AJAL

"It is imperative to …": Importance markers and the construction of newspaper discourse

Jonathan Ngai
The School of Arts and Social Sciences, The Open University of Hong Kong

Evaluation is concerned with the expression of opinion and can be expressed along different dimensions. Yet while evaluations marking certainty/doubt have attracted much linguistic interest, "importance-marking in relation to evaluation does not appear to have received very much attention" (Partington, 2014, p. 147). Evaluations of importance are central to the nature of academic discourse (Bondi, 2015). They are equally, if not more, essential to newspaper discourse, where they are used not only to express opinion, maintain writer-reader relations and structure the discourse but also to construct newsworthiness. Drawing on a 600,000-word specialized corpus of Hong Kong newspaper texts, this paper looks at the ways in which importance markers are used to construct two major newspaper genres: editorials and feature articles. The study has implications for future research as well as the teaching of reading and writing.

Key words: evaluation; evaluative meaning; importance markers; discourse functions; textual colligation

Introduction

Evaluation refers to the expression of a speaker or writer's attitudes, feelings and values, often involving the use of evaluative language, e.g. *important, succeed, certainly* and *perhaps* (Thompson & Hunston, 2000). Linguists have come far in their perceptions of the role of evaluation or evaluative meaning in language. Leech (1981) in his discussion of seven types of meaning seemingly attaches less importance to evaluative meaning (or in his words, "affective meaning") than it deserves, saying that it is "largely a parasitic category." In more recent years, however, there has been an increased understanding of the importance of evaluation (e.g., Hunston & Thompson, 2000; Partington, Duguid, & Taylor, 2013), because of its pervasiveness in human interaction and its multifunctional nature: expressing opinion, maintaining writer-reader/speaker-listener relations and organizing the discourse. Tellingly, but not surprisingly, Malrieu (1999) stresses that evaluation is "a fundamental semantic notion" (p. 2).

There have been linguistic attempts at categorizing evaluative meaning, notably Bednarek (2006), Biber, Johansson, Leech, Conrad, and Finegan (1999), Hyland (2005, 2013) as well as Martin and White (2005). There are certainly overlaps among these differently named and yet essentially semantic categorizations of evaluative meaning, but there are also noticeably different emphases. Though evaluation can be expressed along different dimensions, they have not received the same amount of academic attention. While evaluations marking certainty/doubt have attracted much linguistic interest, importance-marking in relation to evaluation has not (Partington, 2014). This is clearly seen, for example, in the semantic categorizations of several common approaches to evaluation, notably Biber et al. (1999), Hyland (2005, 2013) and Martin

and White (2005), although the marking of importance has drawn attention from some scholars (e.g., Bondi, 2015; Partington, 2014; Precht, 2000; Zare & Keivanloo-Shahrestanaki, 2017). Despite some researchers like Bednarek (2006) dealing with importance markers in news reports, the linguistic literature is generally silent about this aspect of evaluative language use in newspaper discourse. This is surprising, given the fact that importance-marking, identified as one of four parameters of evaluation in Thompson and Hunston (2000), figures prominently in newspaper discourse.

The importance/unimportance dimension is related to the notion of what is important/unimportant, relevant/irrelevant and significant/insignificant. In Bednarek and Caple (2012), the notion has been broadened to include related notions of stardom/ famousness (*star*, *famous*) and influence/authority (*senior*, *top*). Evaluations of unimportance (e.g. *minor*, *insignificant*), much fewer in number, normally do not come to the fore in news discourse. In contrast, evaluations of importance feature prominently and are closely linked with the news values of eliteness/prominence and relevance/impact. These are news values often foregrounded in the media partly because its main role is "to convey information about important events to their audiences" (Feez, Iedema, & Rose, 2008, p. 72). Additionally, importance markers contribute to attribution and discourse organization. Given the importance of importance markers and our limited understanding of how they work in newspaper genres, this paper, which is part of a larger project on evaluation in newspaper discourse, seeks to throw light on how such markers are employed to perform different discourse functions in editorials and feature articles and so contribute vitally to their construction. There will also be a discussion of implications for teaching and future research.

Newspaper editorials

Unlike news reports which mainly report on events, newspaper editorials overtly evaluate events and persuade readers. As one subset of opinion discourse, editorials are essentially evaluative and persuasive, overtly stating a point of view on a topical issue and arguing for it. They represent not only "the prototypical type of comment text" (Blanco, 2011, p. 207), but also "the most institutional of opinions" (Conboy, 2007, p. 9). They "present the official position of a newspaper on a topic that is considered to be of particular societal importance at the time of publication, and, as such, are supposed to carry a significant persuasive value" (Le, 2004, p. 688). In doing so, they serve to define the political identity and values of the newspaper and ultimately seek to influence public opinion and decision-makers. Editorials are thus called the voice of the newspaper.

Editorials have attracted less attention from linguists than hard news stories. Still, there has been a growing body of linguistic work on editorials, notably Le (2004, 2010) Fowler (1991), Granger (2014), van Dijk (1991, 1996), Vestergaard (2000a, 2000b) as well as Zarza and Tan (2016). In particular, some studies focus on evaluative language use in English-language editorials (e.g., Bolívar, 1985, 2001; Lemke, 1998; Morley, 2004, 2009), whereas other studies adopt a cross-linguistic approach to evaluative language use in the genre (e.g., Blanco, 2011; Marín-Arrese, 2007). Yet none of the studies has focused its attention on how importance markers are employed to construct editorials, which engage in argumentation primarily driven by evaluation (Ngai, 2017).

Newspaper feature articles

The feature article is a Cinderella genre in the world of linguistics. Most references to it in the linguistic literature are brief and in-depth studies are scarce. Fowler (1991) makes no reference to the feature article. Bednarek and Caple (2012) give it a one-sentence

mention. Bell (1991) and Cotter (2010) discuss it but not in detail. One notable exception is Feez et al. (2008), where more space is devoted to feature writing, though the discussion is confined to only one main type of this genre (i.e. the news feature).

Feature articles are newspaper texts which fall between news stories and editorials (Reah, 2002). Like hard news stories, they report on events by relying heavily on attribution but they explore a topic at length by providing "more comment, analysis, colour, [and] background" (Keeble, 2006, p. 219). Like editorials, feature articles evaluate events, issues and people but they editorialize less and often in a less overtly persuasive manner. In addition to informing and editorializing, some feature articles seek to educate or entertain, especially those dealing with such topic domains as health and travel.

Feature articles are variously categorized. According to Noonan (2008), they can generally be divided into timely feature articles (i.e. news features) and timeless feature articles. The former are "expanded news stories" (Feez et al., 2008, p. 152), whereas the latter stand on their own merit and can be published at any time. This distinction is particularly useful for linguistic research purposes because it suggests possible differences in evaluation use between the two types of feature articles, which, as Granato (1992) argues, put different emphasis on different news values. This paper only deals with timeless feature articles. Such articles usually have a strong focus on human interest, which is constructed partly through evaluation (Ngai, 2017).

Methodology

The Make-up of the Present Corpus
The texts for this study are from a 600,000-word specialized corpus (Table 1). Most texts were downloaded from the website of the South China Morning Post (SCMP*)*, a leading English language newspaper in Hong Kong. Some additional texts are from WiseNews, a database of full-text articles published in newspapers and magazines in Hong Kong, mainland China and the region. All the newspaper texts were published between September 2009 and August 2014. The texts in the editorial sub-corpus are divided into three topic domains (the economy, the environment and politics), with each area having about 100,000 words. The texts for the feature article sub-corpus are divided into three common topic areas (education, health and profiles), with each having about 100,000 words.

Table 1. Make-up of the specialized SCMP corpus

Genre	Topic domain	Tokens	Texts
editorials	the economy	99,722	223
editorials	the environment	99,905	229
editorials	politics	99,984	224
Total		299,611	676
feature articles	education	99,374	96
feature articles	health	100,029	90
feature articles	profiles	99,910	102
Total		299,313	288
Grand Total		598,924	934

Annotation (Authorial evaluation)

This study focuses only on authorial use of importance markers in editorials and feature articles, that is, how journalists deliberately use importance markers to construct these two genres. To study systematically evaluative markers (including importance ones) in the corpus, several steps were taken. First, a list of evaluative markers commonly used in both journalistic and non-journalistic texts was compiled based on previous literature (e.g., Bednarek, 2006; Hyland, 2012; Precht, 2000), reference books (e.g., Rundell, 1993) and careful reading of sample newspaper texts. Then evaluative markers were examined more systematically in the editorial sub-corpus, using the corpus access software programme *AntConc* (Anthony, 2013) and compiling two general frequency word lists (alphabetical frequency and rank order) of evaluative markers which appeared five times or above in the sub-corpus.

Then, using the tentative list of evaluative items and the rank order frequency word list, evaluative items which appeared five times or above in the sub-corpus were identified and their frequencies noted. Evaluative items which looked evaluative but had not been included in the tentative list were also noted. The alphabetical frequency word list was then checked to total the different related forms of evaluative items (e.g. *fail*, *fails*, *failed*, *failing*) already identified as appearing five times or above in the rank order frequency list; and to ensure no evaluative items actually appearing five times or above had been missed.

For the feature article sub-corpus, manual tagging was carried out of all types of evaluative markers, including those indicating importance. This is because there is a great deal of attribution in this genre, thus making it difficult to distinguish between authorial and non-authorial evaluative markers during frequency counts. As all the explicit authorial evaluative markers were now tagged, the frequency list for feature articles was more easily compiled.

Meanwhile, separate frequency word lists of evaluative markers of positional sub-corpora were compiled because of the need for structural analysis of different parts of the texts of the two newspaper genres. The lists are related to:

- Feature headlines;
- Feature leads (introductions);
- Editorial headlines; and
- Editorial conclusions.

Results

This section first looks at the frequencies of use of evaluative markers, especially importance markers in editorials and feature articles. It then looks closely at the different discourse functions performed by importance markers in the construction of the two newspaper genres.

Frequencies of use

Table 2 shows that editorials have far more room than feature articles for expressing opinion and so evaluative language. More importantly for this study, the table also shows that importance markers used by journalists figure prominently in the corpus, ranking fourth in the editorial sub-corpus and second in the feature article sub-corpus. Numerically, however, editorials have almost double the number of importance markers than feature articles.

Table 2. Evaluations of different dimensions in editorials and feature articles

Evaluative markers	Editorials (300,000 words)	Feature articles (300,000 words)
Goodness	2644	699
Badness	2904	247
Importance	2263	757
Unimportance	25	NIL
Usualness	109	31
Unusualness	195	63
Positive emotion	462	341
Negative emotion	811	107
Certainty	1480	323
Doubt	3503	862
Total	14374	3430

Despite their shared need for importance markers in text construction, both editorials and feature articles show rather pronounced differences in their use (Table 3). First, editorials and feature articles employ importance markers with varying degrees of frequency, with the former having a much greater need for marking importance. Second, both editorials and feature articles seem to have their own preferred importance markers, though *leader*, *important(ce/ly)*, *key* and *top* are among the most frequent importance markers in both genres.

Table 3. Most frequent importance markers in editorials and feature articles

Importance markers	Editorials (300,000 words)	Importance markers	Feature articles (300,000 words)
leader	305	top	77
important(ce/ly)	211	chief	72
power(ful)	210	important(ce/ly)	45
major	123	veteran	36
key	117	best	30
significant(ce/ly)	97	key	30
top	87	expert	29
necessary	86	senior	29
priority	72	leader	23
reputation	63	leading	22

Discourse functions

As well as being frequently used in editorials and feature articles, importance markers are also deftly employed by journalists to construct the two newspaper genres, and this is clearly shown in the different discourse functions they perform. They are used to state the main theme (in headlines), represent people, and make recommendations. Moreover, importance markers are used in editorials to comment on situations in news events, and in feature leads (i.e. introductions) to set the feature angle.

Stating the main theme

A total of 45 importance markers have been identified in the editorial headline sub-corpus. They are used to state the main theme of the whole editorial, for example:

> Nuclear energy still the <u>best</u> alternative (Editorial, 1 April 2011)
>
> Euro-zone deal <u>a turning point</u> (Editorial, 3 July 2012)
>
> Swift action <u>vital to</u> solve Hong Kong's garbage crisis (Editorial, 30 July 2013)

Importance markers may also be used in hortatory headlines (to advocate action on an issue) or summative headlines (to put a definitive slant on an issue). Regardless of type, editorial headlines tend to be relatively short, and importance markers, while indicating significance, help make them sound pithy and forceful. Particularly noteworthy is the use of the short importance adjective *vital* which in this corpus appears more frequently in editorial headlines (nine times) than in other parts of editorials (six times). It is meant to save space in attention-grabbing headlines, but this function also suggests a reason for textual colligation (Hoey, 2004), which posits that certain words have a bias for certain textual positions and functions.

A far greater number of importance markers (153 times) have been identified in the feature headline sub-corpus. Similarly, they are also used to state the main theme of the whole feature article, as illustrated by the following examples:

> Good health is the <u>key</u> to better hair (Feature article, 15 November 2013)
>
> Speech therapy centre is <u>monument</u> to couple's late toddler
> A local couple turn their personal **tragedy** into a mission to **help** children with speech disorders through a **remarkable** charity, writes Elaine Yau. (Feature article, 16 July 2013)
>
> New <u>chief</u> Adrian Walter has <u>big</u> plans for HK Academy for Performing Arts
> Adrian Walter has **bold** plans for performing arts academy, including <u>raising its profile</u> in the city and setting up a cultural policy centre. (Feature article, 3 September 2012)

The first example is like a typically pithy and forceful editorial headline, and the use of the importance marker *key* gives the whole headline an air of authority. But feature headlines (as seen in the other examples) are normally much longer than editorial headlines, making it possible for importance markers to work with other types of evaluative marker (e.g. *tragedy* and *bold*) to create meaning and set the feature angle.

Previous research on the use of importance markers in news stories (e.g., Bednarek, 2006; Bednarek & Caple, 2012) has primarily focused on the ideational meaning of importance markers (i.e. evaluating). The current study shows that in helping state the main theme in editorials and feature headlines, importance markers not only evaluate

but also perform the important function of structuring the discourse and so priming the reader for what is to come in the rest of the editorial or feature article.

Representing people

Importance markers are also used to represent people in both editorials and feature articles. Because this function can be found anywhere within these texts, it is hard to know how many importance markers are thus used in the 600,000-word corpus.

Nevertheless, importance markers seem to play a prominent role in representing news actors in editorials. They are normally used to indicate their social significance. Surprisingly, however, *important* (149 times), the most frequent importance adjective, is almost exclusively used to evaluate things and propositions rather than people. In contrast, adjectives like *major* (123 times), *key* (117 times), *top* (87 times), *main* (44 times), *senior* (34 times), *leading* (27 times) and *chief* (17 times) are much more frequently employed by editorial writers to introduce newsworthy figures:

> … all the major political parties of note have been severely affected by in-fighting and schisms in the past few years. (Editorial, 29 January 2011)

> These small-scale constituencies will either have to be reformed or dropped if the key players (Editorial, 12 December 2009)

> European leaders have six weeks before the next G20 summit to come up with a solution that calms financial markets. (Editorial, 30 September 2011)

In feature articles, importance markers are also employed to represent people, and there is a great variety of such markers as *top* (35), *chief* (60), *head* (32), *senior* (18), *veteran* (12), *known for* (18), … *the spotlight* (9) and *expertise* (5):

> Better known to the public as Uncle Fat, the 76-year-old veteran has enjoyed a long career in the city's changing political scene over the past 50 years. (Feature article, 15 July 2013)

> And despite a 30-year age gap, the toy tycoon known as "LT" and his wife, Shelly Lam Qi Xiaobin, have been together pretty much ever since. (Feature article, 10 February 2013)

Such use of importance markers is especially common in profiles, which have a greater need to highlight the status and fame of well-known people.

At a deeper level, the frequent use of importance markers to portray people in editorials and features articles is also ascribable to the tendency towards hyperbole in the wider pattern of present-day newspaper discourse informalisation, which sometimes necessitates using different types of evaluative markers including those indicating importance to "express some kind of extreme degree or exaggeration … frequently … for effect rather than description alone" (Duguid, 2010, p. 115). From a slightly different angle, evaluative language contributes, at least to some extent, to the construction of newsworthiness, although some journalists have reservations about overused importance markers, especially *key*, *major* and *top*, because they tend to represent unexplained claims and to make people or things more important than they really are. Waterhouse (1989), for example, labels *top* as "a lazy word that does not earn its keep" and seems to be used "to impress rather than to inform" (p. 235). Similarly, *The Economist Style Guide* (The Economist, 2015) comments that using *key* as in *key players* to make the subject of a sentence more important than it is provides "a sure sign of a puffed-up story and a lazy mind" (p. 80).

Not all importance markers can be easily dispensed with in newspaper genres which involve explicit evaluation such as editorials and feature articles. Indeed, some importance markers are essential to text construction, as evidenced by the use of abstract nouns or phraseology indicating importance:

> That Xi was able to push through the former when previous such efforts have failed testifies to his growing <u>authority</u> as leader. (Editorial, 14 November 2013)

> His <u>expertise</u> in public-health science made him a natural pick for the government […] (Feature article, 10 December 2012)

> This put him <u>in the media spotlight</u> and triggered calls for him to step down. (Feature article, 15 September 2014)

The use of the abstract nouns *authority, expertise* and *in the media spotlight* indicates the news actors' social significance, but the real importance lies not in making the news actors look newsworthy, but in helping to develop the arguments. Semantically, these importance markers are thus an integral part of the whole sentences and are hard to replace.

Making recommendations
Recommendations are statements intended to suggest a way forward for an issue under discussion. They may appear anywhere in editorials and feature articles although in editorials they tend to appear towards the end:

> Transparency is <u>key</u> when environmental hazards and health crises arise. (Editorial, 13 March 2013)

> <u>It is in China's best interests to</u> get on with major trading partners. (Editorial, 12 October 2001)

This use of importance markers is part of the writer's effort to move the argumentation to a climax and to bring it to a close.

Of special interest is the tendency of polarized importance adjectives to appear towards the end of editorials. Swales and Burke (2003) define such adjectives as "very important". Table 4 shows their distribution in both whole texts and conclusions.

Table 4. Most frequent importance adjectives in whole texts and conclusions in SCMP editorials

Importance adjective	Whole texts	Conclusions (%)
imperative	14	8 (57)
critical	13	7 (54)
essential	33	10 (30)
necessary	86	24 (28)
critical	31	8 (26)
important	149	38 (26)
Total	326	95 (29)

While *important* is a centralized adjective, all the other five are polarized. Of course, not every instance of the importance adjectives found in the conclusions is necessarily used to make recommendations. Some instances may simply be used to indicate the importance of something and are not directly linked to recommendations. The following, however, serve to make recommendations:

> It is, therefore, <u>essential that</u> Beijing takes into account the views of the people. (Editorial, 22 February 2012)

> <u>It is imperative for</u> both sides to capitalise on the opportunities while easing the friction. (Editorial, 12 September 2013)

The use of the evaluative patterns *It is + adjective (for somebody) to-infinitive/that-clause* makes it explicit that the writer is not just assessing a proposition but also making a recommendation in an emphatic way. These two structures are especially well documented in studies on academic discourse (e.g., Hewings & Hewings, 2001, 2002; Hyland & Tse, 2005) and have received attention in at least two studies on editorial discourse (Morley, 2004; Murphy & Morley, 2006). More noteworthy is that four out of eight instances of *imperative* and three out of ten instances of *essential* appear in the very last sentence in the articles, suggesting that the writers purposely end on a strong note. This is also a common way of working towards a climax and is consistent with the observation that the persuasive force tends to concentrate towards the end of editorials (Morley, 2004; Murphy & Morley, 2006). Again, this lends support to Hoey's (2004) view of textual colligation.

Like editorial writers, feature writers also make recommendations, albeit less liberally. This is especially true of feature articles on education and health, which now and then dispense advice to their readers, for example:

> Taking medical advice is <u>critical</u>. (Feature article, 10 June 2014)

> But if there is an underlying cause for the fixed head position, treatment of that cause is <u>essential</u>. (Feature article, 7 October 2013)

> It's sometimes <u>necessary</u> to be concerned about the children who are speaking. (Feature article, 17 March 2014)

> <u>It is vital to</u> reignite students' interest in reading and writing in both English and Chinese. (Feature article, 28 April 2014)

Feature writers do rely heavily on attribution, but these are obviously moments when feature writers are at their most persuasive. They are no different from "direct directives" (Bolívar, 1994, p. 292) commonly employed in editorials, though their frequency is much lower in feature articles. Alternatively, feature writers may use importance markers such as experts and scientists in the plural to indicate "impersonalized attribution" (Feez et al., 2008, p. 239), as in:

> To stay healthy, <u>experts</u> say children and young people need to do at least an hour of physical activity - such as walking or cycling to school and running in the playground every day. (Feature article, 30 December 2013)

> In fact, despite the studies, researchers have yet to determine a causal link between mobile device usage and cancer. Still, many <u>experts</u> agree that it is better to be safe than sorry. (Feature article, 11 March 2013)

These examples show that such importance markers, inextricably linked with attribution and social significance, can be used to cite elite or authoritative sources to make recommendations sound credible and to inspire confidence in the reader, thus forming part of the writer's rhetoric. In this sense, this rhetorical device contributes to reported argumentation, which Zlatkova (2012) says is an integral feature of news stories heavily based on arguments provided by sources.

Commenting on situations in news events

In addition to the above discourse functions, importance markers are also commonly used in editorials to comment on situations in news events, as illustrated by the following:

> Never before has China been so <u>important to</u> the US. (Editorial, 12 March 2011)

> Even-handed justices and the rule of law are <u>critical</u> assets that distinguish Hong Kong. (Editorial, 23 February 2010)

Sometimes an importance marker may be juxtaposed with another type of marker to mix praise with criticism:

> This is a **long overdue** but <u>essential</u> step to broaden consumer protection. (Editorial, 28 June 2013)

> For residents and their elected representatives, it may be **a victory worthy of celebration**. But for the city, it is <u>a major setback</u>. (Editorial, 26 June 2013)

In the first example, the importance marker *essential* expresses praise and the badness marker *long overdue* criticism. In the second, the praise (*a victory worthy of celebration*) precedes the criticism (*a major* [indicating significance] *setback* [indicating badness]). Whether the praise or criticism comes first, the purpose is to make the comment more balanced, and this rhetorical strategy contributes to evaluative coherence, a term developed by Thompson and Zhou (2000) to account for the way a consistent personal evaluation of the topic the writer is dealing with is conveyed.

Setting the feature angle

Also worthy of attention is how importance markers are used in feature leads (i.e. introductions, usually made up of several paragraphs) to set the feature angle:

> [paragraph1] Studying abroad means striking a balance between the books and your social life - and making local friends is <u>key</u>. (Feature article, 18 August 2014)

> [paragraph 3] Now the university is <u>raising its profile</u> as a place which teaches about, as well as researches, the country. Its newly founded Centre for China Studies offers undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, and is aimed at international students. (Feature article, 3 September 2012)

In the first example, the feature writer comes straight to the point in the first paragraph about the main theme of the article by using the importance marker *key.* In the second, the feature writer uses only in the third paragraph the phrase *raising its profile* to indicate the significance of the action involved, which is then elaborated on in the rest

of the article. In both examples, the importance markers not only express ideational meaning but also structure the discourse. In other words, the importance marker in each example helps foreground the main idea and sets the stage for the rest of the text. This echoes Sinclair's (1987) suggestion that evaluation commonly occurs at boundary points in a text (Thompson & Hunston, 2000).

Clearly, there are noticeable differences in terms of the frequencies of use and variety of importance markers employed in both editorials and feature articles. But it is also clear that such markers are employed to perform more or less the same discourse functions in the construction of the two newspaper genres.

Discussion and implications

Evaluation contributes vitally to the construction of editorials and feature articles. The corpus shows frequent use of different dimensions of evaluation and frequent use of importance markers. But, as we have seen, the real significance of importance markers is in how they perform specific discourse functions, particularly in different textual positions in both genres and thus contribute vitally to their construction. This study has shown that in both editorials and feature articles, they can be used to state the main theme (in headlines), represent people, and make recommendations. Moreover, importance markers are used in editorials to comment on situations in news events; and used in feature leads (i.e. introductions) to set the feature angle.

Equally important is the finding that evaluation use in both editorials and feature articles is genre-specific, playing a pivotal and yet dynamic role in constructing newspaper texts. The use of importance markers, as with the use of other types of evaluative marker, is bound up with communicative purpose and rhetorical conventions which, in turn, have the most direct bearing on what, where, why and how evaluative items are used.

In particular, this study has lent support to Hoey's (2004) claim that some language items have a built-in bias for certain positions and functions in texts. It also shows a close link between newspaper genres and evaluation use. Different evaluative keys or writer voices manifest themselves in different journalistic genres, and variation in these genres is ascribable to "regularities in the use journalistic texts make of the resources of appraisal [evaluation]" (Martin & White, 2005, p. 165). For this reason, genre specificity within newspaper discourse can be explained and illustrated using the concept of evaluation, and how importance markers are employed to help construct editorials and feature articles can serve this purpose well.

Methodologically, this study has illustrated how structural analysis, however partial, contributes to a better understanding of where and how evaluation works in the construction of the two newspaper genres; and that there is a place for manual tagging in a specialized corpus in order to make a clear distinction not only between averred statements and attributed statements but also between authorial evaluations and non-authorial evaluations.

Newspaper texts are "a rich source of linguistic data" (Bhatia, 1993, p. 157), and the evaluative resources in different newspaper genres can be profitably and systematically exploited in the English language classroom. Pedagogically, this study suggests potential value in sensitizing students to the use of importance markers in newspaper discourse (and other discourses) in terms of their forms, functions and textual positions. Editorials and feature articles can be used as a starting point to illustrate the use of importance markers in writing. Later, other text types, such as research articles, can be

used to illustrate how such markers contribute to their construction. This will aid students' text comprehension and help develop their writing ability.

Conclusion

There has long been a relative neglect of the different discourse functions performed by importance markers to construct different newspaper genres, and the use of importance markers in newspaper discourse is often associated mainly with the need for conveying drama. But evaluative use, including the use of importance markers, varies from newspaper genre to newspaper genre, and there is much more to the use of importance markers than conveying drama to the reader.

In summary, this paper has thrown into sharp relief at least three salient points about importance markers. They figure prominently in editorials and feature articles (though with varying degrees of frequency of use and variety). They perform various specific important discourse functions in both genres. They contribute vitally to their construction. All this suggests that importance markers play a more significant role in newspaper discourse than normally assumed.

Acknowledgements

About the author

Jonathan Ngai is an assistant professor at the School of Arts and Social Sciences, The Open University of Hong Kong. His research interests are in the fields of evaluation/stance, stylistics, academic writing and journalistic writing.

References

Anthony, L. (2013). AntConc. Retrieved from http://www.laurenceanthony.net/software/antconc

Bednarek, M. (2006). *Evaluation in media discourse: Analysis of a newspaper corpus*. London: Continuum.

Bednarek, M., & Caple, H. (2012). *News discourse*. London: Continuum.

Bell, A. (1991). *The language of news media*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell.

Bhatia, V. K. (1993). *Analysing genre: Language use in professional settings*. London: Longman.

Biber, D., Johansson, S., Leech, G., Conrad, S., & Finegan, E. (1999). *Longman grammar of spoken and written English*. London: Longman.

Blanco, M. P. (2011). The language of evaluation in English and Spanish editorials: A corpus-based study. In S. Goźdź-Roszkowski (Ed.), *Explorations across languages and corpora* (pp. 207-225). Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang.

Bolívar, A. (1985). *Interaction through written text: A discourse analysis of newspaper editorials.* (Unpublished Ph.D. thesis), University of Birmingham.

Bolívar, A. (1994). The structure of newspaper editorials. In M. Coulthard (Ed.), *Advances in written text analysis* (pp. 276-294). London: Routledge.

Bolívar, A. (2001). The negotiation of evaluation in written text. In M. Scott & G. Thompson (Eds.), *Patterns of text in honour of Michael Hoey* (pp. 129-158). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Bondi, M. (2015). Probably most important of all. Importance markers in academic and popular history articles. In N. Groom, M. Charles, & S. John (Eds.), *Corpora, grammar and discourse. In honour of Susan Hunston* (pp. 161-182). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Conboy, M. (2007). *The language of the news*. London: Routledge.

Cotter, C. (2010). *News talk: Investigating the language of journalism.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

Duguid, A. (2010). Newspaper discourse informalisation. *Corpora, 5*(2), 109-138

Feez, S., Iedema, R., & Rose, D. (2008). *Media literacy*. Surry Hills, N.S.W.: NSW Adult Migrant Education Service.

Fowler, R. (1991). *Language in the news: Discourse and ideology in the press*. New York: Routledge.

Granato, L. (1992). *Newspaper feature writing*. Geelong, Vic.: Deakin University Press.

Granger, S. (2014). A lexical bundle approach to comparing languages: Stems in English and French. *Languages in Contrast, 14*(1), 58-72

Hewings, A., & Hewings, M. (2001). Anticipatory 'it' in academic writing: An indicator of disciplinary difference and developing disciplinary knowledge. In M. Hewings (Ed.), *Academic writing in context: Implications and applications* (pp. 199-214). Birmingham: University of Birmingham Press.

Hewings, A., & Hewings, M. (2002). "It is interesting to note that...": A comparative study of anticipatory 'it' in student and published writing. *English for Specific Purposes, 27*(4), 373-383

Hoey, M. (2004). Textual colligation: A special kind of lexical priming. In K. Aijmer & B. Altenberg (Eds.), *Advances in corpus linguistics* (pp. 171-194). Amsterdam: Rodopi.

Hunston, S., & Thompson, G. (Eds.). (2000). *Evaluation in text: Authorial stance and the construction of discourse*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hyland, K. (2005). Stance and engagement: A model of interaction in academic discourse. *Discourse Studies, 7*(2), 173-191

Hyland, K. (2012). *Disciplinary identities: Individuality and community in academic discourse*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hyland, K. (2013). Metadiscourse. In K. Hyland (Ed.), *Discourse studies: Essential concepts* (pp. 65-88). London: Bloomsbury.

Hyland, K., & Tse, P. (2005). Hooking the reader: A corpus study of evaluative that in abstracts. *English for Specific Purposes, 24*, 123-139

Keeble, R. (2006). *The newspapers handbook* (4th ed.). London: Routledge.

Le, E. (2004). Active participation within written argumentation: Metadiscourse and editorialist's authority. *Journal of Pragmatics, 36*, 687-714

Le, E. (2010). *Editorials and the power of media: Interweaving of socio-cultural identities*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Leech, G. (1981). *Semantics: The study of meaning*. London: Penguin Books.

Lemke, J. L. (1998). Resources for attitudinal meaning: Evaluative orientations in text semantics. *Functions of Language, 5*(1), 33-56

Malrieu, J. P. (1999). *Evaluative semantics: Language, cognition and ideology*. London: Routledge.

Marín-Arrese, J. I. (2007). Stance and subjectivity/intersubjectivity in political discourse. A contrastive case study. *BELL-Belgian Journal of English Language and Literatures*, 113-132

Martin, J. R., & White, P. R. R. (2005). *The language of evaluation: Appraisal in English*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Morley, J. (2004). Modals in persuasive journalism: An example from the Economist. In R. Facchinetti & F. Palmer (Eds.), *English modality in perspective: genre analysis and contrastive studies* (pp. 67-82). Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang.

Morley, J. (2009). Lexical cohesion and rhetorical structure. In J. Flowerdew & M. Mahlberg (Eds.), *Lexical cohesion and corpus linguistics* (pp. 5-22). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Murphy, A., & Morley, J. (2006). The peroration. In V. K. B. M. Gotti (Ed.), *Explorations in specialized genres* (pp. 201-215). Bern: Peter Lang.

Ngai, B. W. J. (2017). *Evaluation in newspaper discourse: A corpus-based study*. (Unpublished Ph.D. thesis), The University of Hong Kong.

Noonan, J. H. (2008). Reporting and writing: Ideas to guide you. In J. H. Noonan & G. Mustain (Eds.), *English-language news writing* (pp. 24-42). Shanghai: Fu Dan University Press.

Partington, A. (2014). The marking of importance in 'Enlightenment' In M. Gotti & D. S. Giannoni (Eds.), *Corpus analysis for descriptive and pedagogical purposes: ESP perspectives* (pp. 143-165). Bern: Peter Lang.

Partington, A., Duguid, A., & Taylor, C. (2013). *Patterns and meanings in discourse: Theory and practice in corpus-assisted discourse studies (CADS)*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Precht, K. (2000). *Patterns of stance in English*. (Unpublished Ph.D. thesis), Northern Arizona University.

Reah, D. (2002). *The language of newspapers*. London: Routledge.

Rundell, M. (Ed.). (1993). *Longman language activator*. Harlow: Longman.

Sinclair, J. (1987). Mirror for a text. *Journal of English and Foreign Languages, 1*, 15-44

Swales, J. M., & Burke, A. (2003). "It's really fascinating work": Differences in evaluative adjectives across academic registers. In P. Leistyna & C. F. Meyer (Eds.), *Corpus analysis: Language structure and language use* (pp. 1-18). Amsterdam: Rodopi.

The Economist. (2015). *The Economist Style Guide* (11th ed.). London: Profile Books Ltd.

Thompson, G., & Hunston, S. (2000). Evaluation: An introduction. In S. Hunston & G. Thompson (Eds.), *Evaluation in text: Authorial stance and the construction of discourse* (pp. 1-27). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Thompson, G., & Zhou, J. (2000). Evaluation and organization in text: The structuring role of evaluative disjuncts. In S. Hunston & G. Thompson (Eds.), *Evaluation in text: Authorial stance and the construction of discourse* (pp. 121-141). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

van Dijk, T. A. (1991). *Racism in the press*. London: Routledge.

van Dijk, T. A. (1996). *Opinions and ideologies in editorials* Paper presented at the 4th International Symposium of Critical Discourse Analysis, Language, Social Life and Critical Thought (14-16 December, 1995), Athens. Retrieved from http://www.discursos.org/unpublished%20articles/Opinions%20and%20ideologies%20in%20editorials.htm

Vestergaard, T. (2000a). From genre to sentence: The leading article and its linguistic realization. In F. Ungerer (Ed.), *English media texts: Past and present* (pp. 151-175). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Vestergaard, T. (2000b). That's not news: Persuasive and expository genres in the press. In A. Trosberg (Ed.), *Analyzing professional genres* (pp. 97-113). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Waterhouse, K. (1989). *Waterhouse on newspaper style*. London: Viking.

Zare, J., & Keivanloo-Shahrestanaki, Z. (2017). Genre awareness and academic lecture comprehension: The impact of teaching importance markers. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes, 27*, 31-41

Zarza, S., & Tan, H. (2016). Patterns of schematic structure and strategic features in newspaper editorials: A comparative study of American and Malaysian editorials. *Discourse and Communication, 10*(6), 635-657

Zlatkova, G. (2012). Reported argumentation in economic-financial news. In F. H. van Eemeren & B. Garssen (Eds.), *Exploring argumentative contexts* (pp. 377-391). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.