# Evaluative semantics and ideological positioning in journalistic discourse – a new framework for analysis

(White, P.R.R., 2006, "Evaluative semantics and ideological positioning in journalistic discourse – a new framework for analysis", in Mediating Ideology in Text and Image: ten critical studies, Lassen, I. (ed.), John Benjamins, Amsterdam: 37 – 69)

### Introduction

I take as my starting point for this paper the view that, contrary to any claims to 'objectivity' on the part of the media industry, news reporting is a mode of rhetoric in the broadest sense of the word — a value laden, ideologically determined discourse with a clear potential to influence the media audience's assumptions and beliefs about the way the world is and the way it ought to be. This rhetorical and ultimately ideological potential has now been so widely demonstrated in the literature that it hardly needs to be argued for. (See, for example, Trew 1979, Hartley 1982, Fairclough 1988, Bird & Dardenne 1988, Herman & Chomsky 1988, Fisk 1989, Fowler 1991, Ericson & Baranek 1991, Parenti 1993, Eldridge 1993, Iedema, Feez & White 1994, Fairclough 1995, White 1997, White 2000).

It is not the case, however, that all instances of news reporting are created equal, so to speak, in this ideological functionality of endorsing, perpetuating and making seem natural particular systems of value and belief. Close observation of individual news items reveals substantial variation in rhetorical functionality not only according to differences in intended audience (for example between tabloids and broadsheets), but also according to differences in medium (print versus broadcast) and even differences in subject matter (for example, politics, versus court reporting versus police rounds.). A key aspect of this rhetorical and ultimately ideological functionality is evaluation — the text's positioning of its audience to take either negative or positive negative views of the participants, actions, happenings and state-of-affairs therein depicted. It is via such evaluative positionings, of course, that the media constructs a particular model of the social and moral order — a model of what is normal and aberrant, beneficial and harmful, praiseworthy and blameworthy, and so on.

My purpose in this paper is to offer a new framework by which fuller, more theoretically principled accounts can be provided of this evaluative aspect of news reporting and how it is that individual news items may vary in the evaluative mechanisms they employ and hence in their ultimate ideological effects. In outlining this framework I will be relying to a substantial extent on the work over the past decade or so by a group of researchers working within what is known as appraisal theory. This network of researchers operates largely within the paradigm of Systemic Functional Linguistics (see for example, Halliday 1994, Martin 1992 or Matthiessen 1995) and is working to extend the systemic functional analysis of interpersonal meanings in order to provide a fuller account of the resources evaluation and stance. (See for example, Jedema et al. 1994, Christie & Martin 1997, Martin 2000, White 2002a/b, Macken-Horarik & Martin, J.R. 2003, Martin & White, in press). This appraisal framework proposes three broad sub-domains of evaluative meaning: values

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