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Reformulation in Major's 1995 Keynote Speech.

in ISLS Workshop: Methodological approaches to the
analysis of political texts.

Chris Gledhill
20th January 1996

1 Introduction

In this paper my initial aim is to apply one linguistic approach to the analysis of John Major's keynote speech at the 1995 Conservative Party Conference. My overriding aim, however, is to demonstrate that linguistic analysis can explain the specific characteristics of extended discourse, and that these characteristics can be related to the ideological orientation of the text, an approach currently explored in the area of 'critical linguistics' (Stubbs 1994:201).

My methodology examines the role of reformulation. Reformulation is not a widely recognised term in linguistics or discourse analysis. Reformulation can be seen as a dynamic process in text, involving the constant linguistic reorganisation of information throughout running discourse. It can be seen in the Prague School's Functional Sentence Perspective and Halliday and Hasan's (1976) theory of thematic progression and cohesion within texts. My own view of reformulation (set out below) is based on an approach

that has recently been developed in Birmingham, but has not received widespread attention elsewhere: Sinclair's theory of posture.

All these models have a common strand. They identify an important factor that makes running texts coherent: an intuitive feeling that the text is building upon itself. In all these theories, linguistic features are identified as reformulations of previous statements. Meaning is seen to be gradually built and reformulated by the text.

However, it is worth remembering that as far as most linguists are concerned no relationships exist beyond the sentence. There is no linguistic motivation to demonstrate coherence within texts, simply because the vast majority of formal linguists have traditionally had other goals in mind. While De Saussure claimed that the crucial task of linguistics is "to search for those forces which are permanently and universally at work in all languages", he also declared that in the distinction between code and message, code is the "sole object of linguistic study." (Jakobson 1973:27).

The majority of anglo-saxon linguists still follow this strict dichotomy, and most have adopted some form of Chomsky's generative or universal grammar. Generative

grammar cannot account for textual structures and is severely limited to analysing intuitive non-authentic texts. As Grimes points out:

"[Chomsky] not only perpetuated Bloomfield's restriction uncritically, but made it stronger by having the sentence... be the distinguished symbol of the kind of grammar that can be constructed as a formal system." (1975:2)

The kind of alternative linguistics Grimes and others have argued for is termed discourse analysis, although this term has a different emphasis than that used by political scientists and literary critics. The aim of discourse analysis is to explain the way factors which are external to the text influence linguistic content. Applied linguists within this framework are often concerned with how these texts can be better described for teaching purposes, or how texts function within the community at large or within a more specialised discourse community, as in the specialism of English for Specific Purposes (Swales 1990).

Unlike traditional political or literary analysts, applied linguists avoid open judgements about the relative success of the text. Rather than asking whether a text is successful or not, they concern themselves with the means by which successful texts can be produced. Nevertheless, within the Hallidayan school of systemic

grammar, an area known as critical linguistics has emerged (Thibault 1991, Fowler 1991, Halliday and Martin 1993, Stubbs 1994).

Critical linguistics argues that linguistic features encode ideological orientations. A classic example of this is Stubb's (1994) analysis of ergative verbs. The ergative use of a normally transitive verb obscures the agent of an action without using the passive, as in 'The factory delocated. Opportunities for finding work are closing. Unemployment is increasing.' Stubbs argues that this is an emergent feature of English that affects not only verbal expression, but thematic choice and transitivity in the language. Over the last century, most verbs in English have come to be used ergatively.

What is the reason for this change? Halliday and Thibault have argued that such formulations represent the influence of scientific language on general English. Halliday and Martin have explored other features of general language and jargon that are originally formulations from pseudo-scientific language. They see language as a dynamic force in the creation (or as Halliday would term it, the 'construal') of the preferred way of saying things. The lack of agency is argued to be an unconscious attempt by the discourse community to distance itself from responsibility. Indeed,

from Halliday's systemic grammar we learn that most linguistic formulations can be seen as deliberate choices within a system of alternative expressions. From this perspective, it is unlikely that any of Mr Major's formulations can be analysed as anything other than ideologically motivated.

Since the work of Austin and Seale (1969), the assertion that a text is simply 'informative' or 'factual' has had little place in discourse analysis. But what is original about Halliday's approach to language is that very specific grammatical features of language have come to be interpreted in terms of ideology rather than style or register. Below, we aim to present a methodology typical of this new subfield of discourse analysis.

2 Posture as a dynamic model of reformulation.

I have argued elsewhere that reformulation plays a key role in the construction of new ideas. In order to identify key features of reformulation in John Major's speech, we have adapted Sinclair's model of posture. In Sinclair's posture model, the sentence is seen as the state of the discourse supported by mechanisms of maintenance or change (Sinclair 1980, 1993). The influential model of cohesion establishes the principle of links with specific referents (Halliday and Hasan

1976). Sinclair has argued for an alternative view of cohesive relations where

"each new sentence makes reference to the previous one, and encapsulates the previous sentence in an act of reference" (1993d:8).

Posture analysis essentially involves looking at each sentence for clues to what has gone on prior to that utterance (encapsulation) and to what lies ahead (prospection). Posture includes many cohesive categories that are the same as those established by Halliday and Hasan (1976, 1989). However, we identify four major particularities that the posture framework does *not* share with cohesion:

- 1) Posture relates a clause / sentence only to immediately adjacent sentences rather than to longer chains.
- 2) Posture functions across clause complexes (coordination and subordination) rather than just between sentences.
- 3) Posture gives more prominence to reformulation than to conjunction.
- 4) Certain postures have precedence over others where the cohesion model gives no priority to any one category.

Sinclair reassigns existing categories of cohesion, anaphoric nouns (Francis 1985) and predictive categories (Tadros 1985) into four with several subtypes: encapsulation, prospection, verbal echo and overlay. As

we explain these subtypes in turn, we exemplify from John Major's speech.

2.1 Encapsulation in Major's speech.

1: Sinclair argues that sentences can be seen to encapsulate previous ones implicitly (the default for all non-initial sentences where a 'logical' relationship can be inferred). In implicit encapsulation, no overt relationship is signalled by the text, and the reader/listener is expected to relate the utterances by inferring from the original context (Prince 1981). In scientific research and newspaper articles these are so frequent that implicit relations are the dominant pattern. By contrast, in Major's speech, they are rare. Examples where the second sentence #2 encapsulates the first implicitly include:

p4 (the first instance of implicit encapsulation)

- #1 This party has never waved any other flag - and we never will.
- #2 To win, Labour, must persuade people this country is on its knees.

p6 (the second instance of implicit encapsulation)

- #1 But he [Blair]'s abandoned so much, so fast you never know.
- #2 The Liberal Democrats support all Labour's nonsense.

p11 (the third instance of implicit encapsulation)

#1 But it [unemployment]'s still far too high.

#2 The best route to more jobs is more small business.

The reading of these pairs is coherent within the text. On p2, Labour policy is set up in opposition to Tory loyalism. On p6, the term 'Labour's nonsense' implicitly reformulates Labour policy set out prior to this statement. On p11, the term 'more jobs' is implicitly contrasted with 'high unemployment'. These inferences are very simple ones, not the kind required by the cancer researcher or even the reader of the Guardian in what Martin (1993) terms 'expository' texts. The relative rarity of this and its simplicity when it does occur indicates that implicit relations may not be a preferred way of setting out political speeches. Instead, explicit signalling appears to be more prevalent.

2: Alternatively in Sinclair's model, the sentence encapsulates a previous one explicitly. Explicit signals are most typically realised by discourse items such as sentence adverbs (*yet, also, therefore*), conjunctive adjuncts (*in fact, as a result, consequently*) and conjunctions (*and, so, but*). Winter (1977) has argued that such items are evidence of an implicit dialogue in the text, as well as devices explicitly signalling the rhetorical structure of the text, enabling the audience

to construct its argumentation. Explicit signals are very frequently used in Major's speech, but they are not as varied as the examples above. The most frequent device is *but*, used thematically in couplets:

- p2 #1 All elections are important.
#2 *But* the next is a watershed.
- p3 #1 I might have lost [...]
#3 *But* I won.
- p4 #1 I don't understand Labour's patriotism.
#2 *But* it's a funny kind of patriotism to rubbish our achievements.
- p17 #1 I haven't changed.
#2 *But* education has.
- p18 #1 It's been a great success.
#2 *But* Labour hate it.

The other explicit signals in the speech are *and* and *so* and much less frequently *at least* and *then*:

- p2 #1 This is the day I'm going to tell you how to win the next election.
#2 *And* if anyone is superstitious, they shouldn't be.
- p5 #1 But - to the best of my belief - he hasn't changed his name.
#2 *At least not when* I got up to speak.
- p20 #1 Labour hate independence.
#2 *So*, parents at the next election - choice or no-choice.
- p26 #1 Conflict with the Westminster parliament would be inevitable.
#2 *And then* - the siren voices of the separatists will foment mischief and demand an independent Scotland...

Such relationships are termed clauses of 'expansion' in Halliday's (1985) model. While expansion can exemplify and typically does in other text types, in these examples, sentence #2 enhances or elaborates previous discourse, generally bringing a sense of evaluation rather than simply a logical or sequential progression. The preponderance of these forms has been noted by Schjerve in her analysis of the discourse of Italian fascism. Adversative conjuncts such as *But* and *However* she claims, are associated with hyperbole in political discourse (Schjerve 1989:68-70). In addition, she finds that such examples of paratactic clause structures are typical of argumentative text types.

As a further example of explicit signalling, we note the frequent clausal signal *That's why*. We can see that Major sets out policy after this signal (in sentences #2) and that this follows an evaluative statement or statement involving modality rather than a specific cause for that policy (emphasised in sentences #1):

p9 #1 Both halves are equally *important*.
#2 *That's why* Malcolm Rifkind will actively pursue the vision of Atlantic Free Trade.

p12 #1 But they work as *hard* as they can.
#2 *That's why*, as Ian Lang told you, we've set up the biggest consultation with business ever seen in this country.

p16 #1 It's a *strong Tory tradition* that you and I look after ourselves and our families before we turn to

others to pay our bills.

#2 *That's why* we need to target our welfare spending on those that need it.

#1 But welfare *should offer* people a ladder back to the pride of self-reliance [...]

#2 *That's why* we're designing a welfare system for the twenty-first century.

p20 #1 Their results have been *outstanding*.

#2 *That's why* I want to enable all schools to become grant-maintained.

3: In Sinclair's model, ellipsis also signals explicit encapsulation. Ellipsis is a relatively important feature of Major's speech, and is likely to be a prominent feature of many spoken, expository genres (Martin 1993). Here are a selection of examples, with the elided item in brackets:

p2 We've won four [elections] and we're going for five.

p3 Well, of course, you couldn't [argue your case].

p3 And if I had [lost] I would still be at this conference.

p3 [I would be] Still offering my full support to the party.

p4 [this country is] Clapped out. Beaten up.

p6 [We have to] Explain to people the opportunities within reach. [We have to] Tell them what can - and cannot- be done.

p10 Of course not [Substitution: hear Labour talk of this].

p12 I don't [find that very funny]

p17 But education has [changed]

Related to this, complex nominal groups function much in the same way as ellipsis, that is they are paratactic

expansions. In other words, they avoid potential verbal or clausal repetition and they are particularly common in Major's speech:

- p4 #1 Today, we meet united, healed, renewed
#2 - *and thirsting for the real fight: with Labour.*
- p11 #1 The Chancellor must act, says Labour.
#2 *Always, always, always the easy option.*
- p13 #1 [...] they look towards European unity as a
guarantor of
political
stability.
#2 *Of their decision never to go to war with one another again.*
- p17 #1 We're doing that with vouchers: to put choice where it belongs:
#2 *not in the hands of bureaucrats*
#3 *but in the hands of parents*
#4 *Choice, choice, choice.*
#5 *And all opposed by Labour.*
- p22 #1 [...] it must be a just peace.
#2 *One that is fair to all sides.*
#3 *And a peace that is constructed away from the shadow of the gun.*
- p26 #1 In the past two and a half years, recorded crime has fallen.
#2 *Well and good.* [epithets functioning as nominal heads]

It is highly unlikely that these devices are elements of naturally occurring conversation. Instead they are symptomatic of rhetorical discourse, whether written or spoken. The series on p17 presents a particularly complex set of expansions, where #4 represents a verbal

echo (see below) of *parental choice* at the same time as an expansion relating to the whole proposition #1-#3. When prosody is taken into account, ellipsis and nominal expansion may be devices for initiating applause, and in this they resemble the hyperboles of explicit signalling mentioned under 2, above.

4: A specific element in a sentence may also encapsulate a previous sentence or part of a previous sentence by either rephrasing or refocussing. Rephrasing involves encapsulation of entire propositions by superordinate lexical items (*things, these data... these compounds*) or items which label propositions as non-illocutionary utterances (*the difference is, this example, the reason for this*), cognitive processes (*this opinion*), types of text or evaluative 'facts' (*this request, these findings, this problem*). These correspond to Francis's (1985) anaphoric nouns and Winter's Vocabulary 3. As suggested in the examples, these are common devices in research articles, but less so in Major's speech. They typically occur where the register of the speech has changed focus from rhetorical exposition to explanation, and where the argumentation is about to be taken elsewhere or nearer to the conservatives:

p9 #1 The state spends too much of our national wealth.

#2 We must get that *share* below 40 per cent [...]

p15 #1 The easy way out is to load bills onto future

- generations - issuing blank chques for out children to pick up.
#2 In other words, *living on tick*.
- p22 #1 Patience, determination and fairness have carried us a long way.
#2 No one has shown these *qualities* more consitently than Paddy Mayhew and Micheal Ancram [...]
- p26 #1 And then the siren voices of the separatists will foment mischief and demand an independent Scotland cut adrift from Scotland.
#2 These are not *distant problems*.
- p27 #1 They will have the supoort of the National Criminal Intelligence Service [...]
#2 But all our available skills are not yet involved in this *battle*.
- p30 #1 We conservatives are for the individual, not the state [...]
#2 These are the *enduring things, the cornerstones of our beliefs*.

5: Refocussing differs from rephrasing in that it involves an overt relationship between the lexical item and the previous discourse. The main instances of refocussing involve 'selective' deictic acts, consisting usually of pronomial / demonstrative reference to specific items in the immediately previous discourse, or simple / complex repetition e.g (*this (+ repeated item), one of these, such a...*). In Major's speech this role is often filled by substitutive *so*. There are numerous examples:

- p2 #1 Because whoever wins will inherit the strongest economy for decades.
#2 We built that *economy*.

p4 #1 [...] I resigned as Leader of our Party [...]
#2 I did so because speculation was drowning out everything [...]

p6 #1 That is the Millenium Challenge.
#2 We have to respond to *it*.

Some chains of reference bind long stretches of text together such as *Assistend Places Scheme ... It* throughout p18. Consequently, the more striking aspects of refocussing can be treated treated in the following categories of verbal-echo (multiple repetition) and overlay (grammatical paraphrasing). They are both considered to function as both reformulating and refocussing information within the text.

6: Verbal echo involves a repetition or reformulation of two or more lexical terms in new grammatical relationships. Verbal echo is exceptional in that it is can be found between two sentences some distance apart. The new message of the sentence is thus more important than the act of specific reference. In research articles, verbal echo is hard to find. But in Major's speech, verbal echo is a key element of the discourse, and there are many examples:

p2 #1 This is Margaret Thatcher's 70th birthday and she won three elections in a row.
#2 Many happy returns to Maggie today, and it'll be many happy returns for us at the election.

p7 #1 Tell them what can - and cannot be done [...]
#2 By telling them I really mean telling them.

p7 #1 But the state can't do it all - //
#2 and what's more, the State shouldn't do it all.
p9 #1 In the recession, we had to put taxes up to
protect the vulnerable.
#2 Now the recession is over, as soon as prudent, we
must get taxes down again.

In an uncharacteristically aggressive point in the speech
Major reformulates 'fashionable people' by 'knockers
and sneerers':

p12 #1 He made garden ornaments 40 years ago and some
fashionable people find that very funny.
#2 [...] I know the knockers and sneerers who may
never have taken a risk in their comfortable lives
aren't fit to wipe the boots of the risk takers of
Britain.

The echo here would bring the reference to 'fashionable
people' and Major's father (also a risk taker) in
relation to the new information: being fit to wipe the
boots of small businessmen.

7: Overlay involves paraphrase but with a grammatical
parallel between two sentences. The second expression
can be considered a paratactic expansion, and indeed the
effect is much the same as that observed under nominal
forms above. Sinclair includes this category because
refocussing and verbal echo do not deal with paraphrases
that appear to 'colligate', that is echo grammatical
structures. In journalistic and science texts, overlay
is not a common structure. But as with verbal echo,

overlay constitutes a rich and productive rhetorical device, and there is no shortage of examples in John Major's speech:

- p4 #1 They say they want to help businesses - so they'll clobber them with the social chapter.
#2 They say they want to help the unemployed - they'll destroy jobs with a mininum wage.
#3 They say they want to treat the unions fairly - so they'll give them privileges even Micheal Foot didn't dream of in the 1970s.
- p8 #1 Conservatism is choice.
#2 Choice is liberty.
- p8 #1 Individual rights will be defended.
#2 Ownership will be encouraged.
- p11 #1 Where were they when we cut inflation?
#2 When we faced down union power?
#3 When we fed life back into the corpse of so many industrialised industries?
- p31 #1 Our hopes for our country are not tired.
#2 Our ambitions are not dimmed.
#3 Our message to our fellow country men is clear.

In the following example, we have verbal echo and overlay operating in parallel in the second half of the expression:

- p11 #1 Interest rates up? Disgraceful, said Labour.
#2 Interest rates down? Not enough, said Labour.
#3 Interest rates the same? The Chancellor must act, says Labour.

2.2 Prospection in Major's speech.

Prospection occurs "where the phrasing of a sentence

leads the addressee to expect something specific in the next sentence." (Sinclair 1993d:12). Prospection includes attribution (not the same as 'attributive clause') where quoted speech or propositions are introduced by a verbal process noun (*the statement that..., his message... is reported* and typically in our sample: *Numerous studies..., In this study...*). None of this can be found in Major's speech.

1: One type of prospection in Major's speech is advance signalling (akin to Tadros's categories of advance labelling and enumeration) where a proposition is given an abstract label (as opposed to a verbal label) and can be expected to be expanded in a further sentence (*There are two reasons for this... The implications are daunting...*).

p7 [Prospection]

#1 There are only two ways to the future.

#2 There's Labour's way.

#3 And there's ours.

2: Topic selection occurs where the writer introduces a new argument to the text, and where the choice of new subject matter is certain to be taken up at a later point. This appears to include Tadros' (1985) categories of recapitulation, hypothetical prediction and rhetorical question. The prospected sentence is labelled 'prospected' with no further posture function. In the

speech, *But* is often used to signal a topic shift:

p3 *But* first a bit of housekeeping.

p4 *But* that was yesterday.

Topic shift also occurs where no implicit encapsulation can be inferred, and this does not always correspond with the script writers' sub-headings.

3 Reformulation in Major's conference speech.

The paratactic structure of argumentation in this text indicates a dominance relationship (Grice 1975:209). Hypotactic structures would have a central argument with peripheral, subordinate circumstances. This is not the case in this text.

The reformulation of information in political texts has not been the object of much interest in discourse analysis. Courtine (1976) looked at Georges Marchais' address to the Christian members of the Communist Party. In this study Courtine identifies different patterns of lexical items, depending on whether they are thematised (presented as topic of a clause, or given information) or 'determined' (presented as comment part of the predicate, in other words in terms of new information or 'up for grabs'). Terms such as *chrétiens*, *communistes*,

France and peuple are thematic. Crise, Français, Parti, pays, classe, démocratie, monde, union, and vie are very highly determined, in other words they are reformulated and redefined whithin the discourse.

Maingueneau (1987) establishes lexical 'zones' of stability and dynamic change in counter-reformation propaganda: la neutralisation discursive, where there is an assumed consensus of meaning, la clôture d'un savoir: where the meaning of the words is defined within the discourse and la contradiction affleurante: where the words are at stake in the discourse and left unresolved.