# A Critical Discourse Analysis of Discourse Strategies in Reports on Youth Crime in UK Radio News

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## Introduction

In Britain during 2007 the problems associated with the antisocial behaviour of young people in gangs, particularly those using guns and knives in violent and frequently fatal attacks, loomed exceedingly large in the media. As the year wore on this issue began to take on the appearance of a 'moral panic', in the sense of Stanley Cohen, as was reflected in a flurry of headlines such as 'Anarchy in the UK?' and 'A Nation Under Siege'. In my research I attempt to practice a form of what Paul Ricouer termed the 'hermeneutics of suspicion', using a version of the approach known as Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to investigate the ideological work of the media texts. In this paper my investigation focuses on one particularly notorious youth crime case which occurred during 2007, namely that of the fatal shooting in August of an eleven-year-old boy by another teenager (presumed to be a local teenage gang member but at the time of writing still not apprehended by the police) and on how the most influential radio news programme in the UK initially reported the crime. I describe how the programme makes use of a number of discursive strategies (at macro-, meso- and micro-levels of textual organization) to not simply – as the conventional journalistic mythology would have it – 'report the facts' but to construct the killing from a particular perspective as a news 'story'. I then attempt to interpret the use of these strategies by the media in terms of the ideological significance of the 'perspectivization' they effect and explain how this relates to the social and discursive order of contemporary societies such as Britain. I conclude by arguing that the main ideological work of news media such as this is not to inform and educate the public about such potentially socially destabilizing problems as youth crime but to influence audiences in line with particular perspectives conducive to maintaining rather than changing the social order.

## CDA and news discourse

My main reason for focusing on CDA studies of news is simply that 'news', broadly defined, is the area of discourse in which most CDA work has been done and in

respect to which its the theoretical positions and methodological techniques have been most fully developed (van Dijk 1988, Fowler 1991, Fairclough 1995, Richardson 2007). It is generally acknowledged that news texts have great ideological significance in contemporary societies and that the production and dissemination of news texts by mass media organizations and their consumption by audiences are key processes in the operation of ideology (Thompson 1990, 1995). It is reasonable to assume that this ideological salience of news accounts in large part for the attention given to it by CDA scholars.

Apart from the work of CDA scholars, the language of news in general and news interviews in particular have also received a great deal of attention from related linguistic fields such as conversation analysis (Clayman and Heritage 2002, Hutchby 2006), psycholinguistics (O'Connell and Kowal 2006) and pragmatics (Dor 2003). News is also a key focus of research in related fields such as cultural (Turner 2003), communication (McQuail 2005) and, unsurprisingly, media studies (Eldridge 1995, Philo 1995, Allan 2004). However, as I shall argue in this paper, of all the academic fields that have taken news as their object of *study*, it is above all CDA that offers the greatest possibilities for actually assisting people in contesting, challenging and transforming the ideology of mass-mediated news. This is because, firstly, only CDA combines a sufficiently interdisciplinary set of theories and methods of analysis capable of reaching across from the broadest levels of global society through the intermediate levels of social interactions and down to the minutiae of textual features, and secondly, because CDA possesses the strongest principled commitment to applying its theoretical and methodological framework as a practical tool for ideological critique: in short, to *praxis*.[1]

## Media focus: radio news

For this study of news discourse I chose a broadcast medium rather than a print medium such as newspapers for a number of reasons. One of these relates to the relatively low degree of ideological bias which broadcast media display.[2] In the UK the national press is relatively unregulated and highly partisan in its political commitments, which undoubtedly has ideological and political implications, as suggested by the famous headline in *The Sun* newspaper following the victory of the Conservative Party in the 1992 General Election: *It's the Sun Wot Won It*.[3] Given its clear ideological bias it is not surprising that much CDA work has focused on the UK press. However, I believe that the problem for CDA here is that

the strength of this bias makes much newspaper reporting too easy a target for criticism. Simply speaking, most readers already know that their daily paper is biased (and actually prefer it that way) and do not need CDA to point this out to them. In contrast, broadcasting in the UK is subject to much more stringent ethical guidelines and many people would regard the BBC in particular as providing fair and unbiased news reporting.[4]

The main reason for choosing radio rather than television is that language is the dominant form of communication in radio and, apart from sound effects and background music, is the only semiotic carrier of meanings, ideological or otherwise. In particular, a focus on radio avoids the need to analyse the complex interactions between verbal communication and visual modes of semiosis. I chose to focus on UK radio news because that is the country with which, as someone who was born and grew up there, I am most familiar. Thus in terms of what Fairclough termed 'members resources' or simply 'MR' (Fairclough 1989b), by which is meant the complex set of knowledge, beliefs, attitudes and values that members of a particular society or community possess, the UK media scene is the one with respect to which my MR are most fully developed.[5] This is an important consideration since it is one's MR that are drawn on when attempting to interpret and explain features of texts in terms of their social and cultural significance.

For practical reasons, the period during which I was able to gather data for this project was the three weeks from Monday, 13 August to Sunday, 2 September 2007. During this period I recorded a selection of UK radio stations for eight hours per day (from 6 am to 2 pm). This enabled me to select the central week as the main focus for analysis but use data from the preceding and following weeks for contextualization and comparison. The reason for recording only from the morning till the early afternoon was that I wanted to focus in particular on the breakfast time news programmes. It is at this time of day that radio is most widely listened to in the UK, as many people are in their homes, getting up and preparing for their day, or commuting to work, and are thus less able to watch television.

### Thematic focus: youth crime

The theme of youth crime was not one that I selected in advance but rather one that emerged naturally during the recording period. Firstly, it was a theme that had been much to the fore in the UK media during the previous months of the year, arguably approaching what Stanley Cohen famously described in relation to the

youth subcultures of the 1960s as a 'moral panic' (Cohen 1972). Secondly, on the Thursday of the central, second week of recording (23 August) the theme assumed exceptional prominence due to the breaking news of the killing of an eleven-year-old boy, Rhys Jones, in Liverpool the previous evening.

### Discoursal focus: strategies

In this paper I shall base my approach on the model of CDA presented by Fairclough in Fairclough (2000) and (2003). This I shall refer to as the 'Genres, Discourses and Styles' (or GDS) model. This model differs from, but complements, Fairclough's earlier 'Three Dimensional' (3D) model as introduced in Fairclough (1989b), which was based on the sequential analysis of text, interaction and context. The newer GDS model places a greater emphasis on seeing discourse as an emergent phenomenon, forming an element or 'moment' of social events, dialectically related to other moments such as persons (with their unique attitudes, feelings and histories), the physical world and time and space. This new emphasis reflects the influence on Fairclough's thought of the critical realist philosopher Roy Bhaskar (1979, 1986) and the Marxist cultural geographer David Harvey (1996).

I shall also make use of the notion of strategies, seen in both discoursal and ideological terms, to analyse the radio news broadcast. Strategies have been studied by CDA scholars for many years (see contributors to Wodak 1989) but have recently returned to prominence through the emphasis given to them by Fairclough (2006). Essentially, we can regard text producers as employing discoursal strategies on various levels in order to achieve ideological aims. On the macro level, these strategies relate to interactional features such as the generic structure of texts. On the meso level strategies are concerned with discoursal features such as the how arguments are presented, how different voices are combined and how various sections of the text are framed. At the micro level the strategies include such things as pronoun usage, nominalization and passivization, discourse markers and deixis.

### The *Today* programme

For this paper I have chosen to analyse just one radio programme from one day: namely, the BBC Radio 4 *Today* programme for Thursday 23 August.[6] I have chosen this programme for the following reasons. Firstly, I decided to focus on Radio 4 ('the home of intelligent speech radio' as the BBC's website somewhat tendentiously describes it) because it is widely seen as the most important news and current

affairs radio channel in the UK in the sense that it devotes more time to these subjects than any other national channel and reports them in a serious way for a relatively well-educated, predominantly middle-class audience. Secondly, within the whole range of Radio 4's daily output, *Today* is regarded as the BBC's 'flagship' news programme. That is, *Today* is seen as the programme which, by virtue of its long-established position in the important morning 'breakfast time' section of the daily schedule and its perceived authoritativeness, 'sets the agenda' for the day's news in the UK.[7] *Today* is broadcast from 6 to 9 am Mondays to Fridays and from 7 am to 9 am on Saturdays. On 28 October this year the programme celebrated its 50th anniversary. Finally, I have chosen to focus on the edition of the *Today* programme for 23 August in particular because it came in the middle of the three-week period during which I gathered the radio recording and associated data for this project and because as noted above it was on this morning that the news about the murder of the 11-year-old schoolboy, Rhys Jones, in Liverpool was first reported.

In the following analysis I shall focus mainly on the generic aspect of the *Today* programme, seeing its generic structure as a macrostrategy. Accordingly, I shall attempt to give a fairly detailed description and commentary of the generic structure of this programme, illustrated with excerpts from the 23 August edition. I shall pay particular attention to the use of repetition in the programme's generic organization both as a strategic structuring device and as a means whereby the ideological work of the news is achieved.

## Presenters

Although not part of the discourse or generic structure of the programme, one notable and characteristic feature of this programme which needs to be mentioned here is its team of presenters.[8] Currently, the team includes five people, three men and two women, who take turns to present the programme in pairs. Due to their prominent role as the 'voices' of this important and popular programme the presenters become household names and personalities in their own right. In addition to these principal presenters, several other people appear in 'supporting roles' on the programme, such as specialist business and sport correspondents, news readers and weather forecasters. The 23 August edition of *Today* was presented by Edward Stourton and John Humphrys. Humphrys (64) is the most senior and well-known of the current presenters. He was born in Wales to working class parents and, although an able pupil left school at 15 to become a local news reporter, working his

way steadily up the career ladder to his current doyenic position. He is thus very much a journalist of the 'old-school'. He is known for his curmudgeonly manner and has a reputation as a tough, opinionated interviewer. He is also interested in language and has written a number of popular books on the use and abuse of English (Humphrys 2004, 2006). He is known to be an agnostic but has written a book on Christian faith. Stourton (51) by contrast, is distinctly upper-class, being the cousin of a baron. He is also a devout Catholic and has written a number of books on Catholicism. Educated at Ampleforth College 'the Catholic Eton' and Cambridge University, his persona, in contrast to the down-to-earth persona of Humphrys', is the epitome of self-assured patrician complacency. A thorough CDA study of this programme will need to analyse the ideological significance of the style and public persona (in terms of Fairclough's GDS model) of Humphrys, Stourton and the other presenters, paying particular attention to their vocal qualities, but in what follows space limitations prevent more than some very cursory remarks about these factors.

### Programme Format

The *Today* programme lasts for three hours on weekday mornings, and two hours on Saturdays. Accordingly, the producers are faced with the task of assembling enough material to occupy exactly that length of time each day, and to have it ready to be broadcast at the scheduled times, six days a week, fifty-two weeks a year. Of course the practical time constraints faced by the producers of *Today* are common to most radio (and television) broadcasting. It is not surprising therefore that over the course of broadcasting history various production techniques have been developed to routinize and facilitate this process, and these are made use of by *Today*. One such technique which I would like to foreground in this paper is repetition. By this I mean the way in which programmes repeat the same news items and other features (such as weather forecasts) at different times throughout their running time, with the option of slightly modifying the item or feature each time. This technique not only helps fill up the allotted time of a programme but also enables programmes to cater for listeners who start and stop listening at various times and for various lengths of time. One advantage of this technique for programme makers (and listeners) is that it allows for the inclusion of news stories that break during the course of the programme, such as was the case with the Rhys Jones killing, and for updating listeners about ongoing stories in a way

not possible for conventional printed newspapers (although the increasing use of websites and services such as RSS news feeds[9] by newspapers is helping to blur this distinction). A disadvantage is that a narrower range of stories can be covered than would be possible if such repetition were not necessary. A difficult but crucial task for the programme's producers therefore is to maintain a suitable balance between (a) the need for repetition, (b) the need for adequately wide coverage of the day's news stories, and (c) the need to provide in-depth coverage of stories held to be particularly important.

The edition of *Today* selected for this study is typical in being structured into a number of (exactly) one-hour and, within these, (approximately) 30-minute units. Within this overall framework the various elements are arranged in a highly predictable way that varies little from day to day. In order to understand how the youth crime case was 'textured' into the programme as a typical news 'story' it is important to see clearly how it figured within the overall temporal flow of this programme. Accordingly, a schematic representation of the complete running order for this edition is shown below:

**Running Order of the *Today* Programme for Thursday, 23 August 2007**

(items related to the Rhys Jones story shown in **bold**)

**06:00** News Headlines and Summary (**RJ story is 1st item in both Headlines and Summary**)
06:06 Weather Forecast
06:07 Two more animals to be killed at Hindu temple where the bullock Shambo was killed.
06:10 President Bush's Iraq/Vietnam speech
06:12 Newspaper Review (**RJ story is 1st item**)
06:15 Business News
06:27 Sport
06:29 Programme trailer (for the BBC Proms concerts)
**06:30** News Summary (**RJ story is 1st item**)
06:32 GCSE exam results
06:35 **Rhys Jones**
06:37 EU vets discuss meat export ban
06:40 Ofcom report on media usage

06:43 Newspaper Review (**RJ story is 2nd item**)

06:45 **Rhys Jones**

06:46 Labour in Scotland: Interview with Prof. John Curtis

06:50 Labour in Scotland: Wendy Alexander (mention of indiscipline in schools)

06:53 French president Sarkozy's popularity

06:55 Salt in food survey

06:57 Weather Forecast

06:59 Programme trailers (for a music programme and for interview with Home Secretary, Jacqui Smith **on RJ story** and youth crime generally later in this programme)

**07:00** News Headlines and News Summary (**RJ story is 1st item in both Headlines and Summary**)

07:09 **Rhys Jones** [Rhys Jones named for first time]

07:14 GCSE exam results

07:20 Study of older people's sexual activity

07:24 Business news

07:27 Sport

07:29 Programme trailer (for a documentary about a foster parent)

**07:32** News Summary (**RJ story is 1st item**)

07:34 Ofcom report on media usage, including loss of trust in media

07:39 Newspaper Review (**RJ story is 2nd item**)

07:42 Sport

07:46 Thought for the Day (by Bishop of Liverpool) (**RJ story and youth crime is theme**)

07:49 Interview with Bishop of Liverpool (**RJ story and youth crime is theme**)

07:53 Interview with Home Secretary, Jacqui Smith (**RJ story and youth crime is theme**)

07:58 Weather forecast

07:59 Programme trailers (for a new Classic Serial, *To Sir With Love*, and for later in this programme)

**08:00** News Headlines and News Summary (**RJ story is 1st item in both Headlines and Summary**)

08:10 GCSE exam results (**prefaced by news flash on arrests in connection with RJ case**)

08:23 British air force jets intercept Russian jets
08:28 Sport
08:31 Programme trailer (for documentary about President Clinton)
08:32 Weather forecast
**08:33** News Summary (**RJ story is 1st item**)
08:34 Proposed EU register of sex offenders – interview with Madeline McCann's father
08:39 **Rhys Jones**
08:41 Business news
08:45 President Bush's Iraq/Vietnam speech
08:51 Slavery museum in Liverpool exhibition on slavery and music
08:55 GCSE exam results
**09:00** End of Today programme, followed immediately by News Summary (**RJ story is 1st item**)

As this Running Order chart indicates, in total, the Rhys Jones case is featured prominently or referred to 21 times during this programme, plus once more in the 9:00 am news summary. To give a better understanding of the nature of the programme's structure, particularly its repetitive elements which, as a discursive macrostrategy, provide the framework against which the almost pulse-like rhythm of the featured 'main' story occurs, each of the various elements will be briefly described. One of the central arguments of my overall 'hermeneutics of suspicion' approach to media discourse is that ideology works in the mass-mediated communication of modern societies not in an isolated and focused way but by insinuating itself (the intransitive usage here is intentional) like a miasma into every corner of the total output. Therefore, I believe it is a mistake for CDA analysts to focus, as they so frequently do, only on certain ostensibly critical textual features whilst ignoring the less obviously ideological elements of texts. On the contrary, ideology is inherently interstitial: in order to understand how a text works ideologically one must look first for the traces of ideology in each element and then, dialectically, at the intertextual relations (including tensions, ruptures and contradictions) between the elements.

### Hourly Units

Time, its accurate measurement and announcement, is a fundamental aspect of

morning news programmes such as this. The highest level of organization of the programme are its hourly units. These are demarcated with the utmost precision by means of time signals (a series of six short electronic beeps, commonly known as 'the pips'). The very scientific precision of these signals, generated as they are by reference to atomic clocks, lends an air of objectivity and authority to the programme. Thus one could regard even these 'pips' as having an ideological function in reminding the audience of the objectivity and authority of the BBC itself, quite apart from that of mustering the nation's workforce in preparation for the coming day. These time signals are obligatorily followed by a presenter saying the time, day and date. The presenter may then also say the name of the programme and the names of the presenters. However, apart from at the very start of the programme this information is usually given immediately prior to the time signal. After saying the time, day and date, the same presenter, or his or her co-presenter, then reads out the news headlines. These are immediately followed by the name of the day's news reader, who then reads out a scripted summary of the news. In the August 23 programme the first of these announcements was as follows:

**06:00** [*Time signal pips*]

Stourton: It's six o'clock on Thursday the twenty-third of August, good morning this is Today with John Humphrys and Edward Stourton.

Humphrys: The news headlines this morning, an eleven-year-old boy has been shot dead in Liverpool. We'll be talking to the Home Secretary. [*other headlines*] Today's news reader, is Alice Arnold.

Arnold: Police in Liverpool are searching for the killer of an eleven-year-old boy, who was shot in the neck as he walked home from a football training session last night. [*continues*]

### Half-hourly units

As noted above, the half-hourly unit markers are not so rigidly demarcated as the hourly ones. No time signals are used to mark the half-hours and the presenters have more latitude concerning when to introduce these items. A mention of the programme's name, the name of the channel and the names of the presenters seems to be an obligatory opening move. This leads on to a scripted news summary read out by a news reader which forms the essential element of these unit markers. Unlike the hourly markers, the presenters do not read out the news headlines before the news reader reads the summary. In the August 23 programme, the first of these items was as follows:

**06:30**

Stourton: You're listening to Today on Radio Four with John Humphrys and Edward Stourton it's approaching half past six, time for a summary of the news from Alice Arnold.

Arnold: Police in Liverpool are searching for the killer of an eleven-year-old boy who was shot in the neck as he walked home from a football training session last night. [*continues*]

### Other repeated programme features

In addition to the hourly and half-hourly markers, a number of other repeated features are used to help structure and segment the programme.

### Weather Forecasts

The programme includes two types of weather forecast: longer, formal forecasts given by a member of the BBC Weather Centre staff, and brief summaries of the weather by one of the presenters. The August 23 programme included three formal forecasts (by staff member John Hammond) and one presenter-forecast. The second formal forecast occurred at 6:57, just after a report on a survey that looked at the salt content of food and just before a programme trailer and the 7 am news:

Humphrys: And the weather now John, give us a break [*laughter*]

Hammond: I'll tell you what John I was on the beach in Devon yesterday and got sunburned back it was so lovely

Humphrys: Good grief, I don't want to hear that

Hammond: Yes, but I'm afraid for East Anglia and the South-East it's er more of the same, cloudy morning, stiff old breeze feels cool and there's some drizzly rain around er not just er desperately chilly as it was er yesterday but still disappointing for this time of year, most of the er rain should tend to have died out by the end of the afternoon but er still nothing special for this part of the world. [*continues*]

The one informal forecast came at 8:32 immediately following a programme trailer and just before the half-hourly news summary at 8:33:

Humphrys: And the weather, at the risk of sounding very London-centric it's going to be horrible again today [*laughter*] however most parts of the country it won't, it'll be pleasant there will be warm sunshine and it will be rather nice, but not ere

**08:33**

Stourton: You're listening to Today on Radio Four, John Humphrys and Edward Stourton twenty-seven minutes to nine time for a summary of the news from Alice Arnold

As the presence of laughter in these two sequences indicates, humour seems to be a permissible feature of weather forecasts, or at least of introductions and codas to them, whereas it is far less common in most other parts of the programme. The fact that both examples were produced by Humphrys reflects both his public persona and, relatedly, the 'humour-rights' which he possesses by virtue of his status as the programme's senior (male) presenter.

### Review of Daily Newspapers

In this regular item, the presenters comment on the main stories in a selection (made by whom and according to what criteria we are never told) of the day's national newspapers. In the August 23 programme, this item occurred three times, at 6:12, 6:43, and 7:39. The 6:12 item began as follows:

**06:12**

Humphrys: The time is twelve minutes past six a quick look at the newspapers and the main story for most of them er they've changed their front pages some of them er during the course of the night is the shooting of that er eleven-year-old boy in Liverpool similar headlines are on the in the red-top tabloids Daily Mirror 'BMX GUN KID KILLS BOY ELEVEN', 'BOY 11 SHOT DEAD BY KID' in the Sun, and and so on and the er Times front page lead puts it like this 'RIDE BY HOODIE SHOOTS AN 11 YEAR OLD BOY DEAD' and um they'll talk about how the police have expressed serious concern, this in the Times, about rocketing levels of violence, particularly, in the capital they report that increasingly, younger children are walking the streets with dangerous weapons in what has been a particularly grim year says the Times, seventeen teenagers have been shot or stabbed to death in London, alone, in 2007.

Stourton: A lot of coverage of that speech by President Bush [*continues*]

In this example, one gets the impression that one reason for reading out these snippets from the newspapers might be to confirm for the listeners that the programme's selection of news stories is consistent with the rest of the national media rather than idiosyncratic. In this way, not only does a consensus about

what the main stories are each day get established amongst the various branches of the media, but amongst listeners and readers too. Seen in terms of the media's role as a public sphere, there would appear to be a somewhat closed and self-limiting relationship here which might serve to limit the terms of national discussion on important issues. For example, one aspect of the ideological work done by this section of the programme might concern the range of newspapers regularly commented on. As far as I am aware, for example, the socialist paper *The Morning Star* is seldom if ever referred to.

### Business News

This is another regular item that usually occurs three times during the programme. However, probably due to its more specialist nature, unlike the review of the newspapers this is introduced not by the main presenters but by a 'Business Correspondent'. This item is sometimes explicitly introduced as 'the business news' but not always so. On the August 23 programme this item occurred at 6:15, 7:24 and 8:41. The correspondent was Guto Harri. The 7:24 item began as follows:

**07:24**

Stourton: Twenty-four minutes past seven the level of personal debt in the United Kingdom has for the first time, exceeded our national income, Guto Harri has details about that, Guto?

Harri: Yees even as a dry old statistic it sounds pretty alarming doesn't it and what it means is that the average person [*muffled*] owes more than he or she makes in a year. That's not necessarily a problem and it wont surprise anyone who's bought a house in the last decade but it is higher than ever according to Grant Thornton. One of their senior tax managers is Maurice Fitzpatrick and he's in the studio now. Um give us a a figure a heart-stopping figure first of all, how much do we owe?

Fitzpatrick: Well the total amount of personal debt in the UK is about one point three trillion, um and that's just slightly less than the um slightly slightly um slightly in excess of the total amount that we actually produce each year so we ac we actually owe more than we produce.

Obviously, from the point of view of any version of CDA that sees contemporary changes in global and globalizing capitalism – and the associated linguistic changes – as a key focus of critique, these business news segments of the programme are particularly relevant. Although listeners may take these items for granted, one could imagine that under other socioeconomic circumstances they might, for example,

be labeled 'work news' or even 'capitalism news' and have a very different angle on the news. While these segments almost always include an interview with a guest, such people are drawn exclusively from the ranks of business executives and particularly those from major financial services firms such as Grant Thornton. It is not clear exactly how these guests are chosen, but they appear on the programme as experts providing information, rather than interviewees to be questioned, and my impression is that the business correspondents such as Harri are seldom very critical towards them. Given a topic such as the one discussed in this example – the unprecedented level of personal debt in the UK – it would seem appropriate to balance (or even replace) the rather complacent assessment given by Fitzpatrick (and backed up, incidentally, by Harri, see below) with a more critical view from, for example, a representative of a charity working with people in debt. However, as far as I am aware, rather surprisingly this kind of balancing is rarely done. Neither are representatives of workers associations such as unions usually invited to be guests on this segment of the programme, and both correspondents and guests are almost exclusively male. Finally, we may note that the use in the above extract of personal pronouns, specifically 'our' and 'we', which are a staple item in CDA studies, displays a characteristic slipperiness. Who exactly are referred to by the phrases '*our* national income' and '*we* actually owe more than *we* produce'?

### Sports News

This item usually occurs three times during the programme, although on the August 23 programme it occurred four times (at 6:27, 7:27, 7:42, and 8:28). Like the business news, this item is introduced by a (male) specialist reporter. The sports referred to are those which generally command the biggest audiences (and thus advertising revenue) in the UK, including football, cricket and rugby. The item usually concludes with the programme's 'racing selections', that is tips for which horses to bet on in the day's races. On August 23, the reporter was Steve May and the 7:27 item, which followed immediately after the business news interview with Maurice Fitzpatrick quoted above, began as follows:

| | |
|---|---|
| Harri: | That's very reassuring Maurice Fitzpatrick thank you very much |
| Humphrys: | Thanks Guto twenty seven minutes past seven Steve sport? |
| May: | Well the back pages have no doubt as to why England lost last night's friendly against Germany at Wembley [*continues*] |

The links between sport and ideology, particularly nationalism, are well-known, and this section of the programme has an important ideological function in aligning listeners to a particular view of sport and its place in national life, particularly as this is projected at the international level. We may note that here too there is a tangential reference to the contents of the day's newspapers which adds to the textured coherence of the programme and, arguably, of the UK media as a whole. Lastly, we may note the unintended irony of following a business news item about record debt levels in the UK with the sports news' gambling tips.

### Programme trailers

These serve as advertisements for what will be coming up later in the programme or for other BBC programmes later in the day or even later in the week. Not only do these trailers have a cohesive function for the programme itself but also for the whole of the channel's output. However, although the BBC is funded through the license fee and in principle does not need to rely on advertising, the intense competition to attract and then retain audiences means that this kind of internal advertising is becoming increasingly common, to the extent that is risks alienating listeners who would prefer to just listen to the news.

### Other Regular Programme Features

In addition to the repeated programme features, there are two prominent regular features that occur only once per programme.

### Thought for the Day

This is a short stand-alone scripted speech by a representative of a religious organization. The programme has a number of regular speakers for this slot who alternate to give their speeches. It is usually broadcast at or around 7:45 and frequently has some relevance to a current news topic. On the August 23 programme, the speech was given by the Anglican Bishop of Liverpool. I do not know whether it was purely a coincidence that he was the speaker on this day when Rhys Jones' murder was first reported. Clearly, this section of the programme raises a great number of ideological issues related to religion. For example, we may ask what precisely the function of a section like this is within a news programme, how the speakers are chosen, and whether or not non-religious ethical viewpoints such as those of humanists should also be given a platform.[10]

### The 8:10 Interview

This follows immediately after the 8 am news headlines and news summary and is usually represented as the highlight of the programme.[11] In this section, one of the presenters conducts an interview lasting up to 15 minutes with a senior political or other public figure chosen for their relevance to the current news. However, on some days this interview slot is given over to a 'special report' on a particularly topical issue. On August 23 this slot began as follows:

**08:10**

Humphrys: The time is ten past eight and we've just had a report it's been confirmed by Merseyside police that an eighteen-year-old and a fourteen-year-old have been arrested on suspicion of murdering eleven-year-old Rhys Jones last night. More on that story of course later in the programme. Now, here we go again, another set of GCSE results out today another row therefore about why every child seems to get an A grade these days, except of course that they don't. An awful lot of them, most of them, will not, they will fail indeed to get the five decent grades A to C in subjects including English and maths that are regarded as the minimum for a good start in life. So, if about half the children in this country are getting at best a D grade, which is still enough for a pass and ninety-nine percent will pass, what exactly does that mean? Jane Roper and Martin Walker are both experienced examiners they've been marking papers for years um and can I ask you Jane Roper first you're a senior maths examiner you've worked for all the three er major exam boards over the last seven years, give us an idea of what you are required to do in order to get a D grade, I mean presumably you've got to be able to add up and divide and multiply and things like that, or have you?

Roper: Good morning John

Humphrys: Good morning

Roper: Not necessarily, I suppose is the answer to the um do you have to be able to add take times and divide. [*continues*]

The insertion of the latest update on the Rhys Jones story at the beginning of this section was clearly a sudden addition to the running order. Humphrys' use of the discourse marker *now* signals a change of topic, specifically a return to the topic of GCSE examination results that was the scheduled topic for this section on this day. From listening to this and other sections of this episode, my impression is that Humphrys' opinion of this topic is that the fact that 99% of candidates pass these exams but less than half get the 'right' grades (in terms of what employers

are said to be looking for) means that they are fairly worthless qualifications and a symbol of the alleged contemporary trend towards 'dumbing down' in modern society. However, he is constrained from taking too critical or aggressive a line with his two guests here because they are not public figures such as politicians who can be held responsible in some way for these exams, but merely expert witnesses. That this is indeed the case is shown when, later in the programme, he interviews the Minister for Schools, Jim Knight. Since the minister is in a sense responsible Humphrys adopts a rather more inquisitorial style of questioning. Conversely, in his 21 August interview which was with Frances Lawrence about the prospect of her husband's murderer being allowed to stay in Britain after release from prision he is exceedingly gentle and sympathetic towards her.

### Summary of programme's repeated and regular generic elements

What I have tried to draw attention to in the preceding sections, based on this preliminary outline description of just one particular edition of the programme, is how the *Today* programme, as a professionally and routinely manufactured media text, is constructed or assembled by combining an array of regular, familiar elements in predictable ways to constitute it as a distinctive, and authoritative, genre of radio news programme. Above all, I have tried to show how these elements are repeated, in more or less modified form, several times throughout the programme. The following chart summarizes the amount of time devoted to each element in this particular episode.

| **Programme Element** | **Time (minutes)** |
|---|---|
| News Headlines and News Summaries | 30 |
| Business News | 19 |
| 8:10 Interview | 13 |
| Sports News | 11 |
| Review of Daily Newspapers | 8 |
| Programme trailers | 7 |
| Thought for the Day | 3 |
| Weather Forecasts | 3 |
| **Total** | **94** |

Even though these elements together comprise over half of the total programme

length, this does not exhaust the amount of repetition in the programme. The remaining 86 minutes of the programme are devoted to a more detailed examination of some of the news stories announced in the news headlines and news summaries. Unsurprisingly, these are frequently repeated, more or less modified, in part or in whole, during the programme. For example, apart from its prominent position as the theme of the 8:10 interview slot, the GCSE examination results story is reported on at three other times during the programme for a total of 14 minutes. And the Rhys Jones murder story, in addition to being the main news item in all news headline and news summary sections and forming the focus of the interview with the Bishop of Liverpool after his Thought for the Day and with the Home Secretary, is reported on four times for a total of 10 minutes.

### The Rhys Jones Case

In the previous sections I have described the generic features of one edition of the *Today* programme and shown how it is characterized by a high degree of repetition at various levels of structure. A working assumption of the present study is that this kind of repetition is typical of the *Today* programme as a whole, at least in its current format, although undoubtedly there have been numerous changes during the programme's 50-year history. As has already been mentioned there are practical reasons for radio news programmes being made in this way and, what is more, I would suggest that this repetition is a characteristic of contemporary mass-mediated news in general. However, my main concern in this paper is not with questions of production, nor even with the actual reception of such programmes by audiences, crucially important though both of these things undoubtedly are for any thorough CDA study of mass-mediated news. Rather, the aim of this paper is to consider how the linguistic features of the *Today* programme, specifically in its genre aspect, contributes to its *potential* ideological effects. Whether or not (and if so how) the potential ideological effects of texts are realized in practice is another highly important – and highly complex – question for CDA and one which again involves sociological or ethnographic investigation of how texts are actually received by audiences. Throughout the foregoing account I have commented on the ideological significance of various aspects of the programme's generic structure, particularly its repetitive features.[12] I shall now turn to look in detail at how the Rhys Jones case was presented in this programme, paying particular attention to the way in which the story is interwoven with those features, how it is repeated

with variations throughout the programme and how this synchronic 'layering' of the story, rather like successive coats of varnish applied to a piece of wood, have a cumulative effect of transforming it from its 'raw' state into a hardened, durable artifact. Unfortunately, due to limitations of space only a small selection of the instances where the story was featured can be discussed here.

### Sequential presentation of the Rhys Jones story

The manner in which the Rhys Jones story[13] was presented is interesting for the way it dovetails into the programme's overall repetitive structure. This allows for the story to be heard by people who tune in to the programme at different times and to be updated as new information becomes available, as it does, during the time that the programme is on air. The general outline of how the story was featured in the programme was indicated in the Running Order chart shown above.

As we saw when examining the Hourly Unit structure of this edition of the *Today* programme, the Rhys Jones story first appears at the very start of the programme in the 6:00 am News Headlines and News Summary section. This began as follows:

**06:00** [*Time signal pips*]

Stourton: It's six o'clock on Thursday the twenty-third of August, good morning this is Today with John Humphrys and Edward Stourton.

Humphrys: The news headlines this morning, an eleven-year-old boy has been shot dead in Liverpool. We'll be talking to the Home Secretary. The GCSE pass rate is expected to rise to almost ninety-nine percent when results come out this morning. Also in today's programme, Madeleine McCann's father tells us why he thinks there's a real possibility that she is in Spain, and, the survey which showed that the over-sixties are as active in the bedroom, as in the blogosphere. Today's news reader, is Alice Arnold.

In terms of generic structure, this initial presentation of the story by Humphrys is no more than a headline. However, since it is spoken English rather than written newspaper English it conforms to the standard grammatical rules by including the indefinite article *an,* which a newspaper headline would probably omit. Also, apart from its prominent position at this point in the programme (and being explicitly described as such in the immediately preceding phrase) this headline is not emphasized in any way that might be seen as the oral equivalent of written headlines, such as by use of a louder voice or forceful background music. Indeed, since this programme hardly ever uses background music – even as a signature

tune – or sound effects (apart from those 'ambient' sounds which occur naturally when, for example, inteviewees speak via the telephone or reporters speak from external locations) the vocal qualities of the presenters are of paramount importance in conveying meaning and emotion and as such deserve detailed consideration.[14]

John Humphys, as a veteran and highly individualistic presenter, has perhaps greater freedom to convey meaning and feeling through vocal qualities (and other means such as humour) than other presenters. Certainly, if one listens attentively to his speech one cannot fail to be impressed by his verbal dexterity and expressive expertise. In this very brief headline section for example, he varies his tone skillfully in accordance with each story. Thus, his voice is noticeably grave when he delivers the headline about the Liverpool shooting. In contrast, his tone lightens when he moves on to the GCSE story, darkens again and assumes a note of curiosity, almost mystery, tinged with sympathy, when talking about the Madeleine McCann story, and finally becomes even lighter when talking about the survey of sexual activity in the over-sixties which is a typical 'light' or 'soft' news topic such as is included in most editions of the programme.[15]

Although this is not entirely clear, the concise, orderly way that not only Humphrys but also the other presenters read out these headlines suggests that they have been scripted. That is to say, they have been prepared by other people and the presenters are, in Goffman's terms, simply the *animators* of the words spoken, rather than the *authors* or *principals* (Goffman 1981). If this is the case then this in turn suggests that the presenters may have had time to practice reading them out before going on air and may even have rehearsed and discussed their speeches. However, the likelihood of this diminishes as the programme proceeds and new information has to be included in the news headlines and summaries whilst the programme is being broadcast. Of course, it applies even less to other sections of the programme such as live interactions with reporters and interviewees. As a general principle, however, when analysing the talk of presenters and news readers we should consider to what degree their words may be scripted or spontaneous. For example, it is clear that the words spoken by the news reader, Alice Arnold, are scripted. Partly for this reason, and also on account of her role as a dispassionate – almost robotic – though humane provider of the basic news 'facts' her voice is far less expressive than that of Humphrys. Following immediately from Humphrys' speech above, her turn is as follows:

Arnold: Police in Liverpool are searching for the killer of an eleven-year-old boy, who was shot in the neck as he walked home from a football training session last night. The boy, who hasn't been named, was shot outside a pub in Croxteth. Witnesses saw a teenage boy in a hooded top ride up on a BMX bike, dismount and fire several times. Assistant Chief Constable Simon Byrne of Merseyside Police, spoke of his disgust at the attack.

Whereas the headline spoken by Humphrys describes the killing using a passive construction in which the victim is thematised and the agent is omitted, here the police are thematised and it is their action of 'searching' that forms the core of the clause, with the main event of the story relegated, albeit with greater details of circumstance, to a hypotactically subordinated clause. This foregrounding of the role of the police is a recurrent feature of the way in which this story is reported on in this programme. While this is not perhaps surprising, since the killing is seen (uncontroversially, in the eyes of the broadcasters) as a crime whose investigation is the legitimate responsibility of the police (any similar case in which the police were shown to be *not* searching for the killer at this time would be highly newsworthy!), we may ask what potential ideological significance this may have. Fundamentally, this foregrounding of the police encourages the audience to view, understand, interpret and explain this story from their perspective. We may see this in Althusserian terms (Althusser 1971) as a situation in which the media, as an Ideological State Apparatus or ISA serves to 'interpellate' the audience, in line with the dominant ideology with respect to crime, by presenting the news from the perspective of another ISA, namely the police. It has long been recognized in the field known as the Sociology of Knowledge, at least since the work of Berger and Luckmann (1966) that all knowledge is 'interested' and must be expressed from a particular point of view, with the very choice of viewpoint possessing meaning in itself. In the present case we may consider what other possible points of view could have been reflected in this news summary. These may range from relatively uncontroversial perspectives such as, for example, those of the (unnamed) witnesses or the family of the victim, through the perspectives of 'civil society' leaders in Liverpool or academic experts on youth crime, to highly unorthodox perspectives such as that of the killer, his associates or members of youth gangs.[16] It is also quite possible that a combination of perspectives may be used, and in particular the perspectives of the UK media, the BBC, the producers and presenters of this programme may be simultaneously or alternately be drawn on. What is important

in terms of ideology is that each of these perspectives would approach the story in a slightly different way which in turn would facilitate, or differentially make available, different interpretations for the audience.

As if to emphasize the police-oriented perspective of the story, immediately following from Arnold's speech above, indeed cued by it, comes the excerpt from the Assistant Chief Constable with which this story is, in this opening news summary section, concluded:

Byrne: [on location] it is quite awful and quite senseless that it's just not right that an eleven year old boy should lose his life in these circumstances and again my appeal really is that anyone that knows who this killer is, this is not a time for silence, do the right thing and turn them in. I particularly appeal to the criminal fraternity, if *you* know who this killer is, work with us to catch them quickly and take them off our streets.

Arnold: Gordon Brown has ruled out a referendum on the new European Union Reform Treaty. [*continues*]

What must be made clear at the outset is that the words of Byrne quoted here were not delivered live. They have been recorded at some earlier time (between when the killing took place at around 7:30 pm the previous evening and the time of this broadcast. In fact later in the programme Humphrys describes Byrne's comments as having been made 'a few hours ago'), at some apparently outdoor location (judging by the ambient sounds), and by some unnamed person or persons (who are probably journalists but may also, for example, be police press officers). Although never explicitly stated, the fact that these words have been excerpted from a longer statement is suggested, for example, by his use of *these circumstances*, *again* and *this killer*. Indeed it is quite possible that they have been edited, such as through the deletion of some words between the second and third sentences. One rather surprising finding of my research so far is that such remarkably fine-grained editing is quite routinely applied to the recorded material used on this programme. No doubt this is generally done for essentially journalist reasons of economy and coherence but the opportunities this affords for introducing ideological bias are considerable.

The decision to make an 'appeal to the criminal fraternity' is rather unusual and reflects the fact that this crime is being viewed by the police as an exceptionally heinous one that breaches the normal ethical terms of engagement between the

police and criminals, thus creating the opportunity or need for this kind of reaching out. The description of the appeal as being addressed to *the criminal fraternity* assumes that such a fraternity exists (setting aside the question of what precisely might be meant, both denotatively and connotatively, by the term) and that there is only *one* such fraternity, at least in Liverpool. However, it is quite possible that the killer himself is a member of this fraternity, and that the fraternity is far less unified and coordinated than Byrne's appeal might suggest, so I doubt whether the police were very hopeful that any members of the fraternity would readily come forward to work with them. The suggestion that 'turning the killer in' (a colloquial phrase perhaps deliberately chosen as being less likely to provoke a hostile reaction than a more formal phrase such as 'inform on' or a more slangish and censorious expression such as 'grass on') constitutes 'doing the right thing' is clearly ideological, since according to the alternative ethical code of the criminal fraternity such actions are generally seen as despicable.

One further interesting aspect of this appeal is the way in which Byrne uses personal pronouns. The use of *you*, uttered with a markedly pronounced emphasis, appears to be a direct address from the police, personified by Byrne, to the criminal fraternity, while the use of *our* in the expression *our streets* here also seems to reflect the sense of common cause between police, criminal fraternity and public that Byrne is trying, consciously or otherwise, to project.

Finally, we may note the way in which Arnold's words serve to frame Byrne's speech. She cues the excerpt by saying that Byrne *spoke of his disgust at the attack*. In fact, although he may have done this at some other point in his speech, this seems rather an inaccurate description of this extract since this personal and emotional aspect does not appear to have been the main point. Rather, after saying that the killing was *quite awful*, *quite senseless* (which, we may note somewhat pedantically, are descriptions of the attack itself rather than of 'his disgust') and *just not right* (once again an attempt at ideologically defining through simple assertion what is and isn't 'right'), his main point is his appeal to the criminal fraternity. By contrast, later in the programme (7:09), Humphrys cues a repetition of the same excerpt with the words *Mr Byrne made a direct appeal to Liverpool's criminal fraternity*, which seems more accurate. As has been widely noted by CDA scholars and others, the power and ability for mass-mediated news producers to frame the news in this way can have important ideological effects, alternatively encouraging or discouraging particular interpretations of the news that is reported. In this case,

Arnold's formulation invites listeners to hear Byrne's words as being an expression of his disgust and indeed to share that feeling. Humphrys' formulation by contrast is less manipulative, yet even this latter formulation might be queried since strictly speaking Byrne is not making a *direct* appeal to the criminal fraternity but an indirect one, via the media.

The next section of the programme in which the Rhys Jones case occurred was the first review of the daily newspapers at 6:12 am. As befitting the importance given to this story by the UK media on this morning it was a prominent feature of almost all the newspapers's front pages (at least their later editions) and was not surprisingly therefore the first item mentioned in this review. This review, repeated from page 44, began as follows:

**06:12**

Humphrys: The time is twelve minutes past six a quick look at the newspapers and the main story for most of them er they've changed their front pages some of them er during the course of the night is the shooting of that er eleven-year-old boy in Liverpool similar headlines are on the in the red-top tabloids Daily Mirror 'BMX GUN KID KILLS BOY ELEVEN', 'BOY 11 SHOT DEAD BY KID' in the Sun, and and so on and the er Times front page lead puts it like this 'RIDE BY HOODIE SHOOTS AN 11 YEAR OLD BOY DEAD' and um they'll talk about how the police have expressed serious concern, this in the Times, about rocketing levels of violence, particularly, in the capital they report that increasingly, younger children are walking the streets with dangerous weapons in what has been a particularly grim year says the Times, seventeen teenagers have been shot or stabbed to death in London, alone, in 2007.

Stourton: A lot of coverage of that speech by President Bush [*continues*]

Again in this section we see the perspectivization of the story, unsurprisingly in terms of police perhaps, but with the curious previously noted framing of their involvement in affective terms as 'concern'. In passing it is interesting to contrast the typically strident use of language by the newspapers, particularly the tabloids, in their headlines with the more measured tones of the *Today* programme. Perhaps one function served by this segment of the programme is that it allows the programme to enunciate these rather scaremongering headlines without having to admit to 'owning' them. In this case, the relationship between animators, principals and authors become yet more complex and, indeed, blurred, because whilst the headlines are clearly those of the papers other phrases such as 'rocketing levels of violence' are

less clearly hearable as belonging to the papers or the *Today* programme. Note how the 'sticking to the facts' approach used here, just summarizing the main points, plus giving some alarming background information about the number of violent teenage deaths in London, precludes any analysis of the socioeconomic, political or cultural factors underlying problems of this nature. A narrow focus on the topic as above all a criminal matter, most extremely in the individualizing of the agency of the killer of Rhys Jones, fusing him into a freakish human-machine hybrid 'gun kid', leaves the wider (and admittedly more problematic) issues out of the frame, at least for the time being. However, explanations of some ideologically plausible sort must be sought and presented to the listeners and this is the main function of the next section in which the case is taken up, namely the first extended report at 6:35 am. This came immediately after the programmes first lengthy report on the GCSE exam results and ran as follows:

**06:35**

Humphrys: The time is twenty-five to seven, another young boy shot dead in the street this time in Liverpool. Here's the Assistant Chief Constable Simon Byrne a few hours ago.

Byrne: [*external location*] We're dealing with a quite an awful and tragic crime an eleven-year-old boy has lost his life having been shot near to the Fir Tree public house in Croxteth. Round about seven thirty this evening we received calls from the public about a shooting, officers went to the scene along with paramedics, the young boy was taken to hospital where par- where doctors tried to work on him to save his life but attempts to resuscitate him failed and he sadly died

Humphrys: Well Caroline Cheetham is our reporter in Croxteth this morning, can you add anything to that em Caroline?

Cheetham: Erm morning morning John er not not an awful lot but I can recount for you exactly what we do know, and that is that er as as you heard there from Simon Byrne yesterday evening at around seven seven thirty in the evening three boys were playing football here outside the Fir Tree pub in Croxteth Park. Now they were all friends and all aged about eleven, now they were finishing the game, when an older boy aged about fifteen, we think, rode up on his BMX bicycle and calmly fired three times, now we believe one of those shots hit a car, which is covered in tarpaulin just to the side of me at the moment, one of the shots went astray, and a third shot hit one of these boys in the head or the neck, now he was taken to Alder Hey Children's Hospital er where he later died and all last night and into this morning and I suspect continuing throughout the day, fingertip searches have been have been going on around the pub and the medical

center and the parade of shops next door and the whole area is, as you'd expect, completely cordoned off.

Humphrys: But what we don't know for sure is whether the boy who died had been specifically targeted by that er other boy on the BMX bike

Cheetham: Mmm no we don't police police would not be drawn as you would expect on that at the moment, I did put to them last night that that this did appear to be, ahh targeted, you know, this this boy who'd calmly ridden his bike by all accounts by eye-witness reports, calmly ridden his bike up, calmly got off bike, calmly opened fire, three times, got back on the bike and rode off again and I said to the police that appeared to be er a targeted attack against one of the boys at least and they wouldn't confirm or deny anything of that they just said this was, er this was a nice boy from a nice area, no links to anything they they're

Humphrys: No

Cheetham: aware of and they can't explain it they are bewildered this morning

Humphreys: And is Croxteth a rough area where you'd expect this kind of thing though God knows you should never expect this kind of thing, but, you know

Cheetham: No, of course not. Um, there are two parts to Croxteth I think I think it's fair to say, the Croxteth Park, where I am today, and where this happened, and there's Croxteth, where they do have issues with with with crime. Croxteth Park though is is very different this this doesn't have er big issues with crime, as far as we're aware, it's a private housing estate, the biggest in Europe, it's a typical Barratt or Wayne Homes estate, you know, small cul-de-sacs of detached properties, very well-kept gardens nice Audis and BMWs on the driveway, um it it's actually very very nice middle-class area the kind of area you would expect your eleven-year-old boy to play safely on the pub car park across the road

Humphrys: Thank's Caroline, we'll be talking to the Home Secretary about this and other things at about ten to eight

Stourton: It's now twenty-three minutes to seven, the EU's vets will meet today [*continues*]

Once again, after the briefest of introductions from Humphrys the floor is given over to the police representative for an extended quotation. The need for this quotation, which does not represent Byrne's 'direct appeal' to the criminal fraternity but may well, judging from the ambient sounds, have come from the same speech, is not immediately apparent because it is followed up by the on-the-spot reporter giving much the same information. So if cognitive, ideational factors are not the reason for this quotation, I believe that it is possible to suggest that once again it has an affective or interpersonal function is helping perspectivize the story from the police's point of view as 'a quite awful and tragic crime'. I hasten to add that

I completely agree with Byrne's description. It is. But at the same time we must remember how ideology is at its most effective when most unnoticed, and that a CDA reading of texts such as these must 'make strange' the commonplace and the taken-for-granted. In this case, the ideological work being done here is not so much a matter of the status of alternative descriptions of the incident but the selective inclusion and exclusion of alternative voices enunciating those descriptions. That is to say, it is the steady and repeated framing of the incident through the eyes of senior members of the state's law-and-order forces which predisposes listeners to be less able to think of the incident in other, perhaps not so conventional ways.

In contrast to Byrne's hesitation-free and very probably scripted remarks, Cheetham seems to be speaking from notes or even memory. From her voice she gives the impression of being a young, earnest, middle-class woman in her 20s or 30s. The fact that she does not speak with a Liverpudlian accent suggests that she is not a local, although she may well be working for one of the BBC's local news centres. At once we can detect traces of the closeness of the relationship between police and mainstream media personnel. First Cheetham omits Byrne's title, referring to him simply as Simon Byrne. Then she repeatedly uses *we* as the subject of mental process verbs to conjecture about what happened (*we think*, *we believe*). Since a great deal of her information must have come from the police, this is a particular kind of inclusive use of *we*. On the other hand, regarding the crucial question of whether the attack was a targeted one, it is clear that she was unable to get a clear answer from the police and this is reflected in her language. She begins to answer Humphrys' question with what I assume was going to be something like a simple *Mmm now we don't [know]* but she self-repaired and rephrased it in a way more congruent with the facts as *police would not be drawn*.

After eliciting from Cheetham the information about the incident, including the fact that as yet the question of targeting remains moot, Humphrys moves on to ask indirectly about possible explanations based on whether the area where it took place was, as he puts it, 'rough' or not. Cheetham's long answering turn is interesting for the way in which she characterizes the two neighbouring areas: first Croxteth, *where they do have issues with with crime*, and then Croxteth Park, where they do not (or at least not of this highly visible nature). There are several elements of her description of Croxteth Park which point to (and positively evaluate) its middle-class character, with the implication that such areas are not likely to have this kind of problem. The listener is left to infer from this that Croxteth itself, however, although

not described in such detail, is everything that Croxteth Park is not. Above all, it is a working-class non-private (i.e. council) estate which, by inference, is a possible home of the sort of violent teenage criminal who appears to have shot Rhys Jones. Even such non-explicit reference to the nature of this area acts as an instance of what Coffin and O'Halloran (2006) refer to as 'dog-whistle' journalism: reporting which though not openly biased, contains sufficient clues for those with sensitive ears to hear the bias nonetheless. Thus here the largely middle-class audience of the *Today* programme is alerted, subtly, by its middle-class journalists, that this is a story rooted in class-related violence. Because the reference is signaled covertly, there is no necessity of explicitly referring to it. And indeed this is what we find as the programme unfolds. In successive interviews, first with a local councilor, Rose Bailey (who predictably lives in Croxteth Park rather than Croxteth), then with James Jones, the Bishop of Liverpool, and finally with the Home Secretary, Jacqui Smith, there is a repeated search for explanations. These focus on things such as the cheapness of alcohol in supermarkets (which would appear for Humphrys to be the main culprit), parents who have 'abdicated their responsibility' to control their children, and above all failures of communities to 'come together'. But nowhere is there a reference to the socioeconomic factors that cause communities to rupture and encourage the sort of gang and gun culture of which the Rhys Jones case is just the most tragic and shocking example.

## Conclusion

What I hope the preceding rather brief study of the opening sections of this one edition of the *Today* programme concerning the Rhys Jones story has shown is that the language used by the presenters and other participants in the programme clearly do not just 'tell the truth' or 'present the bare facts' according the standard mythology of journalists, but rather they construct the news using various strategies as a set of stories from very particular perspectives and in accordance with particular ideologies. It is my hope that as my long-term research project into youth crime reporting in radio news proceeds I shall be able to identify with greater precision than I have in this paper just what those perspectives and ideologies are and what strategies are used to realize them. These perspectives and ideologies may not explicitly draw attention to themselves, although it is clear that in many cases they do, at least to anyone who attends to them critically, but nevertheless the meanings and effects they make available accumulate gradually, item by item, throughout the *Today*

programme, encouraging or facilitating certain ways of understanding the 'news' for its listeners while backgrounding others. This is not to say that oppositional or negotiated 'hearings' are excluded altogether, but simply rendered less easy to make. Busy middle-class citizens getting ready for their working day and listening to the radio perhaps only out of habit, or 'for the company', or to know when it is time to set off for work, or at most listening to the programme cooperatively and thus with minimal cognitive effort, that is, listening for 'gist', are less likely to listen to the news about the killing of an 11-year old boy as critically as I have. To most listeners, I suggest, the Rhys Jones case will have been heard as shocking and terrible crime, rightly of course, but a crime that is the work of a depraved individual or at most a gang of such individuals, a local problem of individual agency, rather than a reflection of any deeper structural problems of society as a whole. And even for those who do see in this story a symptom of all that is wrong in modern Britain, the explanations encouraged and facilitiated by the news media will be constrained by, and conform to, the hegemonic norms of the capitalist state. From beneath the avalanche of reportage, facts and information, the 'story' will emerge to be heard as something for the local 'authorities' to deal with in the short term and the local 'community' to address in the longer term. The programme and others like it will offer a plethora of sensible suggestions concerning solutions: the teaching of better parenting skills, stricter controls on the sale of alcohol, the provision of better leisure facilities for teenagers perhaps and a few more CCTV cameras in public places – in those areas that do not have them already – for the protection of the citizens of Croxteth Park (with their 'very well-kept gardens' and 'nice Audis and BMWs') and the surveillance of those in Croxteth. And thus day after day the steady drip-feed of news works its way into the consciousness of middle-class Britain like a drug to which it becomes addicted: each day's news a stimulating but soporific dose of the predicably-novel, the same-but-different: ephemeral, and never enough.

## Notes

[1] Statements of the principles of CDA abound and vary in interesting ways, which I shall discuss in a future work (compare for example the list of 8 principles in Fairclough and Wodak (1997) with the list of 10 in Wodak (2001)), but a commitment to the practical application of CDA to address social problems is an element common to them all.

[2] While this is true of the UK media I am aware that in other countries such as the USA

the situation is quite different.

[3] The power of papers like *The Sun* to influence voting behaviour has been much debated and opinion remains divided (Curtice 1999). Be that as it may, the strong political commitments of the national press in Britain mean that ideology is a prominent underlying feature of their news coverage and as such merits serious critical attention.

[4] Trust in the BBC and British television more generally was shaken during 2007 by a number of scandals concerning *inter alia* the misuse of premium-rate phone-ins and vote rigging. Nevertheless, my impression is that the public's regard for the BBC's neutrality in its news coverage remains high. I am currently seeking evidence to support this assertion.

[5] Having lived in Japan for the past 18 years my MR with respect to the UK and UK media are unlikely to be as well developed as they would have been had I remained in the UK. However, I hope that my particular circumstances will make for a degree of distanciation or estrangement that will allow me to notice features about the UK media that might not otherwise has been so apparent.

[6] A recording of this edition is currently available in the 'Listen Again' archive section of the Today programme's website (http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/today/).

[7] In a survey of MPs conducted for the industry magazine *Broadcast* in 2005, *Today* was voted the most influential programme in setting the political agenda. *BBC News tops MP's survey* http://news.bbc.co.uk/newswatch/ukfs/hi/newsid_4440000/newsid_4444700/4444751.stm (14/4/2005) (last accessed 18/12/07)

[8] Strictly speaking, in terms of Fairclough's GDS model the collective and individual characteristics of the presenters ought to be considered under the heading of Style rather than Genre.

[9] RSS stands for 'Really Simple Syndication'. This refers to an automated system for distributing website updates (known as 'feeds') to people who subscribe to the system. It is widely used by media organizations for distributing headlines and story summaries from their websites.

[10] There is a website, *Platitude of the Day,* devoted to satirizing this section of the programme from a broadly humanist perspective. http://www.platitudes.org.uk/platblog/index.php (last accessed 18/12/07)

[11] There is an interesting gender dimension to this item of the programme. As it is the 'hard news' highlight of the programme, this interview is generally conducted by the senior of the two presenters. This means the interviewer is almost always male. In constrast, the interview is often followed by a 'lighter' topic which is presented by the other (frequently female) presenter. I am grateful to Veronika Koller of Lancaster University for drawing my attention to this point.

[12] One way of thinking about the ideological significance of generic structure is to imagine how *else* the programme could be structured. For example, we could imagine the programme without regular hourly and half-hourly divisions and news summaries, no repetition of news items, and no regular features such as the newspaper reviews, business news or weather forecasts. Such a structuring might well lead to audiences receiving and interpreting the news in quite different ways. Another strategy, and one which I

intend to employ at a later stage in this study, is to compare the generic structure of this programme with other breakfast time programmes broadcast by other radio channels and stations on the same day (23 August 2007) as this one.

[13] I would like to make it clear that I intend no disrespect to the memory of Rhys Jones in my use of the term 'story'.

[14] A major problem in presenting work on oral data in written form concerns how vocal qualities such as tone, rhythm, volume and accent can best be represented on the page. Even prominent Conversation Analysis scholars who have focused on 'media talk' such as Ian Hutchby have generally not satisfactorily addressed this problem, despite their use of transcription conventions considerably more detailed than my own (Hutchby 2006).

[15] I recognize that such descriptions as those I have used here are highly subjective and open to wide secondary (or meta-) interpretation.

[16] One notorious aspect of this case was that members of two local gangs had posted videos on the website YouTube featuring their members wielding guns and showing off their dogs and committing acts of antisocial behaviour such as joy-riding.

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