Loud signatures

Comparing evaluative discourse styles: rants and riffs[1] versus measured tones

This paper is intended as a contribution to the investigation of evaluation in texts and in particular as a contribution to Corpus Assisted Discourse Studies (or CADS), defined as a meeting of two disciplines, that of corpus linguistics and that of discourse analysis. One of the main points of CADS lies in the importance given to the systematic observation of naturally occurring data over and above the study of isolated data picked out from individual texts. This approach is particularly useful in the investigation of particular discourse types, text types or genres, to confirm intuitions which are part of the competent native speaker's knowledge, but it can also help to reveal underlying attitudes and make explicit persuasive devices. Here, two small subcorpora are compared in order to identify the differences in evaluative styles with particular reference to textual interaction, priming, and the resources of engagement.

1.1 The background

In attempts to maximise exposure to language and to provide current affairs and cultural input during language learning, EFL students are often encouraged to read newspapers and in particular British broadsheets which provide a good source of naturally occurring language for learner investigations. However the clarity and accessibility of the content and of the language data can be limited for the reader who is unfamiliar with this evaluative style. In my university teaching context I used a 100-million word corpus of newspapers (*Papers 93*)[i] as a reference corpus in work in language teaching and found repeatedly that the language data was not helping to clarify either form or meaning problems for students, making the consultation of concordances less useful for our purpose than I had hoped. The difficulties were caused by the amplifying and intensifying resources employed in newspapers involving hyperbole, humour, metaphor, irony and the metonymic use of socio-cultural references, where metaphorical or metonymic comparisons are opaque and bewildering for a reader unfamiliar with a wide range of cultural tokens. Let us take an example. In searching for instances of the hedging device *a sort of,* one salient pattern seemed to involve reference to 'known' information for evaluative purposes, nearly always involving proper names, place names and brand names or other specifics.

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[1] A **rant** is a widespread and distinctive phenomenon of emotional speech or writing usually consisting of complaints or attacks, sometimes in a political nature. Rarely, rants express great praise, defending an idea or a person from attack. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rant)
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The definition of a riff is a repeated chord progression, pattern or melodic figure, often played by the rhythm section instruments, that forms the basis or accompaniment of a rock music or jazz composition. "A riff is a short, repeated, memorable musical phrase, often pitched low on the guitar, which focuses much of the energy and excitement of a rock song." Some sources explain *riff* as an abbreviation for "rhythmic figure", however, the musical use of the term derives from its use in comedy where a *riffing* consists of short clever remarks ([1]) on a subject. Thus riffing on a melody or progression as one would riff on a subject by extending a singular thought, idea or inspiration into a *bit*, or *routine*.
(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Riff)

> *(1)* ***A sort of*** *cross between Edna Everage and Margaret Thatcher*
> *Paris as **a sort of** Gene Kelly theme park*
> *combines the joys of Julie Andrews with the punch of Arnold Schwarznegger **a sort of** Goldilocks on crack*
> ***a sort of** Jung meets Tarkofsky fable*
> *the Super Soaker **a sort of** Kalashnikov of water pistols*
> ***a sort of** Norman St John Stevas without jokes*
> ***a sort of** Out of Africa twinned with Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*
> *Peter Brooke is **a sort of** toffs' John Prescott*
> *Sir John Falstaff **a sort of** upmarket Gazza*
> *Sylvania Waters **a sort of** maritime Chigwell*

All these stand out as being non-descriptive and assume the reader's recognition and sharing of certain values. A good proportion of examples seem to derive from certain high-profile writers who specialize in this particular evaluative style, and so I decided to compile a small corpus of their work (250,000 tokens) and to compare and contrast it with other evaluative texts, using CADS techniques to analyse the particular features of their style. The discourse type under investigation here is that of humorous opinion pieces, appearing regularly in British broadsheets to which a certain amount of publicity foregrounding is given. The reviews are regular features and these feature articles are characterised by the personal style of the writer, and evaluation plays a key role. The evaluative style foregrounded by this investigation is a very culturally constrained one but represents an frequent feature of the British broadsheet press, a style mixing informality with force of opinions, and a marked use of irony and figurative language. The columnists in question (Clarkson, Gill, Goldacre, Hoggart, Williams) have helped create a genre of persuasive opinion pieces which evaluate by commenting with what Martin and White (2005) have called 'increased volume'. They are of course not the only exemplars of this evaluative style and the tradition of using humour, irony and other rhetorical features goes back a long way in the British tradition, from Defoe and Swift to Bernard Levin. Some of the influence of the Gonzo journalism of Hunter S. Thompson and Tom Wolfe is also visible, where the reading experience overshadows the experiences being recounted or any information that might be gleaned.[2] One reason for choosing the group is the amount of space they have been given by the broadsheets, their appearance in other publications on a freelance basis, and the fact that there is some data about their reception in the form of their profiles in the common search engines and thus there is some clue to the way their discourse is received. The way in which their expression of opinion is interpreted as having "attitude" is part of stance, key and signature (Martin and White 2005:203) and the features of their signature is what will be examined.

1.2 Humorous opinion pieces

In these humorous opinion pieces an experience (reading a book, watching a programme, driving a car, eating at a particular restaurant), has been delegated to the writer who has been given the responsibility for evaluating that experience for the reader, thus having to convey both hard facts (e.g. price, location, scientific data) and subjective sense impressions (sight, sound, motion, taste, hearing) to the reader to enable the readers to make decisions about purchases or a choice of leisure activities, (places to go, productions to watch, cars to buy, food to eat). The genre uses

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[2] Some features of this kind of writing can also be recognised in the character of 'the angriest man in Islington' in Nick Hornby's *How to be Good*.

humour to align a readership; idioms, irony and non-literal meanings are part of the repertoire and if not understood or read compliantly the text purpose is lost.

Like the language of evaluation, the language of humour has received a great deal of attention (in particular by Attardo 2000, 2001, 2003) and is very difficult both to define and analyse. Partington (2006) discusses a variety of resources of language which provoke laughter using a corpus based approach. He also deals with the role of schemata and scripts, the shifts involving the creation of expectations and the frustration of such expectations. In our corpus of humourous opinion pieces (called *the HO Corpus*) there is an overreaching communicative intent to be funny and all will be manipulated to fulfil this purpose. The schemata, scripts and narrative shifts belong to a shared cultural context and may involve parody and pastiche. The corpus under examination might be said to be prototypical but the template is widely used in broadsheets, tabloids and blogs. Exposure to such texts creates expectations and develops pragmatic knowledge. The purpose is persuasive rather than descriptive, they are functionally centred on interpersonal relationships rather than on the exchange of information, and evaluation is a key element.

1.3 Evaluation

Since the particular area of investigation being explored is that of the language of evaluation, it is worth spending some time here to lay out the main themes which have informed the study. Evaluation, stance or appraisal are all terms dealing with the ways subjective views of speaker or writer are conveyed in language and how evaluative language expresses the value systems of individuals and communities (Hunston and Thompson 2000; Martin and White 2005; Biber et al 1999: chapter 12; Bondi and Mauranen 2003). Evaluation is a very complex textual phenomenon and is realised prosodically across clause and sentence boundaries, and throughout a text.

For Hunston and Thompson 'evaluation is the broad cover term for the expression of the speaker or writer's attitude or stance towards, a viewpoint on, or feelings about the entities or propositions that he or she is talking about' (2000:5). In highlighting the fact that evaluation is comparative, subjective and of course value-laden they identify four parameters of evaluation (good/bad; certainty/uncertainty; expectedness; importance) but admit that basically the good/bad parameter is the most basic and the one to which the others relate. They identify three functions for evaluation: that of expressing opinions, that of constructing and maintaining relations between the speaker or writer and hearer or reader, and that of organising the discourse. The first function, an ideational one of representing the world around us through language, also involves the expression of communal value systems and every act of evaluation builds on that system. In maintaining relations, evaluation is part of the interpersonal function of language, while the organizational function also serves to inform reader or hearer of the point of the discourse and is part of the textual function of language. Sinclair and Hunston (2000) set out an account of a local grammar for evaluation in order to see how we recognize evaluation and describe it through the parsing of patterns in text corpora. These examples have been taken up by other scholars (e.g. Bondi and Mauranen 2003 on academic discourse; Radighieri 2004 on evaluation in art reviews; Bednarek 2006 on evaluation in media discourse). .Bednarek comments on the importance of evaluation

> evaluation itself is a significant element in our lives: as a device for interpreting the world and offering this evaluation to others, it pervades human behaviour: when we interact with the world around us, we perceive, categorise and evaluate what we encounter. Our short term evaluations may then turn into long-term values which are as important to our lives as our beliefs.
>
> (Bednarek 2006: 3-4)

Biber and Conrad (2000) use the term *stance* rather than *evaluation* as a cover term for subjective assessments and personal feeling, identifying three domains: epistemic stance, which also includes attribution, attitudinal stance, and style stance which involves the manner in which the information is presented. Biber et al (1999) devote a chapter to the lexical and grammatical resources found in corpus data and across genres.

Martin and White (2004) in *The Language of Evaluation* build up a complex system called Appraisal, with subsystems dealing with affect, judgement and appreciation and further systems of engagement, or commitment to the appraisal expressed and how appraisal can be reinforced or downplayed; they also outline a system of dialogistic positioning dealing with how the discourse interacts with real or implicit interlocutors. Appraisal involves a variety of resources and may be either directly inscribed, that is explicitly expressed in the text, or alternatively the evaluation can be evoked by items which trigger an evaluative inference and depend on the hearer or reader's interpretation and stance. In their discussion of the resources of engagement they identify a syndrome of evaluation comprising certain foregrounded and favoured resources of appraisal and evaluation:

> a 'loud' signature will generate both centripetal and centrifugal reactions through the use of force and focus, intensification and quantification and interacts with attitude to either increase or decrease the 'volume' of that attitude as evaluative prosodies are set up across the text. There are associated effects with respect to alignment and solidarity. They construe the writer as maximally committed to the value position being advanced and hence as strongly aligning the reader in to that value system
>
> (Martin and White 2004)

Other connected studies important for our purposes examine the question of textual interaction between reader and writer (Hoey 1999) in which text construction is seen as an interplay between reader expectations and writer attempts to deal with them which he describes as 'a dance' between reader and writer; Hoey contends that, since our approach to texts will to some extent be determined by our previous encounters with similar texts, certain text templates are recognizable by a particular discourse community and thus a textual interaction is set up between writer and readers whereby meanings are construed as much by their expectations as by lexico-grammatical resources. These ideas are then developed in Hoey's 2005 theory of lexical priming: our encounters with language will prime us by setting up expectations about collocational, syntactic, semantic, pragmatic and textual relations. There are receptive primings as well as productive primings and our relationship to those from whom we encounter language, and how much we identify with them, are important in determining whether we will adopt or not adopt the forms they use. Choosing to use *well drunk* as opposed to *dead drunk,* or *wicked* as opposed to *cool* to express positive evaluation often depends on which we have been exposed to more, and what our relationship is with those who use the various forms.

1.4 Methodology

To study evaluation in humorous opinion pieces I decided to compile a corpus to get a quantitative perspective to ally to my intuitions deriving from qualitative analysis. With the intention of comparing evaluative styles, then, I compiled a small corpus of a series of opinion pieces by columnists of British broadsheets, again mostly review articles of a variety of artefacts and events. (256,353 tokens and over 200 texts from 2004 and 2005, from Jeremy Clarkson, Simon

Hoggart and A.A. Gill, Zoe Williams, Ben Goldacre; I will refer to this as the *Humourous Opinion pieces Corpus* or *HO Corpus*).

Corpus work is essentially comparative, no claims can be made about patterns unless one can say with what the results are being compared, and so another corpus, (216,65 tokens) was used as a background corpus, made up of reviews published by the Times Literary Supplement (also from 2004 and 2005 which I will refer to as *the TLS corpus*). These reviews, commissioned by the journal from their pool of contributors, are signed and cover the evaluation of new books, films, journals and live performances. The domain is close to the academic though it does not coincide with it as it is intended for a general public rather than a specialist one. It has a serious tone overall; though individual reviewers may use humour and irony it is essentially a restrained publication. This corpus was chosen because it too contains essentially evaluative discourse but with considerable differences in the realisation of the evaluation

So here we will be looking at how the two sets of writers achieve evaluation through language and how they differ. The methodology is that set out by Partington (2006:270)

Step 1: Design, unearth, stumble upon the research question
Step 2: Choose, compile or edit an appropriate corpus
Step 3: Choose, compile or edit an appropriate ***reference*** corpus / corpora
Step 4: Make frequency lists and run a ***Keywords*** comparison of the corpora
Step 5: Determine the existence of *sets* of key items
Step 6: ***Concordance*** interesting key items (varying quantities of co-text)

The research question is thus: is it possible to identify the patterns or repeated regularities of forms in the ways in which loud signature texts present their evaluations of experiences through language? The question might also be seen in terms of whether it is possible to identify the tricks in the tool kit of humorous writers by starting with quantitative methods and then to examine them more closely via a qualitative analysis of the key resources. Many of the resources of evaluation belong to the open class part of the lexicon and the list of items to be sifted through is varied; it is in the qualitative analysis that we see much of the evaluation, with the resources nesting (Hoey 2005) to provide an accumulation or build up. For the second step then I chose to examine *the HO Corpus* of over 200 texts and 200,000 words from the above mentioned 'loud' journalists, comparing it (step 3) with the reference corpus *TLS corpus* of evaluative texts from the more sober or 'quieter' Times Literary Supplement to see what are the key items which differentiate the two evaluative styles. Identifying the sets of key items involved the use of WordSmith tools software (in particular Wordlist and Keywords; other corpus analysis resources used were Concgram and the consultation of the Wmatrix facilities (Lancaster University) which provided the semantic and POS tagging.

Large corpora reveal patterns which might be missed by close textual analysis and the advantages of the quantitative approach have been discussed in various places (Stubbs 1996; Partington 2004; Baker 2006). However evaluative patterns can be complex, involving semantic diffusion of evaluation prosodically throughout a text, and the nesting of a number of features, so close analysis is also needed and this is provided by the examination of concordance lines using WordSmith Concord and Concgram software.

2. Comparisons

2.1 The writer/reader relationship and exophoric reference

An initial examination of the key words highlights how many of the differences discernable between the two corpora are a question of register. The differences in content naturally account for many of the lexical (as opposed to grammatical) items in the Keywords lists (*car, restaurant, MP, cost, choice*). The differences between the two genres however are mostly related to differences in the projected relationship with the reader, and the features which project it. The *HO* writers have chosen to project a conversational tone with readers, marked by features of informal spoken language. As Carter and McCarthy have commented on the continuum between spoken and written language

> journalists also achieve impact and get on a 'conversational' wavelength with their readers by using common spoken discourse markers and purposefully vague language in a projected conversational exchange

(Carter and MCarthy 2006:238)

Table 1 shows the keyness of a range of dialogistic pronouns. The key words obtained through our WordSmith software indicate a first area of identity

Table 1 Dialogistic pronouns in the keywords lists

Word	%F group	%TLS	Keyness
1.*You*	1.02	0.09	1.909,7
3.*I*	1.29	0.21	1.832,1
4.*You*r	0.24	0.01	504,0
16.*I'm*	0.14	0.03	250,9
24*Me*	0.20	0.07	170,9
45.*we*	0.36	0.19	134,0
48.*My*	0.23	0.10	130,3
TOTAL:	3.48	0.70	

First and second person pronouns are signals of informality in written discourse, being typical of interactive spoken discourse, part of a conversational tone. They are deictic pronouns, and deictics have variable reference according to the context and therefore show how our corpus displays many of the features of oral interaction. The concordance lines which indicate their co-occurrence, provided by Concgram, serve to indicate a number of ways in which these are used and give the tone of the discourse, continually linking writer and reader:

(2)
> And *I* bet *you*'ve never wondered how on Earth they get
> But *I* bet *you* have no idea what the seven Christian
> But *I* wouldn't if *I* were *you*. What *I* would do, if *I* had set my heart
> And *I*'m also being realistic when *I* tell *you* that in a straight fight, on any road or
> heard great things of the relaunch and thought *I* owed *you* a review of so talked-about a place.
> Why? Actually, forget *I* asked that. What can *I* do for *you*? Would *you* like me to make
> I know what they mean and they're right. Which, as *I*'m sure *you*'ve guessed, brings me neatly to
> then onwards to 155. Mmmm. A tasty prospect, *I*'m sure *you*'ll agree. Unfortunately there's quite
> and agricultural protectionism into your lap. *I*'m sure *you*'re quite aware and, after all, they're
> the unlovely and the marginal. Countdown was, as *I*'m sure *you* know, the first programme to be
> bobbing like buoys in soups of old fatty fat. *I*'m sure if *you*'re born to it, it reminds *you* of
> may marvel at the new Aston Martin V8 but may *I* prevail upon *you* to stop and think for a moment.
> anarcho-syndicalist. But then, who didn't?" *I* don't expect *you* to shop your own offspring, but
> It yearns for its string quartet. *I* know a lot of *you* don't like music with food,
> been as helpful as the boat journalist *I* met as *I* left the show. *You* might think that writing about
> tenth of the price. Why should that be so' *I*'d love to give *you* an answer but the owners
> Now *I*'m going to hit *you* with a feast of verbiage, a

*it'll taste like Fairy Liquid." But all **I** can do is tell **you** it was horrid. Kate's main*
*very follicles of your soul. Bikers know what **I**'m on about here. **You** ask one. And then name any*
*and that Dale Winton also has one. But **I** wouldn't if **I** were **you**. What **I** would do, if **I** had*
*but violent life and **I**'m delighted to tell **you** that nothing has gone*
*provide a wonderful driving environment. And **I** can pretty much guarantee **you**'re with the chap*
*and set about eating her face, **I** was so close, **I** could hear every slurp. Mind **you**, she was a lot*
*Now, if **you** think **I**'m putting off having to write about sloth, the*
*for every clogged-up road **you** can show me, **I**'ll show **you** 10 that provide the driving*
*explain the difference to **you**, but frankly, **I** can't be arsed. So what is it about sloth that*

These are only a few of the many examples used in the genre and give a flavour of the informal register.[ii] Discourse markers *you see, you know* project the assumption that knowledge is shared or that assertions are uncontroversial and reinforce common points of reference (Carter and McCarthy 2006:221). The TLS corpus only had 10 examples, all of which came from quotations.

A good number of authors, among them Hoey, Bakhtin, Voloshionv, Martin and White, and Widdowson have argued that dialogue is the basic model for all communication. Written language, while apparently monologistic, engages in dialogue in a number of different ways. Second person pronouns, self-mention and attitude markers all emphasise personal subjective attitude, making the discourse more intimate despite the public nature of the genre. The use of self-mention can also be seen as an attempt to engender solidarity between the writer as individual and the readers as individuals, encouraging identification. Here the dialogue becomes explicit and is constantly being referred to by the writers with the presupposed interlocutors forming a community of shared belief or value (Martin and White 2005:93). The writers expect those they address to respond to the current proposition and the value position it advances. The audience is taken for granted as being part of an ongoing dialogue and is woven into the text. The relationship is set up which will underlie all the evaluations and the language used to make them. At the same time the evaluations are frequently evoked rather than inscribed and depend on shared knowledge of people, places, films, television programmes, as well as experiences of the outside world. On comparing *the HO Corpus* with the *BNC Spoken corpus,* the various categories of proper nouns were found to have high relative frequency (NP1 2.42% vs 1.55%; NP (0.05% vs 0.00%; NP2 0.04% vs 0.01%) reflecting the way in which these are used to suggest evaluations; this feature is nested into nearly all the examples of other features illustrated here in the concordance lines.

Other deictic elements involve exophoric demonstrative reference used to suggest that a shared opinion is being taken for granted or that shared experience is being called on. Usually such cohesive ties refer to elements within a text and the pattern of occurrence is something we acquire with our experience of texts; we are primed to expect to be able to identify the referent within the text (Hoey 1998). Whereas in the *TLS corpus* data the demonstrative reference is endophoric, *the HO Corpus* has a large proportion of exophoric demonstrative reference. The concordance lines again show how these forms create a presupposition of shared experience and values. Carter, referring to conversation, says such resources are listener-oriented and display detached or possibly critical attitude. The reader is being asked to recognise the experience to which the writer is referring, in order to understand the quality or evaluation. The description is essentially deictic and exophoric in its use of *those* and *that*, followed by pre and post modification of the head. To some extent this can involve the notion of stereotypes and it is also one of the ways that evaluations are embedded inside noun phrases.

(3) Those

*Perhaps he tried to be too clever, like **those** Arsenal players who used a cunning ruse to miss a penalty last week*
*Your knife, fork and spoon have a bijou indented rest, like **those** bits of rock they put chopsticks on.*

*She wears one of **those** blue suits that only women MPs seem to be able to find*

*Mr Blair was less enthusiastic. He was like one of **those** handsome young men on the Dick Emery show, pursued*

*I managed to smuggle of **those** individual Toblerone things*

*There's bacalao (salt cod) and **those** little custard tarts and, erm, another of **those** delicious little custard tarts*

*And there are all **those** overdesigned indoor-outdoor patios, with lantern candles, ice buckets and*

*Showing the behind-the-doors of her private life, like **those** people who agree to appear in Hello! to protect their privacy*

*It's the same deal with **those** thin-lipped angry looking women you see in Caffe Nero reading the Guardian*

*Loud rhythmic noises make them bounce up and down like **those** wind up toys they sell on street-corners*

*(4) **That** as demonstrative:*

*in various shades of salmon intestine and is clean, with **that** deep, reassuring smell that fried fish adds to soft furnishing*

*familiar holiday favourites made in **that** familiar, holiday, not-very-good way - because,*

*and **that** final, marvellous slalom of consonants that fit into your*

*They had resisted giving in to all **that** fine-dining-event insecurity that plagues country hotels.*

*Most of the starters had **that** flaccid, self-absorbed, glutinously expired quality of*

*bashing, dreadnought building, deep hole digging and all **that** good industrial smutty, hacking, early-grave, 19th-century*

*It's still a pretty car, make no mistake, but it doesn't have **that** hand-biting Oh my God-ness of the coupé*

*a strange American, who said "Hi" in **that** inclusive, I'm-not-strange, American way. He*

*Great name, great part, played by **that** old autopsy of a ham, James Robertson Justice*

*100-year-old antiques were just too middle-class. **That** old watercolour left by granny, the Spode*

*In many ways, it's the spiritual successor to the old 2CV, **that** poisonous upturned bathtub favoured by the sort of hip*

*All this was accompanied by **that** terrible, by-the-yard Walking with Dinosaurs-type music*

These are examples of exophoric reference which the reader can only make sense of by having the same shared experience; and while the experience may be shared there is no guarantee that the evaluation, always subjective, is also shared, so the structure presupposes common values by embedding the evaluation inside a deictically expressed demonstrative noun phrase. It is a constant reiterated pattern which invites alignment.

Similar effects are obtained with patterns using the definite article: *the –X- of the/a,* signalling evoked evaluation through metonymy or accompanied by inscribed lexical evaluation.

(5)

*He is **the** MP equivalent **of** **the** cushions Japanese executives kick to relieve*

*He was **the** Mother Teresa **of** television, a person who tirelessly loved **the***

*Its blackened cod has become **the** Burberry check **of** every pick-up, jabberwocky menu.*

*she said with **the** quiet authority **of** a special-needs teacher. "There are left-hand*

*seems ideally suited to **the** forgotten dream **of** a balls-out Sunday afternoon thrash.*

*tapas, which is very like **the** Spanish version **of** tapas, but without **the** thumbscrews. .*

*Having **the** IQ **of** a taxi driver, but **the** spelling ability **of** a Polish waitress, I've been a martyr to*

*they are not **the** manly equivalent **of** a leylandii hedge. They are William Morris*
*into your mouth with **the** gliding precision **of the** drawers in a spice merchant's cabinet.*
*a car that has **the** aerodynamic properties **of** a small hill.   If they really wanted to make a*

Such use of the definite article as part of the grammatical cohesion takes as given what has not really been given, thus again embedding evaluation inside a noun phrase

2.2 Loudness

Other register signals come in the choice of the (relatively few) value terms in the keywords list. The set of explicitly evaluative lexical items connote informality, (*big, rude, crap, nice, weird, awful*) but are also rather vague and unfocussed evaluative terms; The value system of the TLS corpus can be seen in the terms of evaluation in its keywords (*true, common, curious, scholarly, vague, certain, journalistic, genuine).* There is also a set of items uniting informality and lack of precision (see Channell:1994) (*stuff, thing, lot, lots, bits, something*) which is a strong indication of an assumed shared knowledge and can mark in-group membership (Carter and McCarthy 2006:202).
Oh is one of the key words and other discourse markers are used like *I mean, mind you, you know, okay, anyway, so, well,* all identified as typical of informal conversation adding to the construction of the relationship. A relationship where the writer does not have to mind his or her manners or to be on best behaviour. Indeed even if we take into account the deliberate use of spoken discourse features there are salient features related to the relative loudness of the signatures. Wmatrix POS frequency lists comparing the HO Corpus with the *BNC Spoken* corpus show a number of items which can be linked to what Martin and White have called force: the use of intensification and quantification, up-scaling and maximisation. For example while adjectives are salient as one might expect in evaluation (6.7% as opposed to 3.7% with a log-likelihood of 577.86), so also are superlative adjectives (0.16% to 0.05%) and superlative adverbs of degree reflecting the intensification (0.12% as opposed to 0.04%). We will come back to this point later in a discussion of hyperbole.

3. Rudeness

Brown and Levinson's politeness paradigm (1978,1987) gave another dimension to linguistic analysis and linked speech acts with the notion of face threatening or face saving (Goffman 1981). Face is seen as being part of our need to be valued or have a positive self-image and our need for autonomy or freedom from imposition. The degree of threat will depend on the variables of distance, power and rank in the relationship, Positive politeness strategies or behaviour which actively expresses positive concern for someone are said to include the use of in-group identity markers, solidarity address forms, slang, contractions, gossip and the use of hearer/reader's deictic centre all of which we have seen above in the data, and the use of jokes and the assumption of reciprocity, which I think are also seen to be present in the data I have provided, in the relationship between the writers and their constructed readers addressed. But many people read newspapers, and among the readers may reasonably be presumed to be those who are the targets of the criticism. Among the threats to one's positive face can be grouped acts which suggest that the speaker/writer has a negative opinion of the hearer/reader's positive face such as expressions of disapproval, criticism, ridicule, complaints, accusations, insults. Another category of face threatening acts suggest that the speaker/writer does not care about hearer/reader's positive face by using

expressions of violent emotions, irreverence, mention of taboo subjects, raising emotional or divisive topics, misuse of terms of address. All of these are present in *the HO Corpus.*

 The need to maintain face is taken as a pragmatic need, associated primarily with face to face interaction and as a means of minimising the risk of confrontation in discourse – both the possibility of confrontation occurring at all, and 'the possibility that a confrontation will be perceived as threatening' (Lakoff,1989:102). Cooperation in maintaining face is based on a belief in the mutual vulnerability of face. For Lakoff, politeness is very much concerned with interpersonal relationships and is related to the expectations of participants. Non-politeness is defined as 'behaviour that does not conform to politeness rules, used where the latter are not expected' whereas rudeness is defined as 'behaviour that does not utilize politeness strategies where they would be expected, in such a way that the utterance can only be interpreted as intentionally and negatively confrontational' (103). For *the HO Corpus* writers there are a number of identifiable targets construed by them as legitimate targets for rudeness, perhaps because the writers themselves perceive a threat to their autonomy (negative face threat) from the relative power of the targets. The use of a high level of force is transgressive on several levels, transgressing Leech's maxims of politeness[3] (Leech1983) while at the same time reaffirming the dialogistic nature of the discourse. Reactions to the writers are frequently expressed in terms that underline the fact that they are essentially 'against' someone or something – this can be seen in the prefixes of the terms used to describe them *irreverent, impolite, iconoclastic, debunking, politically incorrect:* all presuppose some previous proposition or position against which the writer is choosing to write.

We can see this in the way that some of the writers construe themselves: Simon Hoggart, in his book on Parliamentary sketches writes:

> …now they have just us, the sketch writers.. we are not interested in straight parliamentary coverage. We are interested in cheap jokes, unfair barbs, and a slanted version of the day's events…..
>
> It was Marshal-Andrews who told me his belief that all journalists, especially sketch writers, were playground bullies: 'You love to hear your victims squeal. It's important that we never let you hear it,' and I'm afraid there might be more truth in that than I care to admit. 'being rude to politicians has been an important part of British life for centuries now, and along with the cartoonists we continue that tradition. We are the jesters whispering – rather loudly – to Roman emperors, reminding them that they too are human. Or at least have very silly hair'
>
> (Hoggart 2002:i-iv).

 Clarkson may state that he hates everybody equally but among the recipients of his rudeness are particular groups, Health and Safety, environmentalists, feminists and in general Guardian readers. Goldacre takes as his target not only bad science but also humanities graduates writing in the press about science. The perception is that of an under group lashing out at a power group which has obtained hegemony. The fact that the *HO* writers know they are addressing their admirers and, at the same time, those they are criticising, means that the discourse takes the risk of reflecting a projected relationship which can be taken as intimate or hostile depending on the compliance of the reader. Instead of polite hedging, toning down, we find exaggeration, and an explicit disregard for both Gricean maxims and Leech's maxims of politeness. Hoggart, for example, uses the disregard for truth repeatedly, as if to underline the lack of seriousness of purpose.

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[3] Leech's Politeness maxims includeTact, Generosity, Approbation, Modesty, Agreement, Sympathy.

(6)

> *I'm afraid that he made the last bit up.*
> *This might be something of an exaggeration*
> *Some of these points I might have marginally enhanced*
> *I made the last bit up but you get the idea*
> *I made the last paragraph up*
> *And yes, I did make that up*
> *Well of course he didn't say the last bits*
> *I fear I may have invented the bit about the Baby Bio*
> *He didn't quite put it like that of course but that was what he meant*
> *No, silly, of course he didn't say the last bit*
> *I made up the last four words but you get it*

The use of taboo words and phrases *(Hell, fuck, Christ, shit, bastard, bugger, bloody* as an intensifier, all found in the *HO Corpus* and absent from the *TLS corpus*) projects either a close intimate relationship with the person or group to whom they are addressed or else a threatening and hostile relationship.

4. Figurative language as part of the signature.

The uses made of figurative language distinguish the strong signatures from the restrained. Part of the evaluative style lies in how writers seek to negotiate and engage readers, as part of rhetoric or the power of persuasion, and this demands a qualitative analysis if we are to be able to identify the key features. Evaluation constructs and maintains relations between reader and writer and can be used to direct and control behaviour; in this case it is directed as much to the buying of newspapers as to the eating in restaurants, choosing of cars or voting for a political party, since the features are read by many people who have no particular interest or intention of taking up the recommendation. Such evaluative discourse can reflect and impose a value system beyond that of the individual entity being evaluated. One particular kind of evaluative resource, the use of figurative language and recurrent patterns of metaphorical usage, is of interest to the discourse analyst since it is often used in subtle and even insidious ways in persuasive argument. Martin and White (2004:147-152) deal with figurative language as part of the engagement system, among the resources for providing force and intensification or quantification.

As we have seen, the data contains many cultural metaphors with proper names, brand names and place names being used metonymically or in similes for rhetorical purposes. The salient features may be somewhat opaque to the outsider. The reference to shared experience tends to construct the relationship between writer and reader: a nod and a wink to pre-supposedly shared experience and thus shared values. The writer, in using metaphor, metonymy or simile, links two terms (target and source) according to features they are deemed to have in common, in order to make a comparison, claim similarity or a relationship between the two. If the two have very few features in common, coming from not just different semantic fields but incongruous ones, then the reader has to work hard to identify the features, to understand the comparison, and is thus being encouraged to engage with the text as with a verbal puzzle. If this is achieved after a considerable amount of effort of identification, an imaginative leap, an epiphany of recognition occurs, or some other investment satisfaction at having solved the problem, ensues.

Within this consensual position we can identify a number of signals which aid computer searching where items are compared through simile, in order to describe the unfamiliar in familiar terms, or to give a concrete parallel for an abstract concept. What Deignant has called "tuning devices to negotiate the interpersonal aspects of situationally distinctive uses of language" are often used, almost as if to warn that figurative use of language is about to come into play. Such devices

are found in similes and with hedging locutions (*a sort of, kind of, like, a cross between)* which act as overt signals of the figurative or fuzzy use of language and are thus identifiable in the wordlists; *sort*, *like* and *kind* all appear as key words. We often describe a new experience in terms of a familiar one, using the closest experience available. While the *TLS* examples are more imprecise hedging than metaphorical, *the HO Corpus* shows mainly figurative use. Partington points out that there are variations in metaphorical use across discourse types

> The concordances of a *sort of* and *kind of* in newspaper corpora has a completely different story to tell. They were found proportionally far more frequently in metaphorical statements than they were in the [White House] briefings texts. This result, however, tells us more about the nature of the two types of discourse than about the hedges themselves. Newspapers texts are written and have relatively more relaxed time constraints in their production than spontaneous speech. In addition, some types of newspaper writing (notably the so-called comment and magazine-types) display considerable novelty and variety of expression. As a result they exhibit what we might call a much higher general *figurative density* than the briefings. The higher proportion of figurative uses of our hedges is most probably a simple reflection of this overall density.
>
> (Partington 2006a)

4.1 Incongruous comparison

Although all metaphor and similes might be said to be incongruous, we find instances of particularly incongruous combinations in comparison. Looking at the differences in the metaphorical uses of *between* we find there is normally some idea of closeness, a metaphorical adjacency of two elements, extended from a meaning of physical position, to link easily comparable entities, or in the expression *a cross between*, which contains the idea of compatibility, in the sense that species can only interbreed, creating a crossbreed, if similar enough. In *the HO Corpus* however the entities are not similar but incongruous, the features they have in common are marginal to their definitions rather than prototypical, or are not immediately identifiable, the terms juxtaposed for effect:

(7)

> *Tory candidates in Liverpool have banded together for mutual support like **a cross between** Al-Qaeda and the Famous Five*
> *and bad hair. Breck was played by Iain Glen as **a cross between** David Niven and Ian Botham.*
> *She is an alluring **cross between** Esther Rantzen and Grace Kelly, a sort of Debbie Tidies Dallas*
> *ravishingly excellent -an unexpected, juicy **cross between** meaty liquorice and Noggin the Nog's bum.*

Between on its own is also used as a vehicle for incongruity rather than an explicit comparison of similar categories. If we look at some examples from the *TLS corpus:*
(8)

> *20,000 souls, witnessed a contest **between three men,** two of whom spent almost Pounds 100,00*
> ***Between 1897 and 1903**, Sir William Laird Clowes produced in*
> *had provided for a compulsory exchange of populations **between Greece and Turkey**, but those Greeks,*
> *Edwardian England, a disquisition on the tensions **between law and justice***

*especially in a community as deeply divided **between majority and minority** as Northern Ireland, after all, the perfect reconciliation **between masculinity and femininity.** Belief in his divinity*
*an institutional difference **between the USA and much of Europe** to which Lieven might h*
*extreme tension; and a witch-hunting consensus **between rulers and ruled***
*highlight the disparity **between American wealth and Haitian immigrant poverty***
*the linkage **between the State and the university** across the Continent has*
*, in which Jesus is described as "the perfect reconciliation **between masculinity and femininity".** Many who even a year ago did not know the differenc**e between zakat and jihad** now write with*

The entities being linked are clearly from the same or related categories (men, dates, abstract concepts from the same semantic field) whereas *the HO Corpus* examples almost underline the unrelatedness of the linked terms, as a hyperbolic contradiction of similarity:

(9)

*the voters, forced to choose **between Mr Davis and being lowered into a vat of boiling pig's urine***
*when it comes to politeness, I think the British slot neatly **between the Israelis and the leopard seal**, a blubbery and vicious*
*most customers would struggle to tell the difference **between a 1945 Chateau Pétrus and a glass of Ribena.***

Similar signals involving comparison are to be found in the keywords for *the HO Corpus* suggesting these participate in salient patterns. (fig. 1)

Word	%*HO*	%*TLS*	Keyness
14. *like*	0.41	0.17	273.8
38. *if*	0.34	0.18	143.9

Figure 1 *like* and *if* frequencies in *HO* and *TLS*

On examination these turn out to be core items in similes. These rely on script and schemata recall, often linked to sensory perceptions, so we get terms such as *look like*, *sounds like*, *resembles*, but which all rely on the reader's being able to make an imaginative leap and understand the allusion. There is the same challenge to search for similarity in our experience without the comparison either being transparent or involving easily retrievable sensory perceptions. Nor are they immediately obvious in terms of evaluation because the target and source are from deliberately incongruous contexts, moving from formal, public to intimate[4], domestic or from banal to high-flown, or recalling incongruous cultural tokens:

(10) As if scenarios

*Then there are a lot of things that come wrapped up, **as if** they'd been surreptitiously spat into pastry*

---

[4] We should perhaps note here that anatomy and physiology are key semantic tags in comparison with the BNC spoken corpus and that one aspect of threats to a speaker's positive face concerns the loss of control of physical control over the body and emotion leakage, non-control of laughter or tears.

*it's a strange up-and-down movement with cupped hands, **as if** he's milking a large cow or ... something.*
*mumble inspirational words or throw away your best clap lines **as if** you were telling a child to remember her bus pass*
*an alarming way of clearing his throat at the end of a sentence, **as if** about to gob on you.*
 *Afterwards, **as if** getting round to taking out the rubbish, he says he'll give*
*Mr McNulty reacted **as if** he had asked a deeply personal question about his wife.*
*amazed at how many people can pick up a menu and sigh **as if** it were a tax form*
*It all tastes **as if** it's come in a tanker marked 'Tepid, brown, vaguely oriental'*
*Ask it to power slide and it looks at you **as if** you've invited it for a threesome with the vicar*
*Mr Paisley made his slow progress towards his seat **as if** to lay eggs on the sand*

Similes exploit the effects in a number of patterns:

(11)

*Countdown is a programme that oozes despair **like** a badly applied tourniquet.*
*The house was **like** a carp pond after someone had tossed in an electric fire.*
*Doherty has victim running through him **like** a chorus.*
*The Stuart drove **like** a Buddhist butler.*
*It's the most annoying song ever made -**like** a collective of fat Enyas*

Incongruously matched images:

(12)

A restaurant:
*face-lift, which has left the room looking like **a cross between** a Miami health spa and an Austin Powers set.*
A politician:
*The problem with Malcolm is that he looks like **a cross between** Miss Jean Brodie and Charles Hawtrey.*
Television production of historic navy drama:
*made Nelson's navy look like **a cross between** the Big Brother house on a dressing-up day and Kim and Aggie's How Clean Is Your Houseboat?*

(13)

*And so the Multipla was born, the first car to **resemble** an Amazonian tree frog.*
*looks like Wallace, though Prof Hennessy does not in any way **resemble** Gromit*
*a shuffling, tongue-tied big lad - the inside of his head probably **resemble**s his bedroom.*
*In which respect the Afghan capital also **resembles** Trafalgar Square*
*It made the Black Hole of Calcutta **resemble** a deserted ballroom*

4.2 Intensification and hyperbole

As we saw earlier, Martin and White list features of loud signatures which involve the build up, amplification and intensification of evaluation which they call force. Upscaling of attitude, they say, frequently acts to construe the writer as maximally committed to the value position being advanced

and hence as strongly aligning the reader into that value position by means of lexical build up, repetition and intensification, and the maximisation of lexis. In *the HO Corpus* we find:

(14)

> *But it still felt brilliant. Utterly, stunningly, mind blowingly, jaw droppingly brilliant.*
> *He didn't stumble bravely. He didn't dare to fail. He seemed simply, nakedly, humiliatingly bereft of all talent and ability*
> *He is terribly, majestically, thunderously boring*
> *Then they encounter the tiny-minded, introspective, self-obsessed, mean-spirited, solipsistic, hidebound, pettifogging, miserable, duplicitous, implacable intransigence of the people they have to deal with*
> *It was terrible. It was also ghastly, chaotic, miserable and floor-staringly, mouth-puckeringly, gaze-avertingly awful.*

But other effects are created through reversals of force and evaluation. Often they contain a mixture of force resources, using a maximiser, and ironic evaluation, involving a bathetic example as comparison: again the keywords highlighted the core word for the pattern

(15)   All

> *HO*   0.48% *TLS* 0.24%   Keyness 145.7

> *the denouement has **all** the anticipatory excitement of a blocked lavatory.*
> *has **all** the aesthetic appeal of a pensioner's diseased gum*
> *the seats have **all** the body-hugging grip of a kitchen chair*
> *with **all** the elegant body language of a beanbag.*

(16)   Every

> *HO*   0.09% *TLS* 0.04%   Keyness 147.7

  Sometimes hyperbole and cultural reference express the evaluation or simply hyperbole and metaphor

> ***Every** mouthful of food eaten outdoors in Britain will contain a wasp, and **every** slurp of drink a fly the size of Jeff Goldblum.*
> *There are Southern Comfort bottles hidden behind **every** hedge in Chiswick. Everyone looks*
> *more than a titter, there's a problem of having **every** line pickled in knowing irony*
> * What Dorset farms have now instead of sheep is retirement. Everyone **looks** over 60*
> *And three: whale music infests **every** massage parlour, chiropractor's, yoga room and beautician*
> *The turning circle means **every** mini roundabout becomes a three-point turn,*
> *Behind **every** plate, there is a strong press release. **Every** well-made dish has a half-baked theory.*
> *Another thing about Chelsea is that it clogs up **every** single restaurant in the western hemisphere.*
> *Mercedes really is endeavouring to provide a different model for **every** single one of the world's 6.4 billion people.*
> *lines and actors not given enough time to breathe. Almost **every** utterance had to move great marble slabs of plot.*
> *if you have overhead spots and oversized plates, then **every** wipe mark on the rim shines like tubercular snot.*

Most exaggerations are examples of extreme case formulations where the point is not that they could be rebutted on truth grounds, we have seen how truth is not the point. The point being made is that a particular state of affairs is essentially the case for the writer. Sometimes a scientific register is evoked through use of precision (cardinal numbers and units of measurement have higher relative frequency in comparison to BNC) but nested with hyperbole

(17)
> now you go past a road sign **every 1.3 seconds.**
> Last week, **every** news channel in Britain cut live **every 15 minutes** to some dizzy bird in wellies,
> I can pretty much guarantee that your C4 will break down **every 15 minutes**.
> Today, my children get a present from someone or other once **every 24 seconds**.
> Why is there a stile **every 2½ feet** over which you have to haul your six-year-old,
> its battery went flat **every 30 seconds**,

4.3 Reversal of evaluation

Sometimes the evaluations involve the use of oxymoron where the amplifier and the evaluative term conflict in evaluation: For example: *He was thunderously not too bad, majestically all right I suppose, triumphantly OK really.* The force of the hedge/amplifier contrasting with the force of the evaluation is used in three part lists: *did seem a little exhausting, a bit greedily nerdy, a touch embarrassingly obsessive,*
We can also see how the hedge *a bit* nests with the simile signalling device *like* and the incongruous or unlikely source which should suggest the evaluation:

(18)
> with another Rover 75 to review a car like the Maserati is **a bit like** asking a refugee from Chad to review the Ivy.
> said to be the best fish-and-chip shop in London, which is **a bit like** being called the best Relate counsellor in Lagos.
> being a motoring journalist is **a bit like** being Prince Andrew. Hugely good fun but, in the big scheme of things
> the wallpaper of gaudy flowers that looks **a bit like** they've skinned a dead BA aeroplane tail and glued it

Thus we find oxymoronic similes with ironic reversal where the semantic features of the source contradict the apparent proposition of comparison:

(19)
> truffle oil, which is about **as** Swedish **as** a limerick.
> **as** comfortable **as** steamrollers.
> **as** attractive **as** a sponsored town centre roundabout
> about **as** emotional **as** a tin opener.
> about **as** fashionable **as** vicarages.
> **As** dynamic **as** someone's dead.

Other examples are interpretable only with knowledge of the cultural references:

(20)

*bandwagon of cosmopolitan holiday orientalism. It's **a bit** Nobu, **a bit** Roka and **a touch** Hakkasan.*
*It was **all** terribly Tate Modern and jolly pleasing on the eye,*
*It would have **all** been too Women's Institute*
*sniffing out tax loopholes **as** fervently **as** a cash-in-hand plasterer*
*In terms of food, it's **all a bit**, well, a bit Notting Hill.*
*Ferraris are **just a little bit** disgusting, with a dash of Beckham and a touch of Rio Ferdinand*
*to be **a bit** more Tracy and Hepburn and **a bit** less Ken Loach does The West Wing*

or if the ironic reversal of force between evaluation and downgrading is recognised, which depends on the recognition of incongruous register in choice of superlatives:

(21)

      *the Anasazi were **the teensiest, weensiest bit** cannibal.*

Register echoes depend on familiarity with other genres. In the following example an advertising register is called-up and the qualities of materials are used metaphorically in the description of the difference between two politicians:

(22)

      Some people go for the Bakelite retro Aspel, where others prefer the drip-dry, stain-resistant Titchmarsh.

5. Conclusion

Humour and irony tend to play a large part in the interactional rather than transactional discourse mode since they effectively hold up the action to a certain extent and delay task completion. They represent the ludic or aesthetic purposes of language rather than the informational.. Here, metaphors exaggerate the feature involved in comparison and call attention to it by its very incongruity, a phraseological memory is called up or an expectation raised only to be disappointed. Many of the similes involve sense based scenarios, calling up body-memories: often intimate and personal ones are juxtaposed with institutional figures; we find the reversal of evaluation with irony, litotes and oxymoron, the increase of force of the evaluation with hyperbole and maximum amplification. The idea of a rant is where an opinion is being expressed with great force: Hyperbolic signals in the shape of adverbial intensifiers *(deeply, particularly, especially, indeed, certainly, doubly, genuinely, bitterly, supremely)* are prevalent. Metaphor used for evaluation highlights the close connection between dramatisation and exaggeration. And again all these features are nested to build up accumulated effects.

Irony provides a mismatch or reversal, not so much of the ideational meaning, but of the loudness or weight, and of evaluation. The kind of word play we have been looking at functions by combining shifts between the open choice and the phraseological principle, with disconfirmation of expectations created by idiom signals. The echoing of cliché and register triggers a priming in much the same way as we expect the next track to begin on a familiar CD as soon as the last one ends, and the unexpected shifting of fixed or frozen wording of idioms creates a collocational shock (for example *drunk as a sock, a rabble soothing speech)* just as the incongruous juxtaposition of register creates a shift in narrative with disconfirmation of script recall (Partington 2006a, 2006b). Readers are primed by the relationship created by their familiarity with the genre and by the resister signals to apply the irony frame in processing meaning. Readers who have not been so primed may well miss the point.

Grundy (2000:248) says that 'passing such understanding tests is a kind of initiation rite which makes us members of the privileged group of those who get the message'. Such a sense of satisfaction encourages further alignment with the writer. Wordplay involving these figures of speech involves defeating the expectation of Gricean maxim's being upheld, a transgression of cooperation and politeness norms. All this can be read and enjoyed but priming, which brings expectations and relies on familiarity, can work against the continued reception of formulaic writing which aims to use incongruity and surprise of juxtaposition as amusing; as AA Gill writes: *"News grows to be a formula in much the same way as <u>all other genres grow to be formulas -it has its reusable and repetitive shorthand."</u>* How much this kind of evaluative style with its usable and repetitive formula will become hackneyed and no longer appreciated will soon be a matter for corpus linguistics to ascertain.

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[i] Compiled by John Morley for the Political Sciences

[ii] Among other domain specific register signals we find contracted forms, a sign of informality in written language, which appear only in the rants and riffs corpus since the TLS has an editorial preference for full forms and will alter copy to adjust contracted forms. We also find truncated clauses and ellipsis.