

Discoursal & Generic Features of U.S. Army Obituaries:

A mini-corpus analysis of contemporary military death announcements

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Abstract

A mini-corpus of U.S. Department of Defense death announcements was compiled and analyzed via a mixed methodology of functional discourse analysis and formal genre move analysis. This analytical framework was designed to investigate the dual roles of the impact of language on social perception and authorial power in the co-construction of meaning. The results of these methodological treatments indicated systematic distancing and dehumanization of U.S. soldier deaths that were consistent with both formal and contextual indicators of function for American public consumption. Results further indicated a coordination of covert semiotic implication in text with overt linguistic markers of support for and affiliation with this same function. The implications of covert language function for social perception and authorial power are discussed both within and beyond the context of the current corpus materials. Finally, the value of form-function, mixed-method approaches to textual discourse analysis is discussed within the context of the present findings.

I. Introduction

Patterns of written discourse both pervade and shape reader perception in a variety of important ways. Indeed, a fundamental assumption of Discourse Analysis (DA), as articulated by Johnstone (2002), suggests that discourse shapes language and its participants just as it is reciprocally shaped by these semiotic and social systems, respectively. Accordingly, discourse necessarily occupies a prominent role in the presentation and reception of ideas. The function of such written discourse in a

time of sociopolitical controversy—particularly when the controversy coincides with military conflict—thus becomes a particularly salient focus for analysis. It is within the contemporary and considerably controversial climate of the conflict in Iraq that this paper examines the written discourse of military obituaries¹ as published by the U.S. Department of Defense (D.o.D.) DefenseLINK (<http://www.defenselink.mil/>).

In particular, this paper will examine and offer analysis of a small corpus of “Identified Army Casualty” D.o.D. press releases over the course of one calendar month, totaling 42 individual texts. The examination and analysis of these corpus materials will employ two distinct methodologies. The first of these draws upon a six-point heuristic for analysis of discourse as outlined and advocated by Johnstone (2002). This broad and holistic approach to discourse analysis provides a systematic, if underspecified, tool for exploring and analyzing the functional components of discourse alongside its associated context. Juxtaposed with this method, an adapted genre move analysis approach (Swales, 1990; Al-Ali, 2005) will be employed. Presupposing a systematic coincidence between the marriage of form and function in text, the adapted genre move analysis will explore specified patterns of corpus items as they relate to such form and communicative function.

Resultant findings from these analyses will explore the profound effects of language on social perception, with specific focus on the role of authorial power in the co-construction of meaning. In particular, the following analysis will examine the unique role of the U.S. Department of Defense death announcements in shaping public opinion regarding the war in Iraq—not through simple authority of dissemination of such information, but via the construction of meaning through coordinated linguistic form and function as text. Grounded in careful analysis of the present corpus data, it will be argued that such attempts to affect perception of the war in Iraq are exemplified in

¹ The use of the term *obituaries* here is specifically intended to draw attention to the manner in which the U.S. military provides public notice of individual deaths. Although slightly unconventional, its use in this case is argued to be an appropriate description of the purpose and essential content of these texts.

specific formal and functional linguistic choices within U.S. Military death announcements and that these texts result in a targeted distancing and dehumanization of U.S. casualties for consumption by the American public.

The implications of such linguistic and rhetorical choices as a vehicle for the prosecution and continuation of large-scale military conflict—within a democratic system relying upon public support—are considerable and provocative. Specifically, the power of covert linguistic construction through discoursal form and function to justify military conflict provides a substantiation of the importance of mixed-method discourse analysis techniques as employed in the present study. Thus, while Johnstone’s discourse analysis heuristic will provide insight into the contextual themes of communicative function, it will be the coordinated integration of Swales’s genre move analysis that will illuminate the formal properties within which such function is established. Moreover, and perhaps more importantly, the present results will suggest that such analytical techniques are not simply a utility of scholarly and literary criticism, but are also powerful instruments of insight for dissent with potential for tangible sociopolitical repercussions.

II. Theoretical Framework

The term *discourse* itself, and particularly *discourse analysis*, often suggests multifaceted and even conflicting perspectives on the nature of language in use. Johnstone (2002), in one instance, describes *discourse* rather simply as, “actual instances of communication in the medium of language” (p. 2). In another though contrasting example, Schiffrin (1994), while implicitly adopting a corresponding view of discourse as an applied rather than abstract notion of language, further ascribes two distinct and apparently conflicting dimensions to discourse that are essential to the

analytical approach taken by discourse researchers and are generally characterized by Schiffrin and others as either 1) focused on structural features of language above the sentence level and aligned with a formalist paradigm of linguistic research or 2) centered on the functional attributes of any language use and thus denoting a functionalist approach to linguistic scholarship. This division between form and function is, in some ways, an artificial one, as both Johnstone (2002) and Schiffrin (1994) later acknowledge. Indeed, many instances of discourse analysis employ hybrids of both formal and functional methods of inquiry, examining the structure as well as the purpose of the language in unison. Nonetheless, as Schiffrin (1994) notes, contemporary views of discourse tend to adopt functionalist perspectives that emphasize language in use over any structural elements. Accordingly, as Jaworski & Coupland (1999) acknowledge in their own appraisal of the diversity in definitions of discourse and its analysis, the role of the context within which language is used becomes an important part of any such discourse analysis.

Indeed, the role of *context* in discourse analysis is a significant and even essential component of the analytical process. As outlined above, contemporary discourse analysis is itself firmly grounded within an emergent or functionalist paradigm of linguistics, thus examining not only formal linguistic properties of a text, but also the function or purpose of the text as a whole and its constituent parts. In order to best assign function however, it has been convincingly argued (Schiffren, 1994; Johnstone, 2002) that one must know the context within which the discourse is situated in order to fully grasp the intention or purpose of the language being used. Thus, the forthcoming discussion of military obituaries within the context of D.o.D. press releases, as well as within the larger context of the current military conflict in Iraq, are vitally important and salient considerations for analysis of the discourse presented in the corpus materials. Indeed, the importance of consideration and analytical inclusion of these and other contextual elements guided

the inclusion of Johnstone's (2002) heuristic for discourse analysis as one of the two analytical instruments for this paper. Johnstone's heuristic places considerable if not exclusive emphasis on the context of language use in order to interpret function and thus serves as an important tool for elucidating such facets of function and meaning contained within.

Complementary to this primarily functional emphasis of methodology on discourse context, a genre-based approach to written discourse comprises a coordinating instrument of analysis intended to highlight the formal properties of the discourse that give rise to certain language functions. The role of genre in this paper follows Swales's (1990) definition of genre as "a class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purposes" (Swales, 1990, p. 58). Thus, genre here is not seen simply as a conventionalized form or structure, but as a form or structure that gives rise to [a] particular set(s) of communicative functions as identified by "expert members of the parent discourse community" (*ibid*, p. 58). Advancing and drawing upon Swales's definition, Bhatia (1993) also notes that genre is characterized by structural constraints that are readily noticed when broken—a further acknowledgement of the integrated nature of form and function in genre-based discourse. These definitions of genre underlie the methodological approach of 'genre move analysis' as a means of identifying the constituent structures embodying communicative functions (i.e., 'moves') that constitute a genre—as specified by the parent discourse community responsible for shaping that particular genre.

Despite attempts to dichotomize general trends of discourse analysis and genre analysis along the lines of attention to function via context and attention to function via form, respectively, both analytical approaches admittedly overlap considerably. In fact, given that genre simply represents a particular type of employed discourse, it comes as little surprise that both discourse and genre analyses focus on all of these elements. Context is, quite naturally, a necessary consideration in

genre analysis wherein the establishment of a genre and its constituent communicative functions stems directly from a contextual need and purpose. Just as it is a requisite in functionalist accounts of discourse analysis, context is essential to the assignment of meaning and purpose to a particular generic feature or ‘move.’ Similarly, attention to form or structure within discourse is an important component of discourse analysis in that it embodies the contextual and thus functional intentions of the speaker that are so much a focus within contemporary discourse analyses. Despite such overlap and similarities, however, the specialized foci of each method employed in this study suggest an acknowledgement of a more form-focused role in genre move analysis alongside a more context-focused role in Johnstone’s heuristic-based discourse analysis. It is for this reason that these two similar though distinct instruments of analysis are employed as complementary methodologies in the present paper.

III. Social Context

As briefly indicated above, the context within which the corpus materials occur is an important component of the overall analytical process. The context for the current study is an extraordinarily complex one, and our discussion will necessarily be limited to broad and overarching contextual themes. An essential starting point for any contextual development of our current corpus materials is the war in Iraq. The current war in Iraq is in many ways a proxy or guerrilla conflict involving domestic militant factions made up of rival sociopolitical and religious groups (including native Iraqis as well as foreign fighters) and the American military forces occupying or operating in disparate areas of the country. The conflict is characterized by small-scale guerilla and suicide attacks aimed at rival domestic factions and the American led forces alongside American military-

led raids and large-scale offensives. Such conflict is perhaps most appropriately exemplified in the use of roadside explosive devices and suicide bombings by guerrilla militants—which have killed thousands of American military personnel as well as Iraqi civilians—and the large- and small-scale incursions by U.S. Military forces into urban areas like Fallujah or the Sadr City quarter of Baghdad, resulting in casualties to civilians and militants alike. Without delving too deeply into controversial claims of its causality, one can generally say that the current conflict is fueled in part by the American military's continued presence and intervention in Iraq and Iraqi affairs. By its very definition, the present conflict also includes a historical context of the American military invasion of Iraq upon a pretext of Iraqi development of so-called Weapons of Mass Destruction (W.M.D.s) and collusion with Al Qaeda terrorists responsible for the 9/11 attacks—a pretext that the D.o.D.-commissioned Duelfer Report (2004) has since deemed erroneous and false.

In addition to the localized context of the conflict in Iraq, the more salient context for the current corpus of D.o.D. "Identified Army Casualty" press releases lies in the more immediate context of American domestic affairs and public opinion. Indeed, current domestic public opinion in the U.S remains significantly divided over the country's role in Iraq as well as its ability to establish successful, American-backed political and economic systems. According to a January, 2005 Gallop Poll (Editor & Publisher, 01/12/05), 50% of Americans opined that "It was a mistake to send U.S. troops into Iraq," while an additional 59% thought that "Things are going badly in the war in Iraq." Such polling data is clearly evidence of divided public opinion over the purpose and efficacy of the conflict in Iraq. This division and controversy is even more relevant, however, to the most sensitive cost of the conflict: U.S. soldiers killed in Iraq. Such deaths exact such a high sociopolitical cost precisely because they are one of the most poignantly felt repercussions of the war itself—given its geographic distance and the lack of any direct threat to US security or sovereignty. While the

financial costs of the war may be of some concern, the emotional impact of the death/killing of a soldier conveys an obvious and unrivaled severity and permanence of consequence for an otherwise psychologically and geographically distant conflict. In light of these primary contextual factors and alongside a diversity of others neglected in this brief analysis, the importance and significance of announcing the deaths of those U.S. soldiers killed in Iraq by the D.o.D. becomes quite apparent. In fact, given that America's last protracted war, in Vietnam, produced hugely significant numbers of U.S. casualties that eventually served as a major impetus in ending that conflict without achieving the declared goals of the D.o.D., the current role of the D.o.D. in reporting and portraying U.S. casualties in Iraq demands close examination and analysis.

IV. Corpus Construction

“Identified Army Casualty” press releases were collected from the Department of Defense Press Release Division *DefenseLink* website. These releases are expressly sent and made available to journalists via the website, but they are also accessible to the public as a matter of public record. Several telephone calls were made (and messages left) to the public information number associated with the D.o.D. Press Release Division in order to ascertain the exact author or authors of these releases. Unfortunately, none of these calls were either answered or returned. While “Identified Army Casualty” press releases made up a large number of the total releases listed chronologically on each web page—accounting for 49.5%, or 42, of the 85 press releases for the month of February, 2005—additional releases concerning more mundane announcements of military officer assignments, Army National Guard and Reserve mobilizations, and even commissions of new Navy vessels were also listed among these casualty reports. In choosing which and how many “Identified

Army Casualty” releases to include in this study, it was decided that a narrow and contemporary collection of such texts would be most appropriate to the limited resources and scope of this paper. Thus, before examining the press release archives for the month of February, 2005, it was decided that all “Identified Army Casualty” releases for this calendar month would serve as the corpus material for this study. The resultant 42 individual texts representing these releases were then compiled into both printed and electronic corpus banks for examination and analysis.

V. Discourse Analysis via Johnstone’s (2002) Heuristic

In her recent monograph on discourse analysis, Johnstone (2002) outlines and advocates a heuristic-guided approach to discourse analysis. Johnstone states, “A heuristic is a set of discovery procedures for systematic application” (ibid., p. 9). Johnstone’s own heuristic comprises a macro-level assessment of discourse from a firm focus on context—one that seeks to develop an understanding of the ways in which “discourse is shaped by context and discourse shapes its context” (p. 9). Additionally, the Johnstone heuristic suggests that discourse should be examined and analyzed contextually for both the language features it contains as well as the language features it does not contain or even actively omits. In applying this methodology to the present study, an acknowledgment of the importance of context for analysis of discourse, particularly in the case of the corpus materials, is thus being made. Later, a more structurally focused approach of genre move analysis will be applied in conjunction with the contextual awareness gained from application of Johnstone’s heuristic.

The Johnstone (2002) heuristic for discourse analysis constitutes a six-point method of inquiry based on six corresponding assumptions concerning the nature of discourse. In the following

analysis, each of the six points will be presented and applied in turn to the present corpus of texts. For illustrative purposes, Figure 1.1 provides an actual corpus item as well as a prototypical example of the form and language used in the “Identified Army Casualty” press releases. Indeed, this format identically characterizes a large majority of corpus materials and will be examined in detail within the genre move analysis below. **Figure 1.1**

D.o.D. Identifies Army Casualty

The Department of Defense announced today the death of a soldier who was supporting Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Sgt. Frank B. Hernandez, 21, of Phoenix, Ariz., died Feb. 17 in Tal Afar, Iraq, when an improvised explosive device detonated near his vehicle. Hernandez was assigned to 2nd Squadron, 14th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Brigade, 25th Infantry Division, Stryker Brigade Combat Team, Fort Lewis, Wash.

For further information related to this release, contact Army Public Affairs at (703) 692-2000.

1. Discourse is shaped by the world, and discourse shapes the world

This first discursal assumption suggests the power of discourse to both represent and manipulate the context within which it is found. In our present analysis, several items in the corpus texts testify to an awareness of this idea. Perhaps the most apparent of these is use of the moniker “Operation Iraqi Freedom” within the initial phrase in Fig. 1.1: “...the death of a soldier who was supporting Operation Iraqi Freedom.” This exact phrase appears in 74% of the texts within the corpus collection, and variations on this phrase that include the use of “Operation Iraqi Freedom” or simply “Iraqi Freedom” constitute the remaining 26% of the texts. The original designation of the D.o.D. offensive and its continued presence in Iraq as “Operation Iraqi Freedom”—and its inclusion here in the announcement of a soldier killed in action while executing this operation—is significant and telling. It clearly suggests an emphasis on the merit of promoting liberty in Iraq that neglects much

American, Iraqi, and international opinion to the contrary. Thus, while some might deem this an accurate characterization of the U.S. motive for war, many others would passionately object and suggest motivations that are economic, political, or otherwise not primarily related to freedom. The choice of this characterization over any other makes clear D.o.D. intentions in shaping public perception. Additionally, the term *operation*, while standard in military designations, belies the offensive and violent nature of the current conflict in Iraq—as evidenced by the very nature of the press release within which this language occurs. Indeed, many military *operations* involve minimal risk and occur in relatively safe and uncontested settings. Such is the case of “Operation Unified Assistance,” wherein the U.S. Military plays a strictly humanitarian role in logistical support for Asian tsunami relief efforts.

2. Discourse is shaped by language, and discourse shapes language

Contained within this discoursal category and overlapping considerably with the previous assumption concerning discourse and the world are two particularly interesting uses and choices of language among the corpus materials: “... the *death* of a soldier” and “*supporting* Operation Iraqi Freedom” as presented in Fig. 1.1 above. These terms (*death* and *supporting*, respectively), and the language within which they are embedded, appear in 100% of the corpus materials, with only minor variation in 2 items. The frequency and rigidity of their articulation suggest that these terms are intended to serve a particular purpose in shaping the discourse and thus perception (what Johnstone loosely terms the ‘world’) regarding U.S. soldiers who are Killed in Action (KIA) in Iraq—KIA is a discoursal item that will itself be addressed and related to this analysis shortly. The use of *supporting* is important and requires examination of context to interpret. Its primary interest lies in

the dual interpretations of the term as either 1) indicative of personal advocacy for the Iraqi operation or 2) suggestive of service and labor on behalf of the operation with no apparent condonement of the operation itself. While one could argue that it is the second of these potential interpretations that is intended here, the context of a divided U.S. public opinion over the conflict and the D.o.D.'s admitted policy and promotion of maintaining a large U.S.-troop presence (at the behest of the Bush administration) in spite of such deaths (DefenseLINK News, 8/24/05) strongly favors the first interpretation. This interpretation is further supported by the uniformity of its use within the corpus materials as well as its use in lieu of alternative descriptors such as '*stationed* in Iraq,' '*serving* in Iraq,' etc. Moreover, the use of this term, if we are to interpret it as a description of advocacy, is both extremely presumptuous and very likely misleading. According to one online daily citing D.o.D. statistics, 5,500 U.S. soldiers have deserted since the start of the Iraq conflict (Lorimer, AIL News, 03/14/05). Additionally, three times as many conscientious objectors have applied to be removed from the violence in Iraq (or the armed services altogether) in 2004 than just three years earlier, when the U.S. was fighting another war in Afghanistan (Gallagher, Northern Star News, 03/10/05). Furthermore, the D.o.D.'s implementation of the so-called 'stop-loss' policy, which prevents soldiers from leaving or retiring at the end of their contractual enlistment terms, has kept over 100,000 soldiers in Iraq against their will (Dickinson, Guerrilla News Network, 03/03/05). These facts strongly suggest a picture of support far different than that which U.S. Army language implies.

Finally, the use of "... the death of a soldier" is a particularly interesting discoursal feature of these corpus texts. What is perhaps most telling is the choice of this term and phrasing in lieu of the more standard KIA designation—a term expressly created and used by the D.o.D. to describe military casualties (see the D.o.D. *Dictionary of Military Terms*,

<http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/jel/doddict/>). In its present formulation within the corpus materials, such generic phrasing presents an arguably benign alternative to a more accurate description of *killed*. *Death* can, of course, occur in any number of ways and, particularly in Western society, is only rarely associated with violence. Its use therefore omits any connotation of responsibility on the part of the U.S. D.o.D. or even the Iraqi insurgents themselves. *Killing*, however, clearly suggests a violent and/or malicious event and, in most discourse, plays a much different role than that of *death*. In the case of Fig. 1.1, the ‘death’ of Frank Hernandez was quite violent. He was targeted (directly or indirectly) for murder, and the result was anything but benign. Indeed, one must wonder at the frequent use of the term ‘*killed*’ to describe victims of the World Trade Center attacks on September 11, 2001, when a benign description of death is used to characterize similarly violent killings of U.S. soldiers in Iraq.

3. Discourse is shaped by participants, and discourse shapes participants

This third assumption of the nature of discourse provides a narrow yet significant focus for our present analysis. Given the written form of these corpus materials and the lack of any overt participation or dialogue, it seems only appropriate to apply the Bakhtinian model of *dialogism* to this study. Dialogism suggests a role of co-construction in the authoring of texts in which the literal author *co-constructs* his writing with an intended (if not articulated) audience of potential readers (Holquist, 1990). Thus, in applying this model to our current context, we can assume that the undefined D.o.D. author(s) had particular intentions regarding the co-constructed discourse (that is, the subsequent meaning resulting from the reader’s interpretation of what was written by the author) that would emerge. Indeed, several of these apparent purposes and intentions of co-constructed

meaning have already been discussed above. An additional and perhaps more poignant consideration under this point of the heuristic requires a close examination of the D.o.D.'s intended audience and partner in this co-construction of meaning. The audience, in this case, is not only evident from the context, but is in fact explicitly cited within the text: *Press Release*. Journalists, therefore, are the intended audience of this co-construction, and the meaning that is made from this marriage of dialogue can be found in their own writings. Thus, it is quite telling to find that an informal internet search engine query returns dozens of news articles displaying entire and partial reproductions of identical or slightly varied phrases used in the original D.o.D. press release. Such a result, though unconfirmed by any systematic corpus analysis, is highly suggestive of the way in which meaning is co-constructed between the D.o.D. and some among the American Press—a larger symptom of an uncritical journalistic trend in much of U.S. news media. There seem to be, therefore, at least some partners in this co-construction who are content to let the D.o.D. construct all the meaning.

4. Discourse is shaped by prior discourse, and it shapes possibilities for future discourse

In a thematic extension of the lack of co-construction among certain members of the American news media, we can relate the phenomenon of *intertextuality* as means by which discourse shapes and perpetuates further instances of itself. Intertextuality, according to Bazerman (2004), suggests that textual discourse does not arise out of a vacuum by means of authorial creativity and brilliance, but rather that all texts rely on previous texts, textual conventions, and their associated schemata in order to be formed and interpreted. Our present corpus materials demonstrate an extreme form of institutionalized intertextuality that relies on D.o.D. language and framing for interpretation—which

in turn relies upon a formal and authoritarian linguistic *register* found throughout military and governmental communiqués. Additionally, however, we have seen in the paragraph above that such intertextuality also extends to outside news organizations responsible for interpreting these original texts. One particularly telling instance of such intertextuality, found in both the D.o.D. corpus materials and in a significant number of related news reports, is the textual convention of including the rank and detailed division assignment for each soldier reported killed. This can be seen in Fig. 1.1 as “Sgt. Frank B. Hernandez ... was assigned to 2nd Squadron, 14th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Brigade, 25th Infantry Division, Stryker Brigade Combat Team, Fort Lewis, Wash.” and is representative of 100% of the corpus materials and approximately 80% of related press reports (with only minor variation in a minority of these) identified via informal internet search. The inclusion of this information is hardly coincidental given its ancillary importance to all but family and friends of the deceased. Why, indeed, would it be important or relevant to include such detailed information regarding rank, division, regiment, squadron, and combat team for public consumption? It seems reasonable to assume that such a textual convention is a way of associating each soldier less with his/her community and more with the military organization of which he/she is a constituent part and the military identity it certainly entails. This, one might argue, constitutes a form of intertextual dehumanization in which the soldiers killed are presented not as mothers, fathers, neighbors, or even simply American citizens, but as cogs in the military machine, components of an organization. These pervasive roles for intertextuality are thus prime and illustrative examples of the present discoursal assumption within this heuristic claiming that discourse is both shaped by prior discourse as well as responsible for shaping future instances of discourse.

5. Discourse is shaped by its medium, and discourse shapes the possibilities of its medium

The discursual medium for our present materials is the D.o.D.'s Defenslink website and one which suggests much more by what is not included than by what is in fact presented. Specifically, it is interesting to note the brevity of the discourse used here and an almost total lack of context. This is important given the web-based medium for this discourse—a format that allows for presentation of hundreds of thousands of pages of text at a cost and storage capacity roughly equivalent to an ordinary compact disk. In four of the 42 corpus items, for instance, soldiers are variously described as having been killed, or more accurately as having been rendered into a state of *death*, “while supporting Operation Iraqi Freedom” by “*enemy small arms fire*.” The lack of additional or specific information concerning the circumstances of that killing stands in stark contrast to the inclusion of the clearly superfluous detail indicating “small arms fire” as the instrument of death.

Additionally, one significant item missing from the discursual context of all of our present corpus materials are images or photos of those soldiers killed. While not an actual component of the discourse itself, it suggests a medium (if a componential one) that certainly shapes the context and thus interpretation of the discourse. Also relevant is the fact that obituaries outside of the D.o.D. context almost invariably include a photo in addition to strictly discursual elements. Indeed, one might convincingly argue that the inclusion of a photo in conventional obituaries is an attempt to emphasize the lost humanity of the deceased, while its exclusion from D.o.D. obituaries is an attempt to dehumanize and deemphasize that emotional response to death. Similarly in this case, given the ease and minimal cost of including photos of soldiers that are already available via D.o.D. enlistment archives, the choice made by the D.o.D. author(s) to exclude photos is significant.

Finally, the web-based medium for our corpus materials also shapes the discourse in terms of the distance that it places between author and audience. While one could immediately demand

additional information or explanation from a D.o.D. official reading this text aloud or presenting it by hand, this is not possible in a web-based medium. While there is a phone number listed at the bottom of each “Identified Army Casualty” release for requesting additional information, this requires the additional step of requesting further details, a step unlikely to be taken by many of those lacking an immediate connection to the soldier killed. Moreover, and perhaps most telling, attempts to discern the authors of the present corpus texts for this study by calling the same D.o.D. public information number resulted in several messages left and not a single response.

6. Discourse is shaped by purpose, and discourse shapes possible purposes

This sixth and final assumption constituting Johnstone’s (2002) discourse-analysis heuristic overlaps considerably with the previous five, yet it maintains a unique and vitally important summative focus for our analysis. The purpose of the discourse presented in the D.o.D. “Identified Army Casualty” releases is clearly multifaceted. We have examined some of the potential and likely functions contained within small portions of the corpus texts, but the overarching purpose ascribed to this genre (a term greatly expanded upon below) remains largely undetermined. In clarifying this meta-function of the text, therefore, it is insightful to examine the linguistic properties of the corpus items as they relate to linguistic register and thus to a corresponding function. Wardhaugh (2002) defines linguistic registers as “sets of language items associated with discrete occupational or social groups” (p. 51). In our present case, the linguistic register is clearly one of extreme formality and authority associated with governmental organizations and the powerful social and occupational groups that immediately direct them. This type of register is evidenced by use of third-person framing throughout the text (e.g., “The Department of Defense announces...” and “D.o.D. Identifies Army

Casualty”), the use of imperatives like “For further information... contact Army public affairs,” and a plethora of specialty terminology such as “casualty,” “small arms fire,” “improvised explosive device,” and various indications of rank and divisional Army assignment. This formality of discourse presents a number of interesting attributes. It clearly marks the author(s) as a member of this social or professional group, for instance. At the same time, according to Wardhaugh (2002) and others, it also creates a distance between the author(s) and the text. Specifically, this formality of register allows the author to deemphasize any intimate or meaningful connection to the text and write/speak while wrapped within a claim to objectivity. Thus, it seems reasonable to assume that it is this very distancing and deemphasis of meaningful ties to the deaths of these soldiers that constitutes an important function and thus purpose of the construction of the texts constituting these corpus materials. The formality of such linguistic register, alongside the diversity of functional language markers and contextual considerations discussed above, strongly suggests, therefore, a purpose-driven attempt to deemphasize the role and responsibility of the D.o.D. in the deaths of these soldiers despite the primary role of the institution in placing and maintaining these soldiers within the violent context of the Iraqi conflict.

VI. Adapted Genre Move Analysis

In his seminal work on genre analysis in academic contexts, Swales (1990) suggests a systematic approach to analyzing genre via determination of the various ‘moves’ shared among a collection of texts. Within the Swalesian formulation, these moves represent various componential textual features that coincide with specific functional properties of the text. Accordingly, in one noted instance of his own work, Swales proposed a series of three such moves to characterize and analyze

the components constituting research-article introductions as: “1) Establishing a territory, 2) Establishing a niche, and 3) Occupying the Niche” (p. 141). This Swalesian ‘genre move analysis’ approach has been more recently adapted by Al-Ali (2005) within the context of a study similar to our present analysis. Specifically, Al-Ali applied an adapted and more interpretive form of this genre move analysis in his own study of a corpus collection containing 200 Jordanian newspaper obituaries. In his own move analysis, Al-Ali (2005) surveyed his corpus of obituaries and assigned a series of common functions according to various formal components within the texts. As a result of this analysis, two distinct types (i.e., genres) of obituary, suggesting significantly divergent textual functions, were elucidated. It is Al-Ali’s (2005) adaptation of Swales’s (1990) original genre move analysis that will be applied to the present study—with the intention of similarly elucidating certain functional and formal features of the D.o.D. corpus materials. In addition, the following analysis will make use of Jakobson’s (1976; in Waugh & Monville-Burtson, 1990) articulation of functions of language within speech events in order to assist in identifying the particular functions associated with each textual move.

Following a detailed survey of the present corpus materials, five distinct generic moves were identified among the just six clauses constituting the individual press-release texts. Each is presented in turn and discussed in detail below. While most genre move analyses incorporate multiple clauses or entire paragraphs within each move, the significant number of moves identified here within such a short text speaks to the poignant lack of detail and contextualization that would normally be incorporated into each move. For illustrative purposes, Fig. 1.2 below presents a prototypical, D.o.D. “Identified Army Casualty” release with these five moves marked within the text as [M-#]. It should be noted that the textual format found within Fig. 1.2 is identical to 80% (or

34 of 42) of the texts and contains only small variations or omissions in relation to the remaining 20% of corpus items.

Figure 1.2

[M-1] D.o.D. Identifies Army Casualty

[M-2] The Department of Defense announced today the death of a soldier who was supporting Operation Iraqi Freedom.

[M-3] Spc. Clinton R. Gertson, 26, of Houston, Texas, died 19 Feb. in Mosul, Iraq, from injuries sustained from enemy forces small arms fire. **[M-4]** Gertson was assigned to 1st Battalion, 24th Infantry Regiment, Fort Lewis, Wash.

[M-5] For further information related to this release, contact Army Public Affairs at (703) 692-2000.

Move 1: Identifying the Release

While this first move presents a heading or title that could be considered superordinate to the main body of the text and thus outside the scope of this move analysis, its dual inclusion within the main download page, where individual releases can be identified and accessed, as well as within 100% of the texts themselves, makes it a salient feature for our current analysis. Indeed, the apparent function of this move is characterized by its brief and distanced third-person description. It is clearly intended to provide information concerning the content of the following text and would thus be indicative of what Jakobson terms the *referential* function. However, one must also wonder at the *emotive* function being served here. While the prosody of speech is a much richer source for analysis of emotive function, the pseudo-prosody of written form and punctuation also allows for insight. In this case, the violent death of a soldier would hardly be characterized by any notable segment of the American population as anything but tragic. Nonetheless, this initial move of the text—one that frames the tone for the rest of the text in many ways—makes a noticeable attempt to

convey *no* emotive function whatsoever, despite circumstances that would normally demand an emotional evaluation and resultant function. Unless indifference can be characterized as an emotive function, then this marked avoidance of any clear emotive purpose or evaluation in this titular move suggests an overarching intent to minimize emotional response in the reader by presenting this highly charged news as objective and decontextualized information. We will return to this analytical evaluation later in the discussion portion of this paper.

Move 2: Characterizing the Person Who Has Been Killed

Move 2 also presents a primarily referential function, but its more specific purpose lies in its particular characterization of the person who has been killed via emotive function. This characterization is two-fold: First, the person is identified as a soldier. This label, as noted in the above discourse analysis, thus moves the reader's focal perception away from the death of a fellow human being and toward the death of an occupational representative. As Bhatia (1993) notes in his description of genre, the communicative function of a genre is perhaps best exposed by breaking the linguistic conventions that constitute that genre. Thus, as evidence to the communicative purpose of this generic feature, the modified phrase, "The D.o.D. announced today the death of a *person*...[or *man, woman, citizen, or human being*]" contrasts quite noticeably with the actual corpus language stating, "The D.o.D. announced today the death of a *soldier*." Additionally, one can identify a second characterization of the person who was killed as "supporting Operation Iraqi Freedom." Here, despite a lack of appeal to emotion concerning the killing itself, a clear emotive function is employed. Indeed, it could even be argued that a justification or rationale for the violent death of this person is provided. As discussed in the heuristic discourse analysis above, the use of *supporting*

and *Operation Iraqi Freedom* each suggest that those persons killed are 1) personal advocates of the conflict in Iraq as well as 2) participants in a heroic and moral fight whose only intention is to bring liberty to Iraq and its people. This casting of individuals killed as courageous and noble servants to a just and moral cause provides clear evidence of a highly emotive communicative function, one that is presumably intended to justify the cost of these violent deaths.

Move 3: Characterizing the Circumstances of the Killing

This next move provides the actual description of the killing itself and illustrates an important element of the overall function of the individual corpus texts. Particularly relevant for our analysis is the extreme brevity and lack of context in these characterizations of death. Only eight of the 22 words contained in the sentence devoted to Move 3 actually describe the immediate circumstances of the killing. Moreover, when the killing is described, as in Fig. 1.2 above, it focuses only on questions of “*what* happened, “*how* this person was killed” (and occasionally vague references, as in ‘enemy forces,’ in response to “*who*”), while the text completely ignores more important questions of “*why*” and “*for what reason.*” Also of interest is the lack of any detail regarding the exact nature of the person’s death. Again, in a reference to Bhatia (1993), the linguistic conventions of this genre exclude descriptive accounts altogether, most notably in the characterization of the killing/dying of individual persons. Thus, if we were to break with this convention and provide such descriptive detail, the communicative function of the text would be entirely different and thus in contrast to the actual communicative function: Sergeant X ...*died of massive hemorrhaging to the stomach, ...was decapitated, ...burned to death, ...was crushed under a vehicle.* Such descriptions are certainly accurate accounts of at least some of the deaths reported by the D.o.D., yet the actual

characterization of these violent deaths in the corpus texts is limited to innocuous descriptions of instruments of death rather than of what was suffered by the victim. Indeed, if our alternative descriptions, centering on the human suffering of death, were included, they would stand in complete contrast to the lack of detail and dehumanizing descriptions provided by the D.o.D. This, then, would appear to make clear the communicative function of this textual move as one intent on minimizing perception of the human realities of death and thus a significant cost of ‘Operation Iraqi Freedom.’

Move 4: Emphasizing the Individual as a Member of the Organization

The communicative function of this move is quite plainly displayed by the inclusion of a long list of organizational designations to which the recently killed individual once belonged. Specifically, the exclusion of any significant detail surrounding the circumstances of the actual killing of the individual in the preceding move, and the inclusion of an enormous amount of seemingly all-but-irrelevant information regarding the precise divisional assignment of the same individual in this move, suggest that its primary communicative function is deemphasis of the individual (including details of his killing) and emphasis on his inclusion within the U.S. Military. Indeed, the majority of corpus materials display a longer description (averaging 10 words) of divisional assignment than the description of the actual killing of the individual (averaging 7 words). The intent to associate the individual with the larger organization thus mirrors the overarching function of this discourse in its deemphasis of the person in favor of the organization and larger social goals.

Move 5: Directing of Inquiries

This fifth and final move performs the limited function of directing action for those wanting more information as well as closes the text. The imperative clause, “contact Army Public Affairs at...” is what Jakobson designates the *conative* function of a speech event and serves to direct inquiries as well as to imply that such additional information is easily obtainable by following the directives of the imperative, an implication called into question by the difficulty of obtaining additional information at this number for purposes of the present study. In addition to this conative communicative function, however, there also seems to be a *phatic* functional component to this move, which indicates the end or closing of the discourse. Anyone who has had experience reading releases or reports by governmental organizations has likely found the exact phrase, “For further information related to this issue, contact...,” or something similar, within the last lines of the text. Indeed, while this final move does provide referential information in addition to conative prescriptions, it also simply serves as a phatic and conventionalized closing to the text.

VIII. Discussion

The roles and functions of discourse, as we have seen in the preceding analyses, lie far beyond the explicit levels of language that embody them. Function may be found in form, but formal conventions often disguise functional intent. The discourse of our present corpus of D.o.D. “Identified Army Casualty” releases has presented a rich source for analysis of such covert communicative function. What may initially appear to be a straightforward account of a soldier’s death becomes, through the lens of discourse analysis, a complex arrangement of subtle attempts to

shape perception and understanding. Using Johnstone's (2002) heuristic for discourse analysis, we have outlined a multiplicity of contextualized language functions within these corpus materials by examining both the discoursal features present in the text as well as those items omitted: the use of *death* in place of *killed* has been elucidated as a lexical choice with significant impact on the perception of such loss of life; the employment of the verb *supporting* has been suggested as a presumptuous characterization of advocacy of the conflict in Iraq on behalf of these recently killed individuals; 'Operation Iraqi Freedom' has been deconstructed to show its moral assumptions and ambiguity of purpose; the co-construction and intertextual properties of the D.o.D. discourse and outside interpretations have been highlighted as important components of an underlying attempt to shape U.S. public opinion; and insights from linguistic register have been cast as an attempt to distance the D.o.D. from the reality of and responsibility for the violent deaths experienced by these individuals. Similarly, employing an adaptation of Swalesian genre move analysis, we have demonstrated the individual and collective functions of the componential 'moves' that constitute this genre of text: The use of strictly referential function in the titular move, alongside a distinct and unusual avoidance of emotive function, has been noted as an attempt to promote personal distance and deemphasis of the humanity in these killings; conversely, the subsequent move in the exploitation of emotive function in the use of *soldier* and 'Operation Iraqi Freedom' has been identified as a subtle appeal to ideals of heroism and both patriotic and moral duty in order to justify the harsh cost of the violence in the Iraqi conflict; the specific accounts of circumstances surround the killings of soldiers has also been analyzed and evaluated as an exercise in deemphasis and dehumanization of their respective deaths; the attempt to accentuate these dead soldiers' association with and collective role in the military over their individual humanity was also discussed as a means of dehumanizing the individual and deemphasizing the significance of their deaths; and finally, the

last generic move of the text was presented as a phatic signal of closing alongside a dubious intimation of the availability of additional information concerning the killings of these soldiers via a telephone call.

IX. Conclusion

Presented with such an enormity of analysis, we are able to draw several key conclusions concerning the overarching functions that underlie the fundamental purpose of this genre of texts. As a preface to these conclusions and identification of purpose, however, it must be recognized that these texts result from a need to report the occurrence of these deaths in general. This obligation to inform the American media and public at large is of course compelled by legal, political, and moral codes of conduct. Despite this basic requisite, however, the function of this reporting is just as clearly an attempt to deemphasize the humanity of those individuals killed so as to minimize the associated emotional response to such human tragedy. We have numerous examples of such deemphasis and dehumanization in the choice of *death* over *kill* to characterize the event, the lack of descriptors concerning the event itself, the emphasis of group- or professional-role association over individual humanity, and the use of ‘Operation Iraqi Freedom’ as justification for these violent deaths—via themes of noble sacrifice in pursuit of a larger moral cause. This deemphasis of the killings of these soldiers alongside a parallel intent to dehumanize them as individuals defines a covert function of this genre of corpus texts. In addition, this same function is also effectively accomplished by the creation of interpersonal distance and deemphasis of responsibility via formal linguistic register and the use of these very press releases to affect co-construction and subsequent intertextuality in the media. Moreover, this functional operation is most clearly recognized from within a contextual

perspective that demonstrates its need by the D.o.D. to shape the divided U.S. public opinion over the military's continued role in Iraq despite such frequency of individual death. The definition of such function through form presents the summative result of our dual methodological analysis of D.o.D. "Identified Army Casualty" discourse in this study. The systematic consideration of function within form has led us to conclude that these corpus items are not simply announcements of deaths, but textual representatives of a complex and coordinated series of integrated functions intended to serve the purpose of deemphasis of these killings and dehumanization of the dead individuals.

In elucidating this interplay between form and function of text and its semiotic implication within the climate of military conflict and extreme sociopolitical controversy, the present study also suggests a powerful argument for mixed methodologies of discourse analysis as an instrument of investigation. By drawing on both formal linguistic properties of lexical choice and discoursal sequencing as well as functional considerations of the semiotic significance of language in context, the present analysis succeeded in triangulating consistent textual themes through the use of compound linguistic indicators. Such methodology represents an interdisciplinary approach to textual analysis that has important and pragmatic implications for both linguistic and literary scholars as well as dissidents of authorial power in any form. Specifically, the formal and functional approaches showcased in the present study outline a model for the complementary deconstruction of text and meaning from a simultaneously empirical (through formal properties) and interpretive (through functional, contextual properties) perspective. Such an approach provides a more representative and comprehensive survey of the analytical object in question as it serves also to validate and buttress the reliability of those conclusions drawn. The findings of the present study thus indicate the need for and priority of further study of interdisciplinary methods of analysis as a means of explicating meaning in text.

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