

“28 Palestinians Die”: A Cognitive Grammar Analysis of Mystification in Press Coverage of State Violence on the Gaza Border

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1. Introduction

Although developed originally to account for ‘traditional’ rank levels of linguistic structure (phonological, lexical, morphosyntactic), Cognitive Grammar has proved to be a particularly congenial framework to work with in various forms of text and discourse analysis. There is now a rapidly growing body of work applying Cognitive Grammar in both stylistics and critical discourse analysis (Giovanelli and Harrison 2018; Harrison 2017; Harrison et al. 2014; Hart 2014, 2019; Nuttall 2018; Stockwell 2009). Where, in this nascent area of applied Cognitive Linguistics, CG has been especially successful is in explicating, in psychologically plausible terms, the cognitive meaning-making processes that might account for a range of experiences subjectively felt in our encounters with texts. CG, in other words, offers a credible model for the way that ‘texture’ is achieved in our readings of texts (Stockwell 2009). In stylistics, the more elusive, subjectively experienced textural qualities that CG has so far been able to elucidate include senses of poignancy (Hamilton 2003), of atmosphere and ambience (Stockwell 2014, 2019) and of fear, disorientation and claustrophobia (Harrison 2019) (see Harrison et al. 2014 for further examples). Such epiphenomenal effects are accounted for by various conceptual processes defined within the architecture of CG as giving meaning to linguistic forms, including schematisation or action-chaining, dominion-chaining, specification, profiling and various other attentional and perspectival phenomena. In critical discourse analysis, CG has been applied to account for ideological effects arising from patterns of linguistic representation in political texts. For example, in the context of news reports of violence at political protests, Hart (2015) showed how contrasts in image-schematic representation and viewpoint specification encoded by transitive versus reciprocal verbs give rise to differences in the social perception of protests and of the actors involved. These ideological effects were confirmed in a follow-up experimental study of audience response (Hart 2018). In this chapter, I apply a CG lens to an ideological effect much studied in critical discourse analysis, namely mystification. I take as data for a case study a convenience sample of media responses to a recent (2018) instance of state violence and mass fatality on the Gaza-Israel border in which a number of Palestinian protesters were killed.

In Section 2, I introduce the notion of mystification as it has been discussed in critical linguistics and critical discourse analysis. In Section 3, I briefly introduce relevant aspects of Cognitive Grammar and the rationale for applying it to the issue of mystification. In Section 4, I present a case study of mystification in news coverage of state violence, highlighting some of the linguistic and conceptual parameters along which mystification may be enacted in discourse. In Section 5, I offer some conclusions and reflections.

2. Mystification

Mystification is the effect that arises from the ability a clause has to downplay or avoid reference altogether to the roles or intentions of social actors in actions and processes. In other words, mystification is characterised by an obtuse sense of responsibility for actions and their consequences.

It is achieved in texts through various patterns of exclusion and vagueness realised linguistically in, e.g., metaphors and metonymies, referential ambiguities, nominalisations, (agentless) passive constructions and the use of intransitive verbs (Merkl-Davies and Koller 2012). Identifying instances of mystification, and inventorying the linguistic resources involved, is a primary concern of critical linguistics (Fowler et al. 1979; Fowler 1991; Kress and Hodge 1993) and has continued to be an important aspect of critical discourse analysis more generally (Fairclough 1989, 1995, 2006; Hart 2011, 2014; Koller and Davidson 2008; Marín Arrese 2002; Merkl-Davies and Koller 2012; Reisigl and Wodak 2001; Richardson 2007; van Leeuwen 1996). From a critical perspective, exclusion or vagueness, with the objective of mystification, may be 'strategically employed to conceal persons responsible for discriminatory activities' (Reisigl and Wodak 2001: 47). They may, equally, be employed to mask the effects that discriminatory activities have on vulnerable people (ibid.). In this sense, mystification may be either agent-based or patient-based.

Mystification occurs in contexts where there is a need to reconcile real-world events with prevailing normative backgrounds, assumptions and expectations which those events are in contravention of. This includes direct physical acts of inter- and intra-state violence, such as military attacks on other nations (Merkl-Davies and Koller 2012), police violence including killing of civilians (Hart 2013, 2014; Trew 1979), and restrictions on the rights and movements of migrants (Hart 2011; Reisigl and Wodak 2001), as well as other indirect forms of state and corporate violence, such as the exploitation of labour (Fairclough 2000). A classic and much-considered example comes from Trew (1979) (see also Lee 1992; Montgomery 1995; O'Halloran 2003; Toolan 1991). Trew analysed news reports of events in what was Rhodesia, on 2 June 1975, in which riot police shot and killed eleven African demonstrators. He found a marked contrast in voice between articles published in *The Guardian* compared to *The Times*. While *The Guardian* reported events in the active voice ('Riot police shot and killed 11 African demonstrators and wounded 15 others'), the same events were reported in *The Times* using the passive voice ('Eleven Africans were shot dead and 15 wounded when Rhodesian police opened fire on a rioting crowd of about 2000'). In the example from *The Times*, agency is only identified by inference through the temporal conjunctive 'when' in 'when Rhodesian police opened fire' (1979: 98). In grammatical terms, the agentless passive in the main clause results in a separation of agent and action (ibid.). This separation, Trew showed, was the first step in a process that went further the next day when there was no longer any reference at all to the police as agents of the action ('After Sunday's riots in which 13 Africans were killed and 28 injured'). The mystification of agency is further reinforced by the verb 'kill' (rather than 'shot dead') which does not specify the manner of death. As Montgomery (1995: 240) notes, 'were shot' would at least have implied a human agent. Instead, the text gives the impression that the riots themselves, rather than armed policemen, were the cause of the deaths (ibid.). For Trew, what we are witnessing, over time, is a recontextualization of events whereby the original story becomes 'quite transformed and the event appears something quite different from how it started'. The motivation behind such recontextualization is explained by Toolan (1991: 228):

Newspapers typically espouse some variant or other of the dominant ideology of the community of potential readers, and have to engage in this espousal (or articulation or legitimization) even in the course of reporting events that are 'awkward' for that ideology. Somehow awkward facts which are a threat to the journal's long-held view of the world have to be dealt with so that the newspaper's 'background' narrative of how the world is prevails over any local incongruities.

In a more recent study, Hart (2014) analysed *BBC News Online*'s response to the metropolitan police shooting and killing an innocent civilian, Jean Charles de Menezes, outside Stockwell tube station on

22nd July 2005, after officers had mistakenly identified him as a suicide bomber. Hart analysed the opening paragraphs of articles, which appeared in bold font, and found that the story followed a similar trajectory. In the first article, published immediately after the incident, the active voice was used ('Police have said they shot a man dead at Stockwell tube station'). The following day, when it had become clear that de Menezes was not a suicide bomber, the clause was reorganised and the passive voice used instead ('A man shot dead by police hunting the bombers behind Thursday's London attacks was a Brazilian electrician unconnected to the incidents'). By 25th July the story was reported using an agentless passive construction ('The man mistaken for a suicide bomber by police was shot eight times, an inquest into his death has heard'). Here, the police are identified as agents only in the process of mistaking de Menezes for a suicide bomber and not in the action of shooting him. A year after the incident, and following the result of a Crown Prosecution Services review, the action was no longer represented by a transitive clause but had become nominalised ('No police officers are to be prosecuted over the fatal shooting of Jean Charles de Menezes'). Nominalisations, like agentless passives, permit habits of concealment (Fairclough 2003: 144; Fowler 1991: 80). Compared to a fully spelt-out proposition like 'X shot and killed Y', nominalisations are informationally impoverished. As Fowler (1991: 80) points out, missing in a derived nominal form are the participants (who did what to whom?) as well as indications of time – since there is no verb to be tensed – and modality. In the case of nominalisations, in contrast to agentless passives, mystification works by reification. Nominalisations "create a universe of things, bounded, stable and determinate" (Halliday 1998: 228). Agent recovery then requires more than completing the representation by 'filling in' the slot left empty by an agentless passive; it involves a significant degree of information 'unpacking'. In line with Toolan and Trew, Hart (2014) suggests that what we are observing in these examples is:

a highly controversial action, inconsistent with the dominant discourse of police as protectors but which the press must nevertheless report, being brought over time into line with that discourse. In other words, [these examples] constitute a natural restoration of legitimacy managed through the mystificatory facilities of linguistic representation. (p.33)

The function of linguistic exclusion is not necessarily, in every context, mystification. For example, linguistic exclusion may be a consequence of normal discourse principles (e.g. brevity) or genre constraints. Some critics have therefore argued that CDA may be guilty of over-interpreting its mystificatory effects. For example, Widdowson (2004: 22) points out that people process texts 'in normal pragmatic ways, inferring meanings which have not been explicitly spelled out by reference to what they have already read and what they know of the world'. From a cognitive perspective, this has lead researchers like O'Halloran (2003: 234) to ask whether absence at the text level necessarily means there will be absence, and thus mystification, at the discourse level. Hart (2013 refers to this as the 'problem of cognitive equivalence' in CDA. O'Halloran argues that in many cases, processing for relevance (Sperber and Wilson 1995) means that social actors need not be explicitly referenced in the text in order for readers to acknowledge their role in the mental picture where it can be inferred instead from the context including any situational and background knowledge which has been derived intra- and inter-textually. O'Halloran also recognises, however, that not all readers will have the requisite knowledge or be willing to invest the extra cognitive effort required to recover implicit information. Similarly, from a cognitive perspective, Billig (2008: 790) questions whether speakers/writers, and so by extension, hearers/readers, engage in nominalisation as a psychological process when they use and encounter nominalised forms.

In response to questions such as these, it is worth noting that the presence or absence of social actors in the mental representation is not absolute. From a CG perspective, as we shall see, it is a matter of degree of attention. Van Leeuwen (1996) identifies two different types of linguistic exclusion:

suppression and *backgrounding*. Suppression involves a radical exclusion so that there is no trace within the text of the excluded information. Backgrounding is less radical; the information is available elsewhere and thus is ‘not so much excluded as de-emphasised, pushed into the background’ (p.39). Mystification then relates to the felt sense or impression of responsibility (or lack of it) for normatively incongruous actions that is built cumulatively through the text as well as across texts that make up a particular discourse. Despite potential issues with claims concerning mystification, then, researchers in CDA hold on to the idea that linguistic exclusion can lead to mystification. As Marín-Arese (2002: 7) states:

Though the factor of relevance is undoubtedly crucial in the omission of the agent, we may also surmise that the varied use of [impersonalisation] strategies cognitively contributes to construct, in van Dijk’s (1998) words, ‘preferred models’ of a situation, and, socio-politically, to hide institutional or elite group responsibility.

Based on a model of linguistic description that is founded on and therefore fits with general cognitive principles, what a CG analysis may be able to offer is a psychologically plausible account of how linguistic exclusion, in its various forms, might result in mystification as a cognitively real experience felt in reading news and other ‘political’ texts. That is, CG has the potential to shed light on the issue of mystification by theorising the cognitive mechanisms by which it might occur. It may also have the capacity to help identify further instances of mystification, realised by means other than linguistic exclusion, which might otherwise go undetected.

3. Cognitive Grammar

Since this whole book is about CG and its applications, I shall only very briefly introduce here two aspects of CG that are most pertinent to the analysis that follows and which serve to illustrate some of the basic principles of CG. These are the action chain model and construal phenomena relating to prominence. CG offers a model of linguistic description dually grounded in cognition and social interaction (Langacker 2008: vii). It is predicated on the claims that (i) grammatical constructions are themselves inherently meaningful and (ii) that grammatical constructions depend for their meanings on more general cognitive principles and processes in terms of which those meanings can thus be characterised. CG makes no distinction between grammar and the lexicon and instead views all linguistic units as paired with meanings, at different levels of abstraction, inside a system of symbolic assemblages. At the core of the model is the notion of *construal*, which refers to our manifest ability to ‘conceive and portray the same situation in alternate ways’ (Langacker 1991: 295). Langacker (1991: 294) argues that every linguistic structure ‘embodies conventional images and thus imposes a certain construal on the situation it codes’. Indeed, from a functional perspective, he argues that it is ‘precisely because of their conceptual import – the contrasting images they impose – that alternate grammatical devices are commonly available to code the same situation’ (*ibid.*). A key claim of CG, then, is that meaning is a matter not just of the conceptual content evoked by a linguistic expression but also of the particular construal which every symbolic structure encodes as part of its conventional semantic value (2008: 55). The various works in CG have been concerned to outline the different dimensions of construal which, applying to conceptions in any domain (like memory, perception, imagination), also provide meaning to linguistic forms.

At the level of clause structure, the conceptual content evoked by different clause types consists in various *archetypal conceptions*, which take the form of *image schemas* representing fundamental aspects of experience (Langacker 2008: 355). In this sense, clause structure is motivated by experience

with certain types of clause being suited to coding certain types of occurrence, which stand as their prototype. One such archetypal conception, representing a pattern of energetic interaction particularly common to our experience, is the *action chain*. The action chain is a force schema representing a transfer of energy from one participant, the energy source, 'downstream' to another until it arrives at an energy 'sink'. Action chains can be of different lengths. However, the *canonical* action chain, arguably representing the most typical pattern of interaction, is a two-participant chain in which an agent (A) acts upon a patient (P) to effect in them a change in state. This schema is modelled in Figure 1 (following Langacker, transmission of energy between participants is represented by a double arrow).

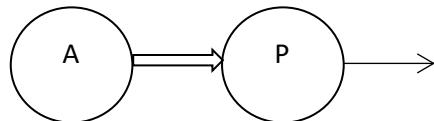


FIGURE 1. Canonical event model: Two-participant action chain

This type of interaction, known as the *canonical event model*, is encoded in the structure of a transitive clause, which offers the most natural way of describing it. The transitive clause, in other words, represents the *default coding* for situations conceived as instantiating this canonical event model. This is not to say, however, that other linguistic structures are not also available to code situations taken to instantiate the model which, for discourse purposes, construe it in a different fashion (Langacker 2008: 358). As Langacker (2002: 214) states, 'the objective properties of a situation do not mechanically determine the grammatical organization of a sentence or finite clause describing it'. For example, one dimension of construal relates to *prominence*. In apprehending any scene, there are inherent constraints on distribution of attention. A complex scene cannot be taken in a global or wholly neutral fashion. We cannot attend to every facet of a complex scene equally and simultaneously. Instead, as a limited cognitive resource, attention must be allocated and, of course, it can be allocated differently depending on circumstance. Two levels at which this focussing of attention shows up in language are: *profile/base* relations and *trajector/landmark* alignments (Langacker 2008). A linguistic expression selects for attention a certain body of conceptual content, which Langacker calls its *base*. This represents the general locus of attention that is identified by a linguistic expression. By virtue of receiving linguistic representation, particular attention is directed over all or certain portions of the base. The sub-structure or region given particular attention constitutes the *profile* of a linguistic expression. For example, the base of a transitive clause is provided by the action chain model. Full transitive clauses (in contrast, for example, to agentless passive constructions or nominalisations) profile the whole action chain. However, participants within a profiled relationship are subject to further attentional variance as they are construed with different degrees of prominence relative to one another. In conceiving any scene, one element necessarily stands out with respect to another. Langacker refers to these elements as *trajector* (tr) and *landmark* (lm) respectively.¹ In language, the trajector is the entity construed as being located, evaluated or described and which is characterised as having focal prominence within the profiled structure (Langacker 2008: 70). Linguistic expressions may therefore have the same content, and profile the same structure, but differ in meaning as a consequence of how they assign trajector and landmark (ibid.). One area of language where this fundamental feature of cognition is manifested is in subject-object relations. A subject is a nominal that encodes a trajector in a profiled structure while an object

is one that encodes a landmark. At a secondary level of attentional distribution, then, differences in voice (active versus passive) are associated with contrasting trajector/landmark alignments. In a transitive active clause, the agent is the trajector and the participant of primary focus while in a passive clause, the patient is the trajector and the participant of primary focus. Crucially, however, ‘trajector status is always imposed: a matter construal, it is never inherent in the situation described’ (Langacker 2008: 368). The alternative construals imposed by active and passive transitive clauses are modelled in Figure 2.

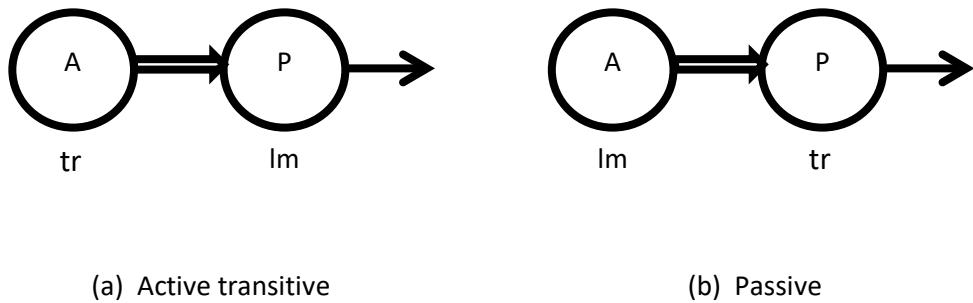


FIGURE 2. Active transitive versus passive construction

Prominence is just one dimension of construal. In Langacker (2008), four broad classes of construal phenomena are identified: *specificity*, *focusing*, *prominence* and *perspective*. Analogous with visual perception, these reflect the fact that ‘in viewing a scene, what we actually see depends on how closely we examine it, what choose to look at, which elements we pay most attention to, and where we view it from’ (Langacker 2008: 55). In the analysis that follows, I show how action chaining, profiling, and other facets of construal might account for mystification in readings of news texts.

4. Data

Illustrative data is taken from press coverage of two events that took place on the Gaza-Israel border in 2018 in which large numbers of Palestinian civilians were killed or wounded while demonstrating as part of a six-week protest known as the ‘Great March of Return’. On 31 March 2018, 16 Palestinian demonstrators were shot and killed by Israel Defence Forces. On 14 May 2018, the day the U.S opened its embassy in Jerusalem, Israel Defence Forces shot and killed 52 Palestinian demonstrators and severely injured thousands more. The data is a convenience sample taken from the online coverage of UK and U.S news outlets, including *BBC News Online*, *The Guardian*, *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal* and *NBC*. A total of seven articles were included (see appendix).

5. Analysis

Arguably, a fully-profiled two-participant action chain (or conceivably a three-participant chain involving an *instrument* as an additional archetypal role – see below) presents the most natural way of conceptualising an event in which one (group of) participant(s) shoots and kills another. Any

departure from this *default model* can be considered to reflect some discourse purpose, including, potentially, ideological purposes.² From a critical perspective, in this chapter, I am therefore concerned with the dimensions along which conceptualisations, evoked by attested language practices, can differ from this default model and how alternative conceptualisations might contribute to mystification. Two types of mystification strategy can be identified: agent-based and patient-based. In agent-based mystification the role and identity of the agent is obfuscated. In patient-based mystification, the agent is identified but the force of the action in which they are agentive is modulated downward and/or the impact of the action on the patient is ambiguated.

5.1 Agent-Based Mystification

One way in which conceptualisations can depart from the default model is in terms of the image schema evoked as the conceptual base. The distinction between conceptual content and construal is not a sharp one (Langacker 2008: 43). The conceptual content evoked by a linguistic expression does not correspond truth-conditionally with objectively given circumstances. Rather, schematisation is already an act of construal, for the same event can be schematised in different ways depending on discourse needs and purposes. While the canonical action chain offers one way of schematising interactional events, other types of action chain model are also available, which may serve to mystify agency. In particular, as Langacker (2002: 244) points out, there are several ways of construing events with respect to the input of energy.

In the data, this is most apparent in the use of transitive versus intransitive verbs in reference to the Palestinian fatalities. For example, *NBC* used the transitive verb 'kill', evoking a two-participant action chain as the conceptual base and profiling the full structure in 'Israeli forces have killed more than 100 demonstrators' and 'At least 58 Palestinians were killed by Israeli forces':

(1) **Scores dead in Gaza fence protest as U.S. moves embassy to Jerusalem**

Israeli forces have killed more than 100 demonstrators and wounded around 12,300 more since protests began on March 30, Gaza's Health Ministry says.³

Similarly, *The Guardian* used transitive verbs in 'shoot' and 'kill', again profiling the full two-participant action chain:

(2) Gaza has had its bloodiest day in years on Monday after Israeli forces shot and killed 58 Palestinians and wounded at least 1,200 as tens of thousands protested along the frontier against the opening of the US embassy in Jerusalem.

The conceptualisation evoked by examples (1) and (2), then, is that modelled in Figure 2a. By contrast, the *New York Times* used the intransitive verb 'die' as in (3).

(3) **At Least 28 Palestinians Die in Protests as U.S. Prepares to Open Jerusalem Embassy**

The relocation of the embassy from Tel Aviv was timed for the 70th anniversary of the formation of Israel — a move that many Israelis have celebrated but that has enraged Palestinians.

Palestinian officials say at least 28 people have died in the latest round of protests.

The action chain evoked by an intransitive verb consists of only one participant (who is thus profiled by default). In Langacker's terms, the conceptualisations evoked by (1) and (2) realise an *agent-oriented* strategy in *trajector alignment* whereby the participant selected as trajector is the agent.

This represents the *canonical alignment* for English (Langacker 2008: 367). The conceptualisation evoked by (3), alternatively, realises a *theme-oriented* strategy.⁴ Theme-orientation encompasses the passive voice as in (4) where the patient is selected as trajector but the thematic process is still construed as having been brought about by the exertion of force from an agent.

(4) At least 58 Palestinians were killed by Israeli forces and more than 2,700 others were wounded Monday after thousands of protesters converged on the razor-wire fence between the Gaza Strip and Israel as the U.S. Embassy opened in Jerusalem.

In the case of intransitives, however, the thematic process is construed in an *absolute* fashion, ‘without reference to the force or agent that induces it’ (Langacker 2008: 385). The intransitive verb ‘die’ in (3) thus construes the deaths as autonomous events abstracted away from the energy input that drove them. The deaths, in other words, are construed as happening of their own accord, independent of cause or agency. The conceptualisation evoked by the use of ‘die’ in (3) is modelled in Figure 3 where any causal input remains outside the *scope of attention* (Langacker 2002: 244-245).

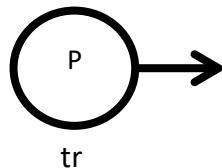


Figure 3. Absolute intransitive

If one way that conceptualisations can depart from the default model is in the conceptual content evoked by a linguistic expression, another is in how that content is construed. The default model involves a fully profiled two-participant action chain. However, the same conceptual content can be construed in an alternative fashion whereby only part of the evoked schema is profiled. When the profiled portion of the action chain moves ‘downstream’ in the flow of energy represented by the schema, profiling produces agent-based mystification. When the profiled portion moves ‘upstream’, it produces patient-based mystification.

One grammatical form that profiles a sub-structure downstream in the action chain is the agentless passive construction. For Langacker (1991: 336), the main function of the passive is to de-focus the agent. In the data at hand, agentless passive constructions are found in prominent regions of the texts, including in the headlines of both the *Wall Street Journal* (5) and *BBC News Online* (6):

(5) Scores Killed as Palestinians Protest U.S. Embassy Opening in Jerusalem
(6) Gaza clashes: 52 Palestinians killed on deadliest day since 2014

In contrast to ‘die’ discussed in relation to (3) above, ‘kill’ in (5) and (6) acknowledges the presence of an agent in a force-interactive process and thus evokes the canonical two-participant action chain as its conceptual base. The agent therefore exists within the scope of attention. However, in contrast to the use of ‘kill’ in (1), (2) and (4), the agentless passive forms used in both (5) and (6) leave the agent unspecified and thus profile only the relationship between the patient, who is selected as trajector, and the process, leaving the role and identity of the agent conceptually out of focus.⁵ The conceptualisation evoked by (5) and (6) is modelled in Figure 4.

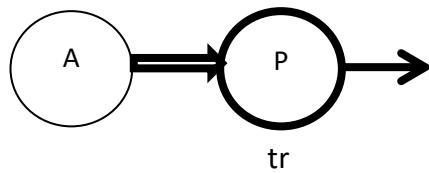


Figure 4. Agentless passive construction

Another way in which conceptualisations can depart from the default model is in their mode of apprehension. In examples like (1) and (2) above, according to Langacker, the verb invites a *sequential scanning* of the conceptual content. Verbs profile the series of contiguous (in time) relationships that hold between participants to constitute an event so that the 'various phases of an evolving situation are examined serially, in noncumulative fashion' (2002: 78-79). By contrast, when the same content is encoded by an expression belonging to another grammatical category (e.g. a noun), it is construed in summary fashion. *Summary scanning* is thus the mode of apprehension associated with nominalisations (Langacker 2008). The two modes of scanning are modelled in Figure 5 (the arrow (t) represents time with the bar along the time arrow representing the particular time-frame in which the construed event takes place).

In the data we find several instances of nominalisation in the form of 'clashes'. For example, in the *Wall Street Journal* this nominalisation is used in both the title of a video, which appears prominently at the top of the webpage, and in the lead paragraph:

- (7) Clashes Over New U.S. Embassy in Jerusalem Leave Dozens Dead
- (8) The U.S. cemented its ties to Israel by opening a new embassy in Jerusalem, as clashes between Palestinian protesters and Israel's military left dozens dead and added to the Trump administration's challenges in the Middle East.

Similar examples are found, involving the same nominalised form, in the headline of the *BBC News Online* article relating to the 31st March events and, involving the nominal form 'mass protests' in reference to the March events, in the *New York Times*:

- (9) Gaza-Israel border: Clashes 'leave 16 Palestinians dead and hundreds injured'
- (10) At least 1,000 Palestinian demonstrators were also wounded along the border fence with Gaza, the Health Ministry reported, as the mass protests that began on March 30 and that had already left dozens dead erupted again.

'Clashes' is particularly egregious in this context partly because it invokes a bi-directional action chain (as opposed to the canonical unidirectional action chain) and thus characterises a brutal show of state power, in which it was only Palestinians who were killed or injured, as a two-sided event (see Hart 2013 on bi-directional action schemas), but also because, like 'mass protests' in (10), it invites a summary scanning of the event which occludes attention to agency. In verb form, 'clash' profiles a series of relationships between two participants such that each exerts some force on the other. In summary scanning, however, the various facets of the event are examined cumulatively so that the whole complex comes to cohere as a single gestalt. In other words, the event is seen instead as an object or a thing and since things do not pertain to time, we do not scan its internal component states

and the processual aspect of the event is lost (Radden and Dirven 2007: 80). Internal event-structure, including agent-patient relations, is therefore conceptually backgrounded. We do not learn from these examples who was the agent responsible for the deaths. Instead, the newly reified thing, encoded by the nominal form, features as an actor in the process designated by another verb so that it is the event itself, rather than another participant in it, that 'leaves' people dead. In other words, the nominalisation enters into an EVENT FOR PARTICIPANT metonymy. The CG analysis thus lends psychological weight to the claims in CDA that nominalisations can 'obfuscate agency, and therefore responsibility' (Fairclough 2003: 144) and that metonymies can, similarly, 'conjure away' responsible actors or 'keep them in the semantic background' (Reisigl and Wodak 2001: 58). From a CG perspective, however, nominalisations and metonymies are linguistic processes. The cognitive processes activated by them are based in the system of attention with both nominalisations and certain, e.g. generalising, metonymies accounted for in terms of summary scanning.⁶

From the nominal(ised) forms in (7), (8) and (10), in combination with the impersonal 'dozens', neither do we learn who was the patient. This leads to a second type of mystification strategy in patient-based mystification.

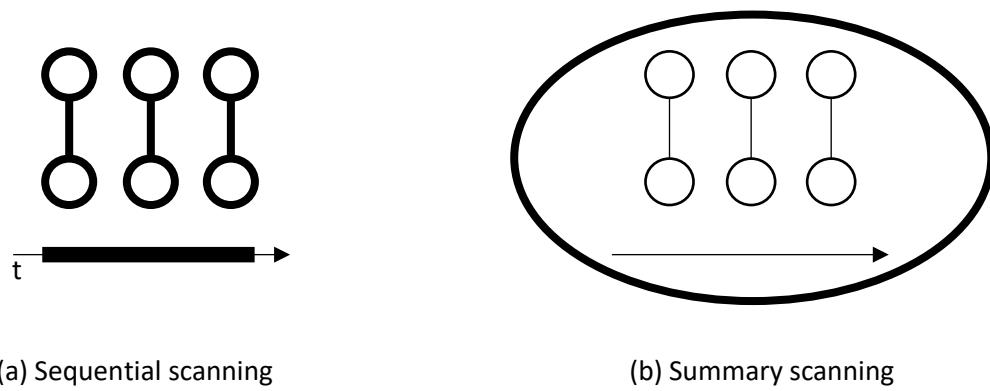


Figure 5. Scanning

5.2 Patient-Based Mystification

In patient-based mystification the identity of the patient rather than the agent is ambiguated and/or the forceful impact of the action on the patient is somehow mitigated. In the case of the latter, patient-based mystification is close to euphemism.

Examples (7), (8) and (10) realise a patient-based mystification strategy due the referential vagueness of 'dozens', which does not explicitly identify Palestinians as the sole victims of the violence, leaving open the possibility that Israeli soldiers were also among the fatalities. Other examples have to do with schematisation and profiling.

Recall the default model for an event in which one group of participants shoots and kills another is a two-participant action chain. Another archetypal conception that also applies quite naturally to such an occurrence, and which thus offers an alternative possibility for schematisation, is a three-participant action chain involving a further archetypal role in the form of an *instrument*. Within the action chain model, an instrument is neither an energy source nor an energy sink and is instead

defined as an intermediary in the transfer of force between an agent and a patient (Langacker 2008: 356). An instrument is something, prototypically an inanimate object, that is used by an agent to effect a change in state in a patient. Different nouns prototypically express particular archetypal roles. Words like *guns*, *tanks*, *bombs*, *missiles* etc. express instruments while *soldiers*, *snipers* etc. prototypically express agents as in (11) found in the *New York Times*:

(11) Israeli soldiers and snipers were using barrages of tear gas as well as live gunfire to keep protesters from entering Israeli territory.

(11) is already somewhat euphemistic as the action in which tear gas and live gunfire feature as an instrument is one of impeding motion and hence affecting the location of Palestinian protesters rather than effecting any change to their internal state (see Hart 2014 for discussion of FORCE versus ACTION schemas). This kind of euphemism goes further in examples like (12) and (13), from *BBC News Online* articles reporting the March and May events respectively, where there is an *instrumentalisation of agents*.

(12) Israel deployed tanks and snipers.

(13) Palestinians hurled stones and incendiary devices while the Israeli military used snipers.

In both (12) and (13), ‘snipers’, which canonically encodes an agent, features as an instrument. Moreover, since neither example includes an infinitival clause there is no reference to the type of action a sniper would, in reality, be engaged in, namely shooting at human targets with an intention to kill or harm. Thus, the profiled portion of the action chain is the relationship between the agent, Israel, and the instrument, snipers. The relationship between ‘snipers’ and the patient, Palestinian protesters, although accessible as a function of frame-based knowledge, remains conceptually backgrounded. The conceptualisation evoked by examples (12) and (13) is modelled in Figure 6.

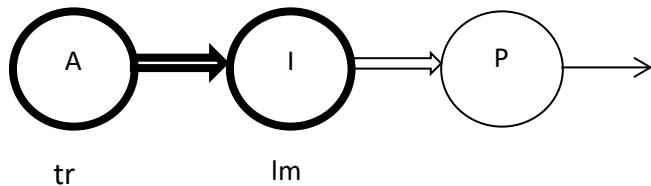


Figure 6. Agent-Instrument Profile

(13) is further interesting because of the temporal equivalence established by the *connector* ‘while’. The events represented by the two clauses in (13) are construed as happening contemporaneously. This goes some way to mitigating the actions of the Israeli military by presenting the violent interaction as two-sided. This process goes further in examples like (14) from *BBC News Online* in which a temporal sequence is established such that one event is conceived as happening in the wake of another.

(14) The Israeli military said soldiers had opened fire after rioting.

(14) is mystifying for avoiding reference to the impact of the action on the patient. Contrast it with (15) from NBC.

(15) The Israeli Defense Forces opened fire on protesters.

In (15), the full action chain is profiled. In (14), alternatively, only the relationship between the agent and the process is profiled. The terminus of the action chain, where the impact of the energy transfer is felt, is evoked as part of the base but remains conceptually out of focus. The conceptualisation instantiated by the subordinate clause of (14) is modelled in Figure 7.⁷

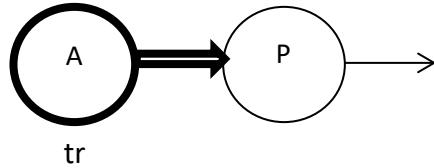


Figure 7. Patientless active construction

(14) is also interesting, though, because of the attached adverbial phrase ‘after rioting’. ‘Rioting’ is, of course, a nominalisation and so the adverbial phrase can be analysed in much the same way as an adverbial clause, except that the event is viewed summarily. The global organisation of this sentence can therefore be modelled as in Figure 8. The connector ‘after’ establishes an explicit temporal relationship between the two events such that one is conceived as succeeding the other. Since trajector-landmark alignments occur across clauses as well as within them, one of the two events is singled out for focal prominence relative to the other. In (14), it is the act of opening fire that is qualified – temporally located – with respect to rioting and therefore has conferred upon it the status of trajector. Implicitly, the connector ‘after’ establishes a causal relationship between the two events so that the second event is seen as a response to the first. Ideologically, this has the effect that in the causal chain of interactions evoked Israeli soldiers are no longer construed as *initiators* but as *reactors* or *respondents* in an action that is restorative rather than gratuitous.

A similar construal is evoked by (16) from the *New York Times* as a function of the verb ‘respond’, which entails some prior legitimising event. In (16), the Israeli action of ‘responding with rifle fire’, which again is euphemistic, is not construed as part of the violence but as a reaction to it.

(16) A mass attempt by Palestinians to cross the border fence separating Israel from Gaza quickly turned violent, as Israeli soldiers responded with rifle fire.

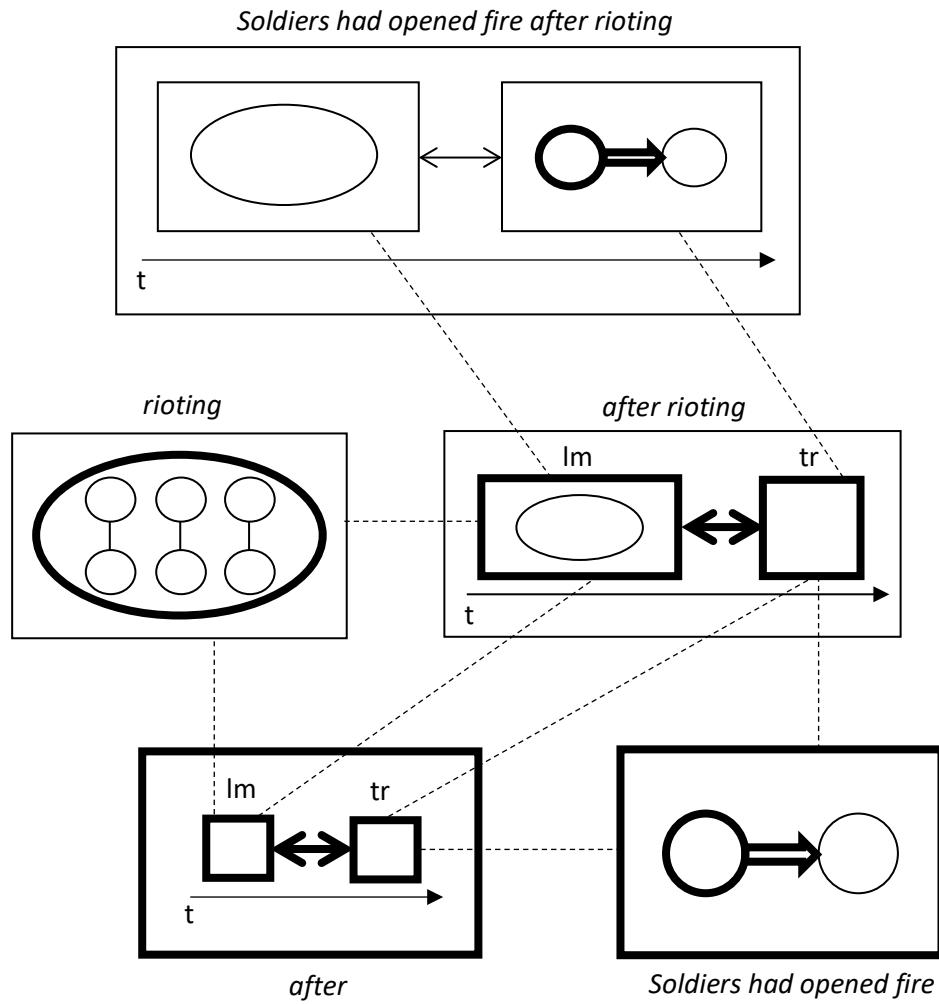


Figure 8. 'Soldiers had opened fire after rioting'

One final form of patient-based mystification worth observing in the data is in the choice of preposition accompanying the verb 'fire'. In the active voice, the verb 'fire', in the sense of shooting, takes a prepositional landmark. In the case of 'fire', in contrast to 'open fire', this is obligatory. There are options, however, in the preposition that can be selected. Much has been written in CG and cognitive linguistics more broadly about prepositions (Coventry and Garrod 2004; Herskovits 1986; Langacker 2010; Talmy 2000; Tyler and Evans 2003; Vandeloise 1994). From a CG perspective, directional prepositions express the *path* an entity takes in relation to the landmark. Such an entity can be an agent or a *mover*. A mover is an entity, prototypically an inanimate object, that undergoes a change of position thus occupying a series of locations through time (Langacker 2008: 370). It is capable both of receiving energy, thus effecting its motion, and exerting energy to bring about some effect in another entity. A mover, like an instrument, can therefore play an intermediary role between agent and patient in a three-participant action chain. Mystification comes in as the path expressed by a preposition can be more or less precise with respect to the landmark. That is, the *goal*, as the place where the mover 'lands', can be the *point* or points in space occupied by the landmark or it can be a *region* of space around the landmark. Consider the contrast between (17) and (18) from *BBC News Online*:

(17) Tomorrow, the Palestinians will bury their dead and head back to the border with Israel to throw stones at the soldiers

(18) The IDF said troops were "firing [bullets] towards the main instigators".

In (17), 'at' construes the goal as a point in space co-locational and co-extensive with the landmark (patient) and thus clearly identifies soldiers as the intended target of the action of throwing stones. By contrast, in (18), 'towards' construes the goal only as a region surrounding the landmark (patient). That is, an area greater in expanse than that occupied by the landmark. The meaning of 'towards', in this context, can therefore be glossed as 'in the general direction of' and is vague as to whether the mover (bullets in this case) hit or was intended to hit the protesters. While 'at' in (17), then, suggests contact between the mover and the patient, 'towards' in (18) leaves this only as a possibility. In this sense, (18) may be said to instantiate a patient-based mystification strategy. The alternative construals associated with 'at' and 'towards' in (17) and (18) respectively are represented in Figure 9.

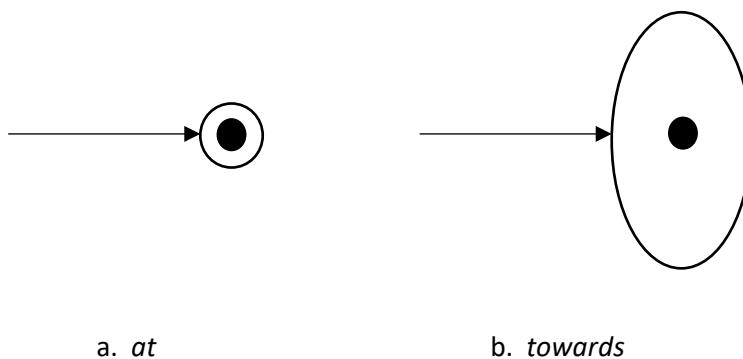


Figure 9. Directional Prepositions

5.3 Multimodal Mystification

Given the links between linguistic structure and visual experience posited in CG, it should not be surprising to find analogous processes in visual semiotisation (Hart 2016). Moreover, in multimodal texts, we might expect to find the imagery invoked by specific language usages to be structurally consistent with co-textually present images. That is, we might expect to find language and image in a multimodal text exhibiting what Lui and O'Halloran (2009) call 'intersemiotic parallelism' (cf. 'intersemiotic repetition' in Royce 2007). Intersemiotic parallelism is defined as a cohesive relation that is established between language and image when the two semiotic components share a similar form and which functions to create coherence or textual convergence (Lui and O'Halloran 2009).

In Lui and O'Halloran (2009), intersemiotic parallelism is identified on the basis of shared transitivity structures working within a systemic functional linguistics framework. Cognitive linguistics, however, and CG in particular, suggests potential new sites or parameters for intermodal convergence based in attentional configurations. Crucially, from a cognitive linguistic perspective, images in a text do not cohere with linguistic structures *per se* but with the mental images evoked by linguistic structures. By way of example, consider the image in Figure 10 and its accompanying caption in (19), taken from the *Wall Street Journal*:

(19) Palestinian protesters look up at falling tear gas canisters near the border with Israel in the southern Gaza Strip on Tuesday.



Figure 10. © Said Khatib/Agence France-Presse/Getty Images

The relevant *event-frame* here is made up of three phases (cf. ‘windowing of attention’ in Talmy 2000). An agent (Israeli soldiers) imparts a mover (tear gas canisters) with energy causing it to be propelled through the air, following a path so shaped as to form an arch, before it reaches a patient (Palestinian protesters) where it effects in them a change in state. These three phases correspond to the three elements that make up the *source-path-goal* schema. In (19), however, the nominalisation ‘falling tear gas canisters’ profiles only the path phase of this event-frame, and specifically the second part of that phase, leaving both the agent in the events and its impact on the patient conceptually backgrounded.⁸ This is modelled in Figure 11 where the single arrow represents the mover’s trajectory through space.

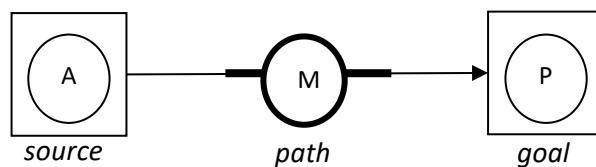


Figure 11. Path Profiling

If we compare the conceptualisation evoked by the caption with the image it accompanies we find striking similarities. An image presents a snapshot of a moment in time. It therefore necessarily captures only part of reality, focussing our attention on that particular aspect. In the image in Figure 10, the gas canisters appear to be falling through the sky like rain without cause or agency. As viewers, we are not shown from where they originated or their impact on the ground. In other words, the image captures the path phase of the event but not the source or goal phases and therefore, like the caption, realises both agent-based and patient-based mystification. In mystifying the impact of the event on the patient, the image, in Chouliaraki’s (2006) terms, represents an anaesthetisation of suffering.

Compare this with the image in Figure 12 and its accompanying caption in (20), taken from *The Guardian*. The image in Figure 12 appeared as the front still from a video located prominently at the top of the article page. It is the image the reader is confronted with when landing on the webpage. In contrast to the image in Figure 10, the viewer's attention is focussed on the goal phase of the event as the devastating effects of the tear gas canisters are made clearly visible. This is reinforced in the caption through the transitive verb 'kill'.

At the schematic level, then, in both cases we find intersemiotic parallelisms in attentional focus. The image in the *Wall Street Journal* and its accompanying caption both focus attention on the medial path phase of the event while the image and its accompanying caption in *The Guardian* both focus attention on the final goal phase. Rhetorically, in news photographs and their captions, intersemiotic parallelism functions to tell the same story from the same perspective, with the representation in each modality serving to corroborate the version of events presented in the other. A CG analysis shows that the image-caption combinations in *Wall Street Journal* and *The Guardian* are each internally consistent but present quite different narratives to one another.

(20) Palestinians killed as US opens embassy in Jerusalem – video report



Figure 12.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

In this chapter, I have used Cognitive Grammar to shed light on the mystificatory qualities of representations in news texts covering specific instances of state violence. I have shown that CG is a rich and powerful tool for researchers in stylistics and critical discourse analysis. Specifically, as has been shown in this chapter, CG enables potential sites and actualised instances of linguistic exclusion or vagueness to be identified and their mystificatory effects to be theorised in cognitively plausible terms. CG illuminates the conceptual processes which, evoked by linguistic representations in text, can account for mystification. Specifically, in its notions of trajector/landmark alignment and profiling, CG adds psychological weight to the concept of the semantic background frequently appealed to in CDA.

CDA is sometimes criticised for not properly theorising the reader (Fowler 1996: 7). CG thus offers an account of meaning in texts that is more readerly. This is not to say that readers cannot challenge, enrich or reject the conceptualisations encoded by linguistic forms. Readers are perfectly capable of resistant or oppositional reading (Browse 2019). Indeed, to give an example from the present case

study, the *New York Times* posted a tweet pointing to their main news article covering the 14th May events on the Gaza border. The tweet contained the update in (21):

(21) Dozens of Palestinians have died in protests as the US prepares to open its Jerusalem Embassy
Responses to the tweet were revealing and included the following:

(22) WERE KILLED. They didn't all get sudden heart attacks.

(23) "Dozens of Palestinians were shot to death by Israeli soldiers while protesting the US opening of the Jerusalem Embassy" ... There, I fixed it for you.

(24) Here, I fixed it for you: Dozens of unarmed Palestinians have been murdered by Israeli forces in protests as the US prepares to open its Jerusalem Embassy.

(25) You mean Israeli snipers have killed dozens of Palestinians.

What these reformulations have in common is a preference for a transitive verb. From a CG perspective, they are examples of what Browse (2019) calls *reconstrual* (see also Harrison 2017 and Giovanelli 2019). Specifically, (22) – (24) involve a *rescoping of attention* so that an alternative schematisation to the one originally proffered is proposed which recognises the role of an agent in the causal chain of events. What CG offers, then, is a theoretical account of the conceptual processes to which readers are disposed, by virtue of representational choices in the text, in order to constitute their experience, i.e. their mental apprehension, of the referential event.

As a textual effect, mystification resides in the overall impression readers take from a text or series of texts. It is cumulative, resulting from persistent and varied strategies permeating a text or discourse. In the data that formed the basis for this case study, mystification was found to be enacted through multiple features spanning semiotic modes. Repeated patterns of mystification were upheld particularly in texts produced by the *Wall Street Journal*, the *New York Times* and *BBC News Online*. There is sufficient semiotic evidence in these texts to suggest that their readers might be left with a diminished sense of the violence inflicted and of agency in those responsible for it.

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Appendix: Data Sources

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¹ Other authors, like Talmy (2000), refer to them as Figure and Ground.

² Of course, adhering to the default model is also, itself, an ideological discourse move. In this sense, no representation is free from the impart of ideology (Fowler 1991: 66).

³ Throughout, bold is preserved from the original texts. Underlining is mine for emphasis.

⁴ For Langacker, the term *theme* subsumes a number of “passive” semantic roles, including patient (2008: 366).

⁵ Notice also that the circumstantial clause in (5) and prepositional phrase in (6) do nothing to resolve the underspecification.

⁶ Not all types of metonymy are accounted for by summary scanning. For example, INSTRUMENT FOR AGENT metonymies are a matter of profiling.

⁷ For present purposes the analysis ignores the fact that the main event in (14) occurs embedded in reported speech.

⁸ The unnominalised form in ‘fall’ is an intransitive verb which, in a construction like ‘tear gas canisters fell through the air’, would profile the same sub-structure of the source-path-goal schema.