

## **Star Wars – The Reality**

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### **1 The data**

A year ago, just before the PALA conference in Switzerland, my partner, Dave, came back from a conference of the Global Network Against Nuclear Weapons in Space he had attended in Colorado, USA. During the hand-over of the children he showed me some of the material that he had picked up out there and I was immediately struck by an impression of Hollywood meeting Game Boy as I flicked through the pages of text and diagrams. I was looking at the ‘Long Range Plan’ produced by USSPACECOM and incorporating a summary of its ‘Vision for 2020’. When I learned that this conference was to have the discourses of war as its theme, I knew that I needed to try and get into this text to find out more about the mind-set of the US military and to see whether the plan was really as Hollywood-fantasy as it appeared at first sight.

The Long Range Plan is divided into 12 chapters and is a very long document. In order to get further than the Foreward and Introduction, but to avoid being drowned by data, I chose the first two chapters after the Introduction for detailed analysis, since much of what follows these chapters is a more detailed and expanded version of what is in them. I also looked closely at the Foreward and Introduction themselves on the grounds that many of the politicians and others reading this plan would get no further than these summaries of the document.

### **2 The approach**

As a linguist ‘brought up’ on a diet of structuralism and Chomskyan grammar, I came late to the offshoots of Hallidayan functional grammar that include critical discourse analysis. It was very gratifying after all that impartiality that there were people out there who believed it was alright to use the relatively objective tools of analysis provided by linguistics to criticise texts that were contributing to oppression in various

ways. You will note that the last sentence makes a number of assumptions about the nature of language and linguistics, not least that there is such a thing as ‘relative’ objectivity and that language is one of the factors in the construction of social values. I will return to these issues later.

Recently there has been a considerable amount of criticism of critical linguistics itself, which is entirely justified as a course of action, though I am not in agreement with all of the criticisms that are made. In order to rescue my favoured approach to textual analysis, which is derived from the work of the critical discourse analysts, I decided that this paper would partly be used as an opportunity to investigate the difficult issues of theory and methodology raised by the likes of Michael Toolan and Henry Widdowson. The debate between Mackay and the ‘great and good’ of PALA about the scientificness of stylistics is also relevant here and I will return to these issues at the end of the paper, when you have seen my analysis of the data.

The type of analysis presented here, then, is based on the familiar themes of transitivity, nominalisation and modality used by many critical linguists. The difference is that I am trying to question and document the methodology as I go. I also want to introduce the question of whether there are other themes that might be chosen as readily as these three to illustrate the ‘point of view’ of the text.

## **2.1 Nominals**

One of the problems I have found in trying to apply critical methodology is that many of the books on the subject are effectively textbooks which show neat (although not always convincing) examples of what is meant by their analytical labels. The question of whether you look at all nominals in a text or just pick out the ones that are obviously derived from verbs and have a political effect is not normally addressed. In teaching ‘Language and Power’ modules I have become convinced that the use of any noun phrase where a clause might have been used has a particular (if not always politically suspect) effect. The effect is one of reification – of packaging the information in a way that makes it more difficult to question than a clause.

There is enough of the scientific linguist in me to want some clarity of method and I find this to be true of students too. I therefore extracted all the noun phrases in the text for the purpose of seeing whether there was any pattern in their construction and/or content. Was there a process of reification going on? Were there rhetorical devices such as three-part-lists being used? Were the roles played by these noun phrases of any particular kind? Did they include a range of referents, or a majority of one kind of referent? I was not interested in statistics because it seems to me perfectly legitimate to pick out and analyse a single noun phrase if there is something interesting about the way it appears to be contributing to the meaning, as long as you have looked at them all. It is also very difficult (and often irrelevant) to decide what to count – for example do I treat noun phrases operating within the relative clause inside another noun phrase as separate items or not? Nevertheless, where there were topographical features of the text (such as a predominance of a particular kind of noun phrase), it seems entirely relevant to mention these too.

## **2.2 Transitivity**

Critical linguists have made a lot of headway by analysing the transitivity of texts and drawing conclusions as to its significance. As in the case of nominals, the literature doesn't tell me whether to look at all clauses and decide on their transitivity or to pick out the foregrounded ones (presumably only foregrounded for me as a reader with a particular angle on the text). Although I could make a case for the latter, I have a hankering after comprehensiveness. Like Widdowson I am left feeling anxious by analyses that show one or two examples and might be conveniently ignoring counter-examples. Of course, this paper will have to pick examples as illustrations, but I wanted it to be clear that all the data has been treated equally.

Another problem with transitivity is that the allocation of verbs to categories is fraught with difficulty. It is mostly easy to distinguish between relational processes, particularly those using the verb 'BE' and material processes. It is much harder when you're dealing with 'real' data to decide whether a material process verb is actually an event or an intentional action. Simpson (1993) distinguishes these on the basis of the animateness (or otherwise) of the Actor, but as will become clear in my analysis, there

are cases where the verb is more of an intentional action, but the actor is inanimate. The problem is partly one of metaphor and personification (see analysis), but it also relates at a fundamental level to the relation between form and function in this kind of analysis. It is easy to tell students that the issue with transitivity is that the form shows us how the text chooses to present the process. It is much harder, given our experiences as readers, to see the surface form and **not** read the underlying meaning.

### 2.3 Modality

Modality illustrates another problem with the practice of critical analysis. Whilst it is easy to pick out all of the modal verbs, and nearly as easy to disregard those that simply present the future time references, it is much harder to say in advance which other features of the text might be expected to present us with modal meaning. Some of the textbooks give us clues to look at adverbs like ‘probably’ etc., but there is no real attempt to start compiling a comprehensive list of those places where modality resides. Part of the reason for this is that we will never finish such a list. One of the wonderful things about language is that it is precisely the lack of one-to-one correspondence between form and function that allows there to be more than one meaning, or a range of meanings for a single form. It is this same characteristic that gives nominalisation the power to presuppose the existence of things and/or reify them. It is the fact of nouns being prototypically ‘things’ – of naming even – that enables nominalised verbs or nominal groups to package ideas and actions as though they were unquestionable ‘wholes’. And it is the same form-function variability/ stability that identifies modality most obviously with the modal auxiliaries, but partly with other maverick items across a range of other grammatical forms.

For the analyst with any intention of rigour, this presents a problem. Forms are relatively easy to identify, functions much less so. In the end we are left with precedence, expertise and experience to build up a backlog of analysis which we can all draw on and discuss the merits of. It is no good saying (as Widdowson does) that linguists are *guilty* of ‘reading’ meanings into texts:

What strikes a particular reader, even one as astute as Fairclough, is hardly conclusive evidence of how ideological significance is written covertly into texts. It is evidence only of what the reader reads into it (Widdowson 1998:146).

We all give credence to phoneticians with years of aural training who say that a sound is plosive or palatal, without requiring untrained hearers to make the same judgement before we will believe it. Why are we so much harder on linguists dealing with the arguably more complex issues of form and meaning? I would suggest (and will try to justify later) that what we need to do, if we want critical analysis to continue, is to begin the long slow process of documenting just those mappings of form and function<sup>i</sup> that seem to us most interesting in the construction of textual meaning. Much work has been done already (and not all under the heading of critical analysis) that could feed into this process, but we cannot skip the boring part just to make political capital – this is what makes Widdowson attack and Toolan unhappy.

## 2.4 Time

Last Easter some of us were in Berne, at the last PALA conference, where the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the English department at the university was being celebrated. In order to honour the theme of the conference – time – I wrote a paper on the poetry of an Irish poet, Mebdh McGuckian, who I thought was constructing a particular view of time in her collection of poems called *Venus and the Rain*. What struck me then and now was that the theme of ‘time’ is one among many aspects of the meaning of a text that the reader constructs in reading and which could well be an aspect of ‘point of view’ that we ought to add to transitivity and the rest as part of a critical (or even a simply stylistic) analysis. McGuckian’s time scales were (predictably for a feminist) cyclical and retrospective. The forms presenting her view of time were not only verbal tenses, and time adverbials, but also morphemes (like the use of re- to indicate repeated processes) and imagery such as that based on reflection and mirrors.

Although poetry is not the issue here, it seemed a good idea to try out a similar approach on the current data, to see whether there is any ‘future’ in the idea of time as one of the ‘planks’ of point of view analysis.

### 3 The reader

Although I am focussing on the text – as critical linguists are wont to do – I would like to make a case for the place of my analysis in the context of the data itself. There are a few indications in the text that the constructed reader (i.e. implied reader) is at least American (references to ‘our nation’ for example) and probably a military person – this is clear from the Foreward which says:

- Finally, this plan validates that the only way to achieve our vision is to eliminate stovepipes in our business by forging active partnerships throughout the space community. I look forward to engaging you on this plan and achieving together the fullest promise of space.

Having said that, it is clear that the writer(s) - we’re never told who or how many – are aware of the likely political readership of this document. There are indications in the text that its main purpose is to convince politicians of the wisdom of the plan and to fund it accordingly. In addition, the US has a Freedom of Information Act which means that all US citizens are theoretically entitled to read such documents. As a result, they are put onto the internet for ease of access and the writer(s) will know that the potential readership will include both ‘friendly’ and ‘enemy’ (how easy it is to use opposites) politicians as well as terrorists and peace campaigners opposed to all weapons in space. Students of history, politics, war, peace, suppliers of military hardware and software and communications equipment may also be amongst the readership of this text. I would suggest that although the military and political audience forms the implied and real intended readership, we cannot be at all sure of the writers’ complex motivations and anticipation of this wider readership. It is therefore as legitimate to read from one of these viewpoints (for example, the peace campaigner one) as any other.

I would also argue, in defence of the relative objectivity of stylistic analysis, that it is likely that defenders of the text would agree with many of the naturalisations I suggest

are detectable from the text. What is at issue politically is not *what* is taken for granted – it is *whether it should be*.

## 4 The findings

### 4.1 Future Strategic Environment

#### 4.1.1 *Nominals*

This chapter on the ‘Future Strategic Environment’ sets out the scenario anticipated by the Long Range Plan and in which it is expected that the military will have to operate. What is striking about the introduction to this chapter is that it describes what follows in this way:

- To further explore the anticipated 2020 environment, we have compiled some key political, economic, technological, military, and space *trends and assertions*. (...). Following the trends and assertions, we'll discuss their implications for US space power.

The use of the verb ‘compile’ implies that these ‘trends and assertions’ somehow pre-exist the process of compiling. This lends them credibility, although there is no reference to any sources for the trends or justification for the assertions. Incidentally, the standard of writing and referencing in this report would be derided in academic circles, though academic reports generally have far less impact on the world than this one. There is no clear distinction made in this chapter between what is a trend and what is an assertion. I tried to label them, but it was impossible, because of the lack of evidence or sourcing, to categorise them.

The nominal groups in this chapter, and in all the data I have looked at, very rarely refer to human actors directly, except the occasional use of ‘we’ (7 in over 200) to refer to the writers, the military or the US as a whole. These pronouns never have a clear textual antecedent, so that the reader has some leeway in deciding which referent is relevant. There *are* fairly common examples of noun phrases referring to groups of people, such as ‘the United States’ or ‘the National Defense Panel’ as well as a small but significant group of nominals based on the idea of the enemy:

Though some of these nominal groups use indefinite articles and adjectives like ‘potential’ (see modality section) to indicate that there is no specific enemy in mind, and indeed no necessary enemy at all, there is slippage between definite and indefinite reference and a number of examples of plural or uncountable where definite may be assumed:

Indefinite	an adversary (x 2) / An adversary's ability to command and control forces / An enemy a global military peer competitor / Anyone with Internet access
Definite	our enemies' potency / The adversary / The enemy's hostile capabilities / They (referring to the enemy) / Amplifying the potential threat
Plural and therefore ambiguous, but often detailed enough to sound quite definite	Enemies adversaries (x 2) / Lesser powers and other actors / Enemy nations that can track satellites and fire significant payloads into space / some potential threats to US space systems and operations. / Future potential adversaries / national military forces, paramilitary units, terrorists, and any other potential adversaries / Non-state actors (e.g., drug cartels, crime syndicates, terrorist organizations, as well as non-governmental organizations and multi-national corporations)
Uncountable	Enemy battlefield situational awareness

There is a tendency towards equating other nation-states who might acquire the same technology as the US with potential adversaries. The following extract conjoins ‘nations’ with non-state actors, who have earlier been defined as “drug cartels, crime syndicates, terrorist organizations, as well as non-governmental organizations and multi-national corporations”:

- Nations and non-state actors with enough resources will immediately gain access to new systems and technologies. More nations will access space and information technologies and products.

Such statements (trends and assertions), in juxtaposition with United States’ claims to space superiority and dominance, lead to the implicature that any actor (nation-state or not) will be seen as an adversary by the US, if it has the new technologies.

Most of the remaining nominals in this chapter, the majority, have inanimate referents, such as ‘space’, ‘space capabilities’, or more complex noun phrases such as ‘tetherless, mobile, and wireless access from anywhere on the globe’ or leading-edge commercial space services’. The ‘packaging’ and reifying of ideas by noun phrases is widely exemplified here and although it may be a commonplace of comment on military language to say that it relies on euphemism and jargon, it is quite stunning to see the extent to which the stereotype is true in this text:

- Rapid integration of information enabled by space capabilities, will be the key to successful operations.

This example is typical, as we shall see in the section on transitivity, of constructions where almost all of the information is contained in two noun phrases either side of an intensive verb. The only question the reader is led to ask is whether the two sides of the equation are in fact equivalent. Their internal structure is not open to question, so that the existence of ‘the key to successful operations’ is presupposed, as is the existence of something as vaguely described as ‘rapid integration of information enabled by space capabilities’. Similarly with the following sentence where the first noun phrase ‘leads to’ the second:

- The precision and lethality of future weapons will lead to increased massing of effects rather than massing of forces.

Here, the first noun phrase is also responsible for producing an existential presupposition. Future weapons will exist and will be very precise and lethal. The sentence proposes that the outcome will be one thing rather than another, using parallel structures to lend apparent elegance to the argument. The new weapons are so powerful and accurate that they can have a greater effect than old-style troop movement. One is tempted to use the same elegance of parallel structures to perform an intervention in this sentence, putting the people back into the text. Thus:

- With the new weapons we will be able to kill lots of enemies without needing to deploy lots of friends who might get killed.

#### 4.1.2 *Modality*

In the chapter on the ‘Future Strategic Environment’, there are a large number of modal verbs, many of them clearly indicating nothing more than future time:

- Rapid advancement of technology *will create* revolutionary breakthroughs.

Apart from questioning whether this (and the many sentences like it) says anything at all, we can only comment about this use of modal auxiliaries that the English language treats the future as modal, because it is unknown.

More interesting are the uses of modals and other items to show different kinds of modalities. Many items showing epistemic modality, particularly those emphasising the doubtful end of the spectrum, are collocated with the enemies or adversaries as in the following examples:

- Enemies *may very well* know, in near real time, the disposition of all forces.
- Other nations, and *possibly* multi-national corporations, will challenge the United States.
- Forward presence will continue to be important to shaping and preparing a region, but *sovereignty issues may* impede it.

There is only one specific mention of relative certainty, and that is ascribed to USSPACECOM/ the writer(s):

- One of the long acknowledged and commonly understood advantages of space-based platforms is no restriction or country clearances to overfly a nation from space. *We expect* this advantage to endure.

I would read these modal choices in an otherwise largely categorical text (the LRP as a whole) as indicating the unpredictability of the ‘enemy’ or ‘other’ and the confidence of the US representatives in their own views.

Other epistemic modalities, indicating ability but not certainty of use, relate to the technology:

- Low-earth orbiting satellites *can be* accurately tracked,
- laser attacks against these sensors *can be* highly effective.

The only place where deontic modality comes into play is where the implications of this ‘future strategic environment’ (compiled from trends and assertions) are assessed and the necessary action is advised:

- Given the huge economic and military importance of space, *USSPACECOM must* shape the region of space and be prepared to protect and defend the US national interests and investments in space.
- Over time, *USSPACECOM must*: develop and maintain the ability to achieve space superiority when required.

It is interesting to note the rhetorical strategy being used here, which moves from asserting how things are to claiming some imperatives about how ‘we’ should act. This sleight of hand would have been criticised by Kant (...)

#### 4.1.3 *Transitivity*

There is a relatively large proportion of Relational – intensive processes in this chapter (29%). I have already indicated one of the issues related to these structures which is that they tend to act like equals signs with a noun phrase on one side (the Carrier) and either another noun phrase or an adjective phrase (the Attribute) on the other. This leaves very little for the clause to do – and little for the reader to assimilate or question, since the equating (or not) of the two roles is the proposition of the sentence.

- Advanced warheads and stealth technology will become more common in ballistic missiles.
- Space capabilities are becoming absolutely essential for military operations, national commerce, and everyday life.

As we shall see, this kind of construction is even more common in the next chapter, but even here it indicates the categorical kind of statement that characterises this text. Given the lack of any substantiation of such statements, and the fact that this chapter is the foundation and ‘validation’ of the rest of the plan, a critical reader might want to question their ‘truth value’. This is possible, but not very meaningful since the proposition of the first sentence is partly an intended outcome of the plan, but is being used here as its justification. The second subject is so vague as to be meaningless, but is one of the most common noun phrases in the text. It may be argued that the term ‘space capabilities’ is one that would be understood by the

intended audience of the LRP. However, I would say that it is part of some interesting ‘slippage’ between the justification for the use of space for purposes of defence and for purposes of attack. I will return to this subject shortly.

#### 4.1.4 Time

The construction of time in this chapter is mainly linear, and largely located in the future scenario that is being envisaged as a background to the LRP. The opening is particularly reminiscent of science fiction settings:

- In 2020, prior to hostilities or during peace operations, an adversary will have sophisticated regional situational awareness.

As already mentioned in connection with the use of modal auxiliaries, much of the text is simple future prediction, although it is difficult to distinguish, sometimes, between pure prediction and wish-fulfilment:

- The United States will remain a global power and exert global leadership.

What is interesting about the use of tenses to create time in this text is that the futuristic thread is punctuated by – and at times alternated with – descriptions of present-time circumstances:

- Space capabilities *are proliferating* around the world. Space commerce *is increasingly* integral to the global economy.
- Military and commercial uses of space *will become* vital national interests for the United States.
- Achieving space superiority during conflicts *will be* critical to the US success on the battlefield.

These three successive ‘trends and assertions’ under the heading ‘SPACE’, are typical of the juxtaposition of present circumstances with future predictions. Although no causal effect is made explicit, readers (critical or otherwise) might well conclude that there is a military and commercial imperative being stated which is based on the existing proliferation of ‘space capabilities’.

Unlike the time-shapes produced by the poetry of Mebdh McGuckian, this chapter seems to leave almost no possibility for ‘branching off’ to another, alternative future than the one it envisages. McGuckian’s poems are full of explorations of what might have happened, what could still happen and what might be happening (somewhere else) differently. This text seems to allow for only one interpretation of the past (as we

shall see in discussing the next chapter), one statement (assertion) of the present and one prediction (trend) of the future.

It is not appropriate to argue (if you wanted to) that this is a functional text with little leisure to dream about alternatives like poetry does – and with the ‘reality’ of linear time to contend with. On the one hand history is littered with predictions that turned out to be wrong. And more interestingly, on the other hand, we are dealing with a text that concerns space. The space-time continuum is not apparently relevant to the small-time human military affairs described here, but there is an indication in the text that space at least is not a ‘given’ shape:

- Given the huge economic and military importance of space, USSPACECOM must shape the region of space

A similar notion of active human intervention in ‘shaping’ space occurs in the Introduction:

- USSPACECOM needs to shape, protect, and defend the region of space as stated in the 1998 Unified Command Plan.

The text does not seem to be taking for granted the given shape of space. There is no necessary reason why time should not be taken to be just as pliable, but the only occurrence of any alternative future the reader is presented with is an ‘unthinkable’ one:

- It would be intolerable for US forces, modeled along the lines of a Joint Vision 2010 force, to be deprived of capabilities in space.

## **4.2 Usspacecom Vision For 2020**

The chapter following the ‘Future Strategic Environment’ sets out the ‘Vision for 2020’ upon which the rest of the Long Range Plan rests. After the rather tasteless pun on ‘2020 vision’, implying that this document sees clearly and accurately, the chapter sets out first how space will support the achieving of Joint Vision 2010 (a joint armed forces plan) and then sets up the ‘four operational concepts’ of Vision 2020 which structure the whole of the remainder of the LRP.

### *4.2.1 Nominals*

The striking thing about the nominals in this chapter is that many of them are not functioning grammatically in clauses, but participate in lists of ‘Common

Characteristics’ or ‘Additional Characteristics’, effectively acting as partial definitions to the headings they follow:

### **Focused Logistics**

Additional Characteristics:

Agile organizations with advanced capabilities that allow for a smaller, in-theater logistics "footprint" and reduced logistics "tails" at all echelons.

Sustained, continuous, flexible logistics operations-tailored for optimum support-from the source of supply to the point of need.

These lists of characteristics authenticate the original nominal, in this example ‘focused logistics’. Following text uses the new term as shorthand for the list of characteristics and the new ‘package’ referred to by the nominal begins to have more tangible existence for the reader, irrespective of her/his orientation to the text.

As in the FSE chapter, there are very few personal pronouns (9 out of 237 NPs) and there are fewer collective human nouns (like ‘the US’) than in the previous chapter. There is not even much mention of enemies/adversaries now either. Much more common head nouns in often very long noun phrases are abstract, or at least very general words like ‘systems’, ‘power’, ‘capabilities’, ‘surveillance’, ‘ability’, ‘operations’.

Many of the nominals produce presuppositions, mostly existential ones like the following:

Military satellite communications are key to achieving Dominant Maneuver on *the future battlefield*.

Here the existence of the ‘future battlefield is not in doubt, and it might be suggested that ‘Dominant Maneuver’ is naturalised as an absolute good by being made the goal of the verb ‘achieve’. There are many other such examples where the ‘concepts’ of

both Joint Vision 2010 and Vision 2020 are treated as existing (though most of them are so far still ideas) and as obviously desired:

- Space Support to Information Superiority
- Space-based capabilities (collecting, generating and transmitting) are critical to the uninterrupted flow of information throughout the battlespace

Notice the definite reference to ‘the battlespace’. If I were to intervene in a sentence of this kind, I would put in some hedges:

- Space-based capabilities (collecting, generating and transmitting) *would be* critical to the uninterrupted flow of information throughout *any* battlespace

I wouldn’t get the funding!

There are a surprisingly large number of nominals containing some kind of three-part list in this chapter (there were also a large number in FSE). Some of them are part of the nostalgic look back at the pioneering spirit of America. Notice the use of the second person possessive ‘our’, here meaning, presumably, Americans (or at least European-descended ones):

- Similarly, during the westward expansion of the continental United States, military outposts and cavalry emerged to protect our *wagon trains, settlements and railroads*.

Some use three adjectives giving a completeness of description which would not be achieved by two or four adjectives:

- Sustained, continuous, flexible logistics operations

And there are some very complex noun phrases, like the following, which use a number of embedded three-part lists:

- the fusion of *information, logistics and transportation* technologies *to provide* rapid crisis response, *to track and shift* assets while en route, and *to deliver* tailored logistics packages and sustainment directly at the *strategic, operational and tactical* level of operations.

I defy any reader to make a great deal of sense of this noun phrase, but the impact might well be that all the options are covered – that it is safe to leave the defence of the country in the hands of whoever wrote this document!

#### 4.2.2 *Modality*

There is far less to say about the modality of this chapter, because having set up the predicted future in the last chapter, the Vision behaves as though there were no (or very few) doubts about what will happen and is largely categorical in its statements (see transitivity section).

There is one significant exception to the dominant categorical mode, which is when the chapter discusses the placing of weapons in space – and their use. Currently not part of US policy, and contrary to a number of international treaties, the writers are obliged to acknowledge the ‘hypothetical’ nature of their statements about such things. At this point a rash of modality breaks out:

##### **Global Engagement**

- the *potential* ability to apply force from space.
- By 2020, a second generation system for National Missile Defense *is expected* to be in place-with many of the weapons and sensors *potentially* moving into space.
- *At present*, the notion of weapons in space is not consistent with US national policy.
- Planning for *the possibility* is a purpose of this plan *should* our civilian leadership decide that the application of force from space is in our national interest.

This section on ‘Global Engagement’, which clearly rests on the ability to place weapons in space, is set out as an equal and indeed intrinsic part of the LRP. Global Engagement is also given a chapter to itself (chapter 6) and though it reminds us of the current political position, it continues to plan for the placing of weapons in space and talks of ‘updating’ treaties to allow for this. Such an attitude was also previewed in the Introduction:

- Eventually, as it continues to mature, it may allow us to project force from space to earth.
- Although international treaties and legalities constrain some of the LRP's initiatives and concepts, our abilities in space will keep evolving as we address these legal, political, and international concerns.

Notice that some of the verbs (notably 'mature' and 'evolve') in these extracts have very positive connotations of progress and improvement.

The very widespread use of the nominal 'space capabilities' throughout the text seems to this reader to be a euphemistic and conveniently vague way of referring to both information-based technology and weapons-based installations. Where the phrase is used in general statements about the impending reliance of the US on 'space capabilities', the phrase has not ambiguous but vague reference to a range of hard- and software, including weapons.

#### 4.2.3 *Transitivity*

Like the Future Strategic Environment chapter, the Vision has a high incidence of Relational – intensive main clauses (50%). Many of these clauses appear to define the terminology that is being introduced in this chapter and forms the headings of later chapters: Control of Space, Global Engagement, Full Force Integration, Global Partnerships.

- Control of Space (CoS) is the ability to ensure uninterrupted access to space for US forces and our allies, freedom of operations within the space medium and an ability to deny others the use of space, if required

Once these definitions have been given, the referent appears to have a kind of tangible existence that it didn't have before. Once this chapter has set up these terms, the rest of the LRP depends on them as though they were in some sense 'given'.

Other relational intensive clauses in this chapter operate similarly to those in the FSE chapter where they are simply categorical statements usually with no modality, which gives them an air of authority:

- The ability to gain and maintain space superiority will become critical to the joint campaign plan

Of the other clauses in this chapter, some are made difficult to analyse by the use of inanimate subjects, despite the verbs being apparently intentional in their meaning:

- Space-based surveillance assets *will provide* near real time threat detection, targeting data, and damage assessment,
- space forces *may protect* the country's commercial assets in this medium.

These examples can be dealt with under the heading of metaphorical extensions that become less metaphorical over time (as Halliday would argue<sup>ii</sup>), but it is significant in the current context to realise that the verbs 'protect' and 'provide' have become so widely naturalised as verbs of warfare.

Another significant group of clauses are those with apparently agentless verbs such as 'emerge' and 'evolve':

- Navies and armies *have evolved* to protect national interests and investments
- Similarly, during the westward expansion of the continental United States, military outposts and cavalry *emerged* to protect our wagon trains, settlements and railroads.
- Air power *emerged* differently because it *evolved* to support land and sea operations

These verbs have connotations of 'naturalness' which seem to be part of the rhetorical structure of this section where the history of the development of various kinds of military structure is given as an 'explanation' of, and justification for what is happening in space now. This reader would suggest that contrary to the implications of these 'agentless' verbs, there have been human beings pushing through all of these developments, just as the writers of this document are actively pursuing the development of space for warfare. What happens if we try putting some of the people back into these extracts:

- People have set up navies and armies to stop others competing for the same wealth
- Similarly, during the westward expansion of the continental United States, white settlers built military outposts and put soldiers on horseback to help them take land and resources from the indigenous people without too much resistance.
- The allies developed air power first of all to support the attacks on Germans at sea and on the land.

## 5 The interpretation

What do I want to conclude about this document that represents the current thinking of the top military men in the US?

That it uses the same old excuses of colonialism – i.e. wanting to suppress native uprisings - for wanting to accrue power to itself, certainly:

- Widespread communications will highlight disparities in resources and quality of life - contributing to unrest in developing countries.

That it uses rhetorical arguments in ways that need further study, but include the ‘we need to be ready in case’ argument which was used against me when I had my first child and they stuck drips in my arm ‘just in case’ – resulting in an unpleasant induced delivery. The same argument is being used – and criticised - in Britain by the Labour party for getting ready for introducing the euro in place of sterling. Whatever you think of the euro, it is clear that preparation of this kind usually ends - and is intended to end - in action.

In terms of the analysis presented here, I would argue that the text shows the naturalisation in military circles of the idea that war is a technological operation with no human consequences. Whilst I find Toolan’s (1997) critique of CDA appealing in many respects, my data points up one interesting problem with his exhortation to us to not only criticise, but to show how it can be done better. The consequence of re-writing this text, putting back in the human, would be to not write it at all, because the courses of action prescribed turn out to be unthinkable, at least for this reader.

What else can we say about this rather cursory glance at a very long and complex text? That the reader might envisage the undoubted existence of future enemies of the US

and read them as being unreliable. That the concepts and ideas on which the whole structure and argument relies are often vague (capabilities) and sometimes illegal (Global Engagement). That there is a large number of definitions using intensive verbs, which take concepts for granted and many categorical statements with no support from evidence or argumentation.

That, interestingly, the US military does not shrink from admitting its colonial aspirations as I imagine an ex-colonial power like Britain would. The noun phrase subject of the following extract not only reifies something as intangible as US dominance of space, but in combination with the verb ‘depends’, also presupposes it to be a desirable outcome:

- Our dominance of space depends not only on new systems but on the emerging synergy of space capabilities, CONOPS, organizational change, effective and innovative ways to train and lead, plus our most valuable resource our Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, and Marines.

## **6 The conclusions**

The theoretical context of the work behind this paper is the debate about CDA and stylistics that has been conducted in recent years by people like Widdowson, Mackay and Toolan. During the research and writing I have been conscious of questions about linguistic model and methodology as well as focussed on the data and its political significance. There are many defences that could be made against the attacks that have been levelled at CDA, but in the short time I have I want to answer just a few of them in the light of the work I have presented here.

### **6.1 Point of View**

In a recent review article on CDA, Widdowson (1998) attacks Fowler’s ‘admission’ that ‘in practice, critical linguists get a very high mileage out of a small selection of linguistic concepts such as transitivity and nominalisation’. Widdowson continues:

This would suggest that analysis is not the systematic application of a theoretical model, but a rather less rigorous operation, in effect, a kind

of *ad hoc* bricolage which takes from theory whatever concept comes usefully to hand. [p 137]

This rather unkind presentation of theoretical eclecticism nevertheless points to a problem I have always had with CDA analyses; namely that they seem to be rather patchy with respect to which aspects of the text they discuss. I think the issue of whether there is a single theoretical model underlying the work is somewhat separate from the question of whether the analysis represents a rigorous application of a methodology – and perhaps as importantly whether it is in any sense comprehensive.

In this paper I have suggested tentatively that the construction of time is one of the aspects of ‘point of view’ (to use Simpson’s 1993 term) that could be added to the features of a text to be investigated. This may or may not lead to a critical reading in the sense that CDA usually intends it, but perhaps the tools of CDA might not end up being any different from those we would want to use in the ‘new stylistics’.

It is clear, at any rate to me, that many of the claims I have made about the Long Range Plan would not be contested by someone more inclined to a favourable reading. Thus the naturalisation of nominals describing military concepts would be seen as a useful shorthand to the writers. Similarly, the vagueness of reference of the term ‘space capabilities’ might be defended as necessary by someone who believed sincerely that the engagement of weapons from (and in) space was an inevitable and desirable step which the rest of the world and international treaties would one day catch up with.

With respect to the range of features making up ‘point of view’ I would suggest that more work is needed on the methodology to establish whether there are indeed other equally important aspects to textual creation of meaning.

## 6.2 Theoretical eclecticism

Widdowson (1998) attacks CDA for using whatever analytical tools come to hand:

Fowler himself suggests that there is a varied assortment of other ideas which might be pressed into service (...) It may be that the term

‘model’ is being used here, somewhat idiosyncratically, to mean a collection of expedient practices, which need only a tool-kit and no theoretical warrant whatever. [p 138]

Others will no doubt answer this charge, but I would like to make a case for theoretical eclecticism, as theoretically justified, but without ignoring the fact that rigour and transparency etc (see next section) are essential to the good practice of CDA and any other stylistic analysis.

My case rests on the following claims:

- A theory is a way of looking at (modelling) texts (or other data)
- It can only be a partial picture because it prioritises a particular angle
- A theory can be shown to be wrong (i.e. not fit the data), but never absolutely right.
- Theories can be either mutually contradictory or congruent (or partly either of these!)
- Models must be simpler than the data they describe – otherwise they explain nothing and are the same (i.e. as complex) as the data
- A theory cannot be uniquely true of a body of data, since it is partial.

If you accept these assertions it stands to reason that more than one theory might be used to illuminate any set of data. This does not exclude the possibility that any analyst will work with a single theory at one moment, for particular (explicable) reasons. Neither should we ignore the fact that the choice of theory (and rejection of other theories) in the first place will be partly informed and affected by the person doing the analysis and their background, experience, political viewpoint etc. These aspects of a person’s character and experience will also influence their acceptance of the validity or otherwise of a theoretical approach.

Having said all that, it remains unavoidably true, in my opinion, that theoretical eclecticism is not only useful in illuminating more than one aspect of data, but that it is theoretically defensible too. Perhaps what is needed in the case of CDA is a clearer statement about the model of language that is being assumed. This would include the socio-political aspects of meaning-creation that are often rehearsed by CDA adherents, but perhaps needs more about the specifics of texts themselves, including more investigation of form-function relationships (see section 6.5 too).

### 6.3 Scientificness and objectivity

There has been a debate in *Language and Literature* recently about the scientificness and/or objectivity of stylistics. I will not add to Short et al's riposte (1998) to Mackay's attack, except to say that I see no reason why we should not accept that there are different levels or degrees of objectivity. Not even natural scientists seem to me to be operating at the absolute end of the scale. For example, I would like to know the motivation of a scientist working on biological differences in male and female brains before I would accept the research findings as 'purely' objective.

We shouldn't waste any more time on this debate. Some of us find evidence, rigour and replicability or transparency important in validating our work. The examples of criticism of individual analyses by Widdowson and Toolan merely serve to show that the work is out there in the public arena and open to debate.

### 6.4 Code-inferencing. A continuum?

On the related issues of linguistic determinism, interpretative positivism and the analysis of processes of production and consumption, there is much to explore. I would like to suggest one particular model of these processes which might help us on the other issues.

If we took it that there was a continuum between coded meanings and inferred meanings (which, because of the nature of these terms, sounds unacceptable), there would begin to be a way of explaining processes of social construction of meaning which is not narrowly Whorfian, but allows for the fact that many people want to place text at the centre of hegemonic processes and oppressive practices. All meanings, then, might be seen as constructed by use (and re-use). The context and frequency of occurrence of any level of meaning (from phonological to pragmatic) would determine its level of 'encodedness' – i.e. whether we saw it as part of the language-system or an individual one-off or somewhere in-between.

The situational context would include issues of power differentials within that context and also in the society it occurred in. Thus we can look at overall naturalised

ideologies in Britain, in Café society or in the Socialist Workers' Party – as well as the precise relationship (institutional and/or personal) between the participants.

The full description of the context/relationship between participants will therefore add to our understanding of the enactment of texts where both production and consumption are happening simultaneously. Multiplicity of meaning is allowed for by this model, which would limit the endless possible interpretations only by the attitude and experience of the reader, but would nevertheless not expect open-endedness of meanings, since it is based on precedent. Linguistic determinism is not an automatic result of this model either, though reinforcement of naturalised ideologies is.

One of the reasons I have come to this conclusion about the lack of clear cut-off between coded and inferential meaning is the experience of reading the Long Range Plan for this paper. Whilst it is clear that it has not changed my political outlook, I was conscious that the effect of reading so much text with a militaristic and colonial view of space was that I was gradually beginning to read it 'from within' its own point of view. That is to say that without accepting its viewpoint one starts to think along the lines of "well, you can see why they would say that". It seems to me that the experience of reading meanings naturalised over a long text is a micro-version of what we all do from the early stages of learning language throughout our lives. It is the repetitiveness and unvarying viewpoint that start to make meanings seem coded rather than inferential.

## **6.5 Form-function models**

I have already said something about the relationship between form and function which I am not the first to see as necessarily integrated – not just in practice but theoretically too. If there were a one-to-one relationship (or even a straightforward mapping) of meaning onto form, linguists would have been out of business long ago, but so would politicians and poets.

What is clear to me is that the Hallidayan model (and to be fair some other models too) has always been both formal and functional. It needs more work to map the kinds of

meanings that are stereotypically carried by particular forms but are also carried by other structures – or to put it the other way round - the range of structures that certain meaning-themes are carried by.

## 6.6 Finally

Erich Steiner's comments (in Chilton ed 1985) still seem to be relevant, nearly 15 years on:

One of the most pressing problems of our time, and one of the reasons for this book, is the threat of war. To be able to justify a strategy such as atomic war, the agencies interested in it have to be able to produce very powerful ideologies, i.e. systems of meanings and beliefs. It is part of the essence of the approach adopted here that ideologies are not only described as systems in isolation, but that their function in serving certain interests (profit, dominance, expansion etc.) is also brought to light. Through this type of analysis, we are destroying a myth (...) namely, the myth that scientific insight can be gained by supposedly detached observation, from an impartial point of view in an ivory tower. (...) This view of rational enquiry does not take the doctrine of detachment for granted; rather it assumes that knowledge can be sought out of concern, out of a feeling of involvement and responsibility [p229].

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<sup>i</sup> See section 6.5 for more on form and function.

<sup>ii</sup> Chapter 10 of Halliday (1985) sets out his view of the metaphorical functioning of transitivity relations.