Exploring the Textual Positions and Functions of Lexical Items in Hard News Stories

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Abstract

Meanings of words are closely linked to the contexts in which they occur, and recent approaches in corpus linguistics have stressed the importance of lexical descriptions that go beyond lexico-grammatical contexts (Hoey 2005, Mahlberg 2005, O'Donnell 2005, Scott and Tribble 2006). The present paper explores textual patterns of lexical items in hard news stories. White (1997) points out that information in hard news stories is packaged and presented following a cyclical development. Other patterns in newspaper stories characterise ways in which participants of the story are introduced, specific features of participants are highlighted, and the development of actions is described. There are also patterns that are used to evaluate the events of the story and underline their newsworthiness (cf. Bednarek 2006). In addition to a functional analysis, these stories should also be examined from the more linear perspective of paragraph structure. One of the claims in the theory of lexical priming is that words may be primed with respect to their position in recognised discourse units, for instance as the initial word in a paragraph. To investigate this claim we have created a newspaper corpus consisting of subsections based on sentence position within the text (e.g. all the first sentences of a text are grouped together). Using the keywords procedure we have identified words that exhibit a tendency to be text initial. This paper will focus on two examples, *fresh* and *branded*, describing both their evaluative features and organisational functions in the creation of hard news stories. The paper will not only present case studies, but also seeks to provide a corpus linguistic context for the findings.

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