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ABSTRACT

An analysis of war reporting in Japan during World War II examines, from a semantico-syntactic perspective, how language is used to systematize, transform, and sometimes mask reality. In wartime, a strong form of solidarity and control is essential as a device for unification and for maintaining popular morale. The approach is based in the notion that language not only reflects but also constrains perceptions of reality. Specifically, the semantic concept of transitivity is examined, i.e., the expression of "who or what does what to whom or what," and its relevance in political disclosure. Data were drawn from Japanese wartime newspaper reports, including banner headlines, headlines, and article text. It is concluded that in this case, the language or style of the text can shape a fictional reality to respond to social demand. (Contains 32 references.) (MSE)

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# The Analysis of Wartime Reporting: Patterns of Transitivity

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# THE ANALYSIS OF WARTIME REPORTING: PATTERNS OF TRANSITIVITY

Noriko Iwamoto (DAL)

## *Abstract*

*This paper is an attempt to explore the relationship between linguistic structure and socially constructed reality. This research takes the view that the language in a certain text structures its own 'fictional' reality. In order to clarify this process, the theory of transitivity in Functional Grammar will be applied to Japanese wartime newspaper reporting; thus I intend to demonstrate how an unconventional or 'deviated' world is shaped by language in response to certain social demands. This study is an attempt to examine an area where systemic grammar, pragmatics and sociolinguistics meet.*

## 1. Introduction

This paper on language and politics explores the use of language for propaganda purposes during the Second World War in Japan<sup>1</sup>. I examine, principally from a semantico-syntactic point of view, how linguistic resources are used to systematise, transform, and sometimes mask reality. In wartime, a strong form of solidarity and control is essential as a device for unification and for maintaining a people's morale. For this purpose, mystification is utilised to reconstruct reality and to obscure unwanted aspects of reality or threats to national goals. Language plays a significant role in this. Hitler proclaimed that 'revolutions are made solely by the power of the word.' To provide an analysis of the range and complexity of propagandistic language<sup>2</sup>, transitivity theory within the framework of Functional Grammar will be used to examine the wartime newspaper texts of Japan.

### 1.1 'Linguistically constructed world'

My analysis of language and politics is primarily based on the idea that, as suggested by the structuralists Sapir (1956) and Whorf (1956), 'the world is linguistically constructed.' This assumption implies that language not only reflects reality, but also acts as a 'barrier' to reality, and constrains our perception of it. It follows, as a result, that language constitutes, and even manipulates, our thought and world-view. Nevertheless, it is important not to adopt an extreme version of Whorfianism or linguistic determinism, for speakers are not so naive or uncritical as to be passively constrained by their linguistic constructions. It would also be misleading to overemphasise the role of language in perceiving reality, which can even be taken to mean that there is no world outside the self; a type of solipsism.

In the specific case of journalistic reports, however, which are the subject of this paper, it is only through language that past events are reconstructed and presented to us (Kress 1983). In this sense, 'the world is linguistically constructed' in journalism, and it follows that there are alternative ways of describing 'reality' (Burton 1982:200). Such subjective representation of the external world is variously termed as 'projection' or 'representation' (Halliday 1985), 'speech and thought presentation' (Leech and Short 1981) and 'disclosure representation' (Volosinov 1986, Fairclough 1989). As Volosinov (1986) notes, 'journalism possesses semiotic values, has its own kind of orientation toward reality, to refract reality in its own way' (cf. Wang 1993:560). By these means, journalists or propagandists, whether consciously or subconsciously, take advantage of linguistic resources, exploiting certain grammatical constructions or naming systems to 'manipulate' people's thought and behaviour. As an example, let us look at how two British newspapers reproduced the same event so differently, based on Trew's (1979) analysis. Trew

examines the following news coverage of 2 June 1975, which reported an event of civil disorder in pre-independent Zimbabwe:

< **Headline** >

Police Shot 11 Dead in Salisbury Riot

< **Body** >

Riot police shot and killed 11 African demonstrators and wounded 15 others .....

(*The Guardian*)

< **Headline** >

Rioting Blacks Shot Dead by Police as ANC Leaders Meet

< **Body** >

Eleven Africans were shot dead and 15 wounded when Rhodesian police opened fire on a rioting crowd of about 2,000 .....

(*The Times*)

(Trew 1979:98)

In the first place, lexical selection in these texts clearly reflects the difference of political stance of each newspaper: the 'African demonstrators' of the *Guardian* are expressed as 'rioting blacks' and 'a rioting crowd' in the *Times*. Syntactically, as well, the *Guardian* adopts active constructions, thereby foregrounding the 'police' as an element directly responsible for the 'killings'. By contrast, the *Times* employs passive constructions, thereby placing 'rioting blacks' in a prominent position while backgrounding the 'police' (the causer of killings) in a less focal position. In addition, the causal transaction (who did what to whom) is more vaguely expressed in the body part of the *Times*. Such clear-cut constructions as 'X shot and killed Y' are not used there as in the *Guardian*; instead, the construction 'Y were shot dead when X opened fire' is used, thereby weakening the causal relationship between the 'firing' and the 'killings'. Trew contends that these differences in lexical and syntactic choices result from the political orientation of each newspaper: the *Guardian* is more sympathetic to 'African demonstrators', the *Times* to the 'police'. Here, we can recognise how two different worlds are linguistically created out of the same reality. Thus, language not only reflects reality, but also manipulates reality. In wartime Japan, information sources were severely restricted and so the degree of reliance on the press as the citizens' source of world knowledge was heavier than during any other period. People were, therefore, required to build their own reality from whatever elements they could find, especially in newspapers.

The main theme of this paper is to analyse how a certain 'world' was deliberately built up in the wartime press in Japan. Specifically, I shall look at the process by which an undesirable reality or 'defeat' was transformed and presented in the newspaper as if it had been a victory in order to avoid a breakdown of national morale. For this purpose, the concepts of *Agent*, *Patient*, and *Range* from the transitivity theory of Functional Grammar are used as analytical tools.

In section 1.2, the situation of the Japanese wartime press and the social reality behind it are described. In section 2, after defining the term 'Transitivity' and introducing concepts such as *Agent*, *Patient* and *Range*, I shall discuss briefly how the theory is relevant to political disclosure in general and to the analysis of Japanese wartime reporting in particular. For the exemplification in section 3, I shall examine data from newspaper texts to show how these analytic tools can be used in this type of text analysis.

## 1.2 Wartime press censorship in Japan

The study of language and politics falls within the domain of pragmatics in the sense that it analyses the 'relations between language and context that are **grammaticalized**, or encoded in the structure of a language' (Levinson 1983:9, original emphasis). Let us now look at the 'context' part of social reality that is encoded in a language structure.

With the outbreak of the Pacific War in December 1941, in fear of breakdown of morale, a great effort was made to bar unwanted news while exaggerating and scattering 'positive' information. The Information Bureau, which controlled newspapers' editing and management, gave orders to each newspaper office and news agency as follows:

1. Suspend the publication of news not permitted by the Imperial War Headquarters.
2. Do not issue news disadvantageous to us.

(*Genron Shoowa-shi* 1958:133)

Following the first air raids on Tokyo on 18 April 1942, the Information Bureau introduced a more specific censorship policy on war reports. The Bureau gave the following orders to newspaper offices. To summarise their main points:

1. Do not report casualties other than those officially announced.
2. Do not report casualties which would be likely to give tragic and pessimistic impressions to the public.
3. Do not describe our losses in detail.
4. Do not describe victims from air raids in panic and confusion.
- [ ..... ]
7. Do not write about rumours of the arrival of enemy planes.
8. Do not write any other thing which would be likely to benefit the enemy.

Censorship Report vol. 4

(*Asahi Shinbunsha-shi, Taishoo, Shoowa Senzen Hen*: 586)

Taketora Ogata, vice-president of the *Asahi* newspaper, later State Minister in charge of the Information Bureau, declared before the Diet, that 'an active press was essential for maintaining the fighting spirit of the people' (*Asahi*, 9 Sept. 1944). This meant that newspaper writers even had to report defeats as if they had been victories. The newspaper publishers abided by these policies throughout the war. With the spread of the war, the army and the Information Bureau increased censorship (*Asahi Shinbun sha-shi, Taishoo, Shoowa Senzen Hen*: 586-7).

Lee (1939) terms the rhetorical device of reporting 'defeat as victory' as *Card Stacking*, which is the strategy of concealing or distorting negative facts. It is one of the seven propaganda devices<sup>3</sup> that Lee identified as persuasive techniques to gain people's compliance without logic or evidence. As its literal meaning 'arranging cards' suggests, *Card Stacking* refers to the situation in which

the persuader ... selects only the evidence and arguments that build a case (even falsifies evidence and distorts the facts). Although there is a deliberate attempt to distort the available evidence or to select only that which would fit the speaker's conclusions, the "evidence" is presented as being a fair and unbiased representation.

(Lee 1939, quoted in Devito 1986:240)

The *Card Stacking* strategy is most vividly observed in Japanese newspapers' reports of Japanese defeats. It was one of the main factors, as far as the 'information war' was concerned, that contributed to the final defeat of Japan, misleading military and wartime leaders as well as the people in the wrong direction (Takeyama 1994:65-67).

These are the parts of social reality that were encoded in the language as we shall see shortly. To conform to these restrictions in war reporting, what linguistic devices were used to 'distort unfavourable reality'?

## 2. Relevance of the transitivity framework in political disclosure

### 2.1 Definition of transitivity

Halliday's transitivity theory provides a useful linguistic framework for analysing how undesirable reality is transformed. In Halliday's terms, transitivity plays a key part in the ideational function of the clause. The ideational function of a clause is concerned with 'the transmission of ideas': the role of the ideational function is to represent the patterns of 'experiences' or, in the broadest sense, 'processes', which typically include 'actions or events of consciousness and relations' (1985:53). The factors involved in this semanticization of processes in the clause are 1) the *process* itself, which is expressed by the very phrase in a clause, 2) the *participants* in the clause, which are normally realised by the noun phrases in the clause, and 3) the *circumstances* associated with the process, which are typically expressed by adverbial phrases or prepositional phrases (101-102). Transitivity is mainly concerned with the first two elements. To put it simply, the primary principle of transitivity is how to express 'who or what does what to whom or what?' (Simpson 1993:106). Transitivity is an important semantic concept in the analysis of the 'representation' of reality in that transitivity enables us to analyse the same event and situation in different ways. Although 'perceptually the phenomenon is all of a piece', when we represent a situation or event, subjectivity comes in because we must 'analyse it as a semantic configuration' based on our subjective point of view (Halliday 1985:101). Thus, a writer's selection of one pattern of grammaticalization or configuration from among alternative ways has the effect of foregrounding certain meanings (*process*, *participant*) while suppressing or concealing others. So transitivity has been a useful tool in uncovering the particular mind-style or world-view encoded in the structure of a language (see Halliday 1971, Burton 1982, Kennedy 1982).

### 2.2 Some participant functions: *Agent*, *Patient* and *Range*

The participant functions refer to the roles of entities that are directly involved in the process: the one that does, behaves or says, together with the passive one that is done to, said to, etc. In this research, the following functions in particular will be of relevance as analytic tools: namely, *Agent*, *Patient* and *Range*. These concepts are used here with the following definitions.

**Agent:** the entity that performs an activity or brings about a change of state to the affected entity. Cruse (1973) further describes agentivity, which characterises 'the definable sub-set of doers', as typically involving 1) volition, 2) active energy investment in carrying out the action, 3) responsibility or 'culpability'.

**Patient:** an entity perceived as affected or effected by the process; literally, an element that 'suffers' or 'undergoes' the process (cf. Blake 1994:68, Halliday 1985:103).

**Range:** the element (abstract NP) that indicates the range or scope of the process (see Halliday 1967:58-62, Halliday 1985:134-137 for the discussion of *Range*). Examples are: *games* in *They played games*, *a question* in *He asked a question*, *a favour* in *He asked a favour*, *the race* in *He ran the race*. The main function of *Range* NPs is to specify the extent of relevance of the process, which is insufficiently specified by the verb alone. For example, adding *a question* or *a favour* to the verb *ask* served to differentiate between two different processes denoted by the verb: *questioning* and *requesting*. The *Range* in a material process usually occurs in clauses in which there is only one directed participant: *Agent* 'only and no *Patient*'. The most notable thing about *Range* NPs is that semantically, they do not refer to participants at all and always consist of inanimate, abstract NPs. However, grammatically, *Range* NPs are treated as if they were participants (*Patients*.) So it is easy to confuse a *Range* with an 'apparent *Patient*' in the surface structure. The *Range* element cannot enter into paraphrases with *do to* or *do with*, whereas the *Patient* can, and it follows that a *Range* is a thing to which nothing is being 'done', so it does not have a resultative attribute as a *Patient* does (Halliday 1967:58-59, Halliday 1985:136). For example, in *They crashed the plane*, where *the plane* is the *Patient*, it can be said that 'they did something with the result that the plane was crashed'. But in *They showed courage*, where *courage* is a *Range*, it cannot be said that 'they did something with the result some change has happened to *courage*'. To put it simply, nothing actually changes as an affected participant in material reality, but it looks as if it did on the surface level. The way in which this 'grammatical manipulation' was exploited in Japanese wartime discourse will be discussed below.

### 2.3 Transitivity as applied to the discourse of Japanese wartime reporting

As discussed in section 1.2 on wartime censorship policy, Japanese defeats were reported in a highly distorted mode, whose rhetorical device Lee termed *Card Stacking*. It is most vividly observed in Japanese newspapers' reports of Japanese defeats. Applying Lee's ideas linguistically to Halliday's Functional Grammar, we can analyse the aforementioned participant functions '*Agent*, *Patient* and *Range*' in some examples of Japanese wartime newspaper reports, to observe the *Card Stacking* strategy.

#### Analysis

##### *Agent and Patient:*

Even in defeats, the Japanese side is never described as the *Patient*, but always takes the *Agent* position as if they were the controllers of the whole situation. Only the enemy's side takes the *Patient* role (even in victory).

##### *Range:*

Naturally, nothing is gained in defeats - since the defeated one is the 'loser'. However, to maintain the discursive coherency of agentivity (continuously doing something positively even in defeat), a transitive sentence with an 'apparent *Patient*' was called for as if 'the Japanese side did something to the enemy positively'. To construct or to 'fabricate' an 'apparent *Patient*' linguistically out of reality in which materially it does not exist, *Range* is a useful linguistic tool since *Patient* as an independent entity and *Range* are often indistinguishable, on the surface at least (Halliday 1985:136). My main point here is that since V + NP prototypically denotes 'process + *Patient*', the structure 'V + *Range* NP' can be exploited to create an *illusion* that we have 'V + *Patient* NP'. A typical example of this in Japanese wartime reporting is *Kishin o nakashimuru koogun no shinzui o hakkishita*. (The Imperial army *displayed its spirit* which would *make* even *the devil cry*). This type of sentence appears frequently in reporting defeats in Japanese newspapers.



### 3. Exemplification

Now, let us see how these transitivity patterns are exemplified in an illustrative text. For this purpose, I use a report of the fighting on Attu Island in May 1943 from *Asahi*, one of the leading newspapers in Japan. The Attu battle was the first major defeat admitted by the Japanese government. In it the entire Japanese garrison, numbering about 2,000 soldiers, died (Shillony 1981:96). Interestingly, even though this was a major defeat, with the consecutive use of *Agent* and *Range*, from reading the text it does not sound as if the Japanese side was defeated. War reports of defeats followed the same discursual pattern as this throughout the war period in order to maintain national morale.

Note that in Japanese, a pro-drop language, a subject can be deleted, and *Agent* may be marked with the postposition *-wa* or *-ga* or may have no postposition at all. It is not a main concern here to go into grammatical detail about NP-*wa* and NP-*ga*, which are the so-called topic-marker and subject-marker respectively. Nevertheless, the important thing to stress is that, as in English, topic and subject NPs are typically but by no means always Agents, and that because of this there is a temptation for the reader to interpret NPs with *wa / ga* agentively.

- defeat at Attu Island (May 1943)

#### ABBREVIATIONS

		examples
AC	accusative particle	-o
COM	complementizer	-to
COP	copula	-dearu, -da, -nari, -tari
GEN	genitive morpheme	-no
NEG	negative morpheme	-nai, -nu, -zu
PASS	passive morpheme	-re, -rare,
PERF	perfect	-ta, -ti
TP	topic particle	-wa

#### < Banner Headline >

(1)						
<i>Attu too</i>	<i>ni</i>	<i>koogun</i>	<i>no</i>	<i>shinzui</i>	<i>o</i>	<i>hakki</i>
Attu island	in	Imperial Army	GEN	spirit	AC	display
		<i>Agent</i>		<i>Range</i>		

Imperial Army shows courage on Attu Island

#### < Headline >

(2)						
<i>Yamazaki butaichoo</i>	<i>ra</i>	<i>zen shoohee,</i>	<i>soozetsu,</i>	<i>yashuu</i>	<i>o</i>	
Yamazaki Commander	others	all soldiers	magnificent	night attack	AC	
		<i>Agent</i>				

kankoo,	gyokusai,	teki	2 man	songai	6000	kudara-zu
carry out	scattering of the jewel	enemy	20,000	damage	6000	go down-NEG
	<i>Range</i>	<i>Patient</i>				

Commander Yamazaki and men venture magnificent night attack and lay down their lives, causing at least 6,000 enemy casualties





*ni-shite*      *butaichoo*      *wa*      *rikugun taisa*      *Yamazaki Yasuyo*      *nari*  
 COP-and      commander      TP      Colonel      Yamazaki Yasuyo      COP

Our garrison, consisting of 2,000, was led by Commander Yasuyo Yamazaki.

(7)  
*Teki*      *wa*      *tokushu*      *yuushuu*      *soobi*      *no*      *20000*      *ni-shite*  
 enemy      TP      special      superior      military weapons      GEN      20000      COP-and  
*Patient*

*S gatsu*      *28 nichi*      *made-ni*      *atae-taru*      *songai*      *6000*      *o*      *kudara-zu*  
 May      28th      until      give-PERF      damage      6000      AC      go-down-NEG

The enemy, with superior military weapons, consisted of 20,000, and the damage we have inflicted on them by 28 May, at least 6,000.

(8)  
 (Correspondent Tanihagi reports) ..... *Shubi*      *suri*      *zein*  
    defend      do-PERF      all (people)  
    *Agent*

*kotogotoku*      *gyokusai*      *shi,*      *kakute*      *Attu too*      *wa*  
 consecutively      scattering of the jewel      do      thus      Attu Island      TP  
    *Range*

*ee'en -ni*      *rekishi no*      *ue-ni*      *shirusa-reru*      *koto*      *to*      *narimashi-ta....*  
 forever      history GEN      on      mark-PASS      fact      Comp      become-PERF

All the people who had been protecting the island laid down their lives, and thus Attu Island will remain in history as a sacred place, where the Imperial Army showed courage.

(Asahi, 31 May 1943)

If we follow the basic principle of transitivity, 'who does what to whom', it can be concluded from this text that the Japanese side is described throughout as the *Agent*, and the processes are of the action type of 'intention'. The Japanese side is in control of everything they do or that happens around them. Nothing 'just happens' to them as a process 'outside their control'. In this discourse, the Agentive element always takes precedence over process. This can be observed in the sentences, as in (2) *Ventured a magnificent night attack* and (3) *Made a gallant attack with might and main*. Since *Range* NP always consists of an abstract NP, *Range* is often associated with metaphors. Examples include the sentence (1) *The Imperial Army shows courage* (with the connotation that it won the battles) with the same figure used in (3) and (8). The sentence (3) *Saigo no tetsutsui o kudashi* (passing the final decision), *saigo no tetsutsui o kudasu* literally means 'passing down the iron hammer' and is used metaphorically to mean 'make a final decision', comparing 'decisions' with 'hammers'. As mentioned earlier, since the *Range* element can easily be confused with an 'apparent *Patient*', it sounds as if the Japanese side did something or gained something even in their defeats. Also the negative images are effaced with euphemisms, as in for example, avoiding direct references to 'death'. *Gyokusai* (lit. 'scattering of the jewel') as in sentences (2) and (4), and *jiketsu* (lit. 'decide by oneself', meaning 'commit suicide') leave the impression that the soldiers chose to die and were not killed passively. He an 'overlexicalization' strategy is at work to avoid such socially sensitive 'core words' as *shiboo* (die). In this way, the lexical level also functions to increase the sense of 'agentivity' or 'positivity'. These functions all contribute to an overall conceptual framework which maintains a flow of *agentive* rhetoric for the Japanese side. Conversely, in spite of



## Notes

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2. The definitions of propaganda vary. Lee (1939) quoted in Devito 1986:239 characterises it as 'organised persuasion; the spreading of ideas and values through a variety of persuasive devices'.
3. Lee's seven propaganda devices quoted in Devito 1986:239-240 include '*Name Calling, Glittering Generality, Transfer, Testimonial, Plain Folks, Card Stacking and Band Wagon*'.
4. Halliday uses the terms *Actor-Goal* instead of *Agent-Patient* respectively. However, in the interest of simplicity, it would be desirable to explain *Range* in contrast to *Agent* and *Patient*, treating these two roles, at least for my present purposes, as equivalent to Halliday's *Actor-Goal*. cf. 'The *Agent* will ... be equivalent to the *Actor* in goal-directed material processes' (Simpson 1993:93).
5. Palmer argues that whereas 'grammatical marking is essentially language-specific, ... notional or semantic characterisations are applicable to any or all languages' (1994:5).
6. Lexis plays a significant role, as well, in signalling discourse of ideology (see, for example, Carter 1987:92-96).
7. *Tokyo Asahi Shinbun* (*Tokyo Asahi Newspaper*) was renamed *Asahi Shinbun* in June 1941 following the amalgamation of local newspapers.

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