

Christopher Hart
Northumbria University

Legitimising Assertions and the Logico-Rhetorical Module: Evidence and Epistemic Vigilance in Media Discourse on Immigration

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Abstract

Critical Discourse Analysis has recently begun to consider the implications of research in Evolutionary Psychology for political communication. At least three positions have been taken: (i) that this research requires Critical Discourse Analysis to re-examine and defend some of its foundational assumptions (Chilton 2005); (ii) that this research provides a useful explanatory framework for Critical Discourse Analysis in which questions can be addressed why might speakers pursue particular discursive strategies and why they might be so persuasive (Hart 2010); and (iii) that findings bare little or no relevance for Critical Discourse Analysis (Wodak 2006). In this paper, I take up the first two of these positions and in doing so, of course, implicitly disagree with the third. I consider the positions in (i) and (ii), then, specifically in relation to Sperber's (2000, 2001) notion of a 'logico-rhetorical' module. Taking the argument which Chilton makes concerning this module one stage further, I suggest that the logico-rhetorical module evolved as much for persuasion as it did for vigilance. I further suggest that the semantic category of evidentiality operationalised in media discourse is intended to satisfy the conditions of acceptance laid down by the logico-rhetorical module. I show how this semantic category therefore performs a legitimising function in media discourse on immigration.

Keywords: Critical discourse analysis, media, immigration, communication, evolutionary psychology, evidentiality, logico-rhetorical module

1. Introduction

This paper is an attempt to show that recent research in Evolutionary Psychology can make a useful contribution to Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) situated at the explanation stage.¹ Within Fairclough's (1995) tripartite model of discourse analysis, it is description-stage analysis which has received most attention (Chilton 2005: 24). However, as O'Halloran (2003) observes, there has by and large been a vacuum of interpretation-stage analysis and specifically, 'anything to do with cognition at the interpretation stage has not received comprehensive scrutiny' (p. 3). Similarly, at the explanation stage a dynamic space has been created for interdisciplinary work combining text analysis with sociocultural theory.

¹ This is part of a research program in Critical Discourse Analysis incorporating two areas of Cognitive Science, namely Cognitive Linguistics and Evolutionary Psychology, to complement one and other at the interpretation and explanation stage respectively (see Hart 2010).

However, absent from the theoretical bases of CDA is biologically-based explanation (O'Halloran 2005: 1945). In this paper, then, I offer a biologically-based explanation as to the use and effect of a particular 'strategy' in media discourse. This strategy, which we will characterise as an 'epistemic positioning strategy', is a linguistic strategy involved in the legitimisation of assertions, a necessary move in the discursive legitimisation of actions. It may be realised *inter alia* in the semantic domain of evidentiality and has the effect, we will argue, of meeting the demands of a 'logico-rhetorical' module, thereby allowing propositions to be accepted by addressees as true. We examine this strategy in the context of print news media discourse on immigration.

In Section 2 I introduce Evolutionary Psychology and its theoretical efficacy for CDA. In Section 3 I discuss the evolution of a logico-rhetorical module and its implications for CDA in light of a recent 'crisis' (cf. Chilton 2005). In Section 4 I present the legitimisation of assertions as an important strategy in media discourse and in Section 5 I show how the semantic domain of evidentiality operates pragmatically in media discourse on immigration to provide the 'external coherence' that addressees, as a function of the logico-rhetorical module, look for before accepting messages as true.

2. Background: CDA and Evolutionary Psychology

Evolutionary Psychology (EP) presents a Darwinian approach to the study of human cognitive systems and behavioural patterns. It is committed to the 'massive modularity hypothesis' and therefore views the mind as a set of domain-specific but interconnected mental modules, each of which is 'functionally responsible for solving a different adaptive problem' (Cosmides and Tooby 2000a: 91). EP, then, seeks to provide an explanatory framework in which contemporary cognitive systems and behavioural patterns can be seen as adaptations selected to meet the needs of our ancestors (Cosmides and Tooby 1997). Adaptations are therefore not adapted to contemporary society but the environment in which our ancestors evolved (*ibid.*).²

In identifying adaptive modules, evolutionary psychologists adopt 'bottom-up' and 'top-down' research methods (Schmitt 2008). In bottom-up methods, researchers take a known universal psychological mechanism and 'reverse-engineer' its evolution (*ibid.* p. 26). This involves constructing hypotheses about a trait's adaptive function. These are not 'just-so' stories as some critics suggest (Gould 1991) but plausible hypotheses which emerge from what is known about the ancestral environment (AE). In top-down methods, researchers make testable predictions about the existence of adapted psychological mechanisms based on expectations derived from evolutionary theories. For example, the theory of reciprocal altruism (Trivers 1971) predicts the existence of a cheater-detection module (Cosmides 1989; Cosmides and Tooby 1992). The cheater-detection module evolved to redress the risk of exploitation in long-term, cooperative systems of social exchange (*ibid.*). Similarly, the evolution of communication predicts the existence of a logico-rhetorical module (Sperber 2000, 2001).

The key claim of EP for CDA is that cognitive adaptations selected in the ancestral environment remain in modern minds to be activated in equivalent contemporary situations. Such situations, of course, can be discursively constructed. For example, discursive constructions of immigrants and asylum seekers as 'social cheats' are likely to activate the cheater-detection module and, in turn, weight decisions in favour of discriminatory social practices. Hart (2010) uses EP to predict the cognitive impact of particular argumentation schemes (topoi) identified in CDA (cf. Reisigl and Wodak 2001). He argues that certain

² The ancestral environment is not a specified place or time but the 'statistical composite of selection pressures that caused the design of an adaptation' (Cosmides and Tooby 1997: 12).

predications in immigration discourse may provide the antecedent that triggers specific cognitive modules which, in turn, affect decision-making processes. Significant modules include the cheater-detection module and emotion modules such as fear and anger.

O'Halloran (2005) uses EP in an entirely different way as a 'lens' through which agent mystification in discourse on child sex offences can be detected. In an analysis of campaign texts from www.forsarah.com he found that 'relational identification' (van Leeuwen 1996) was absent for precisely those agents that EP predicts are most likely to commit child sex offences. Such absences have the effect of removing any (explicit or implicit) references to the home as the site of sexual abuse and instead contribute to constructing a 'preferred' narrative of non-familial child abuse. O'Halloran also suggests that EP can provide 'theoretical constraints' on CDA which help to address problems of over-interpretation and analytical subjectivity (cf. O'Halloran 2003; Widdowson 2004).

Some researchers in CDA see no place for EP. For example, Wodak (2006) chooses to ignore recent discussions concerning the evolutionary dimensions of discrimination because 'no convincing arguments ... have yet been brought to light' (p. 187). However, I have since argued (I hope convincingly) that discrimination in contemporary society is best accounted for within a model that connects communication with evolved cognition (see Hart 2010). Note that this is not a biologically determinist position as some might charge. Evolved cognition does not predispose us to discriminatory behaviour but may be exploited in Machiavellian ways by speakers looking to legitimise discriminatory practices. This is because once in place, adapted cognitive modules may be mobilised in alternative, contemporary conditions for purposes beyond their proper function (Sperber 1994). Such strategic communication, of course, relies on the addressee accepting as true the false, partial or distorted representations of reality which seem to justify discrimination.

CDA often assumes that representations of this kind become 'naturalised' inside an order of discourse and that addressees are therefore likely to accept them automatically as true and accurate (Fairclough 1989). And that such representations, in turn, automatically yield particular conclusions in argumentation schemes known as topoi (Reisigl and Wodak 2001). The business of CDA is then seen as intervention. However, one of the problems with CDA is that 'the reader simply is not theorised' (Fowler 1996: 7). CDA has had comparatively less to say at the interpretation stage of analysis than it has at the description stage (cf. O'Halloran 2003; Chilton 2005; Hart 2010). Chilton (2005) draws on recent research in EP to suggest that the assumption that addressees so readily accept representations as true and accurate may be misfounded and that CDA, if it does not re-address this fundamental issue, could be left redundant.³ This argument is built around the proposal of a so-called 'logico-rhetorical' module, which emerges as a natural expectation in the evolution of communication.

3. The Logico-Rhetorical Module

A cooperative system like human communication (Grice 1975; Sperber and Wilson 1995) could not have evolved in the first place unless it evolved for the exchange of honest information (Sperber 2001; Hurford 2007). If the first speakers were not honest, then addressees would not have attended to their communications and the practice would soon have been selected out. Similarly, if honest speakers did not receive honest information in return, then they would soon have stopped sharing valuable information and communication would then too have folded.⁴ Once in place, however, communication, like any system of

³ O'Halloran (2003) argues that this assumption applies only to an 'idealised reader'.

⁴ This is assuming, as is widely accepted (Ulbaek 1998), that communication evolved through reciprocal (Trivers 1971; Axelrod 1984) rather than kin-selected (Hamilton 1964) altruism.

social cooperation, was susceptible to exploitation, which in the case of communication takes the form of deception and distortion for purposes of persuasion (Origgi and Sperber 2000: 161). There would have been significant short-term advantages for speakers to communicate false or distorted information which served their own interests but which did not necessarily meet the interests of the hearer.⁵ This is not to say that individuals would try to deceive their interlocutors on all occasions of use. Only that we should expect individuals to attempt to coerce others some of the time, in certain, specific situations, and for the effects of being misinformed to be serious.⁶ Indeed, according to many researchers, communication evolved as much for manipulation and as it did for cooperation (e.g. Desalles 1998, 2007; Sperber 2000, 2001).

Communication, of course, continued to be selected for despite the potential risks of exploitation. According to Sperber (2000, 2001), this has to do with the fact that individuals are both speakers and addressees who stood to gain obvious long-term net benefits from reciprocal acts of honest information exchange. There were thus significant selection pressures toward the sustained development of language but which were dependent on a solution to the problem of exploitation. The evolution of communication therefore predicts that some form of cognitive defence must have co-evolved. Following Sperber (2000: 135), 'the human reliance on communication is so great, the risks of deception and manipulation so ubiquitous, that it is reasonable to speculate that all cost-effective available modes of defence are likely to have evolved'. One such mechanism proposed by Sperber is a 'logico-rhetorical' module. This module evolved 'as a means of reaping the benefits of communication while limiting the costs' and 'originated as a defence against the risks of deception' (Sperber 2001). As Chilton (2004: 21) points out, 'humans do not, or do not have to process incoming messages as already true'. Comprehension and acceptance are two distinct processes in communication (Sperber 2000, 2001; Sperber et al. 2010; Origgi and Sperber 2000). Speakers therefore have two goals in communication: to be understood and to affect the beliefs and behaviours of their audience. Hearers similarly have two goals: to understand and to acquire true and useful information. The interests of both parties are convergent in the first goal but not necessarily in the second. The logico-rhetorical module therefore operates at the stage between comprehension and acceptance to ensure the calibration of trust and filter incoming messages based on assessments of truth and relevance (Sperber 2000: 135).⁷

Sperber (2001) proposes several forms of defence for which the logico-rhetorical module is responsible. These involve attending to what he calls the 'internal' and the 'external coherence' of the message.⁸ Internal coherence refers to logical relations between propositions. Addressees 'keep track' of assertions made in the course of the discourse and monitor them for logical inconsistencies with one and other. External coherence refers to situational relations of support. For example, addressees can pay attention to behavioural signs of sincerity or insincerity in the speaker. Other situational features the addressee might attend to include the reputation of the speaker as a competent and benevolent communicator or the evidence or basis on which the assertion is made. The checking of

⁵ In EP this is known as 'tactical deception' and it relies on a suite of cognitive processes, including metarepresentation, Theory of Mind and social inferencing, which when used in this way are collectively known as 'Machiavellian intelligence'.

⁶ Such situations can be expected to include those in which the potential gain to be had by misinforming outweighs the cost of any subsequent punishment as a factor of the risk of discovery involved.

⁷ Although we are presenting it as a serial process, this is just a matter of convenience. In reality, the cognitive processes involved in communication are likely to take place in parallel (Sperber et al. 2010).

⁸ More recently, Sperber et al. (2010) refer to 'epistemic vigilance' directed at the *content* and the *source* of communication.

external coherence can therefore be characterised, at least in part, as attending to the felicity conditions that underlie the illocutionary act of assertion. Specifically, the sincerity condition that the speaker believes the assertion to be true and the preparatory conditions that (i) the speaker is qualified to make the assertion and (ii) that there is some basis or evidence on which the assertion is made. This tripartite distinction is necessary because an honest and knowledgeable communicator may still sometimes be mistaken and so addressees would always do well to search for evidence. Conversely, of course, there may be instances when the weight of the evidence provides sufficient grounds to accept the communicated proposition regardless of the reputation of the speaker.

Drawing on this body of research, Chilton (2005: 43) argues that the claims and aims that characterise CDA are problematised. Indeed, according to Chilton, 'it is possible that taking stock of recent research in the cognitive sciences leads us to the conclusion that we do not actually need CDA' (2005: 22). This research, for example, calls into question the assumption that addressees readily accept representations as true or 'natural' and, as a result, raises questions concerning the efficacy of CDA, at least in so far as CDA is seen primarily as an interventionist enterprise. If, as the research seems to suggest, addressees exercise their own form of epistemic vigilance, then what is the role of the critical discourse analyst? Or as Chilton (2005: 44) puts it: 'if people have a natural ability to treat verbal input critically, in what sense can CDA ... reveal in discourse what people can (by the hypothesis) already detect for themselves?'

This research, then, as Chilton highlights, calls for CDA to reconsider its fundamental claims and the contributions which, as a result, it can realistically make. However, such a reassessment, I want to suggest, still leads to the need for CDA. This is because the story so far covers only the 'first step in a persuasion-counterpersuasion arms race' (Sperber 2000: 136). According to Sperber (2001), the next step in this spiral consisted in speakers displaying the very coherence, or at least the appearance of it, that they can expect hearers to check for. Following Sperber, communication is 'even more advantageous, if, while protected from the deception of others without being overprotected, you can penetrate their protection and deceive them' (2000: 135). In this case, the logico-rhetorical module evolved as much for manipulation as it did for defence. It is an 'evaluation and persuasion mechanism' designed to 'help audiences decide what messages to accept, and to help communicators produce messages that will be accepted' (Sperber 2001). At least on this account, then, the significance of CDA is theoretically justified.

Texts can display internal coherence through argumentative forms conjoining propositions and creating apparently logical relations between them. It is usually assumed that the paralogical vocabulary involved (e.g., *so*, *therefore*) is adapted for reflection and reasoning. However, it may alternatively be viewed as a tool for speakers to convince audiences of the truth of their messages through argumentation rather than simple testimony (Sperber 2001). Indeed, the evolution of communication predicts that this should be its proper function (*ibid.*). It is also well documented in the psychological literature on argumentation that audiences do, as a function of an adapted drive toward cognitive efficiency, accept fallacious arguments as valid (see Maillat and Oswald 2011).

Similarly, certain contextual and linguistic features of particular text genres may provide external coherence. In media discourse, of course, behavioural signs of sincerity cannot be evaluated since production and reception do not co-occur. However, the media generally enjoys an institutionalised right of narration and people tend to place some stock in the media as a source of information. For some people, then, for whatever reason, the logico-rhetorical module may be improperly calibrated toward trust in this particular genre. Chilton (2005) recognises that there may be certain circumstances in which the operation of the logico-rhetorical module is skewed. However, any critical analysis here, he argues, might need to be of the social, historical, political and economic conditions surrounding the

communicative act rather than of the language itself used (p. 45). As we have already suggested, though, acceptance is not based solely on assessments of the speaker but also on evidence for the assertion. News reporters therefore cannot just rely on the reputation of the media but must provide reasons as to why their audience should accept their assertion as true. And this is a linguistic matter for one way that speakers can provide evidence for their assertions is through the semantic domain of evidentiality. Evidentiality therefore serves a legitimising function in media discourse. The legitimising function, however, is the legitimisation of assertions, upon which the legitimisation of actions depends.

4. Legitimation and Evidentiality

CDA has done important work in identifying the ‘common-sense’ reasoning exploited in the rhetoric of racism (Reisigl and Wodak 2001; van Leeuwen and Wodak 1999; van Dijk 2000a/b). These researchers have uncovered a number of *topoi* commonly used in anti-immigration discourse. Topoi are ‘content-related warrants’ in which an assertion functions as a first premise in an argument whose conclusion is taken for granted as self-evident and therefore does not need to be spelled out (Reisigl and Wodak 2001). The conclusion of most topoi in anti-immigration discourse is the need for some form of social exclusion. The argument, of course, may be fallacious. But it is precisely because conclusions in favour of social exclusion are presupposed by certain premises that those assertions functioning as first premises serve to legitimise discriminatory practices. The successful justification of action, however, requires that the hearer accept the justifying assertion as true in the first place. So whilst the move from the premise to the conclusion may be seen as common sense, even if it is in fact fallacious, the move is only likely to be made if the audience accepts as true the initial premise. There are thus two macro-level speaker strategies involved in discriminatory discourse: the *legitimation of actions* and the *legitimation of assertions*.

Several typologies of strategy in political discourse have been put forward with various strategies proposed and similar strategies organised at different levels of subordination (cf. Chilton and Schäffner 1997; Reisigl and Wodak 2001).⁹ In the typology I propose, the legitimisation of actions and the legitimisation of assertions are two superordinate speaker (or argumentation) strategies which three types of micro-level, linguistic (or representation) strategy serve to support and where the former is dependent on the latter. These three types of micro-level strategies are based in the general cognitive processes of attention, comparison and perspective and are realised in various different construal operations (see Hart 2011). *Identification* concerns which social actors are referred to, explicitly or implicitly, in which semantic roles and to what degree of salience. *Framing* concerns how entities, actions, events and processes, through categorisation and metaphor or simple predication, are ascribed particular positive or negative qualities. *Positioning* can be deictic or epistemic. *Deictic positioning* concerns the relations held between elements in the ‘discourse world’ and can be social, spatial or temporal (cf. Chilton 2004; Cap 2006). And *epistemic positioning* concerns the epistemic status of the proposition. It is epistemic positioning that is involved in the legitimisation of assertions, whilst identification, framing and deictic positioning are involved in the legitimisation of actions, as represented in Figure 1.

⁹ ‘Strategies’ are defined in CDA as more or less intentional or institutionalised plans of practices, including discourse practices, whose adoption achieves some social, psychological or linguistic effect (Reisigl and Wodak 2001: 44).

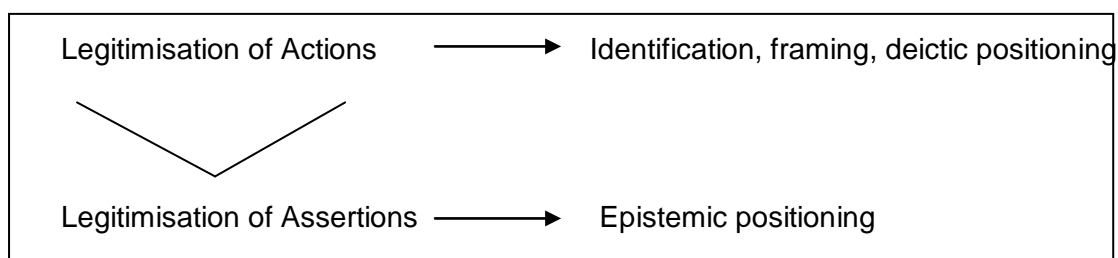


Figure 1. Legitimation in political discourse

Epistemic positioning has been discussed elsewhere (e.g. Bednarek 2006a) and is clearly related to the strategy of ‘intensification’ identified by Reisigl and Wodak and defined as helping to ‘qualify or modify the epistemic status of a proposition’ (2001: 45). Epistemic positioning here, however, is seen specifically as an (unconscious) attempt on behalf of the speaker to influence the hearer’s epistemic stance toward the proposition in such a way that their logico-rhetorical module is satisfied and the assertion is thereby accepted.¹⁰ And moreover, whilst Reisigl and Wodak make no mention of evidentiality, this semantic domain is seen here as an important means by which speakers can hope to achieve acceptance. The legitimation of assertions is then characterised as a process by which speakers, in order to overcome the epistemic safeguards of their audience, offer ‘guarantees’ for the truth of their assertions in various forms of evidence.

Bednarek (2006a) observes the key role that evidentiality plays in epistemic positioning. Surprisingly, however, this semantic domain has scarcely even featured on the radar of most mainstream critical discourse analysts.¹¹ For example, both Fairclough (1989) and Fowler (1991) discuss epistemic modality at length but fail to recognise the strategic significance of evidentiality. This is in spite of the fact that the two domains, evidentiality and epistemic modality, are so intimately connected as expressions of legitimation. Van Leeuwen and Wodak (1999) similarly discuss a range of legitimation strategies to which evidentiality is relevant, including *authorisation* and *rationalisation*, but fail to explicitly address the role that evidentiality plays in these strategies.

Evidentiality, of course, has been the subject of comprehensive investigation in typological language studies (e.g. Givón 1982; Wilett 1988). Here, it is primarily grammatical and morphological systems of evidentiality that have been of interest (Aikhenvald 2004: 6; Mushin 2001: 35). As a result, English has been more or less excluded from research on evidentiality (Bednarek 2006a: 636). Certainly, the pragmatic functions of evidentiality in English media discourse have not been seriously addressed, despite the frequency with which lexical evidentiality occurs in this particular genre.¹²

Evidentiality marks the basis of the speaker’s knowledge concerning the state of affairs reported in the assertion. That is, evidentials indicate how the speaker has come to know what they are claiming. Various types of evidence have been identified and different classifications can be found across the literature. However, these tend to cluster around binary distinctions between direct and indirect or firsthand and secondhand means of

¹⁰ Epistemic stance may be conceptually grounded in a complex cognitive model involving distance, deixis and force-dynamics where evidence stands as a metaphorical ‘force’ behind the proposition moving it toward the hearer’s conception of reality (see Hart 2010).

¹¹ Though see van Dijk (2000a/b, 2011).

¹² Though see Marín Arrese (2004, 2011). See Chafe (1986) and Biber and Finegan (1989) on evidentiality in other text genres.

knowing (Wilett 1988; de Haan 2001). Direct forms of evidence include sensory-perceptual acquisitions of knowledge. Indirect forms include knowledge based on inference and knowledge gained from third-party sources. The semantic domain of evidentiality can be sketched as in Figure 2 (adapted from Wilett 1988: 57).

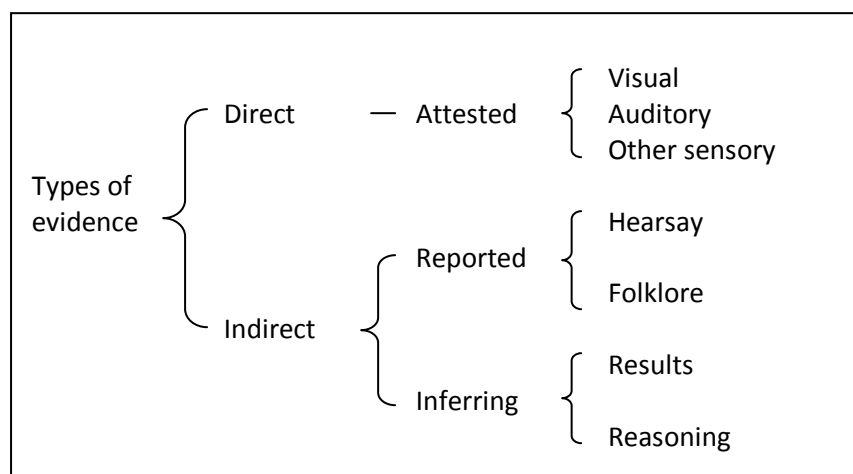


Figure 2. The semantic domain of evidentiality

The semantic domain of evidentiality is closely connected with that of epistemic modality and the two have been analysed in various relations of inclusion and subordination.¹³ Most researchers (e.g. Palmer 1986) have analysed evidentiality as an expression of epistemic modality. However, others have subsumed epistemic modality under the banner of evidentiality (e.g. Chafe 1986). Still others see evidentiality and epistemic modality as distinct semantic domains but which are obviously intimately bound (de Haan 1999; Nuyts 2001). For these researchers, the speaker's epistemic stance (as reflected in modality) is determined by the nature of the evidence they have for their assertion (Nuyts 2001: 27). On this account, it is only epistemic modality that involves an evaluation on the part of the speaker (ibid.) where depending on the means of knowing, one can be more or less confident in and therefore committed to the truth of one's assertion. As de Haan (1999: 85) puts it: 'epistemic modality evaluates evidence and on this evaluation assigns a confidence measure to the speaker's utterance' whilst 'an evidential asserts that there is evidence for the speaker's utterance but does not interpret the evidence in any way'. However, Mushin (2001: 58) notes that 'speakers are motivated to adopt a particular epistemological stance partially on the basis of their source of information, but also on the basis of their rhetorical intentions, on how they want their utterance to be understood and treated in the moment of interaction'. From the point of view of the audience in news discourse, then, epistemic modal markers, including zero-marked modality, can be analysed as evidentials. They at least imply that the speaker has some evidence for their assertion, even if it is not explicitly spelled out. Indeed, total commitment of the speaker in non-hedged modality may be taken as evidence for the truth of their assertion on the assumption that the speaker is confident enough to make a categorical claim when they wouldn't want later to be undermined and lose credibility.

This leads to two epistemic positioning strategies for legitimising assertions which we can call 'subjectification' and 'objectification' (Hart 2010). The two strategies are manifested in epistemic modality and evidentiality respectively. The distinction between them has to do with how confident the speaker is that the hearer will 'take their word' for the truth of the

¹³ See Dendale and Tasmowski (2001) for overview and discussion.

assertion. Subjectification profiles the speaker's assessment of the proposition and as a legitimising device relies solely on their reputation as a reliable source of information with perhaps privileged access to certain states of affairs or means of knowing. It is realised in expressions of epistemic certainty such as *must*, *will*, and zero-marked modality. Objectification, by contrast, makes available to the hearer the speaker's means of knowing. In effect, objectification suggests that the speaker's assertion can be verified or that it is corroborated by others. Crucially, it provides the hearer with the option to 'check for themselves'. Objectification is particularly apparent in media discourse since 'the news story is a genre that is preoccupied with knowledge' (Bednarek 2006a: 639). In the next section, we turn to categories of evidentiality in media discourse on immigration.¹⁴

5. Evidentiality in Media Discourse on Immigration

In a corpus analysis, Bednarek (2006a) identifies four specified bases of knowledge used as evidence in British newspaper reportage: PERCEPTION, PROOF, OBVIOUSNESS and PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE. These bases of knowledge provide legitimacy to propositions in different ways but they all provide external coherence to the author's claims. They can be related to the different types of evidence identified in Figure 2. PERCEPTION provides directly attested sensory evidence. PROOF and OBVIOUSNESS both constitute indirect evidence inferred from results and reasoning respectively. And PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE is reflected in indirect reported folklore. We can further identify EXPERT KNOWLEDGE as a form of evidence reflected in hearsay. EPISTEMIC COMMITMENT can also be considered a form of evidence in so far as it suggests the speaker is 'qualified with the knowledge required to pass judgement' (Fowler 1991: 64). In other words, EPISTEMIC COMMITMENT includes a claim to authority on the topic at hand (Fowler 1985; Fairclough 1989) which, if believed, implies something about the competence of the speaker and serves to satisfy the first preparatory condition for assertion. These forms of evidence can be arranged on a sliding scale of reliability which corresponds to the degree of speaker subjectivity involved as in Figure 3.

PERCEPTION is the most objective and therefore most reliable form of evidence. PROOF and OBVIOUSNESS both involve some degree of subjectivity since they are based on speaker interpretations. However, they both imply that these are objectively rationale interpretations. PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE refers to subjective processes but not, or not only, of the speaker. It may, of course, involve intersubjectivity if the hearer already shares this knowledge (Nuyts 2001). EXPERT KNOWLEDGE similarly involves subjective processes of others but the attribution is to a specific individual or organisation that the speaker assumes the hearer will consider authoritative. EPISTEMIC COMMITMENT is the least objective form of evidence, and therefore the least reliable, since it presents only the speaker's belief in the truth of the assertion.

¹⁴ Examples are intended as illustrative only, although they are all attested, taken from a corpus of newspaper articles on immigration and asylum published in the UK between 2000 and 2006. During this period, the European Union expanded twice and two UK General Elections were held. Largely fuelled by the media, the 2005 General Election was heavily focussed on the issue of immigration and extreme right-wing parties like the UK Independence Party and the British National Party gained significant ground.

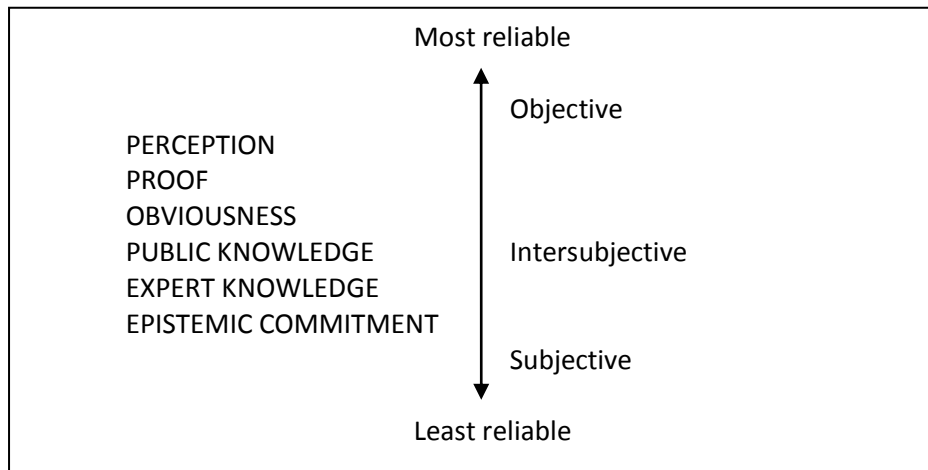


Figure 3. Reliability of evidence and degree of subjectivity

Evidence from PERCEPTION is exemplified in (1) - (4):

- (1) *The Sun*, 25 April 2003
Often it **appears** that these immigrants are looked after much better than our own people.
- (2) *Daily Mail*, 27 July 2005
Britain is operating an asylum system ... **visibly** loaded in favour of any foreigner ... staying here indefinitely
- (3) *Mail on Sunday*, 27 Feb. 2000
Jack Straw faced a fresh immigration crisis last night as it was **revealed** that hundreds of Kosovan refugees given temporary permits to stay in Britain now **look** set to seek asylum.
- (4) *Daily Mail*, 12 Jan. 2005
One million illegal immigrants could be living in Britain, it **emerged** last night.

The evidentials in (1) and (2) mark the information reported in the assertion as acquired via VISUAL PERCEPTION. The propositions in (3) and (4) are similarly presented as something made available to see. Evidence from VISUAL PERCEPTION may be the strongest form of evidence available based on the assumption that what is seen can be believed.

Evidence in the form of PROOF is found, for example, in independent 'research', 'reports', 'results', 'studies' and 'statistics' which confirm the facts, often through visual perception. Statistics in particular are accepted as a primary means of displaying objectivity (van Dijk 2000b: 222). The category of PROOF then, often co-occurs with that of PERCEPTION as in (5) - (7):

- (5) *Daily Mail*, 15 March 2006
All international studies show that the benefit to the host community is very small.
- (6) *The Express*, 1 March 2003
[N]ew statistics show a record 110,700 people sought refuge here last year. This once again proves Britain is unable to get on top of an accelerating problem.

- (7) *The Mirror*, 17 Nov. 2004
Figures reveal 10,385 new refugees arrived between July and September – up 13 per cent on the previous three months.

OBVIOUSNESS is invoked as evidence in examples like (8) - (10). This form of legitimisation is linked to what van Leeuwen and Wodak refer to as 'theoretical rationalisation' – legitimisation by reference to 'the facts of life' (1999: 105). The adverbials in (8) – (10) provide support to the propositional claim by stating it as beyond question and just simply the case.

- (8) *The Sun*, 12 Sept. 2001
Phoney refugees will **obviously** do a runner the minute security is taken off the gates.
- (9) *Daily Mail*, 20 Feb. 2003
Clearly, British citizens are having to wait longer to be found houses because of the influx.
- (10) *Sunday Times*, 8 Feb. 2004
When even the home secretary admits he does not have a clue how many illegal immigrants there are in Britain, there is **plainly** a serious problem.

It is interesting to note here that one evidential may be simultaneously related to more than one basis of knowledge. For example, 'clearly' in (7) also relates to the category of PERCEPTION. This is because *clearly* actually belongs to the semantic domain of perception – one can 'see clearly', 'hear clearly' etc. The use of 'clearly' in examples such as (7) may be given rise to by an underlying system of conceptual metaphors which connect the domains of knowledge and perception (Lakoff and Johnson 1980). In this case, the particular conceptual metaphor may be expressed as FACTS ARE VISIBLE.

Evidentials expressing OBVIOUSNESS are often used to make apparent concessions and are therefore involved in the denial of racism (van Dijk 1992). Typically, denial strategies also involve an adversative conjunction followed by a negative predication. Consider, for example, (11), in which the adverb 'clearly' occurs once in the first clause, the concession, and once in the second clause, the negative predication:

- (11) *The Daily Telegraph*, 19 April 2004
Clearly, immigration does bring economic benefits but there are, equally **clearly**, costs as well.

Evidence from PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE is 'marked as based on what is regarded as part of the communal epistemic background' (Bednarek 2006a: 640). This form of legitimisation is therefore related to presupposition. The evidential marks common ground between discourse participants and acts as a presupposition trigger. This legitimising strategy also corresponds with what van Leeuwen and Wodak (1999: 105) refer to as 'conformity authorisation'. It rests on the *ad populum* fallacy that something is true if everybody believes it (van Eemeren et al. 2002: 131). Consider (12) - (14):

- (12) *Independent on Sunday*, 9 Sept. 2001
Mr Blunkett confirms **the widely held view** that the UK has become a haven for people seeking asylum from around the world.

- (13) *The Express*, 23 Feb. 2005
Under Labour, Britain has become a soft touch on asylum and immigration and **everybody knows it**. [quoting shadow Home Secretary, David Davis]
- (14) *The Daily Telegraph*, 16 Jan. 2003
Everyone can see that the asylum system, whatever the merits of the principle behind it, is not working.

From a purely epistemological point of view, of course, to believe that something is true simply because other people believe it is foolish. From an evolved psychology point of view, however, this fallacy may not in fact be so naive. As Sperber et al. (2010: 380) put it:

If an idea is generally accepted by the people you interact with, isn't this a good reason to accept it too? It may be a modest and prudent policy to go along with the people one interacts with, and to accept the ideas they accept. Anything else may compromise one's cultural competence and social acceptability.

There may therefore be an adaptive bias toward conformity of beliefs that has been selected for in human cognition (Henrich and Boyd 1998) and which this particular legitimising strategy exploits.

A further way in which speakers can provide external coherence to their claims is to attribute assertions to 'experts' as evidence for their truth. For example, through direct or indirect quotation. This form of legitimisation thus involves the linguistic and cognitive process of 'source-tagging'. Source-tagging is particularly prevalent in news discourse, where 'one of the most characteristic features of newspaper language is its "embeddedness": much of what features in the news is actually reported speech' (Bednarek 2006b: 59). Source-tagging is a form of metarepresentation, an evolved cognitive ability essential for inferential communication (Sperber 2000). In attributing assertions, source-tagging sentences such as 'an independent report states that P' metarepresent previous public speech acts. Verbs like 'said', 'stated', 'claimed', 'warned', etc., of course, require source-tags as arguments.

Cosmides and Tooby (2000b) argue that source-tagging itself must have played an important role in the evolution of communication (p. 70). It can be seen as part of the logico-rhetorical module proposed by Sperber and may therefore have evolved initially as a cognitive defence against Machiavellian discourse. For example, Chilton (2004: 22) states that 'one reason why this potential exists could be that the ability to meta-represent constitutes a significant part of our ability to detect communicative deception'. Meta-representation allows hearers to temporarily suspend the truth of a proposition until they have enough information about the reliability of the source to decide whether or not to accept it as true. It is a kind of mental note taking. According to Cosmides and Tooby:

Source tags are very useful, because often, with contingent information, one may not have direct evidence about its truth, but may acquire information about the reliability of a source. If the sources of pieces of information are maintained with the information, then subsequent information about the source can be used to change the assigned truth-status of the information either upwards or downwards. (2000b: 69)

However, as we have already argued, the logico-rhetorical module would subsequently have come to function in argument and persuasion. Speakers therefore have the facility to use source-tags in displays of external coherence intended to satisfy the hearer's expectations of evidence. By attributing assertions to third-party sources the speaker, in effect, offers a 'guarantor' for the truth of the proposition. That guarantor, of course, must be one that the

speaker at least assumes the hearer will consider right and reliable. Assertions in media discourse are therefore often attributed to perceived sources of alliance or authority as in (15) - (17):

- (15) *Sunday Times*, 20 July 2003
Migrationwatch UK, a specialist think tank, says that in the next 20 years one new house will have to be built for every four already existing in London, the southeast and southwest of England.
- (16) *The Guardian*, 6 Aug. 2004
The government policy of dispersing asylum seekers away from London and the south-east may increase HIV transmission, **medical experts warned last night**.
- (17) *The Express*, 22 Aug. 2005
Mr Hague said: 'it must now be obvious to all concerned that some of our asylum and human rights laws are being massively abused'.

This particular form of legitimisation is linked to what Van Leeuwen and Wodak (1999) refer to as 'authorisation' – legitimisation by reference to authority. It relies on the *ad verecundiam* fallacy in which the speaker resorts to the voice of an expert to present an argument as fact (van Eemeren et al. 2002: 131). The antecedent authorial voice is therefore usually 'someone in whom institutionalised authority is vested' (van Leeuwen and Wodak 1999: 104). And as in the case of PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE, there may be an adapted bias toward believing the assertions of accepted authority figures (Sperber et al. 2010: 382).

One way in which speakers provide displays of internal coherence is through argumentative forms expressing logical relations between propositions. The linguistic forms involved include the para-logical vocabulary mentioned earlier, which 'indicate that a backing of some sort may be found in their context' (Bednarek 2006a: 650). In (18) and (19), for example, the final proposition is evidenced by previous propositions and the logical connection between them is made explicit by 'means that'.

- (18) *Mail on Sunday*, 4 March 2001
Last year, more than 78,000 asylum applications were turned down, and each year the immigration judges reject about 15,000 appeals. But fewer than 9,000 failed applicants are removed **which means that** almost 70,000 disappear into the woodwork.
- (19) *Sunday Times*, 26 March 2006
The demand for new housing from immigrants **means that** 65,000 new homes - equivalent to a city the size of Peterborough - will have to be built every year for the next two decades.

Backings and bases both co-occur in text to co-construct legitimisation. Backings make explicit internal coherence between propositions whilst bases of knowledge provide external coherence to claims. Consider by way of example the following, final extract in which both types of evidence can be seen.

- (20) *Daily Mail*, 9 September 2003
AN astonishing 80 per cent of failed asylum seekers never leave the country, **it was revealed yesterday** [PERCEPTION]. Despite David Blunkett's claims to be tackling the asylum crisis, the problem is getting worse, **says an analysis of Home Office figures** [PROOF]. **It means** [BACKING] the number of people living here illegally is climbing by the year on top of all those who enter the country clandestinely without ever coming to the attention of authorities. **The report, by independent thinktank**

Migrationwatch UK, warns that [PROOF; EXPERT KNOWLEDGE] the Government's failure to speed up deportations **means that** [BACKING] more than 200,000 asylum seekers whose cases have been thrown out in the last six years alone are still living here.

And far from improving, the situation is deteriorating, **it says** [EXPERT KNOWLEDGE]. **Newly-released Home Office figures show** [EXPERT KNOWLEDGE; PROOF; PERCEPTION] the proportion of asylum seekers thrown out of Britain within a year of their case collapsing has fallen from 27 per cent in 2001 to 19 per cent in 2002.

6. Conclusion

In taking up the issues raised by Chilton (2005) we have suggested that the logico-rhetorical module, which evolved alongside the human communicative competence, is as much a speaker resource for persuasion as it is a hearer resource for protection. As a result, 'a significant proportion of socially acquired beliefs are likely to be false beliefs, and this is not just as a result of the malfunctioning, but also of the proper functioning of social communication Cognitive manipulation is one of the effects that makes the practices of testimony and argumentation adaptive' (Sperber 2001).

The media is a particular genre in which we might expect to find Machiavellian communication from which false beliefs may be derived. For one reason, the rules of reciprocity do not apply in this genre and so the speaker has less to lose in communicating false, partial or distorted information. And since hearers' beliefs about the realities reported in the news are generally also garnered from the news rather than firsthand experience, hearers are less likely to encounter claims that are inconsistent with existing ideologies (notice that the reproduction of dominant discourses then becomes self-sustaining). Hearers can therefore be expected to exercise some sort of epistemic vigilance as Chilton points out. This is normally directed at the felicity conditions for assertion. However, the sincerity condition at least cannot be monitored in this genre and although the media is generally regarded as a valid source of information, reputation is not alone sufficient. The emphasis is therefore likely to fall on evidence. The various categories of evidentiality that we have discussed may thus perform a legitimising function in serving to satisfy the conditions of acceptance dictated by hearers' logico-rhetorical modules. Of course, it is not the case that evidence will automatically lead to acceptance. Some hearers may have sufficiently little faith in the media as a source of information that no amount of evidence is enough. Rather, it remains that for some hearers on some occasions, evidence is enough to weight the logico-rhetorical module toward acceptance. CDA is therefore still needed to disclose the clandestine ideological and persuasive properties of talk and text. However, any complete account of legitimisation in CDA must attend to the role of evidentiality in legitimising assertions.

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