and functional approaches such as that of Halliday (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). Within the theories which aim to offer comprehensive accounts of the structures of languages, are myriad sub-systems, each of which are candidates for analysis, as potentially revealing about representation choices. The researcher might identify as revealing a study of verb voice, for example, or clause types, or cohesive devices. One sub-system which emerged as meaningful for the BP data was modality. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the expression of doubt, certainty, (in)ability, willingness and necessity was a fruitful area for investigation in media texts about crisis (although, as it turned out, modality usages did not conform to my expectations). Given this, I give here an account of modality as just one exemplar of a grammatical system, otherwise called a textual code.

Modal expressions are one of the resources used by journalists to signal their commitment to the validity of the propositions they make in their news reports, and their presence or absence can be a marker of subjective or objective styles. At its simplest level, the system of modality is said to "construe the region of uncertainty that lies between yes and no" (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004: 147). The resources of the modal system allow the speaker or writer (in the case of this data, the journalist, blogger, etc.) to interpose his/her own judgements about the propositions they are making. For Halliday, the modal system is part of the *interpersonal* function of language, that is, the resources used by language to facilitate interpersonal communication. Halliday and Hasan (1976: 27) characterise the interpersonal component of language as "the speaker in his role as intruder". However, this "intrusion" can be realised in ways that allow speakers and writers to associate themselves with or dissociate themselves from responsibility for the views they are expressing. This is referred to as "orientation" in Halliday's terms (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004: 619),

or, more usefully I feel, as "modal responsibility" by Thompson (2004: 69). Degrees of modal responsibility can be expressed along two dimensions—objective–subjective and implicit–explicit—and these dimensions can provide useful ways of commenting on degrees of engagement of the journalist with his/her materials.

This "region … between yes and no" contains different sorts of uncertainty, in the areas of probability, usuality, obligation and inclination, and the resources in the English language used to express these four areas of interpersonal perspective are substantial. Writing just about probability and usuality, Chen (2010: 28) suggests that "over 350 lexical devices are found and used for expressing doubt and certainty in English". These resources include modal auxiliaries, adverbials, adjectives, nouns in modal phrases and clauses. While modal auxiliary verbs, such as "would", "ought to" and so on, are a relatively restricted group, many other verbs can be used with modal import, for example, "try to", "hope to", "refuse to" and so on (Roberts, Zuell, Landmann, & Wang, 2008). Within each of these grammatical realisations, and for each type of modality, there are also degrees of strength, from high through medium to low. So, for example, in the area of *probability*, the following are possible. A mix of grammatical realisations is shown for each:

> High modality: certainly, surely, certainty, it is definite that.
> Medium modality: probably, in my opinion, fairly, tend to suggest.
> Low modality: possibly, possibility, could, would appear to suggest.

The choice of grammatical realisation is meaningful in itself, for example, modal clauses and phrases can suggest the writer/speaker is less of an "intruder" than some other grammatical choices, for example, modal auxiliary verbs, as Droga and Humphrey (2003: 61) argue:

> Modal clauses and phrases (interpersonal metaphors) are a more indirect way of expressing modality and are therefore often used to make texts seem more objective and difficult to argue against.

Choice of modal expression is part of a mix of linguistic strategies that can signal the construction of objectivity or subjectivity, and patterns of modal choice vary by news media genre.

The modal areas of probability, usuality, obligation and inclination can be defined in terms of two main types of modality: what Jespersen (1922) calls "propositional modality" and "event modality". Propositional modality, which consists of *epistemic* and *evidential* modality, expresses the *speaker's judgement of the proposition* (probability and usuality). Of the two types of propositional modality, epistemic modality is by far the more common, with evidential modality found to occur relatively rarely (de Haan, 1999). In propositional modality, there is no element of will. On the other hand, event modality, which comprises *deontic* and *dynamic* modality, expresses the *speaker's attitude to a potential future event* and does contain an element of will. Deontic modality includes permission and obligation, while dynamic modality is concerned with ability and willingness or inclination. These three main types of modality—epistemic, deontic and dynamic—provided a categorisation for the analysis of modality in the BP texts.

A linked perspective on writer judgement and the related issue of subjectivity and objectivity is offered by work in Appraisal Theory. Appraisal Theory has been most fully developed by Martin and White (2005) and has at its core many of the same issues as the study of modality. Indeed, Halliday and Matthiessen present appraisal categories alongside modality categories in direct correspondence. Martin and White (2005: 1) describe the topic as follows:

> This book [*the Language of Evaluation*] is concerned with the interpersonal in language, with the subjective presence of writers/speakers in texts as they adopt stances towards both the material they present and those with whom they communicate.

Where Appraisal Theory offers additional analytic resources to modality studies is in the consideration of lexis, and here an overlap between the sign (word) and the code (system) is evident—although Appraisal Theory is characterised by Martin and White (2005: xi) as a "framework", and therefore a system. The framework examines evaluative lexis expressing attitudes of three broad kinds: *affect*, which deals with emotional reactions, *judgement*, which concerns the evaluation of behaviour and ethical

issues, and *appreciation*, which relates to aesthetic evaluation. Appraisal Theory systematises ways of analysing the force (how strong) and the focus (how typical) of terms used in texts of all kinds. It also provides ways of assessing the engagement of the speaker or writer by looking at processes of attribution, modality, proclaiming and disclaiming. This analytical procedure has been used effectively to comment on the ways crises have been depicted in the media (e.g. White, 1997).

The Level of Mythic Meanings

The next level in the semiotic heuristic that structures this analysis approach is that of "mythic meanings". Myths, in the sense that Barthes (1972) conceived them, are the ideas, beliefs and attitudes shared by cultural groups that generally go unremarked, so taken-for-granted are they. One of Barthes' endeavours was to uncover and analyse these taken-for-granted myths, or "what-goes-without-saying" (1972: 11), and thereby make clear the ideologies and interests that they support and perpetuate. Barthes recognised myths not only within verbal language (he argued that myth is itself a language) but in many forms of cultural practice which we do not readily recognise as ideologically informed. In fact, he purposely selected objects for study that were as far as possible from literature and the literary application of the word "myth".

Although semiotic "codes" have been presented as being at a different level in the hierarchy from mythic meanings, this does not imply that their constitution does not serve an ideological purpose. On the contrary, as outlined earlier, the frameworks within which we understand signs are culturally and temporally specific, and thus potentially as subject to myth-making as all communication practices. It is simply a convenience to discuss a semiotic view of language by following a line of thought: building blocks → systems → meaning potential → ideology behind meaning. Put simply, both building blocks and systems in language are already myth and ideologically laden.

Connotation

One of the ways in which Barthes was able to expose and describe myth was by making a distinction in his early work between two types of meaning for signs, namely, "denotation" and "connotation", and I described how "denotation" can be considered the literal, face-value "meaning" of a sign and "connotation" the additional associations, both socio-cultural and personal, that the sign generates for the person who perceives it. Barthes conceptualises this such that the *signifier* and *signified*, being the denotative meaning, together form another *signifier*, to which the receiver of the sign attaches a further *signified*; this "second-order semiological system" is termed "myth" (Barthes, 1972: 114). This process can lead to an infinite chain of signification—Barthes' "floating chain of signifieds" (1977a: 39).

Barthes argues not that denotative and connotative meaning are on a continuous spectrum and difficult to disentangle (although this may also be true) but rather that the ultimate connotation may appear to be the most "innocent", to use Barthes' term (1972: 61), by being apparently the least burdened with non-literal association. As Lacey (1998: 68) writes: "Myths are connotations that appear to be denotations." Indeed, it has been argued that there are no denotative meanings at all, as "literalness" and "simplicity" are as much constructs as representations that appear to have complex and diverse meaning. Hall (1980: 122) suggests that the distinction between denotation and connotation is no more than an analytical convenience, with denotative meanings simply being those that attract a wider consensus than connotative meanings.

> It is useful, in analysis, to be able to apply a rough rule of thumb which distinguishes those aspects of a sign which appear to be taken, in any language community at any point in time, as its "literal" meaning (denotation) from the more associative meanings for the sign which it is possible to generate (connotation). But analytic distinctions must not be confused with distinctions in the real world. There will be very few instances in which signs organized in a discourse signify only their "literal" (that is, near-universally consensualized) meaning.

My earlier observations about the construction of fact and objectivity in the media serve to illustrate this point. What is presented as a simple description of reality is mediated through a set of discursive practices that we have learned to interpret as simple description. In effect the news report genre presents itself as denotation, where, in Barthes' terms (1974: 9), it may be "no more than the *last* of the connotations".

   If we accept Hall's analytical convenience in order to consider language which is more connotative than denotative, we are dealing with language as it communicates in a figurative rather than a literal way. Here language is not primarily representative, but has an intended alternative meaning beyond "what it says". In the study of rhetoric, figurative language can belong to one of four main tropes: irony, metaphor, metonymy and synecdoche. Each trope represents a desired meaning via a different and non-literal relationship between word (signifier) and concept (signified), and these relationships are understandable through codes. Again, any or all of these figurative tropes might prove of interest in the study of a particular data set, as indeed might connotative meanings which do not fall into the categories of these tropes. In the BP data, metonym, synecdoche and metaphor emerged as significant, and I use these as illustrations of language features at the level of mythic meaning.

Metonym and Synecdoche

Both metonym and synecdoche are forms of language that create meaning by *association*. This association is seen in part–whole relationships, for example, "two heads are better than one", where "heads" stands for "people" or "people's ideas", and in relationships where an associated entity stands for the actual referent, for example, "the White House made a statement today" where "the White House" stands for the US president or his/her spokespersons. The metonymical relationship covers a very broad range of actual instances, but its distinguishing feature from metaphor is that both entities (the metonym and the referent) are drawn from the same domain, or semantic field. In metaphor, on the other hand, one entity is described in terms of another from a different domain.

Some linguists, including Lakoff and Johnson (1980), have argued that metonymy is simply a type of metaphor. There are certainly areas where the two interact, and the work of Goossens (1990) theorises "metaphor from metonymy" and "metonymy within metaphor", also coining the word "metaphtonomy".

The distinction between metonym and synecdoche is not always agreed, but many linguists (e.g. the early Jakobson [Jakobson & Halle, 1956]) would see synecdoche as falling under the larger heading of metonymy. In my own work, I agree with Lock's (1997: 323) droll assertion: "I shall follow the early Jakobson and treat synecdoche as a synecdoche of metonymy." Synecdoche is generally considered to be a part–whole or whole–part relationship, while metonymy also includes other relationships of association. These examples are taken from Radden, Köpcke, Berg, and Siemund (2007) and Wales (1989):

PLACE FOR EVENT— "he was shocked by Vietnam"—metonymy.
OBJECT FOR USER—"the sax has flu today"—metonymy.
AUTHOR FOR WORK—"I love Proust"—metonymy.
PART FOR WHOLE—"strings [stringed instruments]"—synecdoche → metonymy.
WHOLE FOR PART—"England thankful to avoid serious injury"—synecdoche → metonymy.

The fact that metonymy (used henceforth as the umbrella term) draws both of its elements (the signifier and the signified) from the same domain, and that the two are already associated in experience, can suggest that metonymy is somehow less figurative and more realistic than metaphor. Jakobson (Jakobson, 2002; Jakobson & Halle, 1956) argued that the tropes are quite different: his metonymic "pole" associated metonym with prose and writing in a realistic tradition, whereas metaphor was associated with romanticism and invention. Metonymic usages may be seen as less creative than metaphoric ones, but they share with metaphor the fact that they *select* certain aspects of the signified to foreground, and *discard* others. For example, both proverbs "Two *heads* are better than one" and "Many *hands* make light work" use parts of the body synecdochically to mean "people", but select those parts that are most relevant to the meaning (connections with "intelligence" and "strength/

skill", respectively). This selection can be meaningful, and can direct the audience's attention to particular desired readings, while discarding or suppressing others, and these emphases can be ideologically significant. In his review of metonymy in a corpus of business texts, Cornelissen (2008) finds the *metonym* ORGANISATION FOR MEMBER (e.g. "BP announced …") to be widespread and significant, and discusses how it works together with the common business *metaphor* A COMPANY IS A HUMAN BEING, to direct the reader to envisage that the company is a person with single goals and purposes who can speak with a unified voice. This selective direction is of particular significance in journalism, where the principle of economy of expression is important (Bhatia, 1993; Biber, Johansson, Leech, Conrad, & Finegan, 1999).

Metaphor

Unlike metonymy, through which signifier and signified have a relationship of *association* or *contiguity* based on a *single* domain, metaphor proposes a relationship of *likeness* between the target (entity being described) and the source (entity used to describe) across *different* domains. It is this relationship of likeness which caused Peirce (1931–58: 2.277) to classify metaphor as an Iconic sign: a view that I will problematise in Chap. 13. Metaphors are extreme instances of figurative language, and as such can be a source of innovation and creativity. Van Leeuwen (2005) describes metaphor as one of the two main agents of semiotic change, alongside connotation. It is this aspect of metaphor that Jakobson emphasises when he writes that the metaphoric pole is the dimension relevant to poetry, surrealism and romanticism. This drive to innovation is clearly evident in the case of fresh metaphors that use unexpected juxtapositions to shed new light on existing concepts. Yet the broadest definition of metaphor—describing one entity in terms of another—encompasses a vast number of metaphorical usages that are so commonplace that their literal meaning is no longer recognised.

These "taken-for-granted" usages are the subject of Lakoff and Johnson's "Metaphors we live by" (1980) in which the authors argue that most metaphors we use are not unusual, creative and poetic, but rather fundamental ideas, often with an experiential basis, that structure our thinking

in particular shared ways; they are at the very root of how we conceptualise experiences, entities and practices. Once a metaphor is shared widely enough, it ceases to have the power to make us understand experience in new ways, but rather reinforces shared ways of seeing (and in that sense has a mythical or ideological dimension). Because of this ubiquity, it can become difficult for the analyst to isolate what is a metaphorical usage and what is not. To illustrate this problem, Lakoff and Johnson call forth an imaginary "objectivist" who argues with them that in many cases a word used in a metaphorical sense is actually a homonym of the literal term with an alternative dictionary definition.

Researchers can choose to view these commonplace metaphors in two ways: one is that they are so routinised as to simply have the status of a literal meaning. The other view would hold that such metaphorical usages should be identified and scrutinised critically; on account of this very ability they have to normalise a way of seeing that is a product of society and culture, and that may reinforce power relations of certain kinds. This is an argument made by Koller (2003) in her examination of how common metaphors in business can legitimise unequal gender relations. Like metonyms, metaphors are selective in the sense that they choose one aspect of an entity or phenomenon to describe by comparison with another entity. This aspect becomes the focus of attention, and excludes other aspects of the phenomenon. This concept is illustrated in the Milne, Kearins, and Walton (2006) article, which shows how the metaphor BUSINESS IS A JOURNEY is used by organisations in connection with their environmental commitments. By conceptualising business in this way (rather than as, say, WAR or SPORT), organisations can imply that they are making progress, without committing to a final goal. In this case, metaphors do not shed new light on abstract issues but rather delimit them. As Tsoukas (1991: 582) writes

> Metaphors tend to be used as substitutes for deeper knowledge, and they tend to be constitutive of, and prescriptive in relation to, the social phenomena they are connected with.

Tsoukas makes a three-way distinction between "dead", "dormant" and "live" metaphors. His definition of dead metaphors broadly corresponds to Lakoff and Johnson's "conventional metaphors":

> Frozen or dead metaphors have become so familiar and so habitual that we have ceased to be aware of their metaphorical nature and use them as literal terms. (Tsoukas, 1991: 568)

The category of dormant metaphors is potentially useful for analysis, in that it encompasses terms that are widely used, with commonly shared meaning, but that are still recognisable as metaphorical:

> Dormant metaphors are quasi-literal terms through which we restrict ourselves to seeing the world in particular ways; however, the metaphorical nature of these terms can be easily exposed. (Tsoukas, 1991: 568)

Dormant metaphors can be reawakened to shed productive new light on the target, or can go on to be dead metaphors, only used in a literal sense. Live metaphors are those that are more unusual and creative, where the writer has as his/her purpose to encourage the reader to conceptualise one entity in terms of another in a way that gives *unconventional* insight into the target domain (the concept or entity that is being described). It is live metaphors, or rather metaphors in the "live" part of their life cycle, that are agents for semiotic change.

The aspect of juxtaposition of one concept with another gives the metaphor its mythical quality in the Barthesian sense. Selection of both the aspect to be compared and the entity with which it is to be compared foregrounds ways of looking at objects and ideas that cannot help but be value-laden, whether the metaphor is conventional or innovative. Indeed, conventional metaphors can be considered those in which these particular ways of looking at things have been naturalised.

The Level of Ideology

I have mentioned ideology in the previous two sections, in the context that both codes and mythic meanings serve to naturalise ideologies. An ideology is a set of beliefs and attitudes that structures all kinds of social practices, and allows for group identity. Coupland and Jaworski (2001: 144) write:

> We understand the term ideology as a set of social (general and abstract) representations shared by members of a group and used by them to accomplish everyday social practices: acting and communicating.

This definition suggests that ideologies can only be maintained and distributed through "representations", that is, through language and other meaningful social practices. Further, ideologies are ubiquitous and necessary—ideologies are what bind groups together, allow for group identities and allow for the workings of society to be intelligible to its members. It is understood that any number of competing ideologies may operate in the daily social life of individuals. However, not all ideologies have access to the same resources for awareness and understanding. Certain groups will have a greater level of power and access to voice, for example, politicians, media publications or celebrities. These more powerful groups are better equipped to establish their views, attitudes and ideas than are less powerful groups. Uncovering the working of power behind the representation of ideas is the project of work by Barthes and Foucault, as well as later writers in the school of Critical Discourse Analysis. Essential for the operation of power is compliance (Foucault, 1980) and what concerns critical linguists is the extent to which the workings of power are hidden, in ideas that are "taken-for-granted" or naturalised. As Eagleton (1983: 117) puts it: "Ideology seeks to convert culture into Nature, and the 'natural' sign is one of its weapons."

I asserted earlier that the news media are one of the powerful groups that has special access to voice, and named some of the other groups that have regular and unquestioned access through media channels to the general public. The news media do not only have the power to express their own institutional opinions in the form of editorial and opinion pieces, but they also have the power to select and interpret the views of others and to police what counts as news. As Parmentier (2009: 146) notes, "Anyone who manipulates or regiments the flow of interpretants thereby indexes social power or cultural capital." Through connotation and intertextuality the press can access shared social meanings that can indicate an ideological position. For example, the now well-used device of attaching "-gate" to words to indicate a scandal ("Monicagate", "Cheriegate", "Plebgate") by analogy with the Watergate affair can quickly imply a

shared moral position on some sets of events (Conboy, 2007: 98). (But interestingly not on others. I have yet to see the formulation "BP-gate" used in media texts, despite extended coverage of alleged safety weaknesses.) Investigating the linguistic strategies that encode ideologies is an important element of a holistic semiotic analysis.

In Chap. 2, I gave a brief overview of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and intimated there and earlier in the book that I make a distinction between critical traditions which start with an emancipatory agenda and others which do not, arguing that most discourse analysis is critical to an extent. I need to make this position more explicit with regard to my own approach, based on the thinking of Barthes, because of the important role CDA has played in the study of discourses, particularly in media texts. There is no doubt that Barthes himself was troubled by the hidden exercise of power through language—he makes this point explicitly (1972: 11) when he writes of "ideological abuse" in "newspapers, art and common sense". His project in the book, including his now famous deconstruction of two images—a *Paris Match* cover and an advertisement for Italian food—is to problematise naturalised concepts.

The difference between Barthes' and Fairclough's understanding of texts in context, then, is one of emphasis and interpretation, rather than fundamentally differing worldviews. Comparing the Barthes heuristic with Fairclough's (1992a: 73) three-dimensional framework for Critical Discourse Analysis illustrates these different emphases. The visualisation of Barthes' levels here is the same as the one shown in Chap. 3, but redrawn by analogy with Fairclough's CDA approach (Fig. 3.2).

There are three issues of divergence I perceive between the Faircloughian approach to critical text analysis and the Barthesian approach I propose. Firstly, I suggest that Barthes' approach to levels of language is more text-focused at all levels than Fairclough's. Fairclough's approach includes analysis of the production and interpretation of texts within both the immediate context and the socio-cultural context. At these levels, the emphasis is on a description and interpretation of the immediate and wider context and their effects on the text. Barthes is more concerned with how the sign reflects, embodies and realises the context. Secondly, I argue that although Barthes' perspective is entirely critical, it has a less explicit emancipatory agenda than CDA. My final point is connected

Barthes' view of language in context

Fairclough's view of language in context
Adapted from Fairclough (1992a: 73)
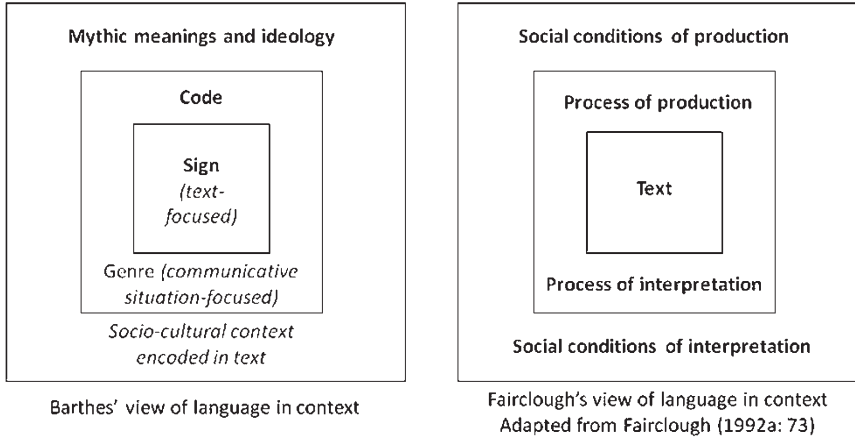
Fig. 3.2   Barthes' and Fairclough's views of language in context

with this. In seeking out a politically motivated driving force for the understanding of language, Fairclough proceeds from a particular view and expectation, based on the thinking of Marx and Gramsci, rather than the shifting, fragmented and competing view of discourses typical of poststructuralist thinkers such as Barthes.

This final point is central to the approach I propose. This approach starts with description of the text, with no preassumptions other than a generally critical standpoint. The findings of the work, which I will go on to outline in the following chapters, suggest discourses of representation which co-exist, change unevenly and even move in different directions (simultaneously "opening up" and "closing down" meaning potentials). These patterns are better understood within a frame of reference which is open-ended rather than agenda-driven.

Discourses

Foucault (1980) proposes that ideologies are maintained and distributed through language via *discourses*. These are regularly articulated sets of ideas in circulation at a particular time and place. In Mills' (2003: 53) definition "a discourse is a regulated set of statements which combine

with others in predictable ways". In using the word "regulated", Mills refers to the dimension of power that is able to regulate what counts as knowledge and what does not. Foucault argues that defining and excluding certain groups (such as the "mad" or the "sexually deviant") limits the possibilities for discourse. Other limitations he identifies include restrictions on who is allowed to speak, and exclusive distinctions between academic disciplines. Some discourses have much more support and wider distribution than others, an understanding of which leads to the observation that some are "dominant", although opportunities can occur for "resistant" discourses to be heard, and even to become dominant themselves in time. The news mass media have a primary role to play in the construction and distribution of discourses, both dominant and (less often) resistant. Discourses serve to position subjects (Foucault, 1972); in other words, discourses offer roles to individuals that they can accept or reject. Rejection of a positioning is not without cost—as it can transgress social expectation. Subject positions are multiple and changing, rather than unified and fixed.

The semiotic heuristic proposes that signs, codes and mythic meanings all contribute to the construction and perpetuation of ideologies. The fact that discourses are myriad and fragmented suggests that researchers may wish to restrict their analysis to certain types of discourse. In the case of the BP texts, for example, there was ample data to investigate discourses concerning oil—its perceived necessity or otherwise and its relationship to the environment, business and politics. Such an investigation would require a study of content, meaning a focus on *what* was expressed in the text. My research interest was rather in *how* the crisis was expressed, in other words, in the media representations of the crisis. Given this focus, my aim was to identify and describe discourses of representation.

In Summary

Barthes offers an understanding of language as multilayered, whereby meaning is encoded at different levels: in sign choices, in the combination of signs and in the understanding of signs as continually in flux, and socio-culturally and historically determined. In this chapter I have

defined the terms "sign", "code", "mythic meaning" and "ideology", in each case giving examples of how these levels of meaning find expression in language. This view allows us to investigate texts from a narrow to a broad (a micro to a macro) perspective, that is, connecting small signs to social contexts. What this means in practice is that we can identify and discuss language features at different levels—individual words and phrases at the level of the sign, systems of signs at the level of the code, connotations and figurative language at the level of mythic meaning and broad patterns of ideas at the ideological level. Taken together, these discursive elements will give us a rich picture of how meaning is constructed in a text or set of texts.

4

Data Collection and Research Principles

The principles emerging from the Barthesian conceptualisation of language described in Chap. 3 is that meaning is made at four interrelated levels (sign, code, mythic meaning and ideology). The following chapters set out a template for the analysis of sets of representations by the news media of the BP events at these four levels. This approach entails firstly a proposal for *data collection and selection*, and subsequently a four-stage methodology for *data analysis.* This four-stage approach is highly flexible; it allows for complete data sets to be described and set into context, and then for relevant language features to be identified and analysed, using a toolkit of methods, according to need and purpose. The features analysed and the choice of analysis tools for BP are not necessarily the same as those that would be used for another set of texts—they were selected for this specific project with its particular research questions. The BP project was designed to investigate:

> How has the BP Deepwater Horizon crisis been constructed in the media? What patterns and characteristics of language can be identified within and across media texts about Deepwater Horizon? What do these patterns reveal about the process of crisis representation, and how we come to make meaning of crises over time?

The following chapters describe how I addressed these questions, from identifying researchable representations of the crisis to investigating patterns and characteristics.

Choosing a Source for Texts

According to my view of a media representation, the texts in a data set will have something in common with each other, although they might be highly disparate in some respects. In the case of the BP media texts, investigating media representations over time entailed collecting data sets from different time points. I selected three: 2010 (just after the explosion), 2011 and 2012. The texts had in common that they were in English, that they were written and that they contained reference to the BP events of 2010. On the other hand, they were of differing geographical origins, differing news media genres (e.g. news report, feature, letter), differing lengths and differing channels (e.g. online and print). Describing changes in representation of the crisis events over time would mean identifying commonalities in the sets of texts which outweighed the differences.

The BP Deepwater Horizon oil spill of 20 April 2010 was an event of international significance, and was widely reported upon by the global media from that date to today. While this intense media coverage makes the oil spill an interesting and relevant topic for study, the main implication for researchers is that millions of texts on the topic exist. Thus the main concern for data collection and selection was how to create a data set that was manageable yet robust: it had some degree of internal coherence which would bear the weight of claims made about it.

I chose the database Nexis UK as my source of media items for a number of reasons. Nexis UK is a database of media texts that covers hundreds of media sources in many different countries. Publication types include both press and web channels: broadsheet and tabloid national and regional newspapers, international trade and industry magazines and online newsletters, blogs and reports (Nexis UK, 2014). Items are included from all sections of a given publication or website, so there is no particular focus on, say, news or finance, and features, letters and reviews

are included. The database is reliably *searchable*, meaning that users are able to specify dates of publication, language and topic keywords in order to identify relevant texts. Individual texts are *complete*, in that they are not edited or rearranged, although they do not include accompanying images. The texts are also presented with *additional information*, such as word length and a categorisation of publication type. Despite these benefits, the database is not exhaustive. In particular, certain business blogs, but not all, are included, and not all English language local newspapers are included. This meant that I was restricting my data to those publications and web pages covered by Nexis UK. However, using the database gave an extensive and varied set of data items for my purpose.

Compiling a Data Set

Initial work on identifying texts that mentioned the BP Deepwater Horizon oil spill showed that there were many thousands in the Nexis database alone. My aim was to extract a greatly reduced text data set in a systematic way. I was potentially interested in both synchronic and diachronic patterns of representation—in other words, how were the events represented at a given time and did this change over time? One way of deriving a data set that would enable me to address both of these questions, while at the same time reducing the text numbers to a manageable level, was to look at all the texts on a number of single days. My first selected date was 27 April 2010. The reasoning behind this choice of one week after the Deepwater Horizon explosion was to allow reporting on the events to have become widespread across a number of publication types. Muralidharan, Dillistone, and Shin (2011) note that the first tweet and Flickr photo from BP were both posted on 27 April. However, the date chosen could equally well have been the day after the explosion, or three or four days later, as long as the crisis period was still in train. What I felt to be important, having chosen a preliminary date, was that subsequent data sets should be drawn from the same date in the years up to the time of analysis, that is, 27 April 2011 and 27 April 2012. This would generate texts from three days, each separated by one year. Using all the data from each date would allow for an exhaustive study of texts relating

to the BP events within a narrowly specified time frame, although this does not entail that the dates are representative of general BP coverage.

Concurrently, in order to determine how many texts this time-based search would generate, I needed to define what constituted "texts relating to the BP events". The main search term would be "BP" as there were no other viable candidates (the former name "British Petroleum" was superseded by "BP" in 1998, and is not used in news media texts). I used three additional terms that my own reading of newspaper and online reports suggested were reliably present each time the events were covered. These were "crisis", "oil spill" and "disaster". A search for any one of these three plus "BP" should, in my view, have found virtually all of the texts covering the BP events. I therefore carried out an initial search based on the following terms:

- BP AND
- "crisis" OR
- "oil spill" OR
- "disaster"

From my previous reading of news reports on the BP oil spill, I felt that these terms would return a near-complete set of texts; however, I was also aware of other references to the events that paired names such as "Macondo" (the company name for the well) and "Deepwater Horizon" (the name of the Transocean rig) with "oil spill" and so on, referring to exactly the same events. I wanted to test the possibility, particularly in shorter or later texts, that BP might *not* be a default descriptor. Further, if I was going to examine, for example, how the events were named, I needed to feel secure that I was not simply replaying the search terms I myself had defined. To address these issues, I performed an alternative search as follows:

- BP OR
- "Macondo" OR
- "Deepwater Horizon" AND
- "oil spill"

This alternative search produced almost identical lists to the original search, ratifying my choice of search terms.

Table 4.1 Sample of BP-related texts from Nexis UK database

	Texts including search terms "BP" AND "crisis" OR "oil spill" OR "disaster"	Sample for depth analysis
27 April 2010	169	20
27 April 2011	94	20
27 April 2012	31	20

I cleaned the data by removing highly similar texts through the search filter and hand sorting the rest for exact duplication, retaining those where a proportion of the text was similar or the same, but not all. In many cases this partial duplication appeared to arise from the direct reproduction of the wording of press releases, which was an interesting point for investigation in itself. The result of these selection decisions was three separate data sets: 169 texts for 27 April 2010, 94 texts for 27 April 2011 and 31 texts for 27 April 2012, shown in the first column of Table 4.1.

I considered that the each full data set would contain a workable number of items for broad contextual analysis to be carried out, using quantitative methods (although any number-based findings from 2012 would need to be treated with caution as this is a small data set of 31 texts). The majority of my analysis would be qualitative, for which I judged a smaller sample was appropriate. I selected 20 texts from each data set for deeper qualitative analysis, using systematic random sampling, that is, choosing every *n*th text in the larger data set to give me 20 texts (this does not imply that my sample is random in any other way). So, for example, from 94 texts in 2011, I selected every fifth text plus the final text, which yielded 20 texts. The final sample is shown in the second column of Table 4.1.

Text, Co-text and Context

The texts chosen varied considerably by origin and purpose, but also in their relationship with the BP story. Some texts were entirely concerned with the BP Deepwater Horizon story, others touched on the story as part of a wider background (e.g. a business page piece about oil), still others

only mentioned it in passing. This observation raised the issue of texts and co-text. Would a text always comprise the complete entity as presented by Nexis, or would it be legitimate to reduce some items? One straightforward approach would have been to analyse *only* those sections of the data items that were directly related to the BP events. However, it was also useful to observe whether and how the importance of the BP story *within texts* changed over time. Given the concern of semiotics with intertextuality and the concept that all texts are acted upon by myriad other texts, I was interested to understand what the BP story was mentioned *with*. Further, it was not always self-evident what texts were "about". For example, in a letters page, it was quite a straightforward task to separate out a letter about the BP oil spill from a different letter on a different topic. On the other hand, it was less straightforward to separate out coverage of the immediate effects of the oil spill from a general discussion of the current energy picture in the USA.

Researchers will arrive at a definition of a text for analysis purposes, according to their research question. In the case of the BP data, I considered all texts in their entirety for a contextual analysis of genre, source, geographical location and salience of the BP story. For the detailed qualitative analysis, some texts were reduced to focus on the segment that related to BP. To take an example, one transcript of a news programme in my data ran to 7345 words, of which only 634 dealt with the BP story. I chose to use just this segment in my sample for depth analysis. Nevertheless, it was still important to retain co-text that was, however, indirectly, part of the overall BP story. This allowed me to form a view about a particular aspect of the construction of the crisis through language: once the oil spill has ceased to be a main news story, in what contexts is it still considered to be relevant?

Research Approaches: Micro, Median and Macro

A significant innovative feature of the methodology I describe is that it sits at a medial level of data description that is uncommon in language research. By this I mean that my methodology is situated in between the decontextualised, large-corpus approach characteristic of Corpus Linguistics and the highly detailed analysis of one or a few texts which

characterises much discourse analysis. This middle-level approach is apparent in both data selection and data analysis. I largely worked with three data sets of 20 texts, this number falling between the norms for Corpus Linguistic and close text analysis studies mentioned above. My analysis approach combined semi-quantitative counting methods with depth analysis of particular texts and text extracts in order to investigate and contextualise the findings suggested by frequency counting. This medial level of investigation has several advantages for research questions that are broad in scope. It allows the researcher to construct reasonably robust "maps" of language patterns through the analysis of frequencies of language-feature occurrence, without the loss of rich contextual detail. The approach is effective both to confirm that the patterns of language features proposed are indeed consistently present (the usual province of Corpus Linguistics) and to describe what these features "look like" in the context of the news media genres in which they appear.

Research Approaches: Qualitative and Quantitative Methods

It has been typical (Bryman, 2004) that quantitative research is used for research within a positivist or post-positivist paradigm, and that qualitative research is more frequently used for research within an interpretivist or constructionist paradigm. However, linguists such as Wodak (Weiss & Wodak, 2003) and Cook, Robbins, and Pieri (2006) use quantitative methods such as surveys, feature counts and corpus methods as part of their range of methodological tools for investigating linguistic phenomena within a constructionist worldview. The purpose of quantitative and semi-quantitative work within my research was not to identify and closely describe language features, but rather to provide one way of looking at patterns across data sets. There are two types of pattern that a semi-quantitative analysis is appropriate to uncover:

- Patterns in *text types*. How many texts are there on the selected dates that refer to the BP events? To what news genres do they belong? What is their country of origin? How important (how big) is the BP story within them?

- Patterns of *linguistic features.* Does the researched feature occur in the data set, and how often? If there are different sub-categories of the feature, which are present and in what proportions? Do these occurrences change over the timespan of the data sets?

Approaching these questions via semi-quantitative methods gave a degree of confidence that the patterns I detect in my data sets were reliably present. Quantitative research did not tell me *why* these patterns are occurring, or whether the changes were peculiar to certain contexts, or indeed whether they went hand in hand with other phenomena. It was not enough to find that a feature type increased or decreased over time: that movement needed to be described and explored using qualitative approaches to explain the function of a language feature in context, and in interaction with other features. However, quantitative findings of this kind were one way of demonstrating confidence *that* such changes are occurring, and provided a firm foundation for further questioning.

5

A Barthesian Analysis of the BP Data in Four Stages

Before I outline the four stages of my research approach, I will discuss in more detail a concept I have mentioned a number of times already—that entire media representations can be conceived of as signs in their own right. This contention is important to the rest of my argument. I hold that sets of texts, such as my three data sets of BP texts, have enough characteristics in common that they are describable as an entity—a "language map".

Semiotic Discourse Analysis and the "Language Map"

A "language map" is a holistic view of a representation which connects small signs to large signs. When we describe speech or writing as a collection of signs, or semiotic modes, or resources, we are perceiving signs as small elements, perhaps as "building blocks" which become invested with meaning only through the ways in which we put them together, our agreement about what this "code" or system means, our recollection

of the ways in which words have been used before and our knowledge that alternative words might have been used in their place but were not. Individual words are signs in that they have a *signifier* (the written word or spoken sound pattern) and a *signified* (their "meaning" or mental concept in context). This is the definition of de Saussure's "isolated sign" (1959: 128) and it is one I will use as I develop my argument. However, there is also a broader interpretation of language-as-sign that I would like to introduce here. De Saussure suggests that larger stretches of language can also be signs:

> As a rule we do not communicate through isolated signs but rather through groups of signs, through *organized masses that are themselves signs.* In language everything boils down to differences but also to groupings. The mechanism of language, which consists of the interplay of successive terms, resembles the operation of a machine in which the parts have a reciprocating function even though they are arranged in a single dimension. (de Saussure, 1959: 128, my emphasis)

The implication of de Saussure's assertion above is that language can function as a sign at different levels—that individual words, groups of words and individual texts are all signs, and, by extension, that sets of texts may be considered as signs. De Saussure uses the metaphor of a machine with its various interconnected parts, each essential to the efficacy of the whole. I imagine a landscape or a map, where individual features appear in varying quantity, configuration and distribution to give a distinctive yet recognisable landscape. The concept of a map sits well with the notion of "representation". The question I address in this book is not "what does the BP crisis 'look like'" but "what does the *representation* of the BP crisis 'look like'".

The idea of representation as map is one explored by Baudrillard (1994) in *Simulacra and Simulation.* Baudrillard posits that society has moved through successive periods in which representations have become increasingly disconnected from the reality they depict. Writing of the "image" (which covers a broad range of representation types) he identifies four successive phases (1994: 6):

1. It is the reflection of a profound reality.
2. It masks and denatures a profound reality (art imitates life).
3. It masks the *absence* of a profound reality.
4. It has no relation to any reality whatsoever: it is its own pure simulacrum.

Baudrillard here presents progressive stages from signs that offer some reflection of reality to signs that refer only to other signs and have no relation to reality at all. In discussing relationships between simulacra (loosely, "signs") and "reality", he draws on concepts of both physical resemblance and authenticity. He alludes in his work to the premodern and modern periods which he identifies as having at least some relationship, however distorted, with the real and original, but his main arguments deal with the nature of late twentieth-century society, where he suggests that not only are the real and original unrecognisable, but that they have evaporated. To illustrate this argument, Baudrillard draws on a fable told by Borges (1999: 325) in which, in an ancient Empire, "the Cartographers Guilds struck a Map of the Empire whose size was that of the Empire, and which coincided point for point with it". Eventually the map rotted away, leaving only a few remaining shards in remote places. Baudrillard claims that society has reached a stage where it is the *territory itself* that has crumbled away, leaving only the *map* as a representation of a reality that no longer exists. Baudrillard denies in his work the existence of any material reality, and this is an extreme view. However, this notion of signs being the outward representation of a shifting, unstable and ungraspable reality is one that is fundamental to semiotic thinking. The discourse analysis approach I offer is one way of describing these outward representations.

In the case of the BP data, I have sought to map three sets of texts, each at a time point a year apart. I propose that, although each set will comprise texts which are very disparate, it will, nevertheless, have important things in common which make it different from the others in the way it makes meaning. I discussed in Chap. 1 that news media texts are highly *disparate*, yet also in some ways relatively *circumscribed* in terms of their representation: by external technical, political and financial considerations, by space and time constraints, by a strong set of generic expectations and

by the demands of collaborative processes. It is this sense of what news representations of a story have *in common* rather than their *differences* which leads me to propose the idea of language landscapes or maps. By this I mean that a synchronic representation of a news story can be investigated by considering a range of texts about the story at a certain point in time. Although the publications, the writers and the genre of the text may be different, nevertheless, a description of the language will show that the combined representation has certain characteristics which make the representation describable as an entity. This is a language map or a larger sign. It is by drawing up a *set* of language maps of the coverage of the BP events that I hoped to understand how the media were constructing our shared meaning of these events over time.

Four Stages of Analysis

I return to my research question: "What does the language of representation of the BP crisis 'look like'?" Such a broad aim called for an open-ended and interactive approach, which would allow the data themselves to suggest areas of particular linguistic interest. This emergent approach to analysis can be summarised as having four stages:

1. A contextualisation stage. A broad description of the data sets. What sort of texts were they, and where did they come from?
2. An immersion stage—Preliminary analysis by reading and rereading the texts in order to identify language features of interest for analysis, at Barthes' four semiotic levels.
3. A depth analysis stage—Investigating these language features and analysing them for frequency, function and change.
4. A holistic analysis stage. What does an in-depth analysis of a single text tell us about how these features interact? Can this exercise describe the "language map" of the representation?

Table 5.1 summarises the stages of the analysis process for BP:

Table 5.1 Four stages of data analysis

	BP data	Research method	Analysis aim
Stage 1 Contextualisation stage	Full data sets: 2010 (169 texts) 2011 (94 texts) 2012 (31 texts)	Semi-quantitative	Overview of country of origin, genres, salience of BP story
Stage 2 Preliminary analysis stage (immersion)	Data subsets: 2010 (20 texts) 2011 (20 texts) 2012 (20 texts)	Qualitative	"Immersion" in data to identify significant features of language use
Stage 3 Depth analysis stage	Data subsets: 2010 (20 texts) 2011 (20 texts) 2012 (20 texts)	Semi-quantitative Qualitative	Analysis of frequency and type of significant features. Analysis of language usages in context
Stage 4 Holistic text analysis	Data subsets: Single texts as required	Qualitative	Single text analysis in-depth—language usages in combination

Chapters 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12 describe explicitly how each of these four stages of analysis can be applied to data, using the example of the BP texts. At each stage, findings from the data analysis are outlined in brief. This not only gives an idea of the kinds of information generated by the analysis approach, but also sets out a source of data which can be further interpreted using semiotic concepts.

6

Stage 1: Contextualisation of the BP Texts

The first stage of analysis is one of broad description of the data sets. At this stage, I dealt with the full sets of texts (169, 94 and 31) before reducing the text numbers for closer examination. The purpose of this stage of analysis was to provide a contextualising description of the sets of texts that mentioned the BP oil spill across a number of broad dimensions. Nexis UK provides certain information on the articles in its database, including word length, name of publication and type of publication (e.g. newspaper, magazine or weblog). However, I was particularly interested in three other pertinent categories. The first was the country of origin of the item. From the Nexis information, it was generally possible to determine the country of origin of the text, although this is not always clear for online publications. The second was genre: my depth analysis needed to take account not only of the range of language features characteristic of the many text genres in the data set, but also of the shifts by genre across the time period of the data. I wished to know whether the news genres in which the BP story appeared were different immediately after the crisis from two years later. While the Nexis database provided information on *type* of publication, this did not necessarily map on to analysable

definitions of media genre. The third was some means of addressing the salience of the BP story in the texts in which it appeared. Did the story constitute the news item, or was it only a small part of a longer text, perhaps mentioned as contextualising information in another story? For this analysis, I determined by word count the proportion of the item which directly concerned the BP story, and classified the texts in bands—less than 25% of the item (by word count) concerned BP; between 26% and 50% of the item concerned BP; between 51% and 75% and between 76% and 100%.

The contextualisation analysis therefore consisted of:

1. Country of origin.
2. Genre of texts.
3. Salience of the BP story.

These three analyses were intended both to offer an initial picture of the kinds of text covering the BP oil spill and to support and enhance the later depth analysis of language features.

Country of Origin

Table 6.1 shows a breakdown of the country of origin of the texts that mention the BP oil spill. Only texts in English were included in the sample.

Table 6.1 Geographical source of items mentioning BP events 2010–12

	27 April 2010		27 April 2011		27 April 2012	
	No. of texts	%	No. of texts	%	No. of texts	%
USA	76	45	56	60	19	61
UK	27	16	11	12	4	13
Rest of world	56	33	11	12	3	10
Unable to determine (Internet text)	10	6	16	17	5	16
Total	**169**	**100**	**94**	**101**	**31**	**100**[a]

[a]Note that low numbers make percentages indicative rather than firm findings

The site of the BP oil spill—the USA—begins and remains the main country of origin for English-speaking media coverage, and this reflects not just the direct interest in the events, but also the size of the USA and the number of local and regional newspapers operating there. However, the fact that the events are perceived to be of global rather than just national interest is reflected in the fact that half the English-speaking coverage in 2010 is outside the USA, primarily from the UK. The UK has a specific interest in events, given that BP, while a global company, is British in origin. At the time of the crisis, President Barack Obama positioned BP firmly as a British (rather than global) company (Burt, 2012) and by extension directed the blame and responsibility in the direction of the UK. By 2012, the USA represented an even greater proportion of coverage at 61% than it did in the first days of the disaster, with both the UK (at 13% on a low base) and the rest of the world showing decreased coverage as a proportion in 2011 and 2012. This picture suggests that concerns with the physical effects of the spill in the USA, both real and potential, are of greater ongoing interest than concerns with moral and financial culpability in the UK. That said, the other area of increase over the years by percentage is the geographically indeterminate category, which consists mainly of Internet and blog coverage. This rose from 6% in 2010 to 16% in 2012, which implies a continuing interest in the story at a more general, societal level.

The other issue of relevance to the geographical origin of texts is that linguistic analysis is situated temporally and culturally—that is, when country of origin changes, then style and social practice change. This principle is central to a social semiotic view of communication and is a critical component of the study of language choices—any story of linguistic representation is also the story of the situated style and social practice from which it arises. It can be important in analysis to indicate that the writer is not just a journalist, but a British or US journalist; that the newspaper is national or local; and that it originates in one of the affected Gulf States, rather than an unaffected US state.

Genre of Texts

Definition and Analysis Method

In order to carry out a quantitative analysis of the genres of the texts, I required a definition and a categorisation of media genres. Establishing a categorisation involved a strategy for identifying media genre types. In presenting genre as one of Barthes' semiotic "codes" in Chap. 3, I characterised text genres as being identified through any or all of the following: common communicative purpose, structural regularities, stylistic regularities and similarities in content. I have yet to find a systematic taxonomy of media genres, and it is possible that none such is available. According to Chandler (1997: 1), "There are no undisputed 'maps' of the system of genres within any medium", no one text displays all the features of a genre and there is considerable overlap between genres. I required a genre categorisation that was suitable for my purpose, that was pragmatic and workmanlike. The two principles I used for genre categorisation were that, where possible, the genres should be recognised in scholarly literature, and, secondly, that they should be on the same level as each other in a notional taxonomy. By this I mean that they are (relatively) mutually exclusive, and one is never subsumed by the other.

Following these principles of previous recognition as a genre, and single hierarchical level, and using Bhatia's (1993) terminology, I used the categorisation shown in Fig. 6.1.

The central column, "genres", provided the basis for the genre analysis shown in Table 6.2.

Findings from the BP Data

Table 6.2 shows how the genres to which the selected texts belong change over the three years of the data. In 2010, 73% of the texts were either print or TV news reports, with the remaining 27% being largely financial reports (27 April was Quarter 1 results day). By 2012, news reports had reduced to less than half of the texts (45%). There is an increase over the years (by proportion) in business and market reports, feature articles and
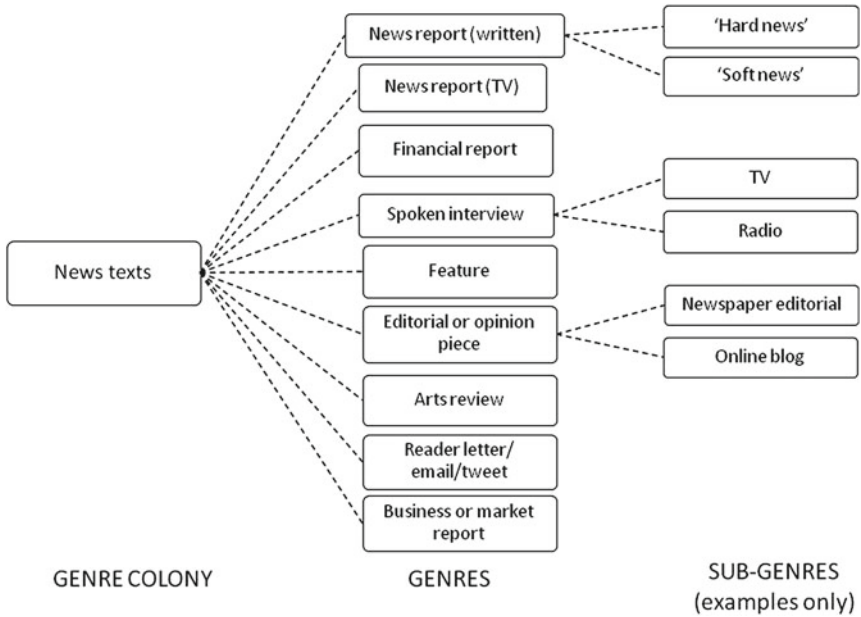
Fig. 6.1 A genre categorisation of news texts

Table 6.2. BP oil spill texts by genre 2010–12

	27 April 2010		27 April 2011		27 April 2012	
	No. of texts	%	No. of texts	%	No. of texts	%
News report (written)	117	69	24	26	13	42
News report (TV and radio)	7	4	1	1	1	3
Financial report	34	20	38	40	2	6
Spoken interview (TV or radio)	3	2	3	3	0	0
Feature article	0	0	0	0	2	6
Editorial or opinion piece (print/online)	6	4	13	14	3	10
Arts review	0	0	1	1	5	16
Letters	0	0	3	3	1	3
Business or market report	2	1	11	12	4	13
Total	**169**	**100**	**94**	**100**	**31**	**100**[a]

[a]Note that low numbers make percentages indicative rather than firm findings

arts reviews of various kinds. The following is a brief description of the texts in my BP data sets, according to genre.

News Reports

In 2010, the news reports on the BP oil spill (73% of texts) are mainly progress reports that discuss announcements by BP concerning the victims and the work being carried out to stop the oil escape, which was still uncontrolled and unpredictable at this stage. As well as quotations from press releases and news conferences, other inputs from eyewitnesses and experts in the fields of oil drilling, the environment and food industries are evident. By 2011, only 27% of texts are news reports. Directly related news stories deal mainly with the progress of compensation and legal action. However, very many of the news reports cover stories that are *not* directly related to the BP oil spill, but concern other events or companies, where the BP oil spill is mentioned in a minor capacity. For example, one 2011 text (The Irish Times, 27.4.2011) deals largely with the new chairman of commodities trader Glencore and his contentious remarks about women employees, also mentioning that Glencore had appointed Tony Hayward as a senior independent director, but noting that "his reputation has been shredded by the Deepwater Horizon disaster". A 2012 text (Lewiston Morning Tribune [Idaho], 27.4.2012) reports that an oil spill in the Yellowstone River has created a need for fish testing. Laboratories, however, are still "backed up processing specimens collected in the BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico". As well as written news reports, the 2010 data set includes a number of television or radio news reports. Even more than reports in newspapers, television news focuses on breaking news. It is therefore unsurprising that while seven of the texts in 2010 were transcripts of television interviews, this dropped to one in each of 2011 and 2012, as the story moves from the immediate explosion to longer-term issues such as compensation.

Financial Reports

In 2010, financial reports account for 20% of texts, and in these the news of BP's first quarter results competes with the ongoing news of the oil spill; 27 April 2011 is again results day, and the first quarter results

become the main story in texts mentioning the BP events, accounting for 40% of items. The spill is mentioned (this is more or less the first anniversary) but in the context of Quarter 1 results. By 2012, only 13% of texts about the BP events fall into the financial reports pages.

Spoken Interviews

Of the six spoken interviews in the full data sample, four are Fair Disclosure interviews in which annual company earnings are discussed in conference calls and are presented in transcript by Nexis. These did not all concern BP solely, but BP was mentioned in all. The other two, both in 2011, are an interview with Michael Greenberger, of the Center for Health and Homeland Security, and a transcript of a speech made by Assistant Attorney General Tony West at the University of Chicago Law School. Both make reference to BP only in passing, in the first case as an instance of a crisis to be dealt with at a national level, and in the second as an example of a large litigation case.

Feature Articles

This media genre appears only twice in the entire data set, and this is in the form of travel features, both, coincidentally, dealing with New Orleans and both written in 2012. Both use the theme of the city's renaissance in the wake of a series of disasters (one shared with the rest of the USA, that is, the financial crisis, and two that were much more localised, that is, Hurricane Katrina and the BP oil spill). One of the items goes even further back in time and scope:

> The nearly 300-year-old city has had to rebound from centuries of disasters including fires, plagues, hurricanes and most recently, the BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. (The New Zealand Herald, 27.4.2012)

One writer uses a personal narrative approach, comparing New Orleans with her home town of Sarasota, and the other uses an impersonal observer approach. In both cases, the tone is largely descriptive, with the point of closure at the end, as is typical of the genre.

Editorial or Opinion Pieces

The texts in this category in the sample are of two main types—editorial/journalistic comment and blog comment. Over the three-year span, the proportion of editorial or opinion pieces increases strongly to 2011 and remains at a similar level in 2012, indicating a shift in focus from reporting to commenting on and evaluating the events. Comment tends to be presented as more impersonal in quality papers, as more personal and emotional in the popular press and often as highly charged in Internet blogs, as two example titles from 2012 exemplify: "Should we kill the politicians before they kill us?" (Phil's Stock World, 27.4.2012) and "'Crucify them': the Obama way" (Right Wing News, 27.4.2012). How commentary is variously constructed as more or less "personal" is a topic for attention in the detailed analysis chapters.

Arts Reviews

The purpose of the arts review genre is to inform the reader about and comment upon particular items of art, fiction and non-fiction literature and so on. This genre does not appear amongst the 2010 texts, and is represented by only one text in 2011, but by 2012 5 of the 31 texts in the data set are of this kind. This is commensurate with the length of time many artworks (in the broadest sense) take to complete, but might also suggest that there is a length of elapsed time deemed appropriate or decent for works of this nature to appear, and also indicates that a process of assimilation may have taken place, that it takes an amount of time for the wider significance of events to be understood and this is necessary for a work of art to have resonance. These texts imply a move of the representation of BP events from being part of the world of "reality" to having an alternative existence in the world of artistic representation. Examples of works referred to in the data are films, books (both fiction and non-fiction) and documentaries.

Letters

Three letters appear in the sample in 2011, with a further one in 2012. These are sent from both those in the public eye (e.g. by the Florida Attorney General), with the purpose of publicising engagement with the crisis, and members of the general public, challenging politicians about their response to the crisis, and in 2012 addressing the continued effect on sealife of the spill.

Business or Market Reports

Business or market reports have in common that they represent events from the sole perspective of their effect on the business world. They can be argued as a genre, in Bhatia's terms, as they have purpose and audience in common, yet stylistically they can be rather different. They can range from somewhat resembling news reports to offering summaries, evaluation and commentary on diverse business-related events. Business reports account for only 1% of the texts in 2010 but increase to 12% and 13% in 2011 and 2012, as writers are able to gain better insight with time into the implications of the BP events for the oil and gas industry as well as for wider business practice. Examples in this data set are a web piece on petrol price rises (Theflyonthewall.com, 27.4.2011), a report on offshore drilling (Greenwire, 27.4.2011) and a report in Campaign on "Building brands through behaviour" (Campaign Middle East, 27.4.2012).

In Summary: The Importance of Genre

I suggested earlier that an understanding of media genres is central to any work which seeks to identify meaningful patterns across a widely varied data set. It was important to understand which of the language features I examined were generally characteristic of the media genre under study, and which were characteristic of writing about crisis events, or indeed

the BP crisis in particular. However, I return to my earlier point that the choice of genre has semiotic meaning in itself. If the BP events are described in a way that is typical of a particular genre, then this is a crucial part of how meaning is made by journalists and received by readers. In this way, the shift of the genres and sub-genres within which the story is located is as important as the individual expressions or structures used to describe the BP events.

Salience of the BP Story

One of the measures of how a story is being represented concerns not just how many media items are written about it, but how much of a given item is directly connected to the story. A reduction in the *number* of stories is indicative of a loss of media interest, and there being less going on in terms of the story. However, a reduction in how big the BP story is *within* a given piece is also of interest, and this is shown in Table 6.3.

In 2010, more than two-thirds of the media items in the sample dealt with the BP spill alone. The majority of the remaining texts are those that deal with financial results, in which BP is only one of the organisations reported on, and TV news programmes, where BP is one story of several. By 2011 just one-third of texts are primarily about the disaster. By 2012, this figure is only about one-fifth, and BP is mentioned only minimally in nearly three-quarters of the texts.

Table 6.3. Proportion of media text dealing directly with BP oil spill 2010–12

		27 April 2010		27 April 2011		27 April 2012	
		No. of texts	%	No. of texts	%	No. of texts	%
% of text relating to	0–25%	37	22	52	55	22	71
BP story	26–50%	12	7	9	10	3	10
	51–75%	4	2	1	1	0	0
	76–100%	116	69	32	34	6	19
Total		**169**	**100**	**94**	**100**	**31**	**100**[a]

[a]Note that low numbers make percentages indicative rather than firm findings

As time goes on, stories that mention the BP events tend to mention it not as a story in itself but as an example that illuminates another phenomenon. Consider the following text from 2012. In a 3029 word blog, the following fragment appears:

> Some of the most profitable of all corrupt activities involve energy. Remember Dick Cheney's secret energy meetings? Those led directly to electricity deregulation scams, corporate welfare for energy producers, fracking, the *BP oil spill*, gas pipeline explosions, high gas prices, faulty nuclear reactors, and an unreliable grid. (Phil's Stock World, 27.4.2012, my emphasis)

Here the BP oil spill is used as an illustration of the results of "corrupt" activities involving energy. This is the only place the BP oil spill is mentioned in the entire piece, and in this way it represents a typical example of the pattern of coverage of the oil spill as time moves on. This pattern of a reducing proportion of coverage within stories may indicate something more than media loss of interest in the BP oil spill. This may be an assimilation of the concept of the BP oil spill into the way we look at the world, where the BP events have become a shorthand or an index of something else, which is jointly understood, and which casts light on yet other social phenomena in a process of unlimited semiosis. This idea is further explored in analysis.

The Contextualisation Stage in Summary

The overview analysis in this chapter indicates a picture of a news story that becomes increasingly a matter of US interest. The genre breakdown shows the story moving from newswires and TV coverage to newspapers, and from the front pages of newspapers to the features, comment and review pages. Meanwhile, other forms of commentary on the events become more important—particularly that in Internet blogs and the business press. From being the major focus of news media items, the BP story becomes largely a "footnote", where it is drawn on as a supporting illustration for the main stories represented.

The contextualisation stage served a number of useful purposes:

1. It provided an overview of the BP story as represented in the selected texts. I was able to establish the kinds of stories which were being written about the events, how they changed and the relative importance of the BP events in the articles in which they were mentioned.
2. It allowed me to trace the movement of genre over the timespan, which I have already suggested is critical for the understanding of the language in the texts. Patterns of change in news genres were reliably established through this quantitative exercise, before being further analysed qualitatively.
3. It suggested a number of areas of interest for analysis which could be further investigated in Stage 2. For example, what role did the story of BP play in other news stories once it was no longer the main topic of coverage?

7

Stage 2: Preliminary Analysis of the BP Texts

The first stage of analysis (contextualisation) served to set the overall data set into context, giving a description of the kinds of texts in the set and the role of BP within them. The second stage (preliminary analysis, or immersion) entailed a close reading of 20 texts in each year, in order to identify features of interest for analysis. I have described my analysis approach as emergent, and this second stage involved a reading and rereading of the texts to generate a longlist and then a shortlist of language features for further investigation. The first task was to read the BP texts repeatedly, questioning the data for significant features and patterns. This process was reflexive—I was cautious not to overburden infrequent features with a weight of significance they did not justify, while remaining open-minded to features I had not expected to find. A close reading of the texts should suggest specific questions that lead to analyses for patterns. I set out below three texts, to show how this process can be used to identify language features that are potentially of interest. To avoid "cherry-picking" significant texts, I show the first text in each data set of 20, as returned by Nexis UK. These texts did not necessarily illustrate all

nine of the features for analysis; rather, I model below the process used in all 60 texts, which resulted in the selection of the final features.

An Example Text from 2010

This text from 2010 (24/7 Wall St, 27.4.2010) is extremely short, at only ten words, including the attribution. It is from an online weblog under the title "Media Digest 4/27/2010 Reuters, WSJ, NYTimes, FT, Bloomberg". The full original text contained 28 entries, of which only one, shown below, relates to the BP oil spill. This single entry constitutes my data item for analysis. As the title of the blog suggests, this is a quick way to alert interested audiences to what the authors deem to be the main stories from respected news sources. Readers can follow up items they wish to learn about in more detail. In the item below, WSJ stands for Wall Street Journal.

WSJ[1]: The[2] BP oil spill[3] could[4] reach land within days[5].

1. General question: writer/audience, who and why? What does this short online piece have in common with longer print news reports, and where does it differ?
2. "The" signals presupposition. What forms does presupposition take?
3. "BP oil spill" indicates a particular naming choice. What naming choices are made and what do they suggest?
4. "Could" is an epistemic modal form. Whose opinion, whose uncertainty? How is modality used?
5. "Within days" is one use of 'facts and figures'. Where are these specific and where (as here) indefinite and why?

This briefest of texts at the beginning of the first data set suggests a number of questions of potential interest to the research, and provides a point of reference for questions of the subsequent texts. I will use the

five questions generated above to illustrate how this initial reading and data interrogation can ultimately be translated into a framework for analysis.

1. General questions. Questions relating to the purpose and structure of the text and comparison with other similar and dissimilar texts relate to the study of genre. Consideration of the genre of texts is critical, as genre entails and explains many features of style and structure I am likely to encounter: genre is therefore adopted as a feature for study.
2. Presupposition in media texts is a potential topic for study. However, it entails the study of a large number of sub-categories (Zare, Abbaspour, and Nia [2012] identify eight categories) and I judge that space does not allow for this level of detail as well as commentary on a wider range of features.
3. Naming choices are potentially interesting in the construction of representations: these are adopted as a feature for study.
4. Modality is likely to be a fruitful area for enquiry, both from the perspective of (un)certainty and (in)ability and as a way of looking at the extent of writer involvement in or distancing from the text: this is adopted as a feature for study.
5. The presentation of empirical facts is a feature of this and other texts. It can be conceptualised as a signal of an "objective" style of writing that in turn is characteristic of the news reporting genre: for this reason facts and figures may be subsumed into the analysis of genres.

I have taken advantage of the brevity of the 2010 text to illustrate in some detail the steps between initial reading and drawing up a final analysis plan. The following texts, for 2011 and 2012, are analysed in less detail, and used mainly to show how the patterns that emerged from the language can suggest a final line of enquiry.

An Example Text from 2011

The 2011 text below (*Journal of Counterterrorism and Homeland Security International*, 27.4.2011) is a transcript of an interview between a representative of the International Association of Counterterrorism and Security Professionals (IACSP) and Michael Greenberger, Director of the Center for Health and Homeland Security. Again, the original full text is longer, but has been reduced for analysis in line with the principles outlined earlir.

This text differs from that of 2010 in that it is no longer describing events but discussing and evaluating them. The BP oil spill is not the

IACSP: Looking back at Katrina, the BP oil spill and other events[1], it does not appear that[2] we[3] are prepared to respond effectively or to recover from natural disasters[4], let alone a major terrorist attack. In your view, is America prepared to withstand a chemical, nuclear or another 9/11 style terrorist attack?

Greenberger: Well, in all candor[5], I don't think we're prepared to withstand a nuclear attack[6]. It would be such a devastating thing that our resources would be overrun. I'm very worried about our ability to[7] withstand a chemical attack. Next to a nuclear attack, chlorine or some other dangerous stored chemical that's released would be very devastating. As you get into emergencies that are not as huge as a large weapon of mass destruction attack, I think the country is much better prepared. If you are talking about 9/11 or a repeat of the anthrax scare, I really think that the infrastructure has gotten better. The public health infrastructure is better. People know what to do. I would say also for a dirty bomb we're better prepared. But anything that involves large parts of the population, I worry about our ability to respond. I don't rule out a weapon of mass destruction, but most of the things we are facing are conventional weapons.[8]

1. This is an interesting list of events. What do Katrina and BP have in common, and what might "other", presumably similar events be? What other lists and groups does BP appear in, and does this change?
2. Epistemic modality—why is this used here and what does it tell us about the speaker?
3. "We"? US or the global population?
4. Is the BP oil spill a "natural disaster"? In what way? How do others perceive it?
6. This is a conversational discourse marker. Is this simply a feature of spoken text, or is the speaker doing Nuclear attack is set up in *contrast* to the BP oil spill (signalled linguistically by "let alone" in the first paragraph). However, does the general discussion of disasters invite *comparison* rather than contrast?
7. Dynamic modality—the role of modality in general, and different types of modality in particular.
8. Greenberger's turn makes use of considerable *repetition*. Again, is this a feature of conversation, or are the repeated parts linked with Greenberger's area of professional interest? What does this passage tell us about the US view of future crises like BP? What is the dominant discourse here?

only topic, but one of many topics of conversation. This text generates a set of questions that are rather more complex than the largely grammatical questions generated by the 2010 text, and may be addressed at the semiotic level of myth and ideology as well as sign and code. Alongside this broadening of interest comes an interrogation of *content* alongside language usage. My questions of this piece have taken on a critical rather than descriptive flavour, and I note that this is something I need to be reflexive about, particularly where I discuss discourses and ideology.

An Example Text from 2012

The first text of the 2012 data set is from the trade journal *Marketing Management* (27.4.2012). Only part of the article is included for analysis, as only part relates to BP. It is part of a multiauthored article on the subject of crisis management. The article is intended to be of general interest to its audience, but its topic is a particular service—a quantitative research product aimed at identifying, and hence more effectively dealing with, the onset of a business crisis. In this sense, the article is also serving as sales promotion.

When Does a Crisis[1] Begin?

In the regular course of business, the increase of familiarity is a good thing. When marketing campaigns are working well, familiarity with the company will grow. We see a crisis begin when the firm's familiarity rises, but this kind of increase in familiarity is the result of the company being in the news. The starting point of a crisis is usually fairly easy to identify, because familiarity will suddenly spike and favorability will drastically[2] decline for reasons outside the normal marketing efforts.[3]

When the Gulf of Mexico platform of BP, the energy company, blew up[2] and the safety valves didn't work,[4] the situation was pretty much[5] guaranteed to become a crisis[6]. Familiarity went up because the burning platform was broadcast immediately around the world; favorability for BP went down when word began to spread that there was likely to be a catastrophic[2] oil leak (see Figure 1[7]).

However, many events that might be thought of as a crisis, such as the multiple Toyota recalls[6], do not actually meet the criteria of one.

1. The authors choose to use the word "crisis" and identify the BP events in terms of business crises. How do writers in other genres name the crisis?
2. Highly affective language. How does this relate to genre, including the purposes of the authors?
3. This first paragraph is scene-setting rather than directly related to BP—there is a decision to be made here on text and co-text.
4. This appears to be a deliberate, almost dismissive over-simplification of the complex situation. What work is this doing, in relation to the article's purpose? Does it tell us anything about views of the events, two years afterwards?
5. "Pretty much" is a modal item, and is also markedly conversational in tone. Is this a generic feature, or does it relate to my comment in note 4?
6. Listing and grouping: is "business crisis" another group to which the events belong (like "natural disasters" above)? BP meets the criteria of a 'crisis' by the authors' very specific definition, but Toyota (last paragraph) does not. As in 2011, both comparison and contrast are in play.
7. Reference to supporting text is a form of intertextuality. This instance is routine, but intertexts such as press releases are crucial to representation.

As in the 2011 text, the BP events are being used here to illustrate the phenomenon "business crises", which in this article have a very specific definition. Once again, the use of a categorisation for different purposes is suggested by the data as an area for further exploration. The descriptor "crisis" is surely significant here and gives further support for an analysis of the feature "naming choices". The use of modal items such as "pretty much" is again of interest, in its interrelated functions of signalling degrees of "truth" and confidence, and doing interpersonal work. Intensified lexical choices such as "drastically" and "catastrophic" indicate that looking at affect and appraisal in language as well as modality might be productive.

Features Chosen for Analysis

The three sections above represent this preliminary engagement with the data as a set of questions suggested by the language of each of the texts. The process modelled here was repeated in the case of all 20 texts in each data set. The process now became interactive and recursive. The long-list of questions generated was followed by preliminary analysis, some of which proved fruitful, and some less so. Some of the features noted turned out to be relatively rare. Others did not appear to generate a productive analysis. For example, a review of sentences that pivoted on the conjunction "as" (for example, in the headline "BP profits soar as oil giant accelerates spill clean-up" (The Evening Standard [London], 27.4.2010)) showed that the construction was quite common, but otherwise uninteresting. Some of the features which were identified as significant were well-identified and researched, for example, the grammatical analysis of modality. Some appeared to be less standard, for example, my particular understanding of listing and categorisation in this data, which required additional identification and description work.

Through this process of identification and preliminary analysis, I drew up a list of nine features for particular investigation for this set of texts, and these were:

1. Naming of events.
2. Naming of people.
3. Categorisation.
4. Genre.
5. Intertextuality.
6. Modality.
7. Metonym.
8. Metaphor.
9. Discourses.

The number nine is not significant and the list is not exhaustive. Three data sets offering a total of 60 texts provide a rich source of linguistic data with potential for analysis against a wide range of dimensions. Five, ten or twenty features might have been equally appropriate for investigation, depending on the nature of the data set and the purpose of the research
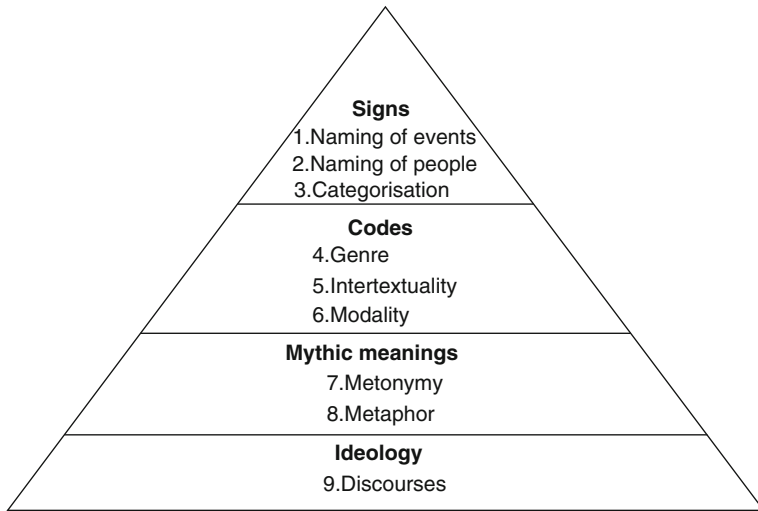
Fig. 7.1   Nine linguistic features for analysis

work. Nevertheless, the final nine features were the ones that not only seemed to be pertinent to an understanding of how the BP events were represented linguistically in the media but also showed movement and development across the data.

The term "features" is a convenient shorthand; in fact, the linguistic areas suggested as important are disparate including grammatical systems such as modality; rhetorical usages such as metaphor; pragmatic and semantic processes such as naming and categorisation; and supra-textual concerns such as genre, discourses and intertextuality. It is at this point in the analysis process that the chosen features could be reconnected with Barthes' framework of semiotic levels. Those features that operated at the level of a word or word group (such as the naming of events) were considered to be a single "sign", in the sense of a building block for meaning. Those features that represented systems or codes were considered to be at the level of "code"; for example, the modality system, genre and intertextuality. At the level of "myth" were two rhetorical tropes—metonymy and metaphor—that serve to add additional connotative meaning to denotative representation. Finally, an analysis of discourses sought to uncover the ideological motivation of some of the language choices at the other semiotic levels. Figure 7.1 shows how the selected features for

the BP data relate to the framework of Barthes' semiotic levels first introduced in Chap. 3.

Of these nine feature types, some would probably be common to most linguistic studies of this kind—for example, an analysis of social actors, genre, intertextuality and discourses is likely to be relevant to most data. Other features such as categorisation or modality might be more relevant to some data than to others.

The Immersion Stage in Summary

This second immersion stage served two main purposes:

1. Gaining familiarity with the data. Reading and rereading the data gave an invaluable sense of the texts which, while not pre-empting the findings from the depth analysis, suggested connections and hypotheses relating *across* texts and data sets as well as *within* individual text items.
2. The output of Stage 2 was a defined set of discursive features for study, which were suggested by the data themselves, rather than predetermined.

8

Stage 3: A Depth Analysis at the Level of the Sign

The next stage of the research was the depth analysis of the nine selected features. The first task at this stage was to determine an analysis process for each of the features that would allow me to produce a description and understanding of patterns of language over the timespan of the data sets. Patterns within and across media texts can be investigated by looking at features in three ways: the feature in context in a particular year, patterns of the feature across three years and commonalities across all nine features in a single year. In order to identify these patterns, the following questions are relevant:

- How can I identify the feature?
- How frequent or significant is the language feature within the data sets?
- What form does it take, and what function is it performing in context?
- Does its *frequency*, *form* or *function* change across the data sets over time? How?

Therefore, for each feature I needed a workable definition and a means of investigating frequency over time. In addition, I needed to be sensitive to

the functions of the features—what work was the feature doing in context, and did this change? With a set of very disparate features for BP, analysis methods ranged from the very straightforward to the rather complex.

To illustrate the approach with the BP data, for each of the features selected for study I outline the definition I used and my plan for investigating frequency and function. This is followed by an indicative overview of my findings for that feature from the BP data. The definitions and analysis approaches are not necessarily exhaustive, and alternatives could have been suggested. The critical issue is that they were applied consistently, across all the texts in the data sets and all the time periods. In this way, internally consistent patterns could be identified. From this point onwards, my analysis is based on the reduced set of 20 texts for each year of the data, so any findings such as counts of features are based on like-for-like comparisons across the same number of texts.

The first level of the semiotic framework is that of the sign, and three of my nine identified features belonged at this level: naming of events, naming of people and categorisation.

Feature 1: Naming of Events

Definition and Analysis Method

Analysing the feature "naming of events" was relatively straightforward. My concern with this linguistic feature was to identify and discuss the different ways in which writers refer to the events of the BP Deepwater Horizon explosion and oil spill. The task was to identify the expressions within the texts that refer to these events. In some cases these were single nouns, and in other cases a noun phrase including determiners, adjectives and prepositional phrases. This raised the question of how much of an expression to count as a naming choice. My procedure was to count the *whole noun group without the determiner*, that is, the noun head and any accompanying adjectives and adverbials. The following is an example of a naming choice:

> British energy giant BP said Tuesday that first-quarter profits rocketed on higher oil prices but admitted that the news was overshadowed by *last*

week's tragic accident at a rig in the Gulf of Mexico. (Agence France Presse, 27.4.2010, my emphasis)

Here I counted the noun head "accident", the adjective "tragic" and prepositional phrases of time or place "last week" and "in the Gulf of Mexico". I carried out an analysis of the length of naming phrases by calculating the average number of words in the naming expressions within each data set. Once I had a set of naming choices for each year, I was further able to analyse them by whether they were generally neutral or generally negative in tone. In the first example above, while I would consider the term "accident" to be a neutral choice on its own, the presence of the adjective "tragic" would suggest a negative shading.

Findings from the BP Data

Using this definition and analysis approach, the data were analysed in 20 texts from each year. The results across the three years—summarised in Table 8.1—showed a number of significant features.

The number of times the events are named at all drops from 89 in 20 texts in 2010 to 41 in 20 texts in 2012. By 2012, the BP story has become part of a bigger picture, and is often mentioned only once per news item. The three most mentioned descriptors (excluding "spill") are consistently "oil spill", "disaster" and "explosion". In 2010, these terms accounted for 38 of the 89 terms used (43 %). By 2012, they accounted for 29 of the 41 terms used (71 %), suggesting an ever closer alignment within the media concerning how the events should be named. The average length of the nominal group

Table 8.1 Analysis of naming terms for the BP Deepwater Horizon events

	2010		2011		2012	
	Number of naming terms (per 000 words)	%	Number of naming terms (per 000 words)	%	Number of naming terms (per 000 words)	%
Neutral	73 (8.0)	82	39 (5.6)	60	23 (3.2)	56
Negative	16 (1.8)	18	26 (3.7)	40	18 (2.5)	44
Total	89 (9.8)	100	65 (9.3)	100	41 (5.8)	100

increased from 2.2 words in 2010 to 3.2 words in 2012, as the noun head is accompanied by a greater number of adjectives and adverbials. This type of density in noun groups is typical of journalistic prose where a lengthy noun group concentrates a considerable amount of information in a small space. What is important about these dense nominal groups is that they are *selective*: they organise and categorise the events in a particular way, which includes certain features or evaluations and excludes others.

Typical of 2010 are names such as:

"tragic incident"
"oil rig spill"
"potential environmental disaster"

By 2012, naming choices have become longer and more descriptive:

"the BP Deepwater Horizon nightmare in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010"
"the US Gulf of Mexico oil spill disaster in 2010"
"the 2010 BP Macondo rig disaster"
"the BP Deepwater Horizon oil disaster"

The qualifying adjectives and adverbials alongside the noun head are commonly *temporal* and *spatial*, but the nouns are often highly *evaluative*. Naming terms used in 2012 are even more likely to be negative (by proportion) than they are in 2011, and this follows a pattern from 2010. "Disaster" is now as commonly used as "oil spill", increasing the number of negative references that together now account for 44 % of mentions.

In Summary

Over the three-year period, naming terms:

- Are drawn from a smaller pool of terms, with the consensus clustering around "oil spill" and "disaster".
- Increase in terms of number of words used in the descriptor. This is judged to be largely due to journalistic convention (the greater the distance from the events in time, the greater the need for specific

identification). However, importantly, an increase in the length of the naming term does not entail an increase in the specificity or the accuracy of the overall description of events. Rather, these longer terms *replace* detailed descriptions, thereby *reducing* depth and accuracy and offering a simplified depiction of the events.

- Are increasingly likely to be negative in tone. This finding should be read in conjunction with the finding on modality, which suggests an increasing level of certainty about the nature of events and how we are to understand them.

The clustering around negative descriptors is unsurprising in itself, given the serious nature of the explosion and oil spill, and the media here acknowledge rather than in any sense downplay that seriousness. The question remains of how this negative naming of the events by the media is positioned: whether these negative shorthand terms are contextualised to suggest that events such as Deepwater Horizon are either regrettable but inevitable or aberrant and preventable. The regular use by the media of certain shared terms, however negatively shaded, can serve to familiarise and compartmentalise deviant phenomena such as crises, as much as mark them out as shocking.

Feature 2: Naming of People

Definition and Analysis Method

As in the case of the naming of events, an analysis of the naming of people involved identifying mentions of human participants in the texts, counting them and looking at the types of descriptor involved. Participants were either individuals or groups of people. They were either specifically named (e.g. "Alison Reed") or referred to by an indefinite noun, a title or a group name (e.g. "a young man", "company officials", "fishermen"). However, I omitted personal pronouns (e.g. "she", "they") from the analysis. Multiple descriptors were sometimes used, for example, "Committee chairman and TDC member Marty McDaniel". Although the great majority of participants were real, I also included in my analysis people who were fictional, such as book characters. In the same spirit, I included in analysis people and groups who were hypothetical and representative rather than specific,

Table 8.2 Social actors in 2010–12 BP texts

	2010	%	2011	%	2012	%
BP staff	44	29	12	10	4	2
US agencies	37	24	10	9	10	6
Universities and private agencies	22	14	4	3	1	1
Workers, public, local businesspeople	17	11	13	11	32	34
BP management	14	9	23	20	2	1
Politics	9	6	8	7	33	19
Business and media—comment	3	2	32	27	19	11
Finance	3	2	7	6	1	1
Lawyers	1	1	2	2	1	1
Art-related (writers, artists and fictional characters)	0	0	3	3	42	24
Others	3	2	3	3	3	2
Total including repeated mentions	153	100	117	100	148	100
Total per 1000 words	16.8		16.7		20.8	
Total excluding repeated mentions	61		59		89	

for example, "your grandkids" in the expression "What are you going to say to your grandkids when they say …", or "designated managers" who would be dealing with a hypothetical crisis.

Having gathered all instances of human actors, I looked for logical groupings, for example, "BP employees" at each of executive and staff levels, representatives of agencies and so on. From this analysis I was able to investigate the salience of different groups to the story, and how this changed over time. I was able to look at the proportion of named and unnamed participants, and what groups each belonged to: and for both named and unnamed people, I could see what descriptors were used to define them. I was able to look at whether participants were real, fictional or hypothetical and whether this changed over time. Finally I could identify movements in participants' proximity to the BP story, looking at how closely related the people mentioned in the news texts were to the actual Deepwater Horizon events, and whether and how this changed over the three years.

Findings from the BP Data

In 2010 and 2011, the number of actors mentioned is nearly 17 per 000 words. By 2012 there is an increase to about 21 per 1000 words. Put simply, more people are being drawn into the BP story, or rather the BP

story is being widened to include more people. The proportions of types of social actor are also considerably changed, as Table 8.2 shows, with some types increasing and others disappearing from the story.

The largest groups of people mentioned in 2010 are (1) BP staff (2) US agencies and (3) universities and private agencies. By 2012, the three largest groups of people, accounting for three-quarters of actors, are (1) members of the public and the community (2) writers, other artists and fictional characters and (3) those in politics. This represents a considerable shift in the cast of stakeholders from both 2010 and 2011 to 2012. By 2012, mentions of BP management and staff are almost completely absent. Where the name of Tony Hayward does appear, it is either as the neutral but familiar "ex-boss of BP" (Campaign Middle East, 27.4.2012) or the evaluative "BP's hapless chief executive, Tony Hayward" (The New York Times, 27.4.2012). The one named BP employee (Kurt Mix) is mentioned in the context of his arrest for deleting electronic evidence in relation to the disaster. Those mentioned in the areas of business and media comment are still evident, but these are now secondary to those mentioned in an artistic context.

Members of the public are increasingly mentioned in broad groups—for example, "thousands of people", "Americans", "the public", "consumers"—and are ever further away from the events, for example, people who live in a town (not near the Gulf) whose work situation has been affected by the Gulf oil spill, or the brother- and sister-in-law of the journalist visiting New Orleans to report on the state of the town after recent disasters. Similarly, politicians, who have an increased presence in the 2012 texts, are less closely connected to events than is the case in 2010. At that time, key figures include, for example, the Chair of the Energy committee, and Governors of the Gulf States. By 2012, they include figures much further away from events, for example, George W. Bush, UK Chancellor George Osborne and President Vladimir Putin. This is another indication of the shift of the representation of the crisis from being something highly situated and local, to something representative and global (even though we know that newspaper coverage is located increasingly in the USA). The considerable proliferation of people mentioned is shown in the analysis which excludes repeated instances. This indicates that 89 unique people or groups are mentioned out of 148 total participant-mentions—a higher proportion than in previous years, where the same people tend to be cited repeatedly.

As indicated in the overview of text genres, a significant change in 2012 is the emergence of texts with a connection with fiction and non-fiction writing, art and music. This brings with it a new cast of characters whose part in the BP story is extremely diverse:

> [Review of a film based on a *Margaret Atwood* book] Also thrown into the mix are *Conrad Black*, the disgraced media mogul who went to prison for mail fraud, *a tattooed Canadian man* serving time for robbery and *abused migrant tomato pickers in Florida*. All are subjects worthy of discussion, but tackling them in one film disrupts the movie's momentum and short-changes *viewers*. *Baichwal* could have devoted a single film to just BP's disgraceful behavior. (The New York Post, 27.4.2012, my emphasis)
>
> [New Orleans' recovery from Hurricane Katrina, the financial crisis and the BP oil spill] Fast-forward to April 14, 2012. There were no *musicians* enlivening the concourse as I arrived this time, but there would be *hundreds of them* down along the sunny riverfront, where an estimated *half-million people* make a pilgrimage each year to the French Quarter Festival. (Sarasota Herald Tribune [Florida], 27.4.2012, my emphasis)

The references to written and performed art generally entail the BP events being placed within a wider context, with no restriction on participants. By 2012, readers and viewers are expected to understand what the events might represent, or what social meaning they have, even as further light is shed upon them through their juxtaposition with other social phenomena. A number of the people included in the "Art" category are not real but fictional.

In Summary

The pattern of participants in the texts over the years is one of increasing fragmentation and dispersal. More and more people are mentioned in connection with the BP story, and there are more unique mentions rather than repeated individuals, yet they have weaker and more distant connections with the BP crisis. BP employees and the victims of the explosion are virtually absent by 2012.

Feature 3: Categorisation

Definition and Analysis Method

The observation from my preliminary analysis which suggested categorisation as a feature for study was that the BP oil spill is included in groups and compared and contrasted with other entities both like and apparently unlike itself.

Examination of the data indicated that this categorisation process appears in a number of interrelated forms:

1. *Comparisons*

Events were referred to in constructions such as "one of …", "the biggest …" and so on. Comparing crisis events explicitly and implicitly with other similar events is one form of categorisation common in media representation, and is intended to help the reader make sense of the current situation.

2. *Lists of entities*

A number of entities were listed, for example, "Katrina, the BP oil spill and other events", and the BP crisis was on the list.

3. *Using the events as an index of something else*

This indexical process can be recognised where the events were a "shorthand" for something else. This analysis linked with naming choices for the events, where there began to be a socially agreed interpretation of what names for the events *stood for.* In this way, the BP events and the indexed phenomenon create a category together. Sometimes this process was realised through one of the other practices mentioned here, such as comparison or listing:

Whether you are the leader of one of the Arab Spring countries, the ex-boss of BP, or a fashion designer prone to drunken, racist out-bursts—if you don't behave in the right way, people will remove you (Campaign Middle East, 27.4.2012)

This list refers to an element of the BP story as an exemplar of, or "standing for", unacceptable behaviour.

4. *Contrasts and absences: What the events are* not

Sometimes the events were categorised with an emphasis on what they were *unlike* rather than what they were *like.* In the 2010 data, the expression "We've never seen anything like this magnitude" (Associated Press Financial Wire, 27.4.2010) did not imply that nothing as big as this has ever happened anywhere, but that this was an exceptional event amongst the group "oil spills" or "man-made environmental disasters". Such exclusions, omissions and redefinition of categories were worthy of examination.

Findings from the BP Data

Instances of what I call here "categorisation" are rare in the 2010 data set, and only six are identified in the 20 texts:

We've never seen anything like this magnitude (Associated Press Financial Wire, 27.4.2010)

We've never seen anything like this magnitude (BreakingNews.ie, 27.4.2010)

We've never seen anything like this magnitude (Trend Daily News (Azerbaijan), 27.4.2010a, 27.4.2010b)

If we don't secure this well, this could be one of the most significant oil spills in US history (Carleton Place (Canada), 27.4.2010)

If the missing workers died, it would be the deadliest US offshore rig explosion since 1968 (TendersInfo, 27.4.2010)

In 1990, a similar bid to change the rules failed, in part because it followed the Exxon Valdez spill. Now observers think the Gulf of Mexico accident could do much the same. (The Globe and Mail (Canada), 27.4.2010)

Three of these instances are identical, where the words of the same expert source have been quoted. The implication of "never seen anything like this magnitude" is that the BP events at this point are so far *not* one of a group, and I mention in describing my analysis approach that referring to what phenomena *are not* is one way of indicating what they *might be*. In the fourth and fifth examples above, the use of the conditional ("If … this could be"; "If … it would be") signals uncertainty and as yet unrealised potential. In the sixth example, the comparison with the Exxon Valdez spill is highly mitigated ("observers think … much the same"). So in 2010, what categorisation exists is expressed in negative terms, realised in the conditional, or highly mitigated. At this point, writers are not attempting or only cautiously attempting to define what the events are, and where they "fit" into already processed understanding.

By 2011, instances of categorisation increased to 17 in 20 texts, indicating a greatly increased presence for this language feature. Categorising expressions in 2011 locate the Deepwater Horizon events within a number of different groups. These include the perhaps surprising group of *natural disasters* (given that the explosion and oil spill were not naturally occurring events):

> Looking back at Katrina, the BP oil spill and other events, it does not appear that we are prepared to respond effectively or to recover from natural disasters, let alone a major terrorist attack. (Journal of Counterterrorism and Homeland Security International, 27.4.2011)

Secondly, other texts place the events alongside *business crises*, that is, events that disrupt the normal run of business, and are to be dealt with and normalised:

> Recently companies such as Toyota, BP, Johnson & Johnson and Hewlett Packard have experienced crises that distracted management, cost millions of dollars in time and resources, reduced shareholder value and resulted in lawsuits that will take years to resolve. (Executive Counsel, 27.4.2011)

Thirdly, the 2010 oil spill is positioned as just one of a number of *BP problems*, where news, finance and business reports in the 2011 data indicate that the oil spill is not the only area of BP concern. As 27 April 2011 is another financial results day, there is media interest in the *part*

Deepwater Horizon is playing in the general business performance of the company. The following is an example of a synchronic list, where a set of events contribute to a state at a point in time:

> A still-rising bill for the Gulf of Mexico disaster, lower production after selling off assets to help pay for it and a hit from the Budget's tax grab on North Sea oil profits saw BP's profits fall 2 % in the first three months of the year. (The Evening Standard [London], 27.4.2011)

An example of diachronic categorisation is the listing of BP accidents and disasters, of which Deepwater Horizon is the most recent:

> In 2005, fifteen workers were killed when BP's Texas City Refinery exploded. In 2006, corroded pipes owned by BP led to an oil spill in Alaska. Now, in 2010, eleven men drilling for BP were killed in the blowout of the Macondo well in the Gulf of Mexico. (M2 PressWIRE, 27.4.2011)

The majority of the lists and groups unsurprisingly set the events into categories of negative experience, but there is one quite interesting exception. This is taken from a press release by BP of 25 April, acknowledged openly in the text "According to a release". The writing positions the BP events more neutrally than is typical for this year's data set:

> ... Scientific understanding of oil spill and dispersant impacts on ocean and coastal systems in the Gulf region, as well as other ocean and coastal systems, and how these systems respond to oil and gas inputs, especially accidental inputs. (Wireless News, 27.4.2011)

The language is rather opaque—in fact it is difficult to see that the research referred to is a direct result of the 2010 Deepwater Horizon events, although these are referred to indirectly twice as "oil spill and dispersant impacts" and "oil and gas inputs, especially accidental inputs". Oblique forms of reference recur throughout the full text. The phrase "scientific understanding" serves to position the research as academic and objective, and the listing of the Gulf region alongside *other* ocean and coastal

systems implies that the research is being carried out for the benefit of the global community. Similarly "oil and gas inputs" generalises (makes vague) the object of the research. The reference to "accidental" inputs (unspecified) again has a role in distancing blame and responsibility. (In making this observation, I do not imply that the 2010 blowout was in any way deliberate, rather that the word "accident" implies unavoidable chance rather than failures of responsibility.)

The bulk of categorisation in 2011, then, positions the BP events alongside other business crises, natural crises, BP's 2011 difficulties and opportunities to gain scientific knowledge for the future. These are expected and conventional groupings, given the topic. This process has started to construct the events as an *exemplar* of something, often something outside itself, for example, something to be dealt with by the International Association of Counterterrorism and Security Professionals (IACSP). Thus categorisation works in a metonymic way, with the part that is the reference to BP serving to represent a whole that is a more graspable type of phenomenon. We begin to see the process of myth-making described by Barthes in action—that the signified has become in turn a signifier of something else. These events are no longer unique, no longer distinctive—media confidence in representation has moved on from the 2010 phrasing "We've never seen anything like this magnitude" to positioning the events alongside other phenomena that it *is* suggested to resemble. The detail about the events that characterised the 2010 reports is no longer a feature; the events are referred to in a shorthand through selected naming practices (analysed earlier), and in lists, comparisons and groupings that indicate to the reader how he/she is expected to understand and locate this particular phenomenon.

In 2012, categorisation remains a significant feature of media writing, with 18 instances appearing across the 20 texts. The categories into which the BP events are placed include some that are similar to those in 2011— what I have called "expected groupings" such as *BP business problems*:

> BP has had a torrid time of late dealing with the costly repercussions of the Deepwater Horizon disaster and the failure of its Russian Arctic venture. (CompaniesandMarkets.com, 27.4.2012)

Another expected group is the oil spill as the representation of the category "disaster". In the fragment below, these are disasters that have affected the city of New Orleans:

> After the storms, New Orleans endured the 2008 economic crash and the BP oil spill. (Sarasota Herald Tribune [Florida], 27.4.2012)

However, a particular characteristic of categorisation emerges in the 2012 data. There is an increasing unexpectedness and creativity of the groupings and listings. In 2012, the BP crisis is being made an exemplar of an increasingly *disparate* set of social phenomena. The following examples are illustrative:

> Whether you are the leader of one of the Arab Spring countries, the ex-boss of BP, or a fashion designer prone to drunken, racist outbursts—if you don't behave in the right way, people will remove you, and the weapon they will use is social media. (Campaign Middle East, 27.4.2012)
>
> This [the complex issue of debt, both moral and financial] includes BP's failure to deal with its environmental transgressions, and the years-long dispute between two poor rural clans that keeps the members of one family virtual prisoners in their own home. (The New York Post, 27.4.2012)

The first example in particular is illustrative of the changes in some of the instances of categorisation in 2012. The category in this case is individuals who "don't behave in the right way", and so is broad and only indirectly related to the BP oil spill. To understand the point being made by the writer, in this case a businessperson writing in the advertising trade journal "Campaign", the reader needs to have knowledge of a range of unconnected events in the news. To relate to the thought, the reader needs to share a perspective that recognises these three examples as instances of bad behaviour. So the social and cultural resources the reader needs to bring to an understanding of the first example above are far greater than those needed in previous years at an earlier stage of the representation process. This later type of categorisation demonstrates a form of meaning-making that depends less on ostensibly objective, factual representation than on construction within a wider, culturally agreed and evaluative context.

In Summary

By 2012, the positioning of BP events within groups can be either expected or unexpected, and can serve as an exemplar for a number of phenomena, in diverse arguments. The movement from 2010 to 2011 to 2012 is that from a low level of tentative, provisional categorisation, through a relation with oil spills, crises and BP problems to finally a positioning with unrelated events, the world's ills and general political issues.

Part of the reason for a new creativity in categorisation is that the events are being categorised within the context of evaluative or persuasive rather than descriptive texts. Texts such as editorial and opinion pieces use language that is high in affect, with the result that the process of categorisation appears to be less a listing of phenomena, as in 2011, and more an accumulation of evidence within an (often impassioned) argument. Taking the examples above, in the first fragment the phrases "drunken racist outbursts", "behave in the right way", "weapon they will use", all express judgement, as does "failure" in the second text.

9

Stage 3: A Depth Analysis at the Level of the Code

Chapter 8 discussed three language features at the semiotic level of the sign. The depth analysis continues with a further three features which are situated at the level of the code: genre, intertextuality and the system of modality.

Feature 4: Genre

Definition and Analysis Method

I have considered issues of genre in two places in my analysis. I outlined at the contextualisation stage those genres which were represented in the data, and indicated the frequency and relative importance of the genres within the data sets, and how these changed over three years. In order to do this, I offered a definition and a categorisation of news media genres, found in Fig. 6.1, and these remained the basis for my consideration of genre at this depth analysis stage. The findings which follow focus on the extent to which typical genre characteristics were evident in my data, and

how the dominant genres in each data set influence the ways we understand the crisis representation.

Findings from the BP Data

In 2010 texts are primarily news reports and financial reports. By 2012 the text genre types are much more varied, and include news reports, editorial pieces, market reports and arts reviews. This change can be summed up as both a widening of coverage in terms of genre and a shift from primarily descriptive genres towards more evaluative genres. I outline some key findings from the data for the following genres:

1. News reports.
2. Financial reports.
3. Features.
4. Editorials or opinion pieces.
5. Arts reviews.
6. Business or marketing reports.

Genre 1: News Reports

In Chap. 1, I drew upon Fulton, Huisman, Murphet, and Dunn's (2005: 233) characterisation of the genre news reports as exhibiting a number of language features, including:

1. A high proportion of empirical information.
2. Third-person narration where the narrative voice is externalised and elided.
3. Lack of modality, preponderance of declarative verbs indicating certainty.
4. Use of the inverted pyramid structure.

These typical generic features are largely present in the 2010 BP news reports.

Many of the texts contain a significant use of empirical information, including the detailed naming of people and clear specificity of time and place. At this point in the BP events, one week after the explosion, the news media is still aiming to answer the canonical questions of news reporting: "who, what, when, where and why?" The following text extract is typical in respect of its focus on "the facts":

> The oil is now about *20 miles (32 kilometres)* off the coast of *Venice, Louisiana*, the closest it's been to land. But it's still not expected to reach the coast *before Friday*, if at all.
>
> BP, which was leasing the Deepwater Horizon, said it will begin drilling *by Thursday* as part of a *$100 million* effort to take the pressure off the well, which is spewing *42,000 gallons (159,000 litres)* of crude oil *a day*.
>
> *Company spokesman Robert Wine* said it will take *up to three months* to drill a relief well from another rig *recently* brought to the site where the Deepwater Horizon sank after the blast. Most of the *126* workers on board escaped; *11* are missing and presumed dead. No cause has been determined. (Carleton Place [Canada], 27.4.2010, my emphasis)

This extract makes use of an accumulation of facts and figures including distances, volumes, temporal expressions, names and titles and employee numbers. In some respects, there is a high degree of specificity. The conversions of miles to kilometres and gallons to litres connote an attention to detail, and signal an orientation towards both national (in this case, Canadian) and international readers. The source of information ("Company spokesman Robert Wine") is clearly named and titled, and the numbers of missing and surviving employees are given exactly. In support of this objective presentation, the future tense declarative mood is mainly used, indicating firmness of intent. For example, in paragraph 2: "BP…said *it will begin* drilling" and in paragraph 3, "Robert Wine said *it will take* up to three months".

Nevertheless, there is a degree of mitigation in the presentation of facts. Distances are approximate ("about" 20 miles in paragraph 1) and temporal expressions are vague ("before Friday, if at all", "by Thursday", "up to three months", "recently"). This can be plausibly explained by the fact that at this stage in the development of the crisis, information was limited or absent, but I would also suggest that a degree of imprecision

can support rather than undermine the representation of an objective reality. Not only does the reader not need to know the exact number of gallons of crude oil being lost by the well, but a figure of, say, 42,367 gallons would invite incredulity and challenge. In fact, the figure of 42,000 gallons, presented with an unmitigated declarative ("*is* spewing"), was far from a generally agreed figure, being at the lowest end of BP's declared estimate and less than a tenth of BP's internal estimates (Bergin, 2011: 171).

Fulton et al.'s reference to the elision of the authorial voice is manifest in a number of forms in the data. Attributed speech is one way of showing that any opinion and judgement within the piece are not the writer's own and individuals and institutions quoted are usually presented as having a warrant to speak. In 2010, the warrant is either (1) expert status, often technical or environmental, or (2) eyewitness status, as shown in the following data extracts:

1. "That system has been deployed in shallower water, but it has never been deployed at 5000 feet of water, so we have to be careful," he [Doug Suttles, chief operating officer of BP Exploration and Production] said. (BreakingNews.ie, 27.4.2010)
2. "We can only hope that they can make that sucker stop very soon," said Wilton "Tony" Sturges, a retired Florida State University oceanographer. The winds that would push the spill toward Tampa Bay's beaches do not normally start until midsummer, he noted. (St. Petersburg Times [Florida], 27.4.2010)

Both illustrations are examples of personal opinion, in both cases using modal auxiliaries to signal uncertainty—"we *have to be* careful" and "we *can* only hope"—which in this genre is typically expressed through speakers other than the journalist, while the journalist usually uses declaratives, and is sparing with modal expressions.

The inverted pyramid in Western news reporting is a key marker of the "objective" style, as it is interpreted primarily as emphasising the factual nature of the story, rather than offering evaluations or telling personal stories. This structure is recognisable where key facts are presented in summary first, followed by detail later. In this way, the point of closure

comes at the beginning of the piece, rather than at the end (as is generally the case in a narrative structure). This structure is evident in many of the texts, for example:

> BP revealed a 135 % rise in first-quarter profit to $5.6 billion (£3.64 billion) today as the oil giant announced it is accelerating its clean-up of the Gulf of Mexico oil spill. (The Evening Standard [London], 27.4.2010)

This introductory section flags up the two key topics to be explored in the subsequent article; firstly, the BP first quarter results, with a dense summary of the key points (fact of increase, size of increase, size of profit) and, secondly, the oil spill (new news on the oil spill, acceleration of clean-up efforts).

There is an interesting exception to this typical inverted pyramid structure in the 2010 texts. In the following text (Associated Press Financial Wire, 27.4.2010), there is an example of a *narrative* structure. It is possible that this strategy was used because the reporting organisation had an exclusive interview with a direct participant in the events, a cook on the rig who was one of the survivors, and this was felt significant enough to warrant an atypical approach. Unlike the inverted pyramid structure, narratives are characterised by a sequential structure, and by choices in lexis, personal reference and evaluative elements that serve the purpose of engagement and entertainment rather than that of information and description. The following extract follows in written form Labov's (Labov & Waletzky, 1967) spoken narrative structure of abstract, orientation, complicating action, evaluation and resolution, and thus gives the impression of recounting the story as it was told to the journalist.

Cook on La. oil rig that exploded recalls escape [headline]	ABSTRACT
Oleander Benton, a cook on an oil rig that exploded off the Louisiana coast, was sitting at a laundry room table with a friend when the lights went out.	ORIENTATION
Then, there was the blast.	COMPLICATING ACTION
The Deepwater Horizon platform shuddered, debris fell from the ceiling and Benton hit the floor, as she had been trained to do. She scrambled through hallways littered with rubble, following a man in a white T-shirt.	
"I could not see anything but that man. He just kept	

on saying 'Come this way, come that way.' It was like he was coaching me to my lifeboat, because I couldn't see," she said.	EVALUATION
She made it across the sweltering, mud-caked deck to a lifeboat one of 115 people to safely escape the platform after the explosion a week ago.	RESOLUTION

The personal story presented above forms only part of the report. After these paragraphs, the journalist reverts to a more typical news structure with the following statement:

> Benton, 52, recalled her tale as crews used a remote sub to try to shut off an underwater oil well that's gushing 42,000 gallons a day from the site of the wrecked drilling platform.

This extract above marks the transition between the narrative section and the more typical news report section, where facts and figures ("52", "42,000 gallons a day") work to portray an objective reality. Thus the narrative section is embedded within a more typical news report structure and language features. Fulton et al. (2005: 146) suggest that the narrative style, when found within or alongside news reports, may have a specific function—that of showcasing the objective style as a contrast:

> A narrative model also allows more "attitude" to be expressed: evaluations of behaviour and outcomes are coded into the narrative structure. Using the narrative model for some items therefore can have the effect of positioning the information model as objective and neutral by comparison.

In the same way as the tentativeness noted in the presentation of facts and figures, small shifts away from expected patterns of "objective" style or structure can support rather than undermine the representation of objectivity.

By 2011, news reports do not all primarily focus on the BP Deepwater Horizon events in the way that the 2010 news report texts did. Fewer of the texts in 2011 offer "new news" on Deepwater Horizon and its aftermath, and these include "BP expects to resume Gulf drilling this year" (The Associated Press, 27.4.2011), "Long legal battle ahead over

Macondo" (EI Finance, 27.4.2011) and "GRI research board announces request for proposals for BP's $500 million Gulf of Mexico research initiative" (ENP Newswire, 27.4.2011). The rest of the news reports refer to the BP events only in passing. "Unemployment falls in 80 pct. of large cities" (The Associated Press, 27.4.2011) is a good news story about the recovery of the economy, but points out that seven of the ten cities with the largest increases in unemployment are in the area most affected by the BP oil spill. Another text, "Rubio: National debt can no longer be ignored" (States News Service, 27.4.2011), reports on a speech made by a Florida senator that includes comments on compensation claims against BP for the effects of the oil spill. In these cases the proportion of each story relating to BP is small, and these texts show how the BP story relates to phenomena that are outside the events themselves.

By 2012, news reports still represent 42 % of texts; however, as was the case in 2011, the BP story is not the focus for the majority of these. An oil spill in Yellowstone (Lewiston Morning Tribune [Idaho], 27.4.2012) has given rise to a need for fish testing; however, specialist laboratories for this work are still backed up with work from the Deepwater Horizon oil spill. In two reports, Congressman Frank Pallone makes a statement on seismic testing in the Atlantic Ocean, which makes reference to the BP oil spill, and Interior Secretary Ken Salazar defends the Obama administration's record on energy. However, two years on from the spill, there are two new stories that directly relate to the BP spill: one is the arrest of a BP engineer in connection with the spill and the other concerns challenges to the administration of the compensation payments made by BP to individuals and organisations after the spill.

Genre 2: Financial Reports

Like news reports, financial reports have the function of presenting a great deal of factual information in limited space. They typically draw on commentary from industry experts (those with a warrant to speak) although not from members of the public. They are unlike news reports in two main respects: firstly, that they tend to be addressed to a more specific and knowledgeable audience than general news reports.

In terms of language choice, the expert audience allows for specialist and technical language to be used without supporting explanation. For example the following extract is from the *London Evening Standard* (27.4.2010):

> Still, BP's $5.6 billion replacement cost profit which trips out fluctuations in the value of oil inventories smashed City expectations of $44.8 billion.

As well as its use of technical lexis (e.g. "replacement cost profit"), this text makes no concession to the reader by converting from dollars to pounds sterling. Further, the figures are very precise. The second specific feature of financial reports is the significant use of spatial and physical metaphor, which is commonplace enough to count as "dead" or "dormant" metaphor in most cases, but which still gives a dynamic dimension to otherwise straightforward accounts. This issue will be explored in more detail in discussion of metaphor, but is exemplified by the choice of "trips out" and "smashed" in the text above. The same text offers the metaphors "soar", "rise", "depth", "boost", "flat" and "lower".

In both respects (factual information and spatial metaphor), the financial reports of the 2010 data set are typical of the genre. What is somewhat less typical is the amount of space given to the Deepwater Horizon events in this specialist type of report, and this is an indication of the seriousness of the events, and the size of the likely impact on the business (as yet unknown).

The financial report genre is still significant within the 2011 texts. The oil spill is still a major part of BP's financial picture, but the account of the events is more likely to be shortened, summarised and taken as read, as shown in the following extract (Agence France Presse, 27.4.2011):

> In London, BP shares gained 1.43 percent to 470.85 pence after the energy group posted a 17-percent jump in first-quarter net profits.
>
> Earnings after taxation leapt to $7.124 billion (4.9 billion euros) on the back of surging oil prices, *one year after being hit by the US oil disaster*.
>
> However, BP also upgraded the cost of *last year's devastating Gulf of Mexico spill* to $41.3 billion. That compared with previous guidance of $40.9 billion. (my emphasis)

The BP events constitute only part of the BP financial picture and the BP financial report itself is placed in the wider context of a report that also comments on other companies' financial results. In this respect, the 2011 financial reports continue a process begun in 2010, in that they characterise the Deepwater Horizon explosion as an explanatory factor for BP financial and business performance. In this respect the financial reports resemble 2011 news reports that have started to marginalise the story. In 2012, 27 April is not Quarter 1 results day, and there are only two instances of financial reports in the full sample.

Genre 3: Feature Articles

Generic characteristics of feature articles are that they present their stories as universal rather than time-bound, they often include human interest elements, their structure tends to be narrative rather than the inverted pyramid, which means that the point of closure is towards the end of feature articles rather than the beginning, and they present a subjective rather than objective point of view. The two feature articles in the 2012 data set are typical of the genre. Both, coincidentally, report on New Orleans, and its renaissance since Hurricane Katrina and the BP oil spill. One contains a typical example of categorisation.

> After the storms, New Orleans endured the 2008 economic crash and the BP oil spill. (Sarasota Herald Tribune [Florida], 27.4.2012)

The text is presented from a first-person perspective: the journalist intrudes upon the story, making her visit and her family part of the commentary ("As my sister and brother-in-law and I drove there from the airport") and structuring the report around a comparison between New Orleans and her home town of Saratoga. The article closes with (has as its point of closure) its key argument.

> There it is: the sense of place that sets a city apart from all the rest. Maybe we, too, will get there someday.

The article is illustrative of two related shifts from the news texts of 2010: in the type of reporting from impersonal and objective news reports to more evaluative and personal reports of various kinds such as editorials, reviews and feature articles; and in the absorption of the BP story into other stories, where it both illustrates and forms part of particular phenomena—in this case, the tribulations undergone by New Orleans that form the backdrop to a good news recovery story.

Genre 4: Editorial or Opinion Piece

In terms of rhetorical acts, the 2010 texts were primarily descriptive. By 2011, there is an increase in texts that are to some degree evaluative. The increase in texts in the editorial or opinion piece genre in 2011 suggests that writers have begun to consider that they are now able to put the 2010 events into context, with the purpose of making judgements about them (and the first anniversary is a motive to do so). The opinion piece genre is characterised in genre literature by the use of lexis that is rich in emotion and judgement, modal expressions that interpose the writer's view on the propositions made and rhetorical persuasive features.

The editorial and opinion pieces in the 2011 data set are typical of the genre in that they exhibit judgement on the part of the writer. In these pieces it becomes more common that the *writer* takes responsibility for the proposition, rather than attributing it to another source, as is characteristic of news reports. The following extracts are examples of opinion pieces:

> *If* the BP oil spill hadnt happened¦ | Deep Sea News #dsn #ocean
> RT: One year after the BP disaster, *tell the President* no new drilling: #B.
> (The Right Blue via Twitter, 27.4.2011, my emphasis)
> *Ironically*, while American oil companies are banned from drilling in the Gulf of Mexico, other countries are not. (CaptainKudzu, 27.4.2011, my emphasis)
>   OPA [Oil Pollution Act] requires our state—like any other party harmed by the oil spill—to present a claim to BP before resorting to a lawsuit. Although Florida has at least three years from the date of the oil spill to assert its legal rights under OPA, we intend to file a claim with BP this summer. If BP does not do *the right thing* and pay that claim, I will not

hesitate to take BP and any other responsible party to court. (Tampa Bay Times [Florida], 27.4.2011, my emphasis)

The first example is from a news digest piece that gathers together tweets and retweets them, the second is a blog and the third is a fragment of a letter to a newspaper. These three pieces are interesting in that they convey judgement and evaluation through diverse strategies. The first tweet of the first example makes use of the modal clause "If (only)…then", but uses only the "If" to indicate modal intent, perhaps reflecting the necessary economy of Twitter communication. The second retweet uses an imperative with no specific addressee—"tell the President"—to convey the writer's view. In the blog, the comment adjunct "ironically" serves to indicate the writer's view, while the rest of the proposition is an unmitigated declarative. The letter from the Florida Attorney General takes a much less conversational but no less direct tone. The lexis is formal and legal ("OPA", "party", "assert its legal rights", "file a claim") but the text is unequivocal in its expression of judgement through social sanction (Martin & White, 2005) in the phrase "If BP does not do the right thing". In the three pieces the authorial position is being conveyed partly through the resources of modality, as might be expected, and partly through other linguistic resources—here choice of mood and the Appraisal System (lexis).

Earlier, I mentioned argumentation and persuasion strategies as characteristic of evaluative genres, and these are also found in the 2011 editorial/opinion texts. The following piece is an online newsletter reflection on the rising price of oil:

Looking for reasons why benchmark Brent crude is trading around $120 per barrel? There are plenty. Rapid economic recovery in emerging economies in Asia, political turmoil in the Middle East and North Africa and constrained supplies from the deepwater Gulf of Mexico are a few. (EI Finance, 27.4.2011)

A number of persuasive rhetorical strategies are exhibited in this short extract. The piece exhibits a Preview–Detail structure (Hoey, 2001; Winter, 1994) where the topic of reasons for high oil prices is raised, and reasons are enumerated. The fact that three reasons are chosen gives a

balanced tricolon pattern to the final sentence. It is typical of persuasive argument (Cockcroft & Cockcroft, 2005) that the writer asks a question ("Looking for reasons…?") that his subsequent argument will answer. The reasons are presented as fact, not opinion, with no mitigating expressions. This style of writing continues into the 2012 texts, and a similar tone is found in the extract below:

> We're living in a world of radical transparency. It's changing the rules of marketing and offers enormous opportunity for those who get it right, and public humiliation for those who don't. (Campaign Middle East, 27.4.2012)

Again, this is an evaluative piece, offering an assessment of the current marketing environment in the form of unmitigated declaratives, with no modal terms. This phenomenon might be called "opinion-as-fact".

These examples of opinion pieces exhibit extreme variation in both channel and tone, but all share the generic aim of expressing opinion and evaluating phenomena. To achieve this, writers use not only modal expressions, but also lexis of affect and judgement and rhetorical strategies.

Genre 5: Arts Reviews

The arts review genre is virtually absent in 2010 and 2012, but is significant in 2012 in texts mentioning BP. In this year, the BP story is referenced in a part-fictionalised documentary film, and two non-fiction accounts of oil companies as well as an unrelated film about events whose PR handling is compared with that of the BP oil spill (BP events as exemplar of a "disastrous" PR campaign). In addition, a different item in the news report genre covers a protest at the Royal Shakespeare Company and refers to a song written about the BP oil spill events: an excerpt from this article is cited at the start of this book. In these examples, the arts review genre exhibits many of the characteristics of evaluative writing: the writer is strongly present in the texts, and the lexis shows high levels of affect, judgement and appreciation (Martin & White, 2005).

Based on Margaret Atwood's book of the same name, writer-director Jennifer Baichwal's film explores the complex issue of debt, both moral and financial. This includes *BP's failure to deal with its environmental transgressions*, and the years-long dispute between two poor rural clans that keeps the members of one family virtual prisoners in their own home. (The New York Post, 27.4.2012, my emphasis)

In this book's more than 600 pages you may sometimes be tempted to utter, as did BP's *hapless* chief executive Tony Hayward, *disastrously*, during the Deepwater Horizon *disaster*, "I'd like my life back." (The New York Times, 27.4.2012, my emphasis)

In both of these fragments the journalists are exhibiting judgement not only about the works they are reviewing (in Martin & White's (2005) term, "Appreciation") but *about the crisis events themselves* (what Martin & White would classify as "Judgement: social sanction"). Reviewers choose whether to endorse or distance themselves from the viewpoints expressed in the works they review, which may or may not be in line with the political perspective of their publication. So both dominant and resistant views are given voice in review pages, but clearly positioned as non-factual and non-news by being placed outside the news pages. This is also the case with letters pages, where readers' views are positioned as "other" (Cook, Robbins, & Pieri, 2006). I mentioned earlier that the choice of news media genre in itself has semiotic meaning. Publications *as a whole* might offer a platform for a range of voices and views about the crisis, but placing some within the front "hard" news pages and others in review and letters pages is a way of bracketing, or making "other" certain voices and the opinions they express.

Genre 6: Business or Market Report

Academic literature on the genre of the business/market report is rare. However, a number of the BP texts are of this type, and I set out here some observations based on the texts themselves. Business or market reports can be of rather different kinds, ranging from those texts that are similar to news reports but aimed specifically at the business community and characterised by markers of objectivity, to texts that serve to

synthesise information and arrive at an evaluative conclusion, to other texts that serve a more argumentative or persuasive purpose (e.g. business journal articles that may partially serve a selling function). Because of this, the genre of business or market reports may be better viewed as a collection of texts with a unified audience, but which have stylistic features of other news genres. The complete text below resembles a news report, although it appears specifically on the business pages:

> MIAMI—Carnival Corp., operator of Carnival Cruise Lines, is seeking compensation for damages and losses it incurred as a result of last April's Deepwater Horizon oil rig explosion that caused a major oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico, according to The Miami Herald. The Miami-based cruise line filed suit against BP Plc. and several other companies related to the oil rig's operations. (Palm Beach Post [Florida], 27.4.2011)

Although the term "major oil spill" is somewhat negatively evaluative, the lexis is generally neutral, and some of the terms ("compensation", "damages and losses", "filed suit") are drawn from a legal technical register. There are no modal items, and statements are expressed as unmitigated declaratives. These are all features that, as in news reports, convey an impression of factual objectivity. The following text is rather different in terms of grammatical choices, and belongs to the second type of business report I mentioned above, of synthesis and evaluation.

> The situation may be further complicated by the approaching election in Russia, since a huge payment to the AAR billionaires for what used to be state assets is not something the incumbent administration will want to defend as it works to win support and secure another term in office. A more modest settlement would suit BP, too, given its commitments in the wake of the Gulf of Mexico disaster. (European Gas Markets, 27.4.2011)

This text is rich in modal expressions ("may be", "will want to", "would suit"), where, importantly, the *writer* is taking modal responsibility. The lexis in this text is more evaluative ("complicated", "huge", "disaster"), as the writer interprets, evaluates and directs the reader. The piece resembles an opinion piece. The final example below is of the third type, which seeks ostensibly to inform, but also contains elements of persuasive language.

Whatever the reason, responsible companies and thoughtful boards must realize that no business, no matter how well-managed or low-profile, is immune from a crisis. When it comes, it might not be as damaging and public as BP's or Toyota's, but that does not mean it can't cause damage. (Executive Counsel, 27.4.2011)

A number of features, such as the deontic expression "must realise" and lexis with high affect such as "damaging and public", indicate an overt involvement by the writer that tends to be avoided in hard news reports. Familiar or conversational language is shown in the contraction "can't", and rhetorical (persuasive) constructions appear in the repetition in "no business, no matter how well-managed or low-profile", and the argument structure of "it might not be…but that does not mean". This text has the indirect purpose of selling consultancy services.

So, while some of the business or market reports do the work of a news report in updating the business community on the latest events in the BP story from a business perspective, the majority are doing the work of evaluative or opinion pieces that serve to place the events into other business contexts, such as the BP–Rosneft share swap deal in the second example above, and the BP events as signifier of a business crisis in the third example.

In Summary

I have discussed generic features at some length, proposing that shifts in genres can explain patterns in language features, from those that construct a factual and objective picture of the BP story to those that relate to rhetorical acts of evaluation and persuasion. An analysis of the genres of the BP texts suggests the broad progression shown in Fig. 9.1.

Deepwater Horizon events → writing which describes events → writing which evaluates events → writing which evaluates other texts about events
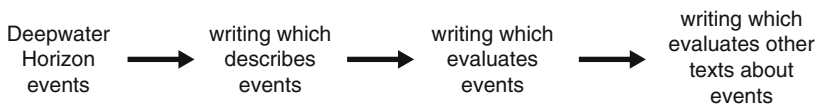
Fig. 9.1   Notional progression of text types in BP data

Figure 9.1 positions the Deepwater Horizon events as the object of representation (and I will go on to discuss a more explicit understanding of the term "Object" in Chap. 13). The "writing which describes events" is news reports and financial reports (largely from 2010). The evaluation of events takes place in feature articles, editorials and blogs within the sample texts, but importantly also outside of the texts, in official reports and artworks connected with the topic. These are the subject of the final genre shift to "writing which evaluates other texts about events". Here the topic is less the events themselves than what has been written about them. In this way, the coverage becomes increasingly distanced from the events, not only temporally, but in terms of the closeness of the author to the object under discussion. This observation leads us to the importance of other texts in the BP story, and I turn to this in the following section.

Feature 5: Intertextuality

Definition and Analysis Method

In my discussion of intertextuality, I described different frameworks for considering types of intertextuality (e.g. Bazerman, 2004; Fairclough, 1992b; Genette, 1997), and based on this work, I suggested that there were three broad types of intertextuality:

- Intertextuality as irretrievable texts.
- Intertextuality as identifiable style/register/genre.
- Intertextuality as retrievable texts.

In my BP text analysis, I did not address this *first* category above, although I presumed a considerable weight of this kind of intertextual influence. The *second* category above concerns structural and stylistic characteristics of genres, and these have been outlined in my analysis of genre in the previous section. In this section, therefore, I will discuss only the *third* category—that is, references within the analysed texts to other texts that have a more or less transparent provenance. In the BP data, the most prominent of these other texts were:

1. Direct and indirect quotation, for example, eyewitness reports.
2. Press releases.
3. Other sources—news reports, news agencies and other reports.
4. Artistic and literary references.
5. Co-text.

An analysis of how and why such texts are incorporated in news media reports contributed to an understanding of how news writers use available linguistic resources as support in constructing a particular view of the BP crisis.

Findings from the BP Data

Intertextuality Type 1: Direct and Indirect Quotation

Both direct and indirect quotation of speech are present extensively in the 2010 texts, primarily from senior BP staff, technical experts and involved members of the public (e.g. the cook's interview narrative mentioned earlier). Quoted speech is also a feature of press releases. The purposes of direct and indirect quotation in news reports are varied, including to add credibility, to personalise a story, to invite reader identification with the quoted individual and to distance the writer from the propositions made in the quotation. In most cases in the 2010 texts, quotation is used to present information from BP as a credible source, and to gain reactions to the oil spill from experts other than BP, such as the Coast Guard, environmental and ocean studies experts and local fishermen. The following excerpt presents the BP perspective:

Paragraph 1   BP plans to collect leaking oil on the ocean bottom by lowering a large dome to capture the oil and then pumping it through pipes and hoses into a vessel on the surface, said Doug Suttles, chief operating officer of BP Exploration and Production.

Paragraph 2   It could take up to a month to get the equipment in place.

Paragraph 3   "That system has been deployed in shallower water, but it has never been deployed at 5000 feet of water, so we have to be careful," he said. (BreakingNews.ie, 27.4.2010)

This fragment shows evidence of a range of reporting strategies. The first paragraph is shown in Free Direct Speech (Leech & Short, 1981)—that is, no quotation marks, but a clear reporting clause ("said Doug Suttles"). The use of Doug Suttles' full name and title (see earlier comments on naming actors in the events) connotes that this is someone with a warrant to speak, as both a BP representative and a technical expert. The third paragraph ("That system has been deployed…") is an example of Direct Speech with full use of quotation marks, reporting clause and specific attribution. However, the second paragraph "It could take up to a month…" is neither in quotation marks nor attributed. The reader can make the assumption that this is still a version of Doug Suttles' words, particularly as the concluding "he said" refers back *across* paragraph two to Suttles' full name in paragraph one, but there is no other linguistic evidence of quotation. The fragment "It could take up to a month…" takes on the colour and authority of Suttles' pronouncements through its placement (and may indeed be his words). However, it allows for economy (no need for reporting clauses or additional attributions if relevant), stylistic variation and a sense of journalist as expert.

This mix of representation strategies is common within news reporting, and it is sometimes difficult to unravel whether markers of (un)certainty can be attributed to the writer or the quoted source. In news report writing, journalists seek ways of varying the presentation between their own consolidated but unattributed understanding from a range of sources, direct quotation from experts and eyewitnesses and something in between, as above.

By 2011, quotations are fewer in number. These are more likely to appear in connection with BP financial results than in news report items: journalists are no longer using quotations as a channel to express uncertainty in relation to the Deepwater Horizon events. I have noted that direct and indirect quotation is one strategy by which journalists distance themselves from reported propositions. This process is observable in the 2011 texts, where certain voices are quoted directly (e.g. Michael Greenberger in an

interview and the views of the Florida Attorney General in a letters page) but such quotations are considerably rarer than in the 2010 data.

Direct quotation is certainly present in the 2012 texts, but used in a different way from the 2010 texts. In 2010, it was a way of representing the crisis as an immediate, recently witnessed occurrence, of inviting the reader to feel somehow present at an unfolding event. By 2012, direct and indirect quotations fulfil a number of different functions.

- Referencing the event, in order to place it in a context, as here, in a business article about crises that quotes the originator of a spoof BP Twitter account: "The best way to get the public to respect your brand? Have a respectable brand." (Campaign Middle East, 27.4.2012)
- Direct quotation from members of the public, but indirectly related to the oil spill (here in the context of a feature about an oil town in Dakota.) "After the spill in the Gulf, it was really getting hard to know if you have a job or not." (Canwest News Service, 27.4.2012)
- Reports of political speeches, dealing with energy matters

  – "Hood says as many as 200,000 individuals and businesses who signed the deals should qualify to receive payments for future damages and any increased damage payments." [indirect quotation] (Greenwire, 27.4.2012)
  – "He [Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar] blasted the Republican-controlled House of Representatives for not acting to codify offshore-drilling regulations adopted since the 2010 BP Deepwater Horizon oil spill, failing to quickly approve a US–Mexico agreement on offshore development, not making tax credits of renewable energy permanent, and not adopting new clean energy standards." [indirect quotation] (Foster Natural Gas/Oil Report, 27.4.2012)

- Literary quotations

One reference of interest is to what was possibly the best-known quotation of the Deepwater Horizon crisis, that of Tony Hayward in May 2010 mentioned earlier:

In this book's more than 600 pages you may sometimes be tempted to utter, as did BP's hapless chief executive Tony Hayward, disastrously, during

the Deepwater Horizon disaster, "I'd like my life back." (The New York Times, 27.4.2012)

The quotation was clearly suggested to the writer by his topic matter, in this case a book on oil companies, primarily Exxon Mobil and BP. But it also shows how recognisable texts from the events (Tony Hayward's words) are appropriated into the public domain for general-purpose use, in this case to make a humorous observation.

Intertextuality Type 2: Press Releases

Press releases are one type of intertext that is more or less retrievable from the items in which they appear, and they are interesting for my analysis because they are one means by which participants other than journalists play a part in shaping the media representation of events. Press releases are written with the primary aim of being repeated verbatim in news reports (Jacobs, 1999, 2000a). They are intended by their originators to present a version of the "truth" that is easily accessible and repeatable, and so eventually becomes *the* version of the truth. Jacobs demonstrates how frequently sections of press releases are inserted in their entirety into a news report, and how the writers of press releases encourage this by their use of the third person ("BP" rather than "we"), their formulaic structures, their submission of direct quotations and their deliberate mirroring of newspaper house styles. In this way, the originator's perspective on the story is far more likely to find its way into the media.

The direct use of press releases as copy is demonstrated in the case of inadvertent error:

> Chief executive Tony Hayward said better weather in the area around the rig disaster that is believed to have killed 11 men had increased confidence *we* can tackle this spill offshore. (The Evening Standard (London), 27.4.2010, my emphasis)

The failure to make the changes from direct to indirect quotation (one of which is the change from first to third person) is unlikely to have arisen

from the reporting of a face-to-face interview with Tony Hayward, and more likely to have been taken from the following press release:

"Given the current conditions and the massive size of our response, we are confident in our ability to tackle this spill offshore," Hayward added. (BP, 2010b, 24 April)

Press releases are also an efficient way of communicating complex information, such as technical information or numerical data. The following press release is dated two days after the explosion (the list continues for a further four items):
BP has mobilised a flotilla of vessels and resources that includes:

- significant mechanical recovery capacity;
- 32 spill response vessels including a large storage barge;
- skimming capacity of more than 171,000 barrels per day, with more available if needed;
- offshore storage capacity of 122,000 barrels and additional 175,000 barrels available and on standby (BP, 2010a, 22 April).

The communication of facts and figures, from press releases, ostensibly an objective exercise, is however, subject to ideological influence. For example, many of the 2010 BP reports make mention of a particular proposition from a press release, that, as at 27 April, oil may reach land in three days. This fact is positioned by reporters in various ways.

- "as little as three days" (Trend Daily News (Azerbaijan), 27.4.2010)
- "expected to reach land by Saturday" (theflyonthewall.com, 27.4.2011)
- "within days" (24/7 Wall St, 27.4.2010)
- "It's still not expected to reach the coast before Friday, if at all" (Carleton Place (Canada), 27.4.2010)
- "may reach land in just days" (CNN, 27.4.2010)

These reformulations of the same basic information reveal a positioning that ranges from the (relatively) neutral "expected to reach land by

Saturday" to the more urgent "*as little as* three days", "*just* days" and "*within* days". An alternative, and more reassuring, version is presented in "*not expected…before* Friday, *if at all*". The choice of contrasting positive and negative formulations in "expected" (second example in the list) and "*not* expected" (fourth on list) again indicate differing modal positioning of identical original information.

The part press releases play is considerably reduced in 2011, with the number of press releases published by BP in April 2011 being much smaller than that in April 2010. Whereas BP issued one release per day from the explosion on 20 April to 27 April 2010, only six releases were issued between 1st and 27th April in 2011. Only three of the six are related to the BP events, and these indirectly. The first concerns sales of assets, and this issue is referred to in several of the financial report texts of 2011 in connection with the need to fund compensation for the oil spill. The second refers to environmental projects along the Gulf Coast. The third concerns the Gulf of Mexico Research Institute (GRI), and is reported in great detail in one of the 2011 texts, with much of the original text from the press release unchanged. (This text has already been noted as of interest for its use of categorisation, because it positions the Deepwater Horizon events (unnamed) as only one of many similar events, and as backgrounded to the global benefits of the work of the GRI.)

The number of press releases made by BP in the month to 27 April 2012 is again six. Three are unrelated to the Deepwater Horizon crisis (one of these concerns BP's involvement in the 2012 London Olympic Games). The other three are connected to ongoing legal issues, and these are reflected in references to legal texts in several of the 2012 items. From a BP perspective, press releases are concerned partly to continue to control the accuracy of the Deepwater Horizon story, and partly to show how the company is moving on away from Deepwater Horizon through undertakings such as the Olympic sponsorship.

Intertextuality Type 3: Other Sources—News Reports, News Agencies and Other Reports

In 2010, apart from the press releases and external sources mentioned above, there is evidence of use by writers of other sources close to the

news-making process, including historical news stories, reports from news agencies, websites, official reports and so on. Some of these sources are explicitly acknowledged, for example:

> …Hayward said in the email, obtained by AFP. (Agence France Presse, 27.4.2010)
>
> WSJ [Wall Street Journal]: The BP oil spill could reach land within days. (2010, *Text 1/20*)

The first extract credits both Tony Hayward as the writer of the email and the news agency (who wrote the piece) for obtaining it. The second item abstracts information in very short form, directing the reader to the source for further detail. However, in other news items, portions are very likely to have been grounded in previous newspaper reports or other sources, but these remain unacknowledged.

The Nexis UK texts are rich in what Chandler (2007) calls "hypertextuality", a category of intertextuality he proposes to take account of the ability of the Web to refer to other texts through hyperlinks. In the case of the Nexis texts, it is possible to gain additional information on companies with an attached hyperlink from, for example, the New York Stock Exchange. The website of the SEC is referred to in "other filings with the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), which are available free of charge on the SEC's website at www.sec.gov" (Market News Publishing, 27.4.2010). Other documents are directly or indirectly referred to: there is a presumption of a previous text in the phrase "in a recent strategy update" (Kuwait News Agency [KUNA], 27.4.2010), and "according to data from the Minerals Management Service" (TendersInfo, 27.4.2010). Some of the data items refer to visual texts, such as aerial photographs by NASA (the North American Space Agency) of the oil slick. Transcripts of TV reports make reference to accompanying film footage. Finally there is a reference to an *absent* text: "No word on when British Petroleum is expected to cap the leaking well" (The Richmond Democrat, 27.4.2010). Poststructuralist analysis proposes that absences as well as presences are significant (see, for example, Sunderland [2006], Wetherell [1998], Oliveira [2004]). Here the absence of the text is flagged; the key piece of information awaited by journalists is unforthcoming. Reference by the writers of the 2010 texts to

a rich background of source texts deliberately hints at a complex reality, from which the writer has pieced together a credible narrative on behalf of the reader, using his/her journalistic expertise.

In 2011 a shift begins from news items that report on the BP events to news items that report on the *documentation* of the events. Various documents related to the events are mentioned and commented upon in the 2011 texts:

- *Documents related to legal processes:* "legal red tape"; "lawsuits"; "filing"
- *Political agreements:* "moratorium on deepwater drilling in the Gulf"
- *Financial reports and statements:* "a new report from Oppenheimer & Co"; "reported Bloomberg"; "Income statements"; "conference call to analysts"; "BP plc reported Wednesday that profits rose"
- *Reports on the explosion and its aftermath:* "Coast Guard report", "Research Initiatives report"

So from 2011 onwards, there is an increasing focus on the ways in which the BP events are reported, analysed and codified into documents or other written texts. These other texts include those related to the legal process to determine responsibility and compensation, the drilling moratorium and official reports on the explosion and oil spill, amongst others. In short, the BP texts are dealing less with *events* and increasingly with other *texts*. Even more than interviews and eyewitness reports, this kind of written documentation serves to reify certain versions of events, clarifying areas of confusion or disagreement, and excluding alternative versions. The text examples above are supplemented, particularly in 2012, by a number of intertexts which can be described as artistic and literary.

Intertextuality Type 4: Artistic and Literary Texts

The 2011 texts contain, for the first time, reference to a number of contributing texts from the worlds of art and literature. The non-fiction book "In too deep", by a journalist with a long relationship with BP, has been mentioned above (M2 PressWIRE, 27.4.2011). Arts texts also appear in

several guises in an article which is only indirectly concerned with the BP events (The News Herald [Panama City, Florida], 27.4.2011). This report deals with a meeting of the local tourist council in Panama City Beach, Florida, discussing their Autumn marketing plans. These plans (partially funded by a grant from BP) comprise such current and proposed texts including TV and print advertising, and a potential booking of the Zac Brown band and their song "Knee Deep". References such as these are an indication that the BP events are being placed within social contexts that are increasingly less related to the events themselves, although they are still connected to the outcomes of the events. In 2011 these social contexts are beginning to include references to the arts.

The number of texts with a direct artistic connection increases considerably in 2012, and in these the level of intertextuality is high. One text (The New York Post, 27.4.2012) is a review of a documentary that is itself based on a book. Another (Coventry Evening Telegraph, 27.4.2012) begins with a headline based on a well-worn pun "BP or not BP? That is the question" and goes on to report the actions of a campaign group objecting to BP's sponsorship of the Royal Shakespeare Company's World Shakespeare Festival. Their protest takes the form of a song, performed (as an "unexpected musical prologue") on the stage at the start of the opening night of the play "Twelfth Night". I mentioned earlier that, by striking coincidence, the phrase "green and yellow melancholy" from the play (Act II, Scene iv) contains reference to the colours of the BP logo, and is repurposed in the protest song.

Even in texts that do not themselves deal directly with artistic works, literary reference is present.

> "The first thing we do, let's kill all the lawyers." William Shakespeare, Henry the Sixth [Blog dealing with a range of, in the writer's view, political shortcomings] (Phil's Stock World, 27.4.2012)
> Truman Capote once wrote of the "gilded baritone" of its hourly bells, drifting over Jackson Square and joining the "solitary grieving howl of a far-off shiphorn". [travel feature on New Orleans] (Sarasota Herald Tribune [Florida], 27.4.2012)

Alongside the shift in genres noted earlier, we can conceptualise a similar movement through the years where texts act upon other texts. Figure 9.2
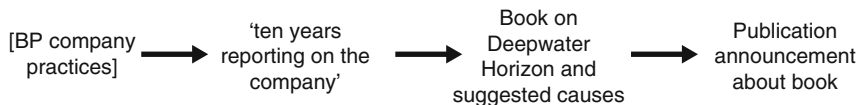
Fig. 9.2 Texts embedded intertextually "In Too Deep: BP and the Drilling Race that Took it Down" (M2 PressWIRE, 27.4.2011)

gives the example of a 2011 text that announces a book about Deepwater Horizon (M2 PressWIRE, 27.4.2011). The example shows how a range of texts interconnect in news reporting, and how news items can become progressively distant from the original events on which they are based.

We can see how one type of text, "news reporting", is nested into another, "non-fiction writing", which is nested into another, "publication announcement". These densely intertextual items set the BP events in sometimes unexpected contexts, providing new perspectives from which to understand their meaning.

Intertextuality Type 5: Co-text

The co-text surrounding the BP story is of two kinds. One is the *surrounding text* in a print or online newspaper. Newspapers are what Hoey (2001) calls a "colony" of texts, where otherwise unrelated stories and genres are loosely linked by placement, headings and publication styles. In the colony, each of the items provides a context for the others that will affect to a certain extent the reading of any given piece. More important to my own investigation is the co-text *within* a particular story. As noted in my Stage 1 analysis, in 2010 the BP story accounts for virtually all of the news items in the majority of the cases. In other words, there is no co-text alongside the BP story in most of the 2010 texts. The exception is financial reports, where BP is one of the companies reported upon, and the co-text comprises financial information about other companies. In these cases, the presence of the co-text gives a different impression from that given by news reports that position the BP oil spill as a serious and unique news story. In financial reports, placing the BP oil spill in the context of Quarter 1 results, and in the further context of general financial news, works to

minimise its significance, suggesting that it is a business crisis disrupting the "normal" flow of continuous production and profit progress.

The proportion of each text relating specifically to the BP events becomes smaller in 2011, which entails an increase in associated co-text. To return to two examples discussed above, the "In too deep" text (M2 PressWIRE, 27.4.2011) mentions the history of BP, other serious accidents and the management style of its CEOs, in addition to the events of 2010. The "Panama City Beach" text (The News Herald [Panama City, Florida], 27.4.2011) discusses marketing plans in general, the composition of the committee and the reaction of local residents, as well as the BP contribution. The amount and nature of co-text in 2011 indicates both the decreasing importance of the BP story in terms of newsworthiness and the absorption of the story into a bigger social picture. The co-text positions the events within a wider social context: for "In too deep" as an example of the unwelcome effects of particular management cultures and for "Panama City Beach" in the context of the effect of the oil spill on the daily lives of the residents and local businesspeople in a particular community.

This continues to be the case in 2012, where co-text continues to serve the dual functions of constraining the size and significance of the BP events, and positioning them in diverse contexts in which they are presented as meaningful.

In Summary

Given the complexity of the Deepwater Horizon story in 2010, and the number of journalists working on it, there is perhaps a surprising degree of homogeneity in the intertexts referred to in the news reports. Primary sources are press releases, interviews and press conferences. Press releases provide a source of factual information (as offered by BP), and some "direct quotations", almost exclusively attributed to Tony Hayward. Interviews and press conferences also generate direct quotations, but these same quotations are repeated frequently from half a dozen actors in the story, chief amongst them Rear Admiral Mary Landry of the Coast Guard. In addition, a number of other texts are implicitly or explicitly

drawn on, such as photographs, websites and TV footage. The impression is of a set of texts teeming with a cast of informed voices, but closer analysis shows these to be relatively restricted and repeated. They are, with few exceptions (one being the voice of the cook Oleander Benton), what Bignell (2002: 88) calls "accessed voices", namely, those with regular and unquestioned access to the news media.

By 2011, press releases and witness voices are drawn upon to a much smaller extent, but documented accounts of the events and the ensuing legal processes are far more evident. These are texts reporting upon other written accounts rather than events themselves. So along with the temporal distance from events comes a distancing through the use of intertexts. Not only does this practice tend to mitigate the intensity of accounts, but it also functions to create *shared* accounts that draw on each other, rather than presenting multiple individual perspectives.

The final year of data draws from a number of intertext types, including for the first time in this data, direct literary quotations. These are used to evoke particular social worlds, to which the reader needs to bring a degree of shared cultural understanding. This is particularly the case where well-known quotations are modified ("BP or not BP?") or used out of context to make a humorous point ("let's kill all the lawyers"). This kind of reference does not use the words of those with a warrant to speak about the topic, but rather draws on shared experience and cultural knowledge to present events as understood, as having a degree of collective meaning.

Feature 6: Modality

Definition and Analysis Method

In an overview of the modality system in Chap. 3, I noted three key types of modality:

1. epistemic modality, expressing degrees of certainty.
2. dynamic modality, expressing ability and willingness.
3. deontic modality, expressing permission and obligation.

A fourth type, evidential modality, which includes sensory and reporting items, is found in research and in my texts to be very rare and for this reason not included. I further noted that modal resources are very broad, comprising not only modal auxiliaries, but adverbials, adjectives, nouns, phrases and clauses. I described how modal expressions can vary in strength, with speakers taking strong, weak or medium positions in relation to their propositions. Investigating these different types of meaning potential for diverse modal resources will contribute to an understanding of how writers position themselves in relation to their construction of the crisis. I also discussed the Appraisal System, which represents an alternative, but related, method for analysing the interpersonal function of texts. Its relevance for my work is that it provides a means for the systematic description of evaluation, particularly in the case of lexical usages.

To analyse modality I started with a count of instances of modal expressions. In line with the categories above, this comprised a frequency count of all kinds of modal usages, according to whether they had epistemic, deontic or dynamic force. I then considered these usages in context, for example, whether an expression of uncertainty represented the perspective of the writer, or a participant in the story. I further considered the strength of modal commitment and the relative subjectivity of the writer. Comparison of modal choices across time indicated the extent to which this positioning alters with increasing familiarity with the material.

Findings from the BP Data

Table 9.1 shows the findings for modal usages over the three years of data.

Table 9.1 Instances of modality in the 2010–12 texts

	2010		2011		2012	
	Numbers	%	Numbers	%	Numbers	%
Epistemic modality	141	56	52	50	43	51
Dynamic modality	97	38	36	34	17	20
Deontic modality	14	6	17	16	25	29
Totals	252	100	105	100	85	100
Total per 000 words	27.6		15.0		11.9	

In 2010, epistemic and dynamic modality are both strongly present in the texts, with epistemic modality occurring more frequently than dynamic modality. The expression of deontic modality (indicating permission and obligation) is extremely low at only 6 % of all modality expressions. These findings are perhaps not surprising. *Epistemic modality* is the system through which certainty, uncertainty, likelihood and probability is conveyed, while *dynamic modality* concerns ability as well as willingness. In a set of texts that deal with an event of almost unprecedented magnitude and the attempts of participants to deal with it, expressions of uncertainty and (in)ability are likely to feature strongly. The examples below contain linguistic items showing epistemic modality:

> The BP oil spill *could* reach land within days. (24/7 Wall St, 27.4.2010, my emphasis)
> He also expressed "tremendous sorrow" when it became clear that the missing workers were *probably* dead. (Agence France Presse, 27.4.2010, my emphasis)
> Such a well *could* help redirect the oil, though it *could* also take weeks to complete, especially at that depth. (Associated Press Financial Wire, 27.4.2010, my emphasis)

The 2010 texts are deeply concerned with the ability of participants to manage the crisis situation, and with their intention and determination to do so. These are expressed through *dynamic modality*.

> "We are *going* to do everything we *can*" (Agence France Presse, 27.4.2010, my emphasis)
> Crews were *trying* to keep oil out of the Pass A Loutre wildlife area, a 115,000-acre preserve that is home to alligators, birds and fish near the mouth of the Mississippi River. (BreakingNews.ie, 27.4.2010, my emphasis)
> Efforts so far have *failed* to shut off the flow of oil nearly 5000 feet (Carleton Place (Canada), 27.4.2010, my emphasis)

(The expression "going to" in the first example above could be analysed either as a simple future tense or, as I have, as a modal expression conveying something like "we intend to".) Words such as trying, failing, hoping, intending, wanting, being committed to—and 20 other verbs expressing

dynamic modality—are employed in the 2010 texts, and this conveys a picture from both the writer's and his/her reported speakers' perspective of effort and intent rather than achievement.

It is worth exploring here the potential *tension* between the uncertainty of the situation and the (in)ability of the actors to have an effect on it, and the portrayal of objectivity which is one key characteristic of the news report genre. White (1997: 5) observes that in the typical hard news report, the reporter "avoids or at least minimises interpersonal meanings". Yet the writers of the 2010 texts make significant use of modal resources, which would appear to run counter to the canonical expectation for news reports of low modality. This raises two important questions:

1. Are the BP reports unusual compared to other news reports for some reason?
2. Whose (un)certainties, and (in)abilities are being expressed?

To take the first question—the BP events in themselves may have been unusual, but they are by no means unique in terms of crises. Both natural and man-made crises are characterised by a degree of confusion or uncertainty in the early stages. In fact, it is *disruption* of the social order in some way that makes an event considered newsworthy. The BP events of 2010 are extreme in certain respects, but I would suggest represent no more uncertainty than, for example, the Tsunami in South-East Asia of 2004 or the disaster at the Fukushima nuclear plant in 2011. So the degree of confusion about the events is not atypical, and other aspects, such as cause, responsibility and the unpredictable movements of the spill were the subject of intense speculation from the start.

What is a more likely explanation for the high levels of modality in the 2010 media coverage is that *even where sources are not overtly indicated*, the expressions of uncertainty and inability are not the voice of the journalist himself/herself, but of his/her sources. The "objective" picture here is one of (un)certainty and (in)ability, and it is not an intrusion of the writer to depict this. The following short fragment shows an example (St. Petersburg Times (Florida), 27.4.2010, my emphasis).

Paragraph 1   The marshes of southern Louisiana and Mississippi *appear to face* the most immediate risk from the spill because they are closest to it, said George Crozier, director of the Dauphin Island Sea Laboratory in Mobile, Ala.

Paragraph 2   What happens after that depends on how quickly the owners of the rig *can* shut off the flow of oil. On Sunday they began using robot submarines to *try to* shut off a valve called a blowout preventer on a leaking pipe deep underwater. If that fails, then they will drill new wells on either side of the leak to relieve the pressure there—a process that *could* take months.

Paragraph 3   "If it goes on for four months, then yeah, we've got a problem," Crozier said. "But if they're able to shut it down after a day or two, then the risk is minimal."

Here attribution is shown in two ways. The first paragraph consists of free direct speech by George Crozier. Despite the lack of quotation marks within the piece, the reporting clause ("said George Crozier") makes it clear that these are either the actual words or a close paraphrase of Mr. Crozier's interview with the journalist. Paragraph 3 is even clearer. We are intended to understand that these are the exact words of the interviewee. In fact, the interpolation of the discourse marker "yeah" in the middle of the words makes their proposed accuracy even more convincing—we feel as readers we are hearing unmediated speech. The use of modality within these attributed portions of the texts points to the views and perspectives of participants other than the journalists.

Paragraph 2 is slightly different. The use of epistemic modality in "could" and dynamic modality in "can" and "try to" appear to be the interpolation, the "intrusion" in Halliday's term, of the writer himself (in this case the writer is male). These expressions, and the use of conditional clauses, suggest a tentative view towards the propositions made in the paragraph. But my interpretation of this is that we are to understand this paragraph too as a report of information, itself tentative, gained from external sources, *rather than* the opinion of the writer about the feasibility or otherwise of the actions undertaken.

The same motivation seems to be at work in the few cases of deontic modality in 2010. These again tend to occur where there is an implicit (first example below) or explicit (second example below) reporting of another's opinion, rather than the stance of the journalist:

> If crews cannot stop the leak quickly, they might *need* to drill another well to redirect the oil. (Associated Press Financial Wire, 27.4.2010, my emphasis)
>
> "That system has been deployed in shallower water, but it has never been deployed at 5000 feet of water, so we *have to* be careful," he said. (BreakingNews.ie, 27.4.2010, my emphasis)

The obligation and permission relates to external circumstances, deriving from the crisis itself—a set of uncontrollable forces obliging a course of human action. They are not the interpolation of the journalist's perspective on the propositions he sets out. My interpretation of these findings about the level of modality in my 2010 texts is that where news reports include a high level of directly or indirectly reported speech, the occurrence of modality will be high overall. And in the case of crisis representation, where (un)certainty and future intention are critical to a representation of the story, the level of modality is likely to be higher, even in the authorial voice, than it might be for other types of news report.

The overview of the frequency of modal markers appearing in the 2011 texts indicates a marked decrease, from 27.6 instances per 000 words in 2010, to 15.0 per 000 words in 2011. By 2011, there was a greater degree of confidence by both journalists and other participants in discussing causes and outcomes, together with a lower occurrence of reported speech. In my earlier analysis of genre, I drew attention to the presentation of opinion and evaluation in language that was markedly *low* in modal expressions—that is, opinion presented as "fact"—and noted that this is sometimes accompanied by highly evaluative lexis. I suggest that these three processes together—increased confidence, reduction in reported speech and "opinion as fact"—account for the decrease in modal items in the data.

Alongside this marked drop in frequency, there is a shift in the types of modal item. Both epistemic and dynamic modality represent a lower

proportion of instances of modality than was the case in 2010, while deontic modality appears more frequently. By 2011 there is a reduced need to express levels of (un)certainty and (in)ability (through *epistemic* and *dynamic* modality) in relation to the events themselves. The oil spill itself has long since been contained, and media attention has turned to investigation, compensation, subsequent business performance and evaluation. The instances of *epistemic modality* halve from 2010 to 2011 (normalised for the size of corpus). Where epistemic modality was used in 2010 to convey uncertainty about the outcome of the ongoing events, by 2011 it is more likely to indicate uncertainty about BP's business future, for example, the scale of compensation and Deepwater Horizon-related costs:

> But the court cases *are likely* to take years and BP *could* face tens of billions of dollars more in fines and penalties if it is prosecuted. (The Associated Press, 27.4.2011, my emphasis)

However, the majority of uses of *epistemic modality* do not deal directly with the BP events at all, but rather with issues arising from them:

> Meanwhile, deepwater costs *are expected to* rise significantly worldwide as governments enhance safety requirements after last year's Macondo disaster in the US Gulf (EI Finance, 27.4.2011, my emphasis)
>
>   Committee chairman and TDC member Marty McDaniel said a fall roster of events, which *could* include a Zac Brown Band concert if a deal *can* be reached, would be in place by Memorial Day. (The News Herald (Panama City, Florida), 27.4.2011, my emphasis)

The cases above demonstrate again the shift of the BP events from being the central focus of events to having a less direct role in news stories.

Changes can also be seen in the function and use of *dynamic modality* in the 2011 texts. This kind of modality indicates aims, targets and intent. In 2010 these related to dealing with the spill and its effects, but in 2011 they are related to moving forward *away* from the crisis events and *towards* a more optimistic and more stable future:

"BP is in the midst of major change as we *work to* reset focus for the company and begin the task of rebuilding long-term sustainable value for our shareholders," Chief Financial Officer Byron Grote said on a conference call to analysts. (The Associated Press, 27.4.2011, my emphasis)

The implication of the example above is of optimism and a positive movement.

Unlike the first two modal types, the role for *deontic modality*, which is the system for expressing obligation and permission, increased in 2011, both in number and proportion of occurrences, although it remains the least used of the three types. Deontic modality is being used by writers to express views about what BP or other similar companies *should* do in terms of handling the crisis, or how readers *should* understand the argument in the news item:

To find out when the country will get relief from these high gas prices, *it is first necessary* to understand why they are rising in the first place. (CaptainKudzu, 27.4.2011, my emphasis)

capital outlays, like F&D costs, *must* be evaluated over longer spans than one year to account for "lumpy" investments in major projects. (EI Finance, 27.4.2011, my emphasis)

The April 20th blowout of 2010 was only the latest of a series of BP accidents that *should* have served as warning signs to company executives and regulators. (M2 PressWIRE, 27.4.2011, my emphasis)

The movement towards statements of obligation and necessity can be related to the shifts in text genre and the purpose of the texts analysed. The 2010 texts primarily have the function of conveying facts and *reporting* the opinions of others. By 2011, texts of an evaluative nature have a greater presence, and the opinions and evaluation of the authors are frequently articulated as suggestions or instructions.

In 2012, an analysis of modality markers shows a further drop from 15.0 per 000 in 2011 to 11.9 per 000, meaning that by 2012, occurrences of modal expressions are approximately two-fifths of the level in 2010. Instances of epistemic and dynamic modality fall again, but deontic modality continues to become more important, in terms of both absolute numbers and proportion. By 2012, epistemic modality indicators are at about one-third of the 2010 level. The mood used in the journalistic

writing of 2012 is more likely to be declarative—"this is how it is"—than modalised—"this is how it might be". There are very few reinforcing modal adjuncts such as "totally" or "absolutely". Yet evaluative language is certainly present, as the following examples show:

> In the regular course of business, the increase of familiarity is *a good thing*. (Marketing Management, 27.4.2012, my emphasis)
>
> The company's fortunes were *ravaged* in 2010 by an explosion on the BP-leased Deepwater Horizon rig that killed 11 workers, sent millions of barrels of oil *spewing* into the sea and left it with *huge* compensation costs. (Agence France Presse, 27.4.2012, my emphasis)
>
> They sang an acapella protest *blasting* BP sponsorship of the World Shakespeare Festival. (Coventry Evening Telegraph, 27.4.2012, my emphasis)

The examples above contain *no* instances of modality. However, the words "good", "ravaged", "spewing", "huge", "blasting" are all highly evaluative. The interplay between modality and Appraisal is discussed further below.

In 2012, *dynamic modality* has reduced in number of occurrences, but in some texts has taken on a more absolute character; that is, there are fewer expressions such as "trying to", "an effort to" and "working to" from 2010. In fact, dynamic terms such as "could/could not", "try to", and "in hopes of", all of which appear frequently in the 2010 set, are entirely absent in 2012. The following examples illustrate where dynamic modal expressions are still present, but have a more definite tone:

> Without ongoing brand benchmarking prior to a crisis, *it is impossible* to chart how the crisis has influenced the brand's decline, how long the crisis is lasting, when the crisis has past [*sic*] and what steps are needed to restore corporate brand equity. (Marketing Management, 27.4.2012, my emphasis)
>
> People understand that business needs to make a profit, but they *want* to know what the business stands for. (Campaign Middle East, 27.4.2012, my emphasis)
>
> "These days *it's hard to* connect to the horror of what's being done—possibly in our name—by oil companies." (Coventry Evening Telegraph, 27.4.2012, my emphasis)

(Note in the first example that "impossibility" can also fall into the category of epistemic modality, but here it is taken to refer to ability and futurity.) If we accept Halliday and Matthiesen's categories of high, median and low modality values (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004: 620), we can generally categorise the 2012 expressions of dynamic modality as high in value, with 68 % of dynamic modal expressions being of high modality compared to 42 % of expressions in 2010. While the earlier texts related to the difficulties inherent in making an impact on a physical entity, the later expressions of dynamic modality take on the characteristics of definiteness and conviction.

In contrast, *deontic modality* increases in 2012 in both numerical and proportional significance, with the increase in evaluative and argumentation texts. These frequently take a didactic or instructional tone.

> For any company, taking the decision to act and transform itself is a critical step, but the key challenge, once this decision is made, is to identify and define what it *should* do, how it *should* act and where. (Campaign Middle East, 27.4.2012, my emphasis)
> "but I do think there is some low-hanging fruit that *should* and could be passed even this year." They are:
> 1. Congress *should* move immediately to codify the reforms implemented since the Deepwater Horizon disaster. (Foster Natural Gas/Oil Report, 27.4.2012, my emphasis)

In this last extract, the instances of deontic modality are offered in both direct and indirect representations of the voice of Interior Secretary Ken Salazar. The reversal of the more canonical "could and should" to "should and could" throws particular emphasis on the deontic rather than the epistemic modal item. The findings concerning the shift in modal types recall Thompson's (2004: 73) observation that texts such as leader articles can show a progression from epistemic to deontic modality as the writer moves from describing a situation to advising how to address it. In a sense a similar progression is reflected across my entire data sets.

So by 2012, there appears to be a decrease in the mitigation and hedging that were characteristic of the reporting in previous years, primarily in the direct and indirect reporting of other people's (not the writers')

views. At the same time, the increase in deontic modality appears largely in the authorial voice, in suggestions of what participants in (or readers of) the texts should do. So while there is an increase in one form of modal resources (deontic modality) to indicate the more overt intrusion of the speaker, this is the only area of increase. The overall decrease in both frequency and strength of modality indicates *an increase in linguistic certainty*.

In Summary

My genre analysis might have generated the hypothesis that, because the texts are moving from more "factual" towards more "evaluative", they would move from a state of certainty (this is what is happening) to a state of uncertainty (but what does it all mean?). We might have expected that an aim for objectivity would give way to a more subjective view of events, and thus a greater intrusion by the writer. In fact, the movements go in the opposite direction. This move to certainty could rather be seen as a move from a state of "newness" to a state of "givenness" (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). With the passage of time, writers are presenting their observations in such a way that they are incontrovertible. A statement without modality is the most unobtrusive way, grammatically, to signal unequivocal information.

However, the analysis also suggests an increase in evaluative language, and here a distinction between the processes at work in the modality system and those at work in the Appraisal System (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004; Martin & White, 2005) are worth making. Following the work of Hunston and Thompson, Martin and White (2005: 38) comment that:

> Opinions about entities are canonically attitudinal and involve positive and negative feelings; opinions about propositions on the other hand are canonically epistemic and involve degrees of certainty.

From this perspective, we see a discernible move from a highly *modalised* ("canonically epistemic") means of expression towards one that is high in force in terms of the *Appraisal System* ("positive and negative feelings").

Table 9.2 Summary of findings—modality and Appraisal

	Descriptive genres	Evaluative genres
Generic expectation	Low modality	High modality
Findings from data	High • Modality mainly attributed to other writers/speakers • Some authorial modality	Lower • Opinion presented as fact • Use of other evaluative strategies
Type of modality found	Epistemic *"It might be"*	Deontic *"You should"*
Findings for Appraisal	Present • "Semantics of intensification"	High • Judgement: social sanction

This could indicate that the crisis moves from a set of disparate propositions about the relevant events, presented using the resources of the modal system, towards being a single entity with a recognisable set of characteristics, presented using resources that are more relevant to attitude and judgement.

Table 9.2 summarises these findings on modality and Appraisal across my texts, as they move from more descriptive genres to more evaluative genres.

The findings indicate that news media writers have become increasingly clear, certain and judgemental in their approach to the topic of the BP Deepwater Horizon events. In effect, they are asserting by this stage: "we know what this is".

10

Stage 3: A Depth Analysis at the Level of Mythic Meanings

My analysis in this chapter moves to a consideration of the linguistic features related to figurative language and connotation, that is, to expressions at the level of mythic meanings. For the BP data, metonymy and metaphor were of interest.

Feature 7: Metonymy

Definition and Analysis Method

I presented an outline of the rhetorical trope metonymy in the context of the semiotic level of connotation or myth. My definition of metonymy includes both the specific concept of metonymy (substitution according to contiguity) and synecdoche (whole for part and part for whole substitution). My analysis strategy for metonymic expressions was firstly to identify all instances of metonymy within my data sets. In this process of identification, I used for support and terminology the summary lists and categorisations of metonyms found in, amongst others, Chandler (2007), Lakoff and Johnson (1980), Cornelissen (2008) and

Radden, Köpcke, Berg, and Siemund (2007), placing metonyms in groups such as ORGANISATION FOR MEMBER, CONTROLLER FOR CONTROLLED and so on. As well as using the guidelines offered in these works, I also followed the general principle outlined by Dirven (2002) that metonymic expressions can often be recognised by the use of an inanimate subject with a verb usually requiring an animate subject. Dirven gives as examples the verbs "mean" or "use", and there are many usages of this type in my own data, for example "The US Census Bureau recently declared …" (Canwest News Service, 27.4.2012). In discussing the functions of metonyms, I took into account that metonymic expressions *select* an aspect of the entity described for attention, and in doing this necessarily *disregard* other aspects of the entity that might have been selected.

Findings from the BP Data

Table 10.1 shows the fall of the occurrence of metonyms from 9.7 per 000 words in 2010 to 3.2 instances per 000 words in 2012. I follow the convention of referring to metonyms in the format "X FOR Y" and in capitals.

The pattern of metonymy in the 2010 data is relatively straightforward. Metonymic expressions (which can be words or phrases) occur nearly ten times for every 000 words, as Table 10.1 shows. By far the majority of metonymic expressions in 2010 are those that use an organisation

Table 10.1 The occurrence of metonyms in the 2010–12 BP texts

	2010	2011	2012
[BP] ORGANISATION FOR MEMBERS	36	23	4
[OTHER] ORGANISATION FOR MEMBERS	33	15	9
MACHINE FOR CREW	13	0	0
INSTRUMENT FOR PRODUCER	1	7	2
CONTROLLER FOR CONTROLLED	2	0	0
ORGANISATION FOR INDEX	0	1	0
PLACE FOR PERSON/PEOPLE	0	3	3
Other metonymic expressions	3	3	3
Extended metonyms	0	0	2
Total	**88**	**52**	**23**
Total per 000 words	**9.7**	**7.4**	**3.2**

name to indicate a person or persons, namely, ORGANISATION FOR MEMBERS. These expressions typically include a verb that would normally require a human subject, for example, in this data extract:

> British energy giant BP *said* Tuesday that first-quarter profits rocketed on higher oil prices but *admitted* that the news was overshadowed by last week's tragic accident at a rig in the Gulf of Mexico. (Agence France Presse, 27.4.2010)

Unsurprisingly, the most common organisation used in this way is BP, whose corporate comments and actions are central to the story. Other organisations frequently used metonymically are the Coast Guard and rig-owner Transocean. Using the metonymy ORGANISATION FOR MEMBERS can have different kinds of effect. Cornelissen (2008) makes the point that metonymy is used in this way primarily for convenience. However, he goes on to argue (2008: 90) that using the company name with a verb normally requiring an animate subject supports the widespread metaphor by which the company is seen as a *person*.

> While the initial motivation for the metonymy may have been primarily referential as shorthand for a relative clause, the use of this kind of metonymy also cues a metaphorical image of a company as a person or human being.

According to this thinking, by using metonymy in constructions such as "*BP said* it is *committed* to doing everything in its power" the company "is imbued with a certain 'corporate personality' or 'corporate identity'" (2008: 90). Cornelissen presents this observation neutrally. However, I would argue that it is generally to a company's advantage to represent itself as a single entity. In particular in the case of a crisis situation, it is considered crucial that the company "speaks with one voice" and acts as one with a single aim and purpose (Burt, 2012). In this sense, the convenience of using "BP said" rather than naming a person whose identity is not relevant might serve the additional purpose of contributing towards a positive sense of a unified entity.

The corollary of this observation is to conceive the ORGANISATION FOR MEMBERS metonymy as obscuring agency. In the 2010 situation where the question of fault, blame and responsibility was at issue but as yet unexpressed, the use of the designation "BP", with all the weight of its brand values and corporate identity, has a different role in meaning-making than "Doug Suttles, chief operating officer of BP Exploration and Production". In this way, when "BP" is used metonymically for actors within the company, it works both to *represent* an existing reality, by indexing all the pre-existing associations readers have with the organisation, and to *construct* reality, by representing the company as a human being. This applies also to the other organisations used metonymically within the data set.

In the case of BP, however, there was a departure from the typical public relations model. CEO Tony Hayward decided to step out from behind the metonym "BP" and become the public face of the crisis. Many of the 2010 texts include quotations from Hayward personally, from press conferences, press releases and direct from the shores near the oil spill. As Bergin (2011: 166) writes:

> This constituted Hayward's third big PR mistake: he had decided to front the response effort himself. If not the most fatal, it was certainly the most public of his mistakes in handling the crisis. As the CEO of a rival would later tell him, "You stopped being the CEO and slipped into chief operating officer mode."

Because of this, it is possible that the frequency of occurrence of BP as ORGANISATION FOR MEMBERS is lower than it might have been in a business crisis where key figures seek to present comments as emanating from the company as an organisation rather than as being the words of particular individuals.

The use of metonymic expressions drops from 9.7 per 000 words in 2010 to 7.4 in 2011, with some marked shifts in type of metonym. The fall in absolute numbers of metonyms is due to the fact that the metonym type ORGANISATION FOR MEMBERS drops by more than half: the 2011 texts do not feature as many quotations from BP or other organisations as was the case in 2010, meaning that it is less common that

the organisation stands in whole-for-part relation for the spokesperson. Where this type of usage does occur, it is more likely to be in relation to the 2011 Quarter 1 results, than the Deepwater Horizon events themselves, as in the following example:

> After *BP PLC reported* Wednesday that net profits rose 16 percent in the first quarter, company officials acknowledged the company has applied for permits to restart drilling in the Gulf. (The Associated Press, 27.4.2011, my emphasis)

The category ORGANISATION FOR MEMBERS covered a limited number of organisations in 2010, focusing on direct participants. In 2011, this group of metonyms refers to a wider spread of organisations, including the US government, the Obama administration, Research and Markets (a publisher) and Shell. This observation accords with the fragmentation of types of actor in the data. Similarly, metonymic usages of the type PLACE FOR PERSON appear to show a movement of interest from the core location of the events in the Gulf to further afield, referring in 2011 to Florida, the White House, and "sister states".

The category INSTRUMENT FOR PRODUCER appears more significantly in 2011 than in 2010, and relates largely to reports and legal documents, in constructions such as the following:

> *Coast Guard report slams* Transocean over Deepwater Horizon. (SNL Daily Gas Report, 27.4.2011, my emphasis)
> *The Times editorial seems to ignore* the applicable legal background. (SNL Daily Gas Report, 27.4.2011, my emphasis)
> *The legal remedy that promises* to give Florida the maximum recovery in the shortest time is the federal Oil Pollution Act, which makes BP and any other responsible party strictly and fully liable for such harm. (Tampa Bay Times (Florida), 27.4.2011, my emphasis)

These are typical examples of inanimate entities associated with verbs that call for an animate subject, but they also exemplify the process of representation I mentioned earlier in my discussion of intertexts, by which reports and documentation of various kinds, instead of direct participants, are called upon to witness and make meaning of the events.

By 2012, very few metonymic expressions are used. It is understandable that BP would feature far less frequently in the construction ORGANISATION FOR MEMBERS than it did in 2010. What is interesting is that it has not been replaced by the use of any other organisations in this whole-for-part way, and this reflects the limited role that organisational statements of any kind are now playing in the BP story. PLACE FOR PERSON has stayed at about the same level, albeit low. The instances featured in the 2012 data set are "the State [estimates]", "the city [is catching up]" and "the City [expects]", reflecting the longer-term implications of the effects of the spill not on directly affected areas but those affected indirectly. Here the metonymic references are to North Dakota (state) and Williston, North Dakota (city) and London's financial centre (the City). The category INSTRUMENT FOR PRODUCER is lower in 2012 than 2011, but, as in the previous year, helps demonstrate the increasing role of reporting texts mentioned in 2011 in the phrases "social media [has taken corporate responsibility]" and "the report [guides people]".

In Summary

Key changes in the use of metonymy can be summarised as follows:

1. A drop in metonymic expressions over the timespan of the data, due largely to the decrease in the form BP FOR MEMBERS.
2. Metonymic expressions become more likely to be used in the contexts:

   - INSTRUMENT FOR USER, especially in 2011 to refer to reports of various kinds.
   - PLACE FOR PERSON where the places are increasingly distant from the Gulf States.

The findings of the metonymy analysis provided additional evidence for the distancing of the story from its original sources on a number of dimensions—distance from BP, reliance on written accounts and the spatial distance of the geographical locations mentioned.

Feature 8: Metaphor

Definition and Analysis Method

Like metonymy, metaphor is a rhetorical trope, and one that is identified as a particular source of innovation in language. Chapter 3 offers a broad overview of scholarly work on metaphor, and of Jakobson's (2002) critical distinction between the metaphoric and metonymic dimensions in representation. In the same way as for metonymy, my research process consisted of identifying metaphors, grouping them by type (in this case, sense domains) and examining their frequency, the nature of source and target domains, and changes over the time period of the data set.

The first stage was to identify all metaphors in order to gain an overview of the use of metaphorical language and how this changes over the three-year period. This was an emergent approach to the data, where no assumptions were made about the type of domain of metaphors encountered, and this approach was aligned to the non-directive nature of my research questions. In other words, I did not seek to explore the frequency and usage of specific metaphorical domains, as is the case in, for example, Koller and Davidson (2008) who examine social exclusion; Koller (2003) on business and war/sport; Milne, Kearins, and Walton (2006) writing about business as a journey and White (2003) on economics and growth. Rather, I sought to identify metaphorical usages of any kind, and investigate themes that emerge: the recurrent domains that are used by journalists to conceptualise the BP crisis and its related outcomes.

The task of identifying all metaphorical usage is complex. The conventional denotation X IS Y (e.g. BUSINESS IS WAR) can imply that nominal metaphors are most typical (Cameron, 1999); however, in verbal language, metaphors span all word classes. Although metaphors are usages where one entity or process is described in terms of another, for some metaphors ("dead" metaphors), the presence of two sense domains is weak or no longer discernible. Nevertheless, I included dead and dormant metaphors in my analysis, on the grounds that even these non-creative usages can contribute, albeit weakly, to a dominant view of the phenomenon in question. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) argue that metaphors we scarcely notice still structure our shared thinking in fundamental ways.

In a business context, Koller (2003: 88–89) argues that weak or dead metaphors, nevertheless, give additional weight to dominant themes. Further, the distinction between live, dead and dormant metaphors is not always easy to define. As is the case in much linguistic analysis (e.g. the identification of genres) prototypical examples are clear, but much other identification and categorisation can be a matter of judgement.

In the BP texts, metaphors either belonged to a recurrent group (e.g. the common group BUSINESS IS WAR) or were one-off usages. In the case of recurrent groups, I included all three categories of live, dormant and dead metaphors, on the grounds that dead metaphors may still support a particular metaphorical line of thought in a congruent way.

Findings from the BP Data

Table 10.2 shows the frequency of metaphorical uses from 2010 to 2012.

A frequency count is a relatively superficial way of investigating metaphor, but a number of interesting changes were evident over the period of the data, which formed part of the evidence for wider patterns. These were:

Table 10.2 The occurrence of metaphors in the 2010–12 BP texts

	2010	2011	2012
OIL SPILL IS MALEVOLENT/WILD CREATURE	23	0	3
FINANCIAL ITEMS MOVE IN SPACE	20	39	4
WEATHER IS ANIMATE	9	0	0
Metaphors in source domain of MYTHS AND LEGENDS	1	4	8
BUSINESS IS SPORT	1	10	8
BUSINESS IS A JOURNEY	0	1	15
BUSINESS IS WAR	0	12	7
OIL IS WATER	0	0	6
Metaphors in source domain of THEATRE AND ART	0	2	5
Metaphors in source domain of CRIME	0	0	5
BUSINESS GROWTH IS LIKE BUILDING	0	6	4
BUSINESS GROWTH IS ORGANIC	0	1	2
COMPANY IS HUMAN	0	4	2
Other live metaphors	4	8	23
Other dormant metaphors	14	37	50
Other dead metaphors	14	26	41
Totals	**86**	**150**	**183**
Totals per 000 words	**9.5**	**21.4**	**25.8**

1. The occurrence of metaphors of all kinds increased over the span of the data.
2. The source and target domains changed over the span of the data.

Firstly, the general rise in frequency of metaphorical usage may have a number of drivers. Studies indicate (e.g. Krennemayr, 2011) that news writing is quite metaphorical, and that, if anything, hard news writing uses more metaphor than soft news. These findings relating to occurrence of metaphor run counter to my own analysis of the BP texts, where the pattern of text type shifts from primarily news and financial reports (Krennemayr's "hard news") towards evaluative writing such as editorials, travel pages, reviews, letters, business articles and personal blogs, which are more aligned to her definition of "soft news". The shift is not wholesale, but Krennemayr's findings would predict a drop, rather than a rise in metaphor. Since I find that genre is an important explanatory factor for linguistic movement in this BP corpus over the three-year period, and since Krennemayr's work is relevant, providing a specific review of how metaphor works in news within a substantial corpus, it is worth taking this apparent discrepancy seriously. It would seem that both the higher incidence of metaphor in Krennemayr's texts and the higher incidence of metaphor in hard news compared with soft news can largely be explained by a single categorisation difference. Krennemayr takes the formulation ORGANISATION FOR MEMBERS to be a metaphor, which she labels personification. Indeed, she cites this as being a key explanation for the "unexpected result" (2011: 123) of the relative overuse of verbs in their metaphorical sense in news. I classify such usages as metonymy, with the justification that they signify a whole–part relation, and in doing this I follow Chandler (2007) and Cornelissen (2008). If this category were added into the analysis of metaphor, it would certainly change the pattern to be more in line with Krennemayr's expected behaviour for the data. Her overall point remains very pertinent to this work, namely, that news writing is highly metaphorical, and that metaphor has a number of functions that are specific to the genre—including making complex or abstract concepts more accessible to the reader, a cohesive function to create a satisfying whole, a rhetorical persuasive function and a way of creating humorous effects (Krennemayr, 2011).

Secondly, there is noticeable change in the clusters of metaphors that appear regularly. Target domains in 2010 are the oil spill itself, the weather and financial items such as shares and profits. Both the oil spill and the weather are represented through metaphor as animate, threatening or uncontrolled.

> Louisiana-based BP spokesman Neil Chapman said 49 vessels—oil skimmers, tugboats, barges and special recovery boats that separate oil from water—are working to *round up* oil as the spill area continues to expand. (Carleton Place (Canada), 27.4.2010)
>
> The sunken BP and Transocean oil rig *is spewing* 42,000 gallons of crude a day. (NewsWatch: Energy, 27.4.2010)
>
> And the Coast Guard unfortunately admitting that no matter *how much cooperation they get* from the currents as well as the winds, it probably will not be able to stop that 1800-mile slick from splashing onto shore by the weekend. (CNN, 27.4.2010)

By 2011, targets remain financial items, given the first quarter results, but metaphors relating to business become more predominant, particularly those that offer a combative view of business, using the source domains WAR and SPORT. This was found in context to relate mainly to BP's business struggles one year after Deepwater Horizon, which concern not only the oil spill, but also other difficulties such as BP's business dealings in Russia. By 2012, as 27 April does not fall on results day, financial texts have dropped in number and proportion, and related metaphors are greatly reduced. Business is still a target for metaphorical expressions, and those relating to WAR and SPORT are still in evidence, although there are fewer, and in the area of business some alternative metaphorical constructions have emerged in the areas of business growth and business conceived as a JOURNEY.

Various metaphors for business growth have been identified in literature, including parenting (Dodd, 2002) building (Dodd, 2002; White, 2003) and organic growth. Within the 2012 data set, examples of the BUILDING metaphor appear, in phrases such as the following.

> *Building* brands through behaviour. (Campaign Middle East, 27.4.2012, my emphasis)

> Shell turned a profit of $7.7bn (nearly £5bn) in the first three months of this year and the trading performance will *buttress* already good market sentiment around its recommended acquisition of Cove. (The Scotsman, 27.4.2012, my emphasis)

The examples above are rather conventional usages, and only indirectly related to the BP events: in the first case the metaphor refers to a theoretical or hypothetical brand (advice for building a brand: don't do what BP did!), and in the second to BP rival Shell.

This widening of application is true of the other cluster of business metaphors that are more conspicuous in 2012, namely, BUSINESS IS A JOURNEY. Of the 15 instances of the metaphor identified in 2012, only one refers to BP itself, and this is the third shown below.

> Brands that embrace this new honest and responsible world have an exciting future. And agencies that can help their clients understand, *navigate* and deliver in this new world will be more important than ever. (Campaign Middle East, 27.4.2012, my emphasis)
>
> *The next step* is to find the idea that can be used as a *strategic compass* not only to communicate this externally but also to galvanise the organisation itself. An idea that *lies between* the two biggest trends impacting business today: social responsibility and social media. (Campaign Middle East, 27.4.2012, my emphasis)
>
> The troubled energy major, which is seeking to *move on* from the US Gulf of Mexico oil spill disaster in 2010, had returned to profit last year with net annual earnings of $23.9 billion. (Agence France Presse, 27.4.2012, my emphasis)

Once again these metaphors are conventional, but I suggest that choice of conventional metaphors can still be telling. The third extract above refers specifically to BP, "the troubled energy major", proposing that businesses need to move on from crisis situations. It would be reasonable to assume that BP, and other oil companies mentioned, could still be portrayed as "battling", "manoeuvring" and "using weapons", but there is a more "questing", "building", "pathfinding" tone to the metaphors used by 2012. Milne et al. (2006) explore the JOURNEY metaphor in the context of business writing on sustainability, finding that in that context,

the metaphor depicts a journey without a destination, and hypothesising that the journey metaphor is a useful device for avoiding commitment to a definite end goal. It is possible that a similar ambiguity is relevant in speculation on the future of BP post-Deepwater Horizon.

Similarly interesting is the emergence of MYTH AND LEGEND as a source domain in the 2012 texts. The concept of myth and legend is realised in the following examples:

> Attendees of the United States Energy Association's (USEA's) membership meeting, taking place simultaneously at the Washington DC-based club, were invited to listen in as the Secretary blasted unnamed Washington insiders for perpetrating *"fairy tales"* about imagined obstacles to oil and gas drilling and expansion on US offshore and onshore federal properties. (Foster Natural Gas/Oil Report, 27.4.2012, my emphasis)
>
> "Like presidents of both parties before him, however," Mr. Coll writes, "he lacked the depth of conviction, the political coalitions and the scientific vision to do more than toss relative *pennies into a wishing fountain.*" (The New York Times, 27.4.2012, my emphasis)

These metaphors are not about BP's progress itself, but appear in co-text. It would be overburdening the findings to suggest that the metaphors of journey, myth and art somehow recontextualise our perception of the BP events. However, these metaphor clusters, emerging as they do in 2012, may be a small part of a general pattern that places the BP into a less concrete and more abstract context.

In Summary

There is evidence to suggest that the use of metaphor within the BP texts increases. This is a slightly unusual pattern, given that news reports in particular are held to be highly metaphorical, but can partly be explained by an overlap in definitions of metaphor and metonym. The other change is in metaphor domains, where metaphors relating to the uncontrollable weather and oil spill give way to metaphors in the domains of journey, myth and legend, which add a different (more symbolic) dimension to the BP story, albeit to a limited extent.

11

Stage 3: A Depth Analysis at the Level of Ideology

So far in this depth analysis stage, I have covered eight of the nine features of discourse relevant to my data set. These eight features have been situated at the semiotic levels of "sign", in the case of naming and categorisation choices, "code", in the case of the explorations of modality, genre and intertextuality, or "myth" in the case of the rhetorical tropes of metaphor and metonym. An identification of discourses should draw on any or all of the eight language features in order to identify persistent patterns that point to the presence of ideological positions. A consideration of discourses is one way of visualising what my disparate set of language features might "add up to". I was open to the possibility that new discourses may emerge year by year, to reveal a continually shifting pattern, or discourses may overlap the data sets, or co-exist in a single year.

Feature 9: Discourses

Definition and Analysis Method

My particular research interest was in news media *representations* of the BP events, and the ideologies that were important to my account were those that informed the ways in which the story of the Deepwater Horizon events was represented to the reading public. In investigating significant discourses, I sought patterns and characteristics of the representation of the BP events which suggested shared ways of thinking, as well as changes in thinking over the time period of the data. Discourses have been found problematic to analyse systematically, and the work of Foucault does not provide specific methodological guidance (Graham, 2005). Sunderland points out (2006: 166) that discourses are "partial", "non-finite" and "non-ubiquitous"—and subject to the perspective of the individual analyst.

> Different discourses are accordingly likely to be "spotted" by different social groups of readers and analysts—for example those who favour a feminist perspective and those with a more traditionalist perspective—even when looking at exactly the same textual set of linguistic traces.

Sunderland defines a number of linguistic features as relevant to discourse identification, including lexical choices, verb forms and moods, speech acts and collocations. She points out that the analyst should be alert to what may be omitted as well as what is present. Fairclough's (1989, 1992a, 1995a) approach to identifying the presence of ideologies focuses strongly on analyses within the framework of Systemic Functional Grammar, where linguistic choices concerning, for example, actor, mood and word order are held to be significant in positioning speakers and audience in certain desired relationships. A great diversity of individual and mixed method approaches have been used in the identification and analysis of discourses, including content analysis (Potter & Reicher, 1987), grammatical analysis (Fairclough, 1989), conversation analysis (Speer, 2001), poststructuralist approaches (Baxter, 2008; Wetherell, 1998) and corpus methods. Many analysts propose a mixed method approach in their selec-

tion of tools for analysing discourses (e.g. Baxter, 2010; Cook, Robbins, & Pieri, 2006).

To identify patterns in the BP data relating to the ninth feature—discourses—I drew on my findings for the other eight discursive features. In my analysis so far, I had already identified a number of recurrent themes. I refer to these now as evidence of four representational discourses.

Findings from the BP Data

Discourse 1: Objective Factuality

In 2010 the dominant text genres were the news report and the financial report, and I have shown in analysis that the texts within these genres largely conformed to genre type in the ways they use language to give an impression of *objective factuality*, which I suggest was the dominant discourse in the 2010 texts.

Several of the individual analyses described above indicate prototypical features of the representation of "objective reality": the prevalence of facts and figures, a use of modality attributed to reported voices, the marshalling (and repetition) of supporting statements from a limited number of sources perceived as credible and metonymic usages that replace people with institutions as social actors. The typical structure of these reports is the inverted pyramid structure, which is one of the conventional markers signalling objective reporting. Alongside these expected stylistic and structural language features are others that are less characteristic of the prototypically "objective" news report. Some are explicable in the context that my selected news texts appeared very early in the course of events. There is evidence of uncertainty in naming choices for the events, and the categorisation of the oil spill amongst world events is as yet tentative. Facts and figures are sometimes unspecific. While modal expressions are generally a feature of quoted sources in the texts, other instances of modality can be seen in authorial voices, serving to qualify the unmodalised declarative mood which is typical of the news report genre, and indicating the level of uncertainty surrounding the events at this stage. This is evident in the metaphors used to describe the spill and

the weather, which represent these as uncontrollable forces. There is occasional use of a narrative or storytelling structure, which is less typical of "factual" reports. While these features would be unusual in quantity for news report writing, in the frequency in which they occur I judge them to be further indicators of an objective–realistic presentation, in that they indicate an acknowledgement of a messy and uncertain reality that accords with readers' experience. An excess of certainty and an entirely declarative style would be neither credible nor easily readable.

In describing the "factuality" of news as a construct, I accept that representations of "fact" are ideologically grounded. In aggregate, these result in versions of news stories that are aligned variously to the interests of media organisations, readers, other journalists and (sometimes) participants in the story. Where these interests are in conflict, there can be a struggle for control over the information presented. In the 2010 texts there is direct evidence from my texts of BP's attempts to control both the content and expression of information via impersonal linguistic constructions in press releases, interspersed with personal (non-metonymic) communications from CEO Tony Hayward. Alternative voices, such as environmental and anti-globalisation interests, have a limited or mitigated presence in 2010, as there is considerable uncertainty about the scale, reach and duration of the spill.

Discourse 2: Positioning

Typical markers of the discourse of objectivity continue to be discernible in many of the 2011 texts, including the presentation of empirical facts, neutral lexis and some distancing of journalists from commentary on their material through the use of reported speech. At the same time, other 2011 texts show a greater degree of engagement by journalists, who have started to express their own opinions overtly, and to summarise, synthesise and interpret information about the oil spill. As a crucial part of this process, journalists place and locate the unknown (the BP events) within the known, in other words, positioning it as a certain entity. While the discourse of objective factuality continues to be a feature of the 2011 texts, a discourse of *positioning* is the characteristic feature in this year.

The positioning of the events is recognisable particularly in the linguistic process of categorisation, which has increased significantly in 2011 over 2010. Through groups, lists and comparisons, BP is positioned, unsurprisingly, as a "disaster" (to use one of the key terms from the 2011 texts) and journalists define the events by analogy with other events, which in their turn have been previously defined and categorised. I have commented that the 2011 lists and groups are what we might term "expected". So by 2011, journalists follow a relatively proscribed pattern of writing about disasters. Amongst other strands, the following topics are typically of interest (Arpan, 2002; Stephens, Malone, & Bailey, 2005):

1. The cost: for restoration and compensation.
2. Blame and responsibility: for the cause of the disaster (not applicable to natural disasters, but applicable to BP) and the subsequent handling (applicable to both natural and man-made disasters).
3. The future: when the immediate effects of the disaster (e.g. oil on the beaches) will have been tackled. Any changes arising from the disaster (e.g. in oil drilling policy).

These are only three of a number of regularly rehearsed ideas about disasters of this kind. These shared ideas raise a series of expectations about media coverage (that the questions inherent in them will be answered), and the texts in my data set show evidence that this is the case. In 2011, the texts increasingly address the questions of cause, blame and responsibility, as well as compensation. They address issues of recovery, such as the form this is taking, and how long it will be before normality is resumed. Addressing the questions that arise from generally held assumptions is part of a longer-term process towards a sense that we now understand what the events mean. The 2011 texts fulfil a critical role before this can happen, and this role is one of definition and location. Here, the relevant information is "bigger/smaller than what?", "like/unlike what?", "as expensive/not as expensive as what?"

Categorising, listing and grouping are the key features of a discourse of positioning, but three other processes are also relevant. Firstly, the analysis of the news report genre in 2011 shows that the BP story increasingly

forms part of *other* news stories; 27 % of the texts are news stories, but only 15 % relate primarily to the BP events. The rest mention BP as part of another story. Secondly, represented events are positioned by means of intertexts. That is, it becomes more common that the researched texts comment on other *texts about the events* rather than the *events themselves*. In this way, an agreement about the meaning is being fixed and shared, through the use and spread of common, legitimised sources. Thirdly, this involves *temporal* positioning—texts start to place the BP events within a diachronic context. Four broad time bands are visible as strands throughout these texts: DISTANT PAST → RECENT PAST (2010 EVENTS) → CURRENT EVENTS (2011) → FUTURE. Current events, as covered in the 2011 texts, are more or less directly related to the 2010 events of a year ago—these are the touchpoints for the 2011 commentary. The more distant past is evoked in phrases such as "the biggest oil spill in US history", which is used several times in the 2011 data set, serving to place the oil spill in the context of events further back than 2010. At the other end of the time spectrum, a number of the texts refer to planning for the future. These include the Panama City Beach text (marketing planning), an item on predicting future oil prices, the text headlined "BP expects to resume Gulf drilling this year" and another whose headline is "Prepare in Advance for the Inevitable Crisis".

Discourse 3: Redeployment

The 2011 texts also begin to show evidence of another discursive feature: a high tolerance for non-neutral and critical voices, for example, a blog and an editorial about the high price of oil, a book about BP' s alleged management failings and Twitter criticism one year after the oil spill. In the same way as many 2011 texts are still part of the 2010 discourse of objective factuality, I suggest that others featuring alternative or resistant voices also belong to a discourse other than the *positioning* discourse—that of *redeployment*—which becomes even more evident in the 2012 texts.

In 2012, I suggest that two types of representational discourse are evident—one of which, rather than continuing the process of *positioning* in a further linear direction of fixing meaning, serves instead to question

fixed meanings and offer different meaning potentials, and this is what I mean by a discourse of *redeployment*. In this discourse, once a meaning for the BP events has been agreed, or partially agreed, it can be regarded as "known" and redeployed as a resource with a (temporarily) fixed meaning. This is, I propose, what can be observed in three significant features of the 2012 texts—firstly, the increase in the exploration of the meaning of BP events through creative works; secondly, the tolerance for alternative voices (resistant discourses) and, thirdly, the use of a creative form of categorisation to play with meaning.

I showed in my analysis how creative works about the BP events became part of the media representation of the phenomenon. These creative works use the new signified, or the positioned concept of the events, as a starting point for exploration of meaning at a societal level. It is only once there is a *shared concept* of the BP oil spill, that it becomes available for interpretation in this way. In reporting and commenting *on* these creative treatments, the media texts mark them as "other", and are able to position these texts for the reader, through selection, approval and disapproval, in ways they choose. However, these challenging artistic representations—if widely seen and adopted—can serve to shift the positioning of the events described above, in an iterative development of meaning.

The challenge presented in creative works is often through the articulation of alternative or resistant discourses. Artistic interpretations often represent resistant discourses, frequently challenging how the mass media has positioned the phenomenon—through humour, by adding layers of complexity or by setting it alongside other phenomena in a productive interplay of comparison and contrast intended to yield new insights. So, for example, the Margaret Atwood book mentioned in one of the 2012 texts takes the idea of the BP events and their subsequent outcomes as moral failure, rather than, say, the inevitable consequence of the risky but heroic venture of delivering oil to allow global progress. Blogs, letters and reports of political speeches also show evidence of resistant discourses: issues of compensation, financial impacts and future drilling agendas in the Gulf and elsewhere are exposed and aired in print and online texts in the data set. I have mentioned in the introductory chapter that control by traditional media institutions has been increasingly broken down by mass access to the Internet, and one of the outcomes is a considerable

increase in voice for minority and alternative views. Within the 2012 (and some 2011) texts, critical voices stand in contrast to, for example, financial reporting, in which the oil spill tends to be mentioned as an explanatory footnote to Quarter 1 results. However, my analysis shows that while critical voices, or resistant discourses, are given a place in the texts, particularly if they belong to politicians or others with ready access to a voice, they are frequently "bracketed". By this I mean that they are placed in non-news pages (so are not endorsed as factual), or they are quoted directly whereby the journalist does not take responsibility for them, or they are positioned as non-mainstream (e.g. they are part of artworks) or they are backgrounded through rhetorical choices. So while institutional and non-institutional voices contribute to this conversation, non-institutional voices can be positioned as to one side of the discussion. As Conboy (2007: 97) notes:

> Hierarchies of news value can be varied to allow unfamiliar and even contentious voices to be heard as long as they do not destabilize longer term patterns of meaning.

Thirdly, the concept of creative categorisation refers to the observation that the linguistic feature of categorisation is employed in a rather different way by the 2012 texts than it was in 2011. Where in 2011, the events were placed in *expected* categories for the purpose of positioning, by 2012 they are mentioned in contexts that can be quite distant from oil spills, and placed alongside quite other social phenomena in a way that suggests an exploration of the boundaries of the partially agreed meaning of the concept "BP oil spill".

Discourse 4: Naturalisation

At the same time as, and in tension with, the discourse of *redeployment* is the tendency to fix and normalise meaning by presenting interpretations of the crisis as "given". This discourse is aligned with Barthes' concept of the *naturalisation* of representation, and can be seen as a progression of the discourse of positioning, whereby once events are located within known frameworks, they are presented as naturally understood in certain ways.

So throughout the three data sets, but particularly by 2012, sit discourses that are concerned to normalise the catastrophic events, and absorb them into the general consciousness. These discourses are part of a longer-term naturalisation of the understanding of events (Barthes, 1972), by which the meaning of the BP oil spill is seen as presumed and unarguable. They are evident in a number of linguistic patterns. There is a continued decrease in modal expressions of uncertainty, suggesting that propositions are not open for question or challenge. The range of naming terms for the events is smaller, and the terms are longer, incorporating shorthand descriptions of the events that propose brief and selective ways of understanding them. The BP story is increasingly reduced to an explanatory footnote or an illustrative example within a different story. For the BP oil spill to have any resonance as explanatory footnote or illustrative example suggests that a process of *naturalisation* is under way.

Strategies by writers to present the events as naturalised can be seen to serve both business and socio-cultural interests. With time, events are positioned as no longer new and unique, but past and "other". From a specifically business perspective, a return to business as usual is the key aim for business management (de Cock, Cutcher, & Grant, 2010; Stephens et al., 2005), for whom crises are seen as part of the nature of business development. Coverage in my set of texts draws upon a number of entrenched assumptions about business in general, and the oil business in particular.

1. That business needs to continue to grow, whether or not this is logical from the point of view of sustainability (Western, 2010).
2. That business involves inevitable risks and setbacks. These need to be "dealt with", "beaten" and "recovered from". Indeed, the business crisis can be construed as an opportunity to expedite desired change or renegotiate leadership practices (Mitroff, 2005; O'Reilly, Lamprou, Leitch, & Harrison, 2013).
3. Business in general, and the oil business in particular, is regarded as adventurous, exciting and pioneering. Seen in this way, risk (although not its negative outcomes) is potentially both exciting and admirable.

So texts such as those of the business and market reports genre present the events from the perspective that crises such as oil spills are inevitable, but that measures have been taken to mitigate their likely future occurrence. In two of the researched texts consultancy services advise on crisis management and restoring business reputations. I have mentioned in analysis texts which deal with BP's forward planning, as well as calls for the resumption of deepwater drilling in the Gulf.

Outside the business context, media coverage refers to the BP events within the context of known social phenomena. The events are no longer the exclusive province of business and the environment, but part of a shared history, and aligned with quite disparate concepts through the processes of *redeployment*. One difference between business and non-business media coverage is that outside the area of business, there is less concern to naturalise the events by treating them as part of the "rough and tumble" of business. Rather, they are a resource to be drawn on as a representative token of a certain type of human experience, be it an environmental issue, a huge lawsuit or an example of complacency about safety. This is a more complex reading of the representation than the business reading. By 2012, resistant discourses are still evident (environmental protest being the most obvious example) and at that time it was still clear that discourses of *naturalisation* are by no means complete and meanings are still being argued, and their boundaries contested.

In Summary

I found four discourses of media representation across the three data sets:

1. Objective factuality.
2. Positioning.
3. Redeployment.
4. Naturalisation.

While there was a broad progression from each of these discourses to the next over the course of the media coverage, nevertheless, there was also evidence of overlap and interplay between them within each of the

data sets. The progression was not necessarily fully sequential or systematic, and I explore this observation in Chaps. 13 and 14. Meanwhile, the fourth stage of analysis is to investigate how the findings from the Stage 3 depth analysis can be understood within single texts, and the following chapter offers an example of this type of holistic analysis.

12

Stage 4: A Holistic Analysis of a Single Text

The analyses I have just described have been relatively decontextualised, and the final stage, which I have called a "holistic analysis stage", serves to reconnect some disparate observations with a complete text, as it would be encountered by a reader. A micro-analytic overview of a single text investigates the interplay of the selected features. This textual overview can serve to show how signs (lexical choices), codes (systems) and mythic meaning (connotations) are combined at different stages in the representation. The holistic analysis stage was particularly useful for the complex process of identifying discourses, which, as I argue above, can be realised through a wide range of language choices and strategies. Here is a text from 2010, briefly analysed as an illustration of the first discourse of representation: objective factuality. This is one example, but any number of texts can be analysed in this way, to demonstrate either a specific or a general analysis point.

Analysis of a Full BP Text

The text below is shown largely as presented in Nexis UK, with a couple of small changes: an error in transcription of an apostrophe has been corrected ("Iâ€[TM]m" appeared in Nexis instead of "I'm"), the font has been changed to fit with the rest of this book and the highlighting of my search terms using emboldened red type has been removed. As well as the complete news report, the database also shows paratextual information, such as the load date (28 April) as well as the original publication date (27 April), the logo and name of the source (in this case the news agency Agence France Presse [AFP]), the length of the piece (in this case 481 words), the language (English) and the publication type (here, a newswire).

[Agence France Presse logo]
Agence France Presse—English
April 27, 2010 Tuesday 10:45 AM GMT
BP's soaring profits overshadowed by oil rig tragedy

LENGTH: 481 words

DATELINE: LONDON, April 27 2010

British energy giant BP said Tuesday that first-quarter profits rocketed on higher oil prices but admitted that the news was overshadowed by last week's tragic accident at a rig in the Gulf of Mexico.

Europe's biggest oil company said net profit soared 137 percent to 6.08 billion dollars (4.5 billion euros) in the three months to March compared with the same period in 2009.

Adjusted net profit on a replacement cost basis soared 135 percent to 5.6 billion dollars.

The replacement cost figure, which excludes the effect of changes in the value of oil and gas inventories, is closely watched by the market and compared with analyst expectations for profits of 4.81 billion dollars.

Production in the three month period was little changed at 4.01 million barrels of oil equivalent per day. BP Chief Executive Tony Hayward, in an email to staff, acknowledged that the strong results

were overshadowed by the "tragic accident" and continuing oil spill from a BP well in the Gulf of Mexico.

The Deepwater Horizon oil rig, operated by BP and owned by Transocean, sank last Thursday—two days after a massive explosion left 11 workers missing and presumed dead.

"We are going to do everything we can—firstly, to control the well; secondly, to ensure there is no serious environmental consequence; and thirdly, to understand how this has occurred and ensure that it never occurs again," Hayward said in the email, obtained by AFP.

He also expressed "tremendous sorrow" when it became clear that the missing workers were probably dead.

"I'm sure, like me, you have all experienced a whole range of emotions over the course of the last week," he told BP staff.

"Shock and, indeed, anger that the accident could happen. Tremendous sorrow when it became evident that the 11 people missing had probably died in the initial explosion.

"And great sorrow and sympathy for the families and friends of those who lost their lives."

Hayward, who has been in the United States since late last week because of the incident, added: "We have a great team in the Gulf of Mexico leading this response.

"I have every confidence that we are doing everything in our power to contain the environmental consequences of this incident."

BP deployed robotic underwater vehicles on Monday to try to cap the leaking well and prevent a growing oil slick from developing into an environmental disaster.

Satellite images showed the slick had spread by 50 percent in a day to cover an area of 600 square miles (1550 square kilometres), although officials said some 97 percent of the pollution was just a thin veneer on the sea's surface.

The group has dispatched skimming vessels to mop up the oil.

Hayward said improved weather conditions were helping the recovery effort.

"This, combined with the light, thin oil we are dealing with, has further increased our confidence that we can tackle this spill off-shore," he said.
LOAD-DATE: April 28, 2010
LANGUAGE: ENGLISH
PUBLICATION-TYPE: Newswire

The fact that this is a newswire tells us that this piece was written for onward distribution to news outlets, such as newspapers or radio or TV news, who will pay organisations such as AFP for prewritten content that they can slot, often more or less intact, into their coverage. The writer is uncredited, which is often but not always the case in newswires; however, AFP goes on to assert its journalistic credentials in the following way. The report partly concerns an email, and the writer uses the phrase "the email, obtained by AFP". This implies that the information contained in the email, ostensibly at least, is not in the public domain like a press release, for example. In fact, it is said to be an internal email to employees, which suggests that AFP has a source inside the company. As it happens, the quotations "obtained by AFP" are similar to expressions of sorrow and sympathy expressed in publicly available press releases, and indeed the final quotation "This, combined with the light thin oil…" is taken directly from a BP press release of 26 April 2010. Why, then, use the employee email as a source rather than the press releases if it is not substantively different in content? It is possible that AFP wishes to "add value" to its service by demonstrating that it does not simply copy and paste sections from press releases, but carries out original investigative journalism and seeks out new sources.

In terms of genre, this text is something of a hybrid. It combines a financial report with a news report—this is evident in the headline where the implication is that what is usually good news ("soaring profits") will be mitigated with other information. As noted earlier, these genres construct factuality in two slightly different ways. The early sections on financial information are typical of the genre financial reports, with substantial use of numbers presented in different ways (percentages, dollars, euros) and covering alternative key measures (net profit and replacement cost profit).

There is use of expert technical lexis ("adjusted net profit", "oil and gas inventories") and spatial metaphor ("soared", "rocketed") which are typical of financial reports, but evaluative markers, for example, modality, affective or judgemental lexis, are lacking.

The move to the second section of the text (beginning "BP Chief Executive Tony Hayward…") is a clear break. This is not a text that blends two genres, but rather exploits two genres held loosely together by the headline and the summarising first paragraph, which is a signal of the inverted pyramid structure. The second section of the text deals with the highly emotive subject of sympathy for the families and colleagues of the victims of the explosion, but presented in a way that communicates factuality and objectivity. All the emotive content is presented as direct quotation and explicitly attributed to a source, in this case Tony Hayward. The writer is careful not to interpose his/her own perspective on what is being said, as shown in the following fragment, where readers are intended to understand that "tremendous sorrow" is a direct quotation for which the writer of the piece takes no responsibility:

> He also expressed "tremendous sorrow" when it became clear that the missing workers were probably dead.

Otherwise the information presented directly by the journalist tends to be restricted to descriptive narrative of events in time and space, for example:

> Hayward, who has been in the United States since late last week because of the incident, added…
>
> BP deployed robotic underwater vehicles on Monday to try to cap the leaking well and prevent a growing oil slick from developing into an environmental disaster.

As quotations are used selectively, the reader has no opportunity to piece together the full text of Hayward's internal email, but it is evident even from these sections that Hayward is doing interpersonal work with his own text. He prioritises the human aspect of the tragedy with his expression of sorrow and sympathy and he aligns himself explicitly with his

staff: "I'm sure, like me, you have all experienced a whole range of emotions…". Yet he also needs to demonstrate that he (as the face of BP—the "we" in "we are going to do everything we can") is in control of the situation. This is an interesting development from earlier in the week, where BP press releases positioned BP as supportive of Transocean, but *not* as leading the response:

> BP today offered its full support to drilling contractor Transocean Ltd. and its employees after fire caused Transocean's semisubmersible drilling rig Deepwater Horizon to be evacuated overnight, saying it stood ready to assist in any way in responding to the incident. (BP press release, 21 April 2010)

In this text of 27 April, Hayward appears to have assumed control, as he appends to his expressions of sorrow some strongly worded demonstrations of confidence. He inserts the phrase "I have every confidence [that we are doing everything in our power]" to emphasise the positive impression of his message and he expresses optimism in being able to tackle the spill, with the weather now on their side. His use of "light thin oil" is intended to address fears about the physical nature of the spill (compare here my finding that metaphors about the oil slick in 2010 conversely emphasise its uncontrollable nature). Finally, Hayward's use of logical structural relations in his "utterance" suggests a rational and coherent strategy for dealing with the events at hand. Specifically, he uses a preview–detail structure (Winter, 1994) in the following text quotation:

> We are going to do everything we can—firstly, to control the well; secondly, to ensure there is no serious environmental consequence; and thirdly, to understand how this has occurred and ensure that it never occurs again.

So we have here a mixed genre text that is typical of the texts of that year, in that news reports and financial reports between them account for 90 % of the texts mentioning the BP events on 27 April. The text shows the different characteristics of its two parent genres; however, both have in common that they are presented in such a way as to appear objective and factual. Although part two of the text (typical of the news report genre) gives clear indications of the interpersonal work Tony Hayward

is doing—namely, expressing sorrow, and reassuring the reader that he is in control—this interpersonal work is distanced from the writer through the consistent use of attribution—using quotation marks and words such as "said", "told" and "added".

Features of the speech situation are noted overtly in the Nexis paratextual framing, and alluded to in the phrase "obtained by AFP". But otherwise the text is presented to the reader in such a way as to suggest it is authoritative, that it is *the* reading of the events, within its limitations, rather than *a* reading of events.

Summary of Section II

Section II has focused on an analysis approach rooted in Barthes' view of how meaning is made in texts of all kinds. This section has offered the following theoretical and practical support for written text analysis:

- A theoretical grounding, introducing a four-level heuristic for the understanding of texts.
- A guide to data collection and research principles, based on the research of the BP Deepwater Horizon story in the news media.
- A plan for a four-stage analysis of data:
    - Stage 1: contextualisation of the BP texts.
    - Stage 2: a preliminary analysis of the BP texts (immersion stage).
    - Stage 3: a depth analysis of the data, based on the four-level heuristic.
    - Stage 4: a holistic analysis of a single text.
- Illustrative findings from the BP crisis coverage in the media for each of the four stages above.

In Section III, I take these findings and make use of another semiotic conceptualisation, drawn from the ideas of C.S. Peirce, to synthesise and interpret the data.

Part III

A Peircean Conceptualisation of Written Language

13

Theoretical Foundations

Aspects of Charles Sanders Peirce's work

I have shown how discourse analysis based on a Barthesian concept of language can generate a micro- and median-level analysis of the language of representation of the BP crisis. This analysis generated a considerable amount of data for interpretation at the level of discursive features. At a broader level, however, sits the "language map", and in order to capture a sense of the full linguistic picture for each data set, I drew on some aspects of the work of Charles Sanders Peirce on semiotic concepts.

Earlier in the twentieth century, but partly in parallel with the work of de Saussure and Barthes in France, Charles Sanders Peirce was developing alternative theories of the sign. He named his area of study "sem[e]iotics", which became a more widely used term than de Saussure's "semiology". Peirce's definition of what constitutes a sign is extensive. For Peirce, a sign is "something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity" (1931–1958: 2.228). This definition appears to give the scope for full linguistic representations or data sets to be regarded as signs in themselves, much as de Saussure's definition. Seeking to

encompass all possible instances of representation, Peirce eventually theorised over 59,000 sign types (Cobley & Jansz, 1999: 30). From this extremely complex logic system, only a few of Peirce's taxonomies are regularly drawn upon in current scholarship, and I will discuss here two key ideas which offered a useful explanatory perspective on the BP data. The first is Peirce's understanding of elements of a sign, and the second is his taxonomy of three sign forms—Icon, Index and Symbol—which are ways of expressing three relationships that the sign or representation has with a real-world referent.

Object, Representamen, Interpretant

Unlike de Saussure's dyadic view, Peirce's view of the sign was triadic: the element he acknowledged in addition to de Saussure's conception was that of some real-world referent, which he termed the *Object*. This referent did not need to be material; it could also be concepts, theories or ideas (Peirce, 1931–1958). Further, Peirce did not presuppose an external reality in which the Object was a fixed, unalterable entity. To explain Peirce's Object of the sign, Chandler (2007) uses an elegant analogy of the sign being a labelled box containing the Object—the point being that the Object is only knowable via the sign, remaining, as it does, hidden inside the box. In addition to the *Object*, Peirce considered that the sign consisted of a *Representamen*, or formal sign (broadly equivalent to de Saussure's *signifier*), and the *Interpretant* (broadly equivalent to de Saussure's *signified*). Peirce (1931–1958: 2.228) explains the Interpretant as follows: "[A sign] addresses somebody, that is, creates in the mind of that person an equivalent sign, or perhaps a more developed sign. That sign which it creates I call the *interpretant* of the first sign." Cobley and Jansz (1999: 23) explain this as "the sign in the mind that is the result of an encounter with a sign". The importance of this conception is that the "sign in the mind" is then open to further interpretation, creating a further Representamen and so on, in a process that Eco (1976: 69), with reference to the work of Peirce, Barthes and Derrida, calls "unlimited semiosis", in other words, an endless and unfixable generation of meanings.

To use the example of BP: the BP crisis is conceived as the *Object*, or the "real-world" referent, the media representations are the sign or *Representamen* which stand for or "mean" the Object, and the *Interpretant* is the "sign in the mind" which is a result of our understanding of the media representation. We could conceive that the initial Interpretant in our collective mind from the media Representamen would be that of an oil rig explosion. However, our developing conception of the crisis might include the damage and destruction caused by the explosion in all its aspects, which might also call to mind other explosions, or indeed crises of different kinds, perhaps business crises, natural disasters and so on.

What does it mean to say that the crisis is the Object for this Representamen? It should be clear already that I do not claim that there is an objective reality of the events that the media reports are managing to describe more or less accurately, although this is not to deny the material consequences of loss of life, injury and destruction of the environment caused by the explosion. Apart from the question of objective reality, there is the question of scale and scope—what are the parameters of the phenomenon I wish to investigate? Butchart (2011: 291) alludes to the complexity of defining "events".

> In what does a happening consist in order for it to obtain the status of an object of knowledge? Is there a difference between a set of related occurrences and the identity of their concept? Is what happens distinct from what comes before it and everything else that codetermines it?

In the case of my research, a broad definition of the hidden Object is an aggregate of the Deepwater Horizon explosion and oil spill, the reactions of participants to it and the crisis that BP found itself dealing with for many years. More specifically, it is the object[s] of discussion by the media that I find when I consider the terms "BP", "disaster", "crisis" and "oil spill". This discussion surrounding the Object changes substantially, and this both describes and constitutes the changing "meaning" of the Object. In the way of unlimited semiosis it will become impossible to discuss the BP oil spill without reference to the web of discussions that have invested it with additional meaning, just as it is impossible to discuss, say, Nelson Mandela as "a man" without reference to the vast range

of images, films and writings that constitute our concept of him. I will go on to hypothesise how the representation of events will develop beyond the time of my data sets, drawing on the ideas of Baudrillard (1994). In Baudrillard's terms, representations at the present historical moment have come to have no relation to any reality whatsoever, but are pure simulacra. In my argument, I conceive that there is, in fact, an Object, albeit hidden and unknowable, and we move away from this Object and towards a simulacrum. In my research, I have endeavoured to trace the linguistic evidence of this movement.

Icon, Index, Symbol

Relationship to the Object

Peirce proposed three forms of the sign related in different ways to the Object, and labelled these Icon, Index and Symbol. Prototypically, an *Iconic* sign is one that relates to its Object via a relationship of *likeness* (Peirce, 1931–1958: 2.276). It represents the Object by looking like it, as a portrait might its sitter, an engineering diagram its realised article or the Underground map of London its system of train lines. These representations may be different *kinds* of likeness, but their form is recognisably related to their Object, and all are labelled as Iconic by Peirce. Under the heading of Iconic signs, Peirce also placed the *metaphor*, on the grounds that metaphors posit a relationship of likeness between one entity and another. Peirce's classification of a metaphor as an Iconic sign was not motivated by the fact that many metaphors are dead—that is they have ceased to rely on unexpected pairings of entities. Rather, he saw it as a logical outcome of the fact that targets resemble their sources in a relationship of likeness. Unfortunately, Pierce did not write extensively about metaphor, and there is little further guidance or support for his decision other than his mention of metaphor as one type of Icon. Other semioticians have recognised that the disparity between the source and target domains may require interpretation through codes and rules that suggest that there the metaphor can also be Symbolic. Some scholars (e.g. Haley, 1995; Ponzio, 2010; Sørensen, 2011) have argued that both sign forms are present in metaphor. Chandler (2001: np) writes:

> The basis in *resemblance* suggests that metaphor involves the *iconic* mode. However, to the extent that such a resemblance is oblique, we may think of metaphor as *symbolic*. (Emphasis in original)

An *Indexical* sign is characterised as being in a relationship of *contiguity* with its Object (Peirce, 1931–1958: 2.276) rather than a relationship of resemblance, as is the case for Iconic signs. Peirce's notion of Indexical signs can be elusive to grasp, as this relationship of *contiguity* can be manifest in a number of different ways (Eco, 1976; Grutman, 2010; Lock, 1997; Sørensen, 2011). Contiguity can take the form of cause-and-effect relations, such as that between smoke and fire or footprints and the presence of a person. It can be realised in metonymic and synecdochic relations, where a part of an entity stands for the whole, or a single instance can stand for an entire class, such as a sign showing a coffee cup with a red line through where the coffee is a metonym for "all drinks". Whole-for-part relations are also synecdochic, and thus Indexical, shown in language by expressions such as "BP announced", where the organisation here stands for a person/people within it. A sign can be Indexical when it points to or indicates the presence of something else, so that arrows and pub signs, for example, are Indexical. These prototypical instances are relatively straightforward, but some signs are more difficult to locate, or show complex relationships with their Object, for example, a Jaguar car can be seen as both an Index and a Symbol of wealth. A photograph may be regarded as an Icon because it shows a resemblance to its Object, or an Index because it represents a point-to-point correspondence with reality (Chandler, 2007: 38–39).

A *Symbolic* sign is one that is related to its Object only arbitrarily and by convention (Peirce, 1931–1958: 2.249). It neither looks like the Object, nor is it related diagrammatically, nor is it associated causally or through part–whole relations. It is understood only through social agreement; it has acquired meaning through the development of conventional systems, which have to be learned to make sense to the receiver. For Peirce, Symbols had meaning through rules and laws rather than through instinct and observation. Words are prototypical Symbolic signs, as they (generally) have no relation to their Object apart from that which has been conventionally agreed. Peirce's view largely accords with that

of de Saussure, which is that language is a set of arbitrary, rather than motivated signs. Other Symbolic signs include mathematical symbols or literary or artistic symbols (such as a lamb in a painting, intended to represent innocence).

I describe the definitions above as prototypical because signs need not be (indeed seldom are) pure versions of Icons, Indexes or Symbols. Most Symbols have at root an Icon and/or Index—for example, red is considered a symbol of danger through convention, but this convention is likely to be based on an association of red with blood, or fire, or the fact that red is a highly visible colour. These associations are primarily in Indexical relationship with the concept "danger". Similarly, (alphabetically) written signs, which are seen as arbitrary and Symbolic by Peirce's definition, and which de Saussure argued only have meaning in relation to each other, are often originally based on systems of pictograms that have an Iconic basis—for example, a tree or a snake (Singleton, 2000). A single sign can be argued as Iconic, Indexical and Symbolic. If I pursue the example of Jaguar, the bonnet ornament on Jaguar cars is Iconic in that it is a direct likeness of the animal; however, we attach Indexical associations of power, speed, sleekness and beauty, which we transfer from the animal to the car itself. But we also understand the ornament as a Symbol of the car through the cultural knowledge that the *signifier* "Jaguar" represents not only the *signified* "animal" but also "a car manufacturer". Further, we might interpret the bonnet ornament as an Index of wealth, or indeed a Symbol of wealth. As mentioned above, writers developing Peirce's trichotomy in the area of metaphor stress the interconnectivity of the three sign forms in creating a metaphor (Abrams, 2002; Haley, 1995; Ponzio, 2010; Sørensen, 2011). As Merrell (2001: 37) writes:

> Now, everything I have written in this section suggests that a sign can be in varying degrees iconic, indexical, and symbolic, all at the same time. A sign's evincing one sign type does not preclude its manifesting some other sign type as well. There are no all-or-nothing categories with respect to signs. As one sign type is, another sign type can become, and what that sign was may become of the nature of the first sign that the second sign now is.

Merrell illustrates that Peirce's three sign modes are separate only in theory: not only can a sign *manifest* more than one sign type, but also one

sign type can *become* another. This quality of mutability is potentially significant for my diachronic study of representation.

Distance from the Object

In their prototypical instances, then, Peirce's three sign modes have differing relationships with the unfixable Object. These relationships are to different degrees either *motivated* by the Object or in *arbitrary* relationship with it. So Iconic signs are said to be rather strongly motivated by the Object, in that they somewhat resemble it. Indexical signs have a relationship with the Object through experience, but one which is less direct. Symbolic signs have no experiential relationship with their Object. We can therefore discuss sign forms in terms of their conceptual *distance* from their Object.

My concept of the BP data depends on regarding Peirce's modes of sign: Icon, Index and Symbol, as progressively distant *in this order* from the Object that they represent. In other words an Iconic sign would be most "motivated" by the Object, an Indexical sign next and a Symbolic sign least "motivated" by the Object. (I acknowledge the complexity that all signs can properly be seen to have elements of each of these modes but focus for the moment on archetypal signs). The order outlined above is not one endorsed by all scholars. For example, Chandler (2007: 35) suggests that Indexical signs are closer to the Object than Iconic signs, citing Peirce as support, because they "direct the attention to their objects by blind compulsion" (Peirce, 1931–1958: 2.306). However, elsewhere, Peirce seems to imply that the Icon is more closely related to the Object than the Index, not least because he orders them in this way in his discussions of the qualities of phenomena in general. One of Peirce's basic categorisations of phenomena was into the domains of "Firstness", "Secondness" and "Thirdness". "Firstness" relates to the quality of things, or their possibility. "Secondness" introduces the idea of relationships between things. "Thirdness" is the area of laws, or the mental realm. In Peirce's theory, Icons belong to Firstness, Indexes to Secondness and Symbols to Thirdness. The view that a cline from Icon to Index to Symbol

represents an increasingly arbitrary relationship with the Object is certainly one held by a number of other semiotics scholars. Hodge and Kress (1988: 26–27) suggest that Iconic signs are closer to the Object as they involve "direct perception", whereas Indexical signs are "based on an act of judgement or inference" and are therefore lower in modality, that is, they have a lesser claim to realism or truthfulness. Writers in the field of metaphor also endorse this ordering, and these include Sørenson (2011), Ponzio (2010) and Haley (1995).

We can therefore conceive of the sign forms as distant from the Object as shown in Fig. 13.1.

As I develop this conceptualisation of my data with specific reference to Peirce's terminology, it is worth relating it also to Baudrillard's conception of representation, discussed in Chap. 2. In Baudrillard's thinking, representation has moved from some degree of connection with reality (in Peirce's terms, motivation by the Object) to the modern-day limited or no connection with reality (in Peirce's terms an arbitrary connection to the Object through laws).

Icon, Index, Symbol and Verbal Language

Peirce's three sign forms are intended to be comprehensive, that is, all phenomena which are signs by Peirce's broad definition should be able to be understood as one or more of the sign forms. The sign forms have tended to be used as explanatory concepts more for *visual* signs and iconography of all kinds, than in the particular area of language. Nevertheless, there are various ways in which language has been envisaged as Icon and Index, as well as purely Symbolic.

Fig. 13.1   Distance of sign forms from the object

Language as a Symbolic System

In the terms of Peirce's definitions of Iconic, Indexical and Symbolic signs, language is considered to be a Symbolic system on the grounds that its relation to its Object is arbitrary and unmotivated, a product of conventional systems or rules that can vary according to culture. (This observation is to be distinguished from the idea of symbolic language, which is language that deviates from the naturalistic, using general and literary symbols [Wales, 1989: 446].) This notion of arbitrariness is most easily illustrated by the fact that different words are used in different languages to denote the same referent. De Saussure, although he did not use the word "symbol", shows that meaning is made within a language system only by reference to other elements within the same system—so "cat" differs from "rat", "*Katze*" from "*Ratte*", "*chat*" from "*rat*".

> Everything that has been said up to this point boils down to this: in language there are only differences…Whether we take the signified or the signifier, language has neither ideas nor sounds that existed before the linguistic system, but only conceptual and phonic differences that have issued from the system. (de Saussure, 1959: 120)

Peirce wrote less extensively about language as a system than did de Saussure, but he was clear that in terms of his sign forms it was Symbolic: "All words, sentences, books and other conventional signs are symbols" (Peirce, 1931–1958: 2.292). Yet the idea of the complete conventionality of language has been challenged in certain aspects. Writers have argued that there are ways in which language is not a completely arbitrary system, and can be conceived as either Iconic or Indexical.

Iconicity in Language

In my earlier discussion of the multiple forms of signs under the Peircean system, where Iconic origins can be detected within Symbolic representations, I mentioned the case of written alphabetic systems that emerged from pictograms that themselves were originally Iconic representations of real-world

referents. What appears now to be purely arbitrary—Symbolic—shapes such as letters, may have at root an Iconic representation (Singleton, 2000: 93). As these Iconic pictograms developed to become more stylised, partly because of the practicalities of the materials used, and partly because of the desire to express increasingly complex concepts, they moved in a process from Iconic to Symbolic.

In spoken language, a further challenge to arbitrariness is the case of onomatopoeia, where sounds are intended to represent their Object through a relationship of aural likeness. As a retort to this challenge, de Saussure (1959: 69) pointed to the wide variation in onomatopoeic words within different languages, arguing that "they are chosen somewhat arbitrarily, for they are only approximate and more or less conventional imitations of certain sounds (cf. English bow-bow and French ouaoua)". Related to onomatopoeia in the field of literary linguistics is sound symbolism, where "certain sounds or sound clusters are felt to ENACT or to be in some way appropriate to the meanings expressed" (Wales, 1989: 426, emphasis in original). Sounds have been described metaphorically as "lighter" or "darker", and this can be used to create particular effects beyond the meaning of the words themselves, particularly in poetry or poetic prose. Rhyme can be said to work in a similar way. While these poetic effects can be argued as both intended and understood, Simpson (2004) points out that they are still contextually determined (e.g. we read poetry with a heightened expectation of sound symbolism that we may not bring to, say, the reading of a textbook). Cook (2001) points to the graphological presentation of words so that they have an Iconic relation to their intended meaning; he discusses this particularly in relation to advertising but it is also evident in some poetry ("visual poetry").

At a syntactic level, Iconicity has been argued in various ways (Givón, 1995; Nöth, 2001; Radwańska-Williams, 1994; Simone, 1995). One of the most obvious manifestations of Iconicity in language is word order, where sequential ordering suggests temporal unfolding of events. "Veni, vidi, vici" ("I came, I saw, I conquered") is an example (Cobley & Jansz, 1999: 145). Jakobson argues (Caton, 1987: 237) that the form of words often relates directly to meaning in a relationship of likeness. His examples are of Russian verbs, where tense aspects indicating expanded meaning are almost always longer than tense aspects indicating restricted meaning. Similar claims are made in English for, for example, related

words such as "big", "bigger", "biggest", where the longest form indicates the most expansive concept. Similarly, Iconicity has been claimed in the use of grammatical subordination and focus, where the location of information can indicate its importance. The examples of Iconicity given above show that the connection between Peirce's category and language and linguistic representation has been researched primarily in terms of phonological, morphological and structural features. That is, researchers have focused on the *form* rather than the *function* of language. Language is held to be iconic if, in its *form*, it somehow "look[s] like the things it stands for" (Simone, 1995: vii).

Indexicality in Language

There are other perspectives from which language has been considered Indexical, rather than Symbolic. Jakobson proposes that deictics are in Indexical relation to the speaker, because they have a "pointing function" indicating time, place, person or specificity, all of which can change with the context of the utterance (Caton, 1987). Jakobson refers to such expressions as "I", "you", "here", "that" as "shifters", following Jespersen (1922). I have discussed at length another linguistic realisation of Indexicality, namely, that of metonym. As Wales (1989: 297) writes: "In semiotic terms, metonymy is an indexical sign: there is a directly or logically contiguous relationship between the substituted word and its referent."

Scholarly work concerning the Indexicality of language (and some of the work on Iconicity) does not deny the fundamental conception of language as primarily Symbolic and arbitrary. Rather, writers are using Indexicality (and Iconicity) as an analogy to certain types of discursive function. So, for example, using the metonym "red tape" and declaring it to be in Indexical relationship with a concept labelled "bureaucracy" does not deny that the words "red" and "tape" are Symbols. The Indexical qualities sit at a different level from the words which are still part of a Symbolic system. Peirce's Icon–Index–Symbol trichotomy has been more widely applied to visual than linguistic signs, but it also offers a perspective from which to look at verbal language. Peirce's aim for his logic system was to offer a comprehensive understanding of all types and modes of sign, of which language was just one.

Understanding a Set of Texts as a "Sign"—The Peircean Perspective

I have already introduced the idea that one way of conceiving extended media representations (e.g. a set of texts from 27 April 2010 concerning the BP crisis) is as one discrete sign. This is not to deny that it is made up of myriad smaller signs, and it is this recognition that led me to use the metaphor of a "language map"—a single recognisable landscape made up of a number of distinctive features. I do not suggest that, say, 169 texts from 27 April 2010 are any more definitive a representation of the BP crisis at that time than another set of texts from another day. However, I do suggest that there is value in examining an agglomeration of representations about an entity as a sign in itself, and Peirce's extensive definition of a sign cited at the start of this chapter would allow for such a view.

In summary, I propose that "signs" can refer to entire verbal representations of an entity, so a set of texts can be seen as a "sign" just as much as a single word, although the process for analysing large and disparate signs is more complex than that for analysing word- or phrase-level signs. In investigating the BP media texts, I was interested in how representations of a business crisis might change over time. This suggested examining the sets of texts ("signs" in my broad sense) in order to explore whether and how language choices differed between them. The procedures of this text examination have been explicated in detail—features of language have been identified and analysed at all four Barthesian levels of meaning. What the Peircean perspective of analysis permits is the broad envisioning of these sets of features as a sign.

At the most uncomplicated level, English-speaking people with access to news media on 27 April 2010 would have had access to a particular configuration of meaning about the BP crisis from the press. I describe this as a certain type of sign, in a Peircean sense. If we understand the representation of the crisis as a semiotic sign, which Peircean sign modes come to the fore with the passage of time? Does this way of looking at the linguistic representation of phenomena shed light on how shared cultural understanding is constructed in the case of a crisis?

14

A Peircean Interpretation of the BP Data

From Data Analysis to "Language Maps"

If we accept that sets of texts can behave as single representations, or signs, then it is reasonable to attempt to describe these signs from a linguistic perspective. I have suggested that it is possible to draw up a linguistic "map" of different representations. Comparing these "maps" gives an overview of what kind of sign is, jointly, being constructed through written texts.

The initial research output from the Barthesian analysis was a number of observations about the nine selected features at the three time points represented by the data sets. A summary of the findings in Table 14.1 gives a starting point for broader analysis at the representational sign level (what I have called the "Peircean conceptualisation"). Viewing the findings in tabular form makes clear that they have possible meanings both synchronically, for example, what does the totality of the 2010 language features "add up to" in terms of a 2010 sign?, and diachronically, for example, what changes in modal choices do we see across the three time points? It is not possible fully to separate these synchronic and diachronic

Table 14.1 Summary of findings from depth analysis

	2010	2011	2012
Naming of events	Low numbers of names, but wide range. Primarily neutral	Increase in number of names, but smaller range. Increase in negative shading	Instances of naming fall: 80 % include just two head terms. Increase in length of descriptor. Increase in negative shading
Naming of people	Focus on direct participants—*senior BP personnel, relief workers/ agents, affected public*	Numbers remain similar, but increase in *commentators* and decrease in *direct participants*	Continued focus on *commentators,* also *writers, other artists, fictional or hypothetical characters.* Wider range of actors, less directly related
Categorisation	Little categorisation, usually relating events to other oil spills	More instances of grouping and categorisation. Primarily *business-related categories*	Level as 2011, but disparate groups, related less often to business/oil, more to wider social phenomena
Genre	Primarily *news report* genre	Fewer news reports, increase in *financial and market reports*	16 % of texts now *arts-related,* and more *evaluative articles and blogs,* although news reports still evident
Intertextuality	Key intertexts are press releases, direct quotation	Fewer press releases and witness quotations, increased reference to BP-related documents/artistic works	Layered intertexts: documentaries < news reports < direct quotation. Indirectly related texts

Modality	Apparent high level of modality, in particular *epistemic* and *dynamic*	Decrease in modal expressions overall. Specifically, decrease in *epistemic* and *dynamic* but increase in *deontic* modality	Decrease in total modal expressions; decrease in *epistemic/dynamic*, increase in *deontic*. High use of appraisal resources
Metonymy	Significant use of metonymy, primarily ORGANISATION FOR MEMBERS	Decrease in metonymic expressions, due to reduction in ORGANISATION FOR MEMBERS constructions	Further decrease in metonymic expression
Metaphor	Metaphorical use relates to physical entities—oil, weather	Increase in metaphorical usages overall, particularly financial and business spheres	Further increase in metaphor. Change in business metaphors towards "journey" and so on. Increase in metaphors of theatre, stories and myth
Discourses	*"Objective factuality"*: representations of events, constructed through facts/figures, witness quotation and so on	*"Positioning"*: move towards "business-as-usual": events placed in context of BP global activities and "big picture" for US oil	*"Redeployment"*: artistic reference and resistant voices. *"Naturalisation"*: representation of events "fixed" though linguistic mechanisms; broad and Symbolic "ownership" of events

readings. For example, we can only confidently suggest that there is a relatively low level of modal expressions in the 2012 "map", by comparison with the relatively higher level in 2010. My first set of interpretations of the findings abstracts patterns and processes through the data—from left to right of Table 14.1—drawing from all nine examined features. This initial work makes it possible to propose descriptors for the three years of signs, reading from top to bottom of the table. We can finally return to the diachronic perspective of development across the table, speculating on what the changes in Peircean sign modes can suggest about how we make social meaning of catastrophic events through written texts.

Patterns and Processes

Table 14.1 sets out very brief summaries of the findings about each language features studied for each of the data sets 2010, 2011 and 2012. These shifting behaviours of a number of linguistic features—both singly and in aggregate—suggest a number of patterns across the data.

Five possible patterns are:

1. *Shorthand*. There is an increase in linguistic devices that enable both writer and reader to access the BP events in ways that simplify their multifarious nature.
2. *Spread*. This is discernible in the type of text in which the events are mentioned, the intertextual environment and the social actors and contexts introduced in the texts.
3. *Categorisation*. This pattern concerns the placing of the BP events in lists and groups, and shows the events placed in increasingly disparate contexts.
4. *Art*. Texts reveal that BP events are increasingly captured, explored or fixed in artworks.
5. *Discursive shifts*. Discourses of representation appear to move from the ostensibly factual towards discourses of naturalisation.

Shorthand

In using the term "Shorthand" I wish to convey both a *restriction* on meaning conveyed by linguistic terms and the idea of *presupposition* (Fowler, 1991; Zare, Abbaspour, & Nia, 2012), or "taken-for-grantedness" (Martin & White, 2005). A number of the linguistic strategies analysed have the effect of limiting and directing perspectives, whether consciously or unconsciously, on the part of the writer. For example, both of the tropes metonym and metaphor *select* certain aspects of the entity described for attention, and *disregard* other aspects, encouraging readers to see the entities from the perspective indicated by the writer. Processes of naming both people and events presuppose some agreement about how we should define, view and ultimately behave towards them. Similarly, the groups and categories in which we place people and events help us to make sense of them in a context proposed by the writer, and later to attach meaning through processes of collocation and association. This latter phenomenon is discussed in a separate section below, and is one of the ways in which we collectively attribute shared meaning through a "shorthanding" process. We are encouraged to locate new concepts and ideas within existing known dominant and resistant discourses, which notion is explored in more detail below. Ideas can be presented as either "given" or "available for discussion" through modal resources, particularly those relating to certainty and those relating to obligation or instruction, constituting further ways in which potential meaning is restricted. Without repeating my analysis findings in detail here, I will draw on them to illustrate how shorthand entails presupposition in the case of the BP data.

Metonymy

The use of metonym decreases over the life of the data, and its shorthand role is more evident at the start of the data period than the end. At the start, metonyms that position BP as animate (BP "says", "confirms", "tries" and so on) were noted in my analysis to have two effects that are potentially

in tension. On the one hand, metonyms work to humanise the company by suggesting that it can speak and act as though it were a human being, and, on the other, they remove agency and responsibility from individuals, by suggesting that it is the corporation, rather than people, performing actions. The positioning conveyed by the frequent metonymic use of "BP" seems to be that BP as a corporation is closely involved in all aspects of the salvage and clean-up operation, having an active and above all *consistent* role in the financial, technological and environmental spheres affected by the spill. This would fit with the guidelines on crisis management outlined in business communications literature (Cornelissen & Harris, 2001; Massey, 2001; Muralidharan, Dillistone, & Shin, 2011) and reinforced in two texts from 2011 and 2012 that offer crisis consultancy advice. Later metonymic usages show a focus on reports and other written materials as actor (such as "the Coast Guard report slams", 2011), positioning official and written texts as agreed and definitive versions of the story.

Metaphor

Metaphors are used throughout the data sets to position the events in different ways. A number of metaphors in the early data (2010) present the events—that is, the explosion, oil spill and the weather conditions that affected operations—in ways that foreground that these phenomena were out of control, or difficult to control. Metaphors used in the later data sets position events and their subsequent business outcomes as part of a journey (BUSINESS IS A JOURNEY), a process, or a story (MYTHS AND LEGENDS). This is a feature of the process of symbol creation, as the events move towards a somewhat-agreed meaning, perhaps that events are "part of life's/business's rich pattern", but it also serves to background those elements of the events that are troubling or fragmented, and were early on metaphorised as being unmanageable.

Naming of Events

My analysis of the naming of the events showed that qualifying terms of time and place increased in number and complexity, the range of head terms reduced, and that "oil spill" and "disaster" became the most commonly used

over time. This reduction in the variety of terms suggests a degree of convergence on the part of the media, while still indicating two slightly different evaluative stances. The word "disaster" already encodes negative shading, and the term "oil spill", in itself arguably neutral, is generally accompanied by qualifying terms that evaluate the events negatively.

Of note is the use of the terms "accident" and "incident" in the 2010 texts, which appear to have been the preferred labels in the early BP press releases. "Accident" implies no, or unclear cause, and "incident" implies a neutral stance towards events. Both are absent in later texts, suggesting that the widespread practice will be either a negative head (disaster) or a neutral head (oil spill) + negative qualifiers. These naming practices do not at all attempt to downplay the seriousness of the explosion and oil spill, although there is a reduction over time in richness of signification, whereby a complex noun phrase serves to replace a longer retelling of the story, and in this way selects and restricts available meanings. The conventional use by news media of certain negative formulations can serve to make these terms familiar yet "other", and in that way "safe".

Modality and Certainty

In considering how aspects of modality relating to (un)certainty would progress through the data sets, I hypothesised that there would be a move from certainty to uncertainty, characterised by an increase in modal items. I imagined an analysis of the early data would show a limited use of modal expressions, as the genre of news reports is dominant in 2010, offering an account of observable facts, and constructing an impression of objective reality rather than personal opinion. By 2012, I hypothesised, an increase in evaluation and speculation about the meaning of the events would suggest an increase in modal expressions, with journalists increasingly intruding into their writing. Instead, I uncovered the reverse trend, namely, that modal indicators reduced substantially between 2010 and 2012. I propose that this change has a number of causes. The first is the initially high level of uncertainty about the "reality" of the situation. Crises of all kinds can be characterised at the outset by chaos and communication failures. The Deepwater Horizon explosion in particular took place in uniquely difficult circumstances (depth of water, previously untried drilling techniques)

and any facts given to journalists were unclear and often unsubstantiated. This uncertainty is reflected in the 2010 texts in the high levels of epistemic and dynamic modality occurring particularly in reported speech. This is not a feature of later texts where a move away from uncertainty towards apparent certainty is realised by a reduction in modality (although journalists and other writers still make some use of modal resources, particularly deontic modality, through which they suggest what should be done, or how the reader should understand their assessment of the BP situation). The resources of modality are one mechanism through which propositions are presented as either "given" or "available for discussion", and the later texts are increasingly characterised by bare assertions of "opinion as fact". Martin and White (2005: 100) argue that monoglossic formulations (bare assertions) demonstrate "taken-for-grantedness" in that they "make no reference to other voices and viewpoints". When modal items are absent, as is increasingly the case over time in the BP data, it is strongly indicative that the possibilities for "other voices and viewpoints" are being closed down. Martin and White also observe that opinions about propositions are typically expressed through epistemic modality, while opinions about events are attitudinal and expressed through Appraisal resources. As the concept of Deepwater Horizon is reified, it may become more of an "event" and therefore the object of the lexis of judgement rather than the resources of modality.

Spread

Spread, or diffusion, relates to the observation that accounts of the events appear in increasingly disparate text genres, comprise an increasing range of contexts, and mention an increasingly wide circle of social actors. These first two overall themes, shorthand and spread, may appear to be in some tension, as the first is concerned with reduction, simplification and selection, while the second is concerned with expansion, diffusion and heterogeneity. I suggest there is a distinction between the *events* and their *context*. It appears to be the case that the events themselves—in de Saussure's terms, the *signified*, in Peirce's terms, the *Interpretant*—are undergoing changes in representation that in some ways make them simpler and more taken-for-granted. On the other hand the contexts in

which they appear and the entities with which they are associated are multiplied and dispersed. Simply put, the events have a more singular sense in a far greater range of applications. Spread is noted across a range of language features, but primarily genre, intertexts and social actors.

Genre and Intertextuality

As shown in analysis, the early texts in my data set belong more firmly to the genre of news report whereas the later texts are attached to a greater range of genres, including commentary, features, reviews and business journal articles. This process alone accounts for much of the linguistic variation noted in my analysis, as different genres are characterised by different purpose, structure and content. The news report genre tends to draw on particular types of external text, including the eyewitness report, the interview or the photograph, whereas the multiple later genres draw on a wider range of external texts, for example, previous news reports on BP, associated but not directly related news stories, artistic texts and evaluative articles, as well as more generalised beliefs, issues and statements that remain unattributed (Allen, 2011; Bazerman, 2004). As the original observable story is absorbed, naturalised, tamed, consumed, through a range of linguistic strategies, so the web of unseen texts with influence on my texts can be imagined to become ever more extensive, and ever less tangible.

Social Actors

At a more detailed level, I observed the range of social actors to become increasingly wide and less directly connected to the source events. From a relatively restricted pool of experts, local people, company employees and agencies in 2010, the metaphorical "cast of characters" associated with the events becomes larger, more distant and widespread, ranging from previous chairpersons of BP and their associates to politicians outside the USA and unconnected individuals who have gone through quite different crises. More notable still is the introduction of fictional and hypothetical characters, including those appearing in books that cover the events, and imagined future businesspeople dealing with as yet unrealised crises.

Categorisation

Both naming and grouping (which are separate phenomena) are acts with consequences in terms of how entities are perceived and thus treated. Categorisation, as I define it, comprises processes of listing and grouping by which an entity (here the BP events) is characterised through its contiguous relationship with other entities. This kind of grouping is fluid over time: the entity, by being placed adjacent to other entities, both absorbs something of their character and represents something of its own within the group. There is something in the process resembling metaphor, whereby a particular feature of one entity (but not all) is selected as resembling a feature of another entity (but not all). The process is also one of a metonymic nature, where an aspect of the entity comes to represent or point to a wider phenomenon, just as the OED word of 2013 "selfie" might come to index a society with an obsession with individual self-representation, at the expense of unrecorded activity, or group activity. Cook (2004: 109) construes this process as ultimately one of a metaphorical nature.

> The physical nature of a new phenomenon, in other words, does not constitute the entirety of its role in contemporaneous discourse. It is appropriated and amplified, but also further understood, as a metaphor. It then both draws upon, and contributes to, understanding of other arenas.

I see the concept of categorisation as representing the fluid process of representation where an entity is not part of a stable category, but moves between groups, absorbing and leaving behind traces, such that its own nature becomes more and more a product of social and cultural agreement. This concept is a commonplace in semiotic theory, but what I am suggesting here is that we can see it happening through linguistic analysis. In 2010, this feature of categorisation is barely present, indicating an entity, or signified, that is represented as being itself, singular, with unique characteristics. By 2011, the entity is represented as being part of known groups, such as business crises, or environmental catastrophes. By 2012, in a further process of "symbolisation", it is sometimes located in very different groupings that have no direct connection with business crises or environmental disasters, for instance, to represent anti-social behaviour, or as one of several themes in a literary work.

Art

The role of artistic representation has been treated so far under a discussion of genre, but I want to identify it here as an important feature in itself. Like categorisation, this feature was virtually absent in the first year of data, presumably for the understandable reason that at a time of immediate crisis, writers have neither the time for reflection nor yet the insight with which to create art, nor might it seem an appropriate first reaction. Examples of texts I include under the broad heading of artistic representation are:

1. Reviews of books/films/documentaries about the events.
2. Reviews of books/films/documentaries that touch on the events, but that are not primarily "about" them.
3. Reports of commentary about the events in artistic form (e.g. specially written protest song).

Outside my own data sets, treatment of the events in artistic form has been quite widespread. Many non-fiction books have been written solely or partly about the BP oil spill (e.g. Bergin, 2011; Burt, 2012), oblique comic reference was made in the sketch show "Ruddy Hell! It's Harry and Paul!" (2012) and US animation South Park satirised Tony Hayward's apology to victims (Coon 2: Hindsight, 2010). These treatments serve to fix or pin down versions of the events: in the case of comic treatments, usually a version that is subversive or resistant. On the one hand, the increase in references to such texts within my data set is surely significant—journalists are acknowledging that these texts and treatments are now an intrinsic part of how the crisis is understood. On the other hand, the nature of my primary texts—news reports, reviews and so on—means that "artistic" constructions of the crisis appear to sit outside mainstream representation. These potentially resistant versions tend to be "bracketed"—they are reported *on* but do not form the substance of the report. This is a natural consequence of choosing mass-media journalism as an object of study (rather than, say, artistic representations themselves). However, my analysis shows that in some instances other, dominant, representations of the crisis are presented as given, while artistic representation is clearly presented as "other". I develop this argument further in relation to the ideological implications of the discourses I identify below.

Discursive Shifts

An account of discourses is of a somewhat different order from the linguistic patterns and characteristics above, although it draws upon all of them. My interest in this book lies in discourses of *representation*, although there is much evidence in my data set that reveals discourses about oil exploration, the environment, US nationalism, risk and reward and other social concepts. To recap, a discourse is a set of shared ideas that appear natural to a particular time and place, but that are, nonetheless, a product of, and specific to, that time and place, and are in that sense conventional. These ideas are taken for granted although not permanently fixed: dominant discourses are challenged, and regularly deposed, by alternative resistant discourses. However, it is through "taken-for-granted" ideas that power interests are served. Individuals and institutions with power (including the media) are able to influence what counts as knowledge, what reaches the public domain and how it is positioned. In this way certain ideologies are embedded in texts and practices and their ubiquity and appearance of "common sense" allows them to go unremarked. Partly because of this, identifying discourses is not a straightforward process. Discourses can be identified through both what is said (content) and how it is said (form). The significance of an analysis of discourses to this book is that it situates the micro-analysis of text discussed earlier within an account of broader social beliefs and practices. The research in this book does not concern itself primarily with "what happened" after the BP explosion. Indeed, in relation to Peirce's hidden Object, I hold that we cannot understand "what happened" other than through language. My concern is rather with how "what happened" was represented and how that representation evolved over time. This is best understood within the context of the discourses of mass-media representation.

From the earliest stages of the analysis, the representations in the three data sets seemed to me to be of rather different kinds with different aims and outcomes, and fuller, more detailed analysis confirmed this view. Put very broadly indeed, it seemed that the language of the texts at the point of crisis in 2010 had the aim primarily to *describe* the events, that language usages in 2011 seemed to be concerned to *place* the incident, while by 2012, I was observing processes of two kinds—one by which the events

were explored through creative expression (including creative categorisation and artistic works) and the other by which events were presented as understood or normalised. I took the presence of these two processes in 2012 as indicating that one phase (creative expression) was in flow and the other (normalisation) was emerging. In making these observations, I do not wish to imply either that the sets of texts were entirely discrete or that these aims were necessarily concerted or conscious. They were partly an outcome of journalistic practices by which developing news stories move from the front pages to the middle pages of newspapers (or from the home page to sub-pages of the website) and eventually become source material for editorials and features.

In identifying discourses of representation, however, I was continually challenged by the apparent co-existence and conflict between the "opening up" and the "closing down" of meaning. Processes that seemed to allow for the "opening up" of meaning—that is, those that allowed for discussion, challenge, alternatives and uncertainty—included the modality of uncertainty, the use and reporting of voices that contested the status quo and the depiction of the events through art. These processes were evident, in different forms, through all three years of data. "Closing down" processes that served to restrict and fix meaning included the modality of certainty, the bracketing or "othering" of contesting voices and the location of the events within the known. These were more present in the second two years of data, but importantly were observable *alongside* "opening up" processes, and even *preceded* them. The challenge for interpretation is not that both sets of processes are observable, but more that they did not follow a consistent pattern, for example, an opening up followed by a closing down of meaning. One interpretation of this mixed picture is that there is a continued contestation of meaning, a back-and-forth or opening up and closing down between questioning and reassertion of meaning, which ends up ultimately with some form of social agreement. For another, I return to an observation I made earlier which is the distinction between the reification of the Object (the BP events) through "shorthanding" and the fragmentation of its deployment as a concept through "spread". What is "closed down" is our understanding of the Object; what is "opened up" are the situations in which it has resonance. In other words, it is

only when we feel we have a grasp of what the Object *is* that we can deploy it as a *resource* in a number of social practices, including artistic representation and other symbolic activities.

Following this line of argument, and taking into account that there is constant interplay between these "opening up" and "closing down" strategies, I do not propose that any one discourse correlates precisely to any one data set, but rather that there are four discourses at play at various times through the data sets, and hypothetically beyond, that can and do co-exist, but that demonstrate a certain progression towards a naturalised meaning for the BP events.

1. A discourse of *objective factuality*, in which events are described and presented as news, and as a set of complex, but factual phenomena.
2. A discourse of *positioning* of the events, in which the events themselves are located, associated and categorised with other events. At this stage, they can also themselves become an exemplar of a category (oil spills, business disasters, major lawsuits and so on). Their meaning becomes placed within the known.
3. A discourse of *redeployment* in which this (partly) agreed version of events becomes a resource for exploration and creative expression.
4. A discourse of *naturalisation* in which exploration is concluded, and meaning is more or less fixed, less complex and more routine.

I have written in some detail in Chap. 11 about how each of these discourses is realised through diverse discursive means. I have commented that these discourses can be complex rather than straightforward, showing, for example, how the discourse of objectivity can be given credibility rather than undermined by the (limited) presence of uncertainty, disfluency and imprecision. I have also emphasised that the emergence of these discourses of representation is far from linear or inevitable—how "objective factuality" remains a feature of some stories in 2012, while some naturalisation, in the form of marginalisation of the BP story in financial reports, is already evident in 2010. That said, these four discourses were present in varying degrees in the data, becoming prominent in broadly the order shown above.

Representations as Sign Modes

Referring back to summary Table 14.1, the five diachronic patterns described above present patterns which can be discerned over the three time points of the data set by reading the table from left to right and drawing in elements from each of the nine individual linguistic features. I return now to my notion of "linguistic maps" to describe the data at three single time points. Is there something about the 2010 data in aggregate that characterises it, and distinguishes it from the 2011 data, and again from the 2012 data? To consider this question, we can read the table from top to bottom for a synchronic view. In particular, the findings just described on the progression of discourses are useful aids to interpretation.

Returning to Peirce's classification of sign modes, I propose that there is a way of conceptualising whole representations as sign modes, along a spectrum which runs from Iconic (strongly motivated by its Object) to Symbolic (connected to its Object only by social agreement). This analogy encourages us to explore the form that social agreement takes about a phenomenon, and from this to suggest conclusions about how we, jointly, make meaning. My question asks whether it is justified and productive to understand the representation of the BP crisis as a semiotic sign, with different orders of the sign (Icon, Index or Symbol) being more significant at different times as the representation progresses. In my discussion of discursive shifts I have already raised some of the points that will contribute to this argument—issues concerning media representation of events ostensibly as they are, and ultimately as what they have come to represent as a result of cultural agreement.

I would like to reconfigure this argument by conceptualising the representations in the three data sets as three meaningful Signs, in the Peircean sense discussed in Chap. 13. In the particular trichotomy Icon–Index–Symbol, the critical relationship is that of the *Sign* (in this case the mass-media representation) to the *Object* (in this case the BP oil spill). I have observed that this is broadly different in each year: in 2010 the relationship is one of resemblance, in 2011 it is one of association, whereas in 2012 it depends to a far greater extent on cultural knowledge and agreement. It is this observation that leads me to suggest that these three phases of semiotic representation might be conceptualised, respectively, as Iconic, Indexical and Symbolic.

Argument for an "Iconic Phase"

In Peircean terms, the Iconic sign is one that is connected to its Object via a relationship of *likeness*. I am suggesting that this relationship is evident in my data in the sense that the drive for linguistic choice is towards producing a representation that looks like the Object of the BP events. All the markers of "objectivity" and "factuality" that we have noted in the analysis chapters, and that I have referred to in my discussion of a discourse of *objective factuality*, are pressed into service to express something like "this is what it would look like if you were there, on the ground, moment to moment, with all its uncertainties, emotions, facts, half-facts and unwitting players". In this view, we see not only evidence of a form of "scientific objectivity" through the devices of highly specific naming, expert witness and hard facts and figures. We also see an acknowledgement of uncertainty and fragmentation in the use of epistemic modality, the (reported) emotive language of non-expert witnesses and the instability of names, descriptors and categories. This uncertainty is, however, mediated by the writer or journalist through devices such as direct and indirect quotation and the presentation of contrasting views. In this way he/she is selecting and combining information to make meaning, but the meaning made is not intended to be a social understanding of the implications of the events, but rather a marshalling of the available information to create the most credible picture for the reader of *what is actually happening*, in other words a picture that *looks most like* the Object. The picture is not the Object, but one selective version of it. As van Leeuwen points out (2005: 160, emphasis in original), "Linguists and semioticians therefore do not ask 'How true is this?' but '*As how true* is it represented?'" Fowler (1991: 170) makes a similar point about the apparent representation of likeness by news reports:

> As a working principle in discourse analysis or critical linguistics, we assume that the ostensible subject of representation in discourse is not what it is "really about": in semiotic terms, the signified is in turn the signifier of another, implicit but culturally recognizable meaning.

By using the term "culturally recognizable", Fowler indicates that news reports (and other texts) are Symbolic artefacts, being only understandable within the time and place that produced them. When I suggest that certain types of news writing are Iconic in nature, I do not lose sight of the fact that they are constructed to be so. There is a potential tension in arguing that news reports propose a direct likeness but acknowledging that any likeness is highly modified according to situated practice and stakeholder interests. If this version of reality is a construct, then why is it not a Symbol, like other culturally agreed-upon signs? I suggest that the argument for Iconicity holds from two perspectives. Firstly, Peirce never argued that an Iconic sign *was* in any way the Object, only that its connection to the Object was one of apparent resemblance. And, as illustrated in Chandler's analogy of the Object hidden in the box, the Object remains unknowable. Yet, crucially, and this is my second point, the texts in 2010 *are presented as resembling reality*—this is their explicit and implicit purpose. The texts are concerned to assemble data of very different kinds into a multifaceted facsimile of an event that the reader is meant to recognise as reality. In short, the writer has created an Iconic sign.

Argument for an "Indexical Phase"

Early in my analysis it seemed clear to me that the language of the first phase of data intended to represent a reproduction of reality, while the language of the final phase of data was evaluative, highly intertextualised and connected to artistic representation, as I shall go on to discuss in the next section. It seemed appropriate to characterise these beginning and end states as displaying features of Iconic and Symbolic signs, while the middle phase could quite well have been simply transitional: a point in the process of movement from one state to the other, rather than a phase in its own right. The year 2011 is, in regard to most of the features studied, a linguistic midpoint for increasing or decreasing movements from the first to the last data sets. This might indeed be the sole source of interest in the 2011 data, were it not for the importance of the particular researched phenomenon, categorisation, which I propose as evidence for an Indexical phase of representation.

Peirce's Indexical signs are those based in relationship of *contiguity* rather than a relationship of *resemblance*. This association can take the form of cause-and-effect relations, part-for-whole and whole-for part relations and a pointing or indicating function. Fowler (1991: 170) discusses media representations as entire Indexical signs, in the sense that I am arguing here, where references to events become "a shorthand, a metonymy, for an underlying 'it' of a more abstract kind". Fowler's point here coincides with my own observations from the analysis of shorthanding processes as well as the gradual move to use the BP events as an illustration of wider phenomena.

Two questions of interest for the BP data arise from these definitions of Indexicality. Firstly, since *metonym* is a linguistic realisation of Indexicality, is there evidence from the BP data of a particular pattern in the use of metonym in the 2011 texts? Secondly, are metonymic (Indexical) relations expressed in any other way? In other words is there evidence that the BP events are somehow *connected to, represent* or *stand for* other events or phenomena? In the first case, an investigation of metonymy as a purely linguistic phenomenon did not reveal 2011 to be a special case. Instances of metonymy in 2010 were predominantly of the kind mentioned above: ORGANISATION FOR MEMBERS, by which BP and other organisation names were used to stand for particular spokespersons. This type of usage decreased steadily over the years with the reduction in the prevalence of company statements, and the trend in 2011 was part of that pattern. (The role of metonymy in *selecting features of interest* of the crisis remained crucial.) However, there did prove to be an important connection with Indexicality in respect of the second question above.

Categorisation

The year 2011 showed a marked increase in a particular type of categorisation. This was the practice of placing BP within a particular category either explicitly, by including it in an enumerated list, or implicitly, through expressions such as "the biggest", "the worst" and so on. The instances of this type of usage increased substantially from 6 examples in 2010 (all tentative or mitigated, as the analysis shows) to 16 (in only 20 texts) in 2011.

The groups or categories in which the events were placed were generally predictable, including natural disasters, man-made disasters, business crises and specific BP problems. Nevertheless, it was clear that the BP events were no longer being represented as isolated, unique or irretrievably "messy". Rather, they were being used in a process of interactive meaning-making that aligned them with other pre-existing or newly made groups. In this way, either the events took on some of the qualities of group members or other group members took on some of their qualities. If group members are subsequently placed in different categories, they bring with them some of the associations of their previous group membership. I will pursue this line of thinking in my discussion of the Symbolic phase of 2012, when the BP groups proved to be far more creative and disparate than in 2011.

BP Events as Index

The BP events are introduced as an *Index* of a number of other concepts in 2011. The data set includes texts from professionals offering crisis advice services, whose interest was to hold up BP as a salient warning to those who did not have crisis management protocols in place (BP events as cautionary exemplar of a very serious business crisis). Other texts were written from the perspective of the effect on other deep-water prospects (BP events as obstacle). Others focused on BP's safety practices (Deepwater Horizon as Index of deep-rooted weaknesses in the BP culture). In these and other texts, the BP events either *stand for* or *point towards* something outside themselves. This can be seen as part of a process of meaning-making whereby the phenomenon moves from a situation where it can be described but not yet understood, to one (the Indexical phase) where it is starting to be located within the known.

Argument for a "Symbolic Phase"

Peirce's concept of the Symbolic sign is one that is related to its Object only arbitrarily and by convention. Put another way, it is not, or only minimally, motivated by its Object. I argue in this section that the way the BP events are represented in the 2012 data set is increasingly a construct of convention

and agreement. Description of the events has given way to evaluation, and the crisis is increasingly positioned as having meaning within a number of social fields, including business and finance, the environment, politics and the arts. By this I mean that the events are now a meaningful concept, or *signified* with a largely agreed social meaning, that depends decreasingly on the material events of 20 April 2010. Butchart (2011) would argue that that the enterprise of describing crisis events is bound to fail, and for this reason we turn to symbolising them. In contrast to the Indexical phase, indications of the Symbolic nature of the 2012 representation can be found across a range of linguistic dimensions, and these are set out below.

Symbolic Genres

From the contextualisation of the texts (Stage 1 of the analysis), we note an increase in news text genres that sit outside the sphere of traditional news reports. These include feature articles and online blogs, as well as text types such as reviews that provide a link to art, music, film and documentary. I would argue that this generic shift is one of the mechanisms by which representations of the BP events move from reporting and describing to evaluating and appraising. By 2012 the BP events are being drawn upon as a *cultural resource* for making meaning. The genres that appear in the 2012 data set are decreasingly those that purport to describe and increasingly those that purport to comment and interpret. Such commentary and interpretation is set in a context that arguably requires increasingly sophisticated world knowledge and cultural agreement. This idea of cultural resource is interestingly supported by an increased number of literary and shared cultural allusions (e.g. to quotations from Shakespeare) that are a feature of the 2012 texts.

So the move from Icon to Index to Symbol is reflected in the features of the dominant genres of the years in question. According to this view, news reports make use of primarily iconic characteristics of representation (they describe), editorials use indexical features (they position, explain, draw comparisons) and arts reviews and feature articles have symbolic features of representation (they illustrate, integrate, draw on cultural references). Thus the shift in genres goes hand-in-hand with changing sign forms.

Layering of Intertexts

Alongside this generic shift is a significant change in the type of source text that is drawn upon as resources for the researched texts. I have already noted a process of layering of intertexts which is evident by 2012, for example, (a) a review *of* (b) a documentary *based on* (c) news reports that in turn *draw upon* (d) press releases or eyewitness statements. From this observed process of the layering of textual resources, we can postulate that social and conventional meanings and understandings are constantly being added to, amending and potentially obscuring the original Iconic representation until it becomes a product of agreement and convention.

Symbolic Actors

Individuals and groups mentioned in the 2010 reporting of BP events are closely attached to the events, from BP executives, (over-)specifically named experts and public participants. Journalists take care to connect these actors closely with the events: their importance lies in their capacity to illustrate and validate the story. Their value lies precisely in the fact that they are "real". By 2012, the actors mentioned are considerably more loosely attached to the story. Interestingly, an increasing number are "not real". These include the fictional characters in related artworks, and hypothetical characters in scenario-building exercises such as those described in crisis management manuals. An examination of actors reveals one way in which the story is increasingly less anchored in the real world and increasingly inhabits a Symbolic world.

Changing Metaphors

I outlined in the literature review chapter that Peirce (1931–1958: 2.277) regards metaphor as an instance of an Iconic sign, relying as it does on a relationship of *likeness* to its Object. Writers on metaphor from a Peircean perspective (Abrams, 2002; Hiraga, 1994; Lattmann, 2012; Ponzio, 2010; Sørensen, 2011) have problematised this view on the grounds of a greatly reduced "immediacy of sign-object link" (Hiraga, 1994: 7). In the BP

data, I did not find that instances of metaphor decreased over time, which might have neatly supported my hypothesis of a movement away from Iconic representation. Instead, I observed an increase, and I make two observations in this respect, one relating to the frequency of metaphor and the other to the type of metaphor. With regard to frequency, I would like to draw upon a different model of metaphor than that of Peirce, namely, that of Jakobson (2002). Jakobson proposes that the "metaphoric order" relies on choices that are paradigmatic, that is, they are concerned with substitution and selection. In contrast, the "metonymic order" is syntagmatic, relying on combination and contiguity. Each "order" or "pole" is closely connected with different types of writing. Jakobson connects the "metonymic order" with journalism, montage and ordered narratives such as epic works. He suggests the "metaphoric order" is related to poetry, romanticism, filmic metaphor and surrealism. I suggest that the observed increase in metaphor relates to the move outlined above from a journalistic to an artistic sensibility.

My second observation concerns the shift in both types of target and types of source in the metaphor in my data sets. In 2010, the target for metaphor is the material entities such as weather and the oil spill itself. This tends to run counter to the pattern that the *abstract* is conceptualised in terms of the *concrete* (Koller, 2003; Koller & Davidson, 2008; Ng & Koller, 2013). By 2012, the target domain is more abstract, and source domains also remain relatively abstract. By this stage, source domains for metaphor have shifted to include those of theatre, stories, myth and journeys. I wish only to touch lightly on this observation, as not all metaphorical usages are directly related to the BP events, some being a feature of co-text. I do, however, suggest that there is a symbolic process of myth and story creation relating to the BP events, which is realised at a number of linguistic levels, of which metaphor is just one.

Categorisation

While categorisation was a key feature of the Indexical phase outlined above, and occurs just as frequently in 2012 as 2011, there is an important change in the nature of the groups in which the BP events were

placed. I have characterised 2011 lists and groups as "expected", comprising events associated with business, finance and the environment. In 2012, group members are much less closely related to the oil spill itself, and I see this as an indication that the concept "BP oil spill" has meanings that are increasingly less dependent on the material events and more related to our social construction of their meaning.

In fact, the linguistic choices described above all have in common that they rely upon a shared understanding of what the BP events "mean" at this stage of representation. The construction of meaning that has taken place at the Iconic (descriptive) and Indexical (positioning) phases have now reached a stage of relative arbitrariness, where full understanding of the sign is only possible if we know the socio-cultural "code". If we accept this argument, the relevant order of the sign at this stage, following Peirce, is the Symbol.

Process, State and the Blurring of Boundaries

The argument outlined above describes discrete and subsequent phases of crisis representation, each with its own set of characteristics, which align it with one of Peirce's orders of the sign. This can only be a convenience: the multifarious nature of my data resists such neat categorisation. Not only does one proposed phase seem to move into the next gradually, but elements of each phase are recognisable in each of the others. I noted similarly that discourses co-existed and blended across the data sets. I cannot even forcefully argue (to use a term from cognitive semantics, see Singleton, 2000: 77–80) that each set of data is *prototypically representative* of the phases I propose, in other words, that each is an archetypal example of Iconic, Indexical or Symbolic representation. The selection of yearly spaced data sets was a device to allow me to explore the process of representation and how it changed. It would be more than a coincidence if I managed to alight on the day when, say, Iconicity, or Indexicality was most prototypically represented in the texts. To take the Indexical phase as an example, there may have been many more distinctive features of what I call Indexicality on 4 November 2010 or 14 September 2011, than there were on 27 April 2011.

Apart from the issue of prototypical representation, there is the issue of overlap between the different phases. The data show that there are elements that I later describe as evidence of Symbolic representation in both Iconic and Indexical phases, just as there are elements of both Iconicity and Indexicality in the Symbolic phase. Those texts in 2012 that are of the news report genre and cover the progress of the compensation cases or speculate on BP's upcoming financial results include many of the features that I have suggested are typical of making an Iconic representation, or descriptive likeness (although I would argue that the Iconic news report changes over time to accommodate Indexical and Symbolic features). To take an example outside my data set, on 27 October 2010 the animated television programme "South Park" aired an episode in which "Tony Hayward" apologised to the victims of the spill in a series of increasingly bizarre settings (Coon 2: hindsight, 2010). This text is definitely representative of what I term the Symbolic stage of representation, being artistic, evaluative and culturally situated, but comes to wide public consciousness just six months after the explosion, well before the date of my Indexical data set of 2011 and 18 months before my proposed Symbolic data set.

I do not present these variations as fatal flaws or even as serious problems for my argument: any synchronic linguistic description is partial and imperfect, representing as it does a single, arbitrary point in a flow of continual change. However, the discussion above does expose an interesting challenge to conceptualising these representational phases. My first view was that the three representational phases followed a linear progression from one point to another in time, represented by the diagram in Fig. 14.1, albeit not entirely discrete as shown. In this view, once a representation has reached the Indexical phase, it has left the Iconic stage behind and so on.

Fig. 14.1 A linear view of iconic, indexical and symbolic phases

This thinking is unsatisfactory in two ways. One is that, as suggested above, not all texts in the primarily Symbolic phase have purely Symbolic features. Indeed, I argue that the Iconic phase is not one that *is* descriptive likeness, but *represents itself as* descriptive likeness, and is in this way Symbolic itself. Because of this, I find it difficult to argue for a complete moving on from one phase to another. Secondly, the linear view implies that the representation moves forward metaphorically to a greater and greater distance from the Object. While this is to some extent what I wish to convey, I will go on to reason in the following section that beyond the Symbolic phase lies something that presents itself as a *different kind of likeness* and so is in some sense closer to an Icon, which I shall call the "naturalised Icon".

Beyond Symbol to Simulacrum—The Naturalised Iconic Phase

Beyond the three sign types I have discussed, we move away from the evidence of the data to some degree of speculation concerning future representation. I proposed a set of three synchronic readings, suggesting that there are identifiable phases in the mass-media representation of the BP Deepwater Horizon events (so far) that share characteristics with Peirce's three modes of sign—Icon, Index and Symbol. I suggested that these are not discrete phases, but have blurred boundaries. Despite the "messy" nature of the representations, I identified a tendency for Deepwater Horizon accounts to move from Iconic in nature to Symbolic in a diachronic process, and noted that this process is realised through changes in the features of language used over the period of the data. However, I raised again as a problem the simple linear view of Icon^Index^Symbol^something else on several grounds. These included the blurred time boundaries between the phases and the closely bound nature of the sign modes. But my primary concern with a linear conceptualisation is that it implies a vector with a direction, and I suspect that any direction will become less and less definable. This current section of my discussion explores the issue of "what next", and to address this question, I turn to Baudrillard's view of the "image" or representation.

As described in Chap. 5, Baudrillard identifies four successive phases of the image (1994: 6) from signs that offer a close reflection of reality to signs that refer only to other signs and have no relation to reality at all.

It would be convenient to suggest that my arguments map progressively on to Baudrillard's phases of the image, and I have certainly explored how representations start by aiming for a resemblance to reality and move towards an arbitrary relationship with reality. However, to draw this parallel would be to misrepresent Baudrillard's argument. In fact, all three of the stages I outline, as well as my putative fourth stage, belong to Baudrillard's fourth order of the image. The fact that I have argued strongly that my Iconic stage involves not factuality or objectivity but what we might call "doing objectivity", coupled with Baudrillard's argument that we belong to an age where it is no longer possible to attach signs to a reality but only to other signs, can only mean that all three representations are pure simulacra in Baudrillard's terms; however, I choose to sub-divide or classify them. A further divergence from Baudrillard's reasoning is one I have raised earlier in this chapter. My vision is one of an increasingly elusive and distorted Object, but Baudrillard's is one of no Object at all.

Baudrillard's proposed stages of the image imply a linear progression through cultural epochs where representations become increasingly distant from what they purport to represent, such that the territory rots away and the map of the territory is all that remains. His argument that "theme park America" is somehow more "real" than the America outside the theme park gates seems to refer to the fact that the less a representation is *transparently* a representation, the further it is from the Object. This raises an interesting question for my own data. Is there a sense in which, according to Baudrillardian logic, my Iconic data phase, by constructing what it intends to be understood as a "reflection of profound reality" (Baudrillard, 1994: 6), is somehow further from the Object than my Symbolic phase, that perhaps aims at a more fundamental authenticity through art, critique and transparently expressed opinion—all of which are openly acknowledged as being at some remove from reality?

How cultural representations progress has been a topic for academic speculation. Chandler (2007) suggests that the move from Iconic to Symbolic is typical. Parmentier (2009: 145), in a discussion of Peirce's

trichotomies, sets out the case that although socio-cultural phenomena are frequently held to develop in a way that exhibits increasing abstraction (he cites the example of money, whose form has evolved from direct barter through gold coins and paper money to financial derivatives), there exists an argument in the opposite direction. Sociolinguists Irvine and Gal (2000) describe a process that they call "iconization", by which linguistic features that are actually indexes of a culture become seen as natural (iconic) rather than culturally derived. This recalls Barthes' discussion of "naturalisation", which process is at its most complete when it is least noticeable. As Parmentier sums up (2009: 145):

> There are even situations where it seems that conventionalizers and naturalizers engage in a direct semiotic confrontation—the bottom line perhaps being that anyone who manipulates or regiments the flow of interpretants thereby indexes social power or cultural capital.

Using the terms "conventionalizers" and "naturalizers", Parmentier illustrates the two arguments—one that social phenomena progress to levels of greater and greater abstraction, and the other that they become so taken for granted that they are perceived as real and are unrecognisable as social constructs. I do not see these two arguments as mutually exclusive, or even contradictory, if one takes the view that naturalised social phenomena are the most arbitrary signs of all. However, the argument expressed by the "naturalizers" does introduce the possibility that distance from the Object could be reconceptualised by imagining that an initial representation which is recognised as Symbolic becomes increasingly seen as "the truth" (Barthes' "what-goes-without-saying") and in that sense more and more Iconic.

My preferred resolution of this tension is to conceive of these two potential understandings of the term Icon as differing from each other, as follows. The Peircean Iconic representation would be understood as being at the early stage of high motivation by the Object and intended to resemble the Object—however, flawed, culturally regulated and politically motivated that representation might be. The projected ultimate form of the representational sign might therefore be termed the "naturalised icon". This is a representation that has been through the phases of Icon, Index and Symbol to reach a different form of Iconicity that is

now so taken for granted that it is unrecognisable as a construct. It is this concept that I wish to propose as my final stage—this is my proposed answer to "what next?"

Pursuing this line of thought—we no longer have a linear progression to an end point, but what might be conceived as a spiral, where representation loops from Iconic back to Iconic status, but where the naturalised Icon is on a different plane. This thinking still locates the representations within Baudrillard's final stage of "pure simulacrum", but suggests that we can identify different processes within that understanding, and these follow a loosely predictable pattern. This thinking is embedded in Barthes' (1972) concepts of the naturalisation of myths and ideologies. By the end of the period of the data, there are signs that the "BP disaster" or the "BP oil spill" is part of the common language, and it unites meanings from previous crises, meanings it acquired at the time of the spill and an array of direct and indirect associations acquired since, in Peirce's infinite series of signs. Its represented meaning is now a "given", at the same time both highly simplified and infinitely fragmented. As the representation of oil spill reaches this stage, it becomes a resource for our understanding of other oil spills and disasters. A trawl of texts published on precisely the same day, 27 April, in 2013 (exactly one year after the last data set), uncovers this text extract.

> His work has immersed him in events that read like a roster of recent catastrophes, from 9/11 to the Gulf oil spill. Now, Kenneth Feinberg is adding the Boston Marathon bombings to that list. (Associated Press, 27.4.2013)

This reference to the BP events is some evidence that our future understanding of the signified "catastrophe" in the first line will be informed by the complex signified "Gulf oil spill". I accept, following Barthes, that the representation of the BP oil spill and its aftermath constructs versions of reality that are more or less compliant with current discourses of representation. However, I suggest that to reach a final state of naturalisation, the representation undergoes a shape-shifting process, in which the sign is variously constructed through language to resemble its Object, position its Object, then test the boundaries of that position, finally presenting the Object in a new kind of likeness. This evolving relation of the sign (media representation) to its Object (the BP events) is realised in a complex network of interrelated language choices.

Part IV

Concluding Thoughts

15

Other Events, Other Contexts

In this book I have outlined a new approach to analysing verbal written language in order to provide a template for other researchers aiming to describe the linguistic characteristics of large written data sets. The approach I describe is grounded in semiotic theory, but flexible to respond to the emergent findings from specific data. It is adapted to make use of language analysis tools according to need. It is critically aware but not agenda-driven.

The particular interest of this book series "Postdisciplinary Studies in Discourse" is in the connections between theories of language and their application in practice. In my particular case study, the focus has moved from theory to practice and back to theory in the following sense. Initially the work drew primarily on the Barthesian view that language makes meaning at a number of semiotic levels, and I suggested that an investigation which pays attention to these multiple levels can provide a holistic account of a textual representation. De Saussure's (1959: 128) concept of "organized masses that are themselves signs" sits alongside the notion of Peirce's sign forms to suggest that a data set (in this case taken at a particular time point, but not necessarily so) can be seen as a representation

or "sign" with its own characteristics. These semiotic theories formed the basis for the language analysis work. Four stages of analysis served to contextualise the data, identify language objects for study at four semiotic levels, investigate the objects using diverse research tools and explore how these features work together in a single text. The conclusions of this project were based on the observation that the three data sets were analogous to Peirce's three main sign forms, Icon, Index and Symbol. What seems to be useful in this conceptualisation is the notion of the proximity and distance of each of these sign forms from the Object, whereby the media representation relates to the BP events in changing ways over time, finally returning to an apparent, but fully symbolic, proximity, in spiral fashion. If this process can be shown to hold for other written representations, then this Peircean conceptualisation provides an explanatory theory which captures how meaning is created, positioned, played with, naturalised and absorbed.

Wider Application of Semiotic Discourse Analysis

The coverage of the BP events in the news media was a productive case for investigation: much media attention was paid to the story over a number of years and the outcomes of the explosion were significant, with not only business but also environmental, social, political and financial repercussions. The data offered evidence for examining our relationship with a catastrophic event over time. However, this is just one form of project. The concept of "language maps" proposes that any given instance of communication will operate at each of the levels of sign, code, myth and ideology, and that an analysis of the interplay of features at these levels will provide a discursive picture of the data set.

This broad principle can be applied to modes other than language, media other than the printed or online press and contexts other than news media. Data sets could differ across dimensions including time (as for this project), genre, geographical area and channel. Drawing up comparative "maps" which differ across a chosen dimension gives an overview of what kinds of large representative signs are being constructed.

To expand on how the approach could be applied, we can consider what shape other research projects might take.

Example 1: Comparative Study of Policy Documents by Political Party

In the study proposed in Table 15.1, as in the BP study, a single mode (writing) is investigated, as well as a homogenous medium (political documents, for example, manifestos). A similar approach could also be used for political speeches, where the mode is that particular kind of "written-like" speech that is characteristic of the genre. In this case, the research is synchronic. The purpose of this particular example would be to explore the linguistic constructions of a political issue, according to parties engaged in the debate. Language features might include, as for BP, the naming of the issue or of items related to it, modal constructions and discourses. Rhetorical figures of different kinds or patterns of argumentation might prove interesting for study. As was the case for the BP data, preliminary analysis would suggest the relevant discursive features.

Example 2: Comparative Study of Policy Documents Over Time

In a similar study (Table 15.2), the emphasis is diachronic, investigating how a single party has dealt with the issue of, say, Europe over time. This design has something in common with the time-based approach to the BP data. In this example, a timeline of external events which might affect attitudes to Europe would be useful information to accompany the analysis.

Table 15.1 A comparative study by political party

Political issue, e.g. Britain's newrole in Europe	Party A	Party B	Party C
Language feature 1			
Language feature 2			
Language feature 3			
Language feature n			

Table 15.2 A comparative study of a political issue over time

Political issue, e.g. Britain's role in Europe	Party A Election year 2005	Party A Election year 2010	Party A Election year 2015
Language feature 1			
Language feature 2			
Language feature 3			
Language feature *n*			

Table 15.3 A comparative study by mediums

The construction of an issue e.g. child obesity or domestic violence	Magazine (e.g. Bella)	Printed advertising	Blog
Language feature 1			
Language feature 2			
Language feature 3			
Language feature *n*			

Example 3: Study of a Consumer Issue in Different Written Mediums

In this study (Table 15.3), the medium of the communication is the focus of attention. Analysis would seek to uncover which language choices were typical of different mediums, using a particular topic as an illustration. In this example, the mode is writing, but the mediums are very different, and genre, purpose and audience will play a significant role in discussing the verbal representation of a particular issue.

Example 4: A Different Crisis

The brief examples above addressed types of research design. A final example touches on more specific aspects of language in the case of a different crisis. On 1 October 2015, after a mass shooting in Oregon, President Barack Obama made an emotional speech about gun control. Although this is an instance of the spoken, rather than written, word, political speeches of this kind, as mentioned above, are a type of communication which Crystal (2003: 292) terms "writing to be read aloud", in that they are usually carefully pre-written, and generally read from autocue. They

frequently exhibit many of the features of writing discussed in this book. A transcript of part of Obama's speech follows:

> Somehow this has become routine. The reporting is routine. My response here at this podium ends up being routine. The conversation in the aftermath of it: we become numb to this. We talked about this after Columbine and Blacksburg, after Tucson, after Newtown, after Aurora, after Charleston. It cannot be this easy for somebody who wants to inflict harm on other people to get his or her hands on a gun. And what's become routine of course is the response of those who oppose any kind of common-sense gun legislation. (Obama, 2015)

A number of observations can be made about this brief extract which are pertinent to the themes of this book. In just these few lines, Obama uses several terms relating to discourse about the tragic events: "reporting", "response" (twice), "conversation" and "talked about this". Obama's choice of words (or "signs") emphasises the role of the discursive construction of crises and other catastrophic events in how we anticipate, manage, control and respond to such events. In a study of this kind of text, one of the discursive features at the level of the sign generated by the immersive Stage 2 of my approach might well be word choices relating to discourse and communication.

Repeating the word "routine" in a tricolon construction ("Somehow this has become routine. The reporting is routine. My response here at this podium ends up being routine."), Obama challenges a discourse of the normalisation of mass shootings. For his part, he is attempting to establish an alternative, resistant discourse about gun control, in opposition to other discourses about "the right to bear arms" which are widespread in the USA. One of the ways he presents this alternative discourse as natural is by using the terms "of course" and "common-sense" in relation to his own argument. If this speech were part of a researched data set, an identification of discourses would be an important area for investigation, where the discourses might be about disputed notions regarding gun ownership rather than discourses of representation (as in the case of the BP research). As part of my immersion phase of analysis, I would note from this excerpt rhetorical features at the level of "code" (structuring figures such as the tricolon mentioned above)

and at the level of mythic meaning (rhetorical tropes such as metonym: here we see a significant use of PLACE FOR EVENT in "Columbine", "Blacksburg" and so on). The use of modality is a further potential area for analysis: in this fragment Obama's words are largely unmodalised declaratives expressing certainty, with only the modal auxiliary "cannot" being used as a deontic (meaning "must not") and having the force of a directive, a pattern I have described as "linguistic certainty" and which would warrant examination. I would also note the appearance and role of categorisation ("after Columbine and Blacksburg, after Tucson, after Newtown, after Aurora, after Charleston").

Final Words

At the end of this book what I hope to have achieved through the detailed analysis of the BP crisis is a demonstration of how to gather and investigate language data in order to build a linguistic picture of a crisis representation. If we understand that the meaning of communication is located in several places—in the intention of the producer, in the text itself and in the understanding of the reader—then a key focus of my approach has been on meanings located in the texts themselves. However, the texts contain within them aspects of the socio-cultural world from which they were generated and to which they are addressed. The study of the social, textual and generic codes by which the signs are organised, the texts to which they refer, their socially embedded connotations and the ideologies they serve all give us access to their *situated* meanings, albeit partially and imperfectly. Our shared conception of crises such as Deepwater Horizon is a construct of (amongst other things) news media writing of different kinds, whose language is shaped by the interests of a large number of groups and individuals. The end stage of this representation—a naturalised iconicity—may be the only way we can collectively cope with crisis events of this magnitude.

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